

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Samuel M. Walton in Bentonville, Arkansas

March 17, 1992

Thank you all. Mr. Sam, now, you sit down. And thank you, David. Good morning to all. And it is a true pleasure to be in America's heartland. And it is most appropriate that I should come to Arkansas to participate in this ceremony.

First, I will apologize to every single person with whom our advance squad, security people, communications people have come into contact—[laughter]—because I know your lives—but we pledge to those who have made these wonderful arrangements that we will leave right on schedule. [Laughter] And we will leave with a heart full of gratitude to all who handled, on very short notice, the arrangements that go with a visit of this nature.

You know, I got a letter last year from a young eighth grader, John Quinton Bagley, in Nashville, Arkansas. And he wrote, "You and Mrs. Bush could stay with me and my family. We do not have many reporters." [Laughter] Smart kids in Arkansas. No wonder I feel so at home here.

But first, of course, my respects to Sam Walton and to Helen Walton, one of God's truly special people. And also, my respects to Bud Walton. Also to the one you've just heard from, ahead of David Glass, John Paul Hammerschmidt. This, I think he and I figured, was my fifth district—not to the State but just to his part of it, his congressional district, first one as President. And I must say, I have been so pleased and so has Barbara as we rode in from Fayetteville and were warmly received by the people who just seemed glad to see the President of the United States. But in any event, you just have this wonderful way of making someone feel at home.

And also I salute David Pryor. And this is trivia that I'm sure no one is interested in, but I'll tell it to you anyway. He and John Paul and I were all elected to the Congress on the same day many moons ago, November 1966. And I am very pleased that both David, of course, and John Paul are here to join us as we fittingly honor Mr.

Walton. In addition, I brought along our own grandson Sam. I wanted him to meet another Sam. He's standing over here, ripped off my Wal-Mart hat. But there he is, so—[laughter].

But anyway, we come here to honor a man who shows that through hard work and vision and treating people right, many good things can happen.

This visit is not about Sam Walton's wealth. He has earned his money, and that's his business. He's been generous with his fortune, and that is in the great tradition of America's commitment to this concept that I call a Thousand Points of Light.

It's not about money. It's not even about philanthropy. This visit is about what is fundamentally good and right about our country. And it's about determination. It's about leadership. It's about decency. His Nation honors him today as the outstanding example of American initiative and achievement. And at the same time, we take note that as he became more and more successful he never turned his back on his roots. His success never altered his lifestyle, a lifestyle that kept him close to his family, his friends, and his community.

I read somewhere that at one time Mr. Sam thought he wanted to be President of the United States. I have two thoughts on that one: One, I'm glad he's not running this year. [Laughter] And two, I've said he's a smart guy; not running proves it. [Laughter]

His story is known to everyone here, but let me just mention for the Nation a few of the highlights, if I might. After college at the University of Missouri, Sam Walton began a career in retailing. He started as a trainee for the J.C. Penney Company in Des Moines, Iowa. And after a stint in the Army during World War II, it was on to Newport, Arkansas, with a Ben Franklin store back in 1945. And over the years, he became the largest franchisee of Ben Franklin variety stores, operating 15 of them under the name of Walton's Five and Dime.

You see—you know this, but many around the country might not—you see, he had hit upon a combination that was to form the basis of the strategy of today's Wal-Mart Stores, smalltown markets for name-brand merchandise sold at a discount. When the folks at Ben Franklin's Chicago headquarters didn't jump at the vision that Mr. Sam put before them, he decided to go his own way. And that was back in 1962 when he started with one Wal-Mart store in Rogers, Arkansas, just 6 miles from here.

And I did hear a story about the opening of his second Wal-Mart over in Harrison, John Paul's hometown. [Laughter] Obviously you've heard it, but I'm going to repeat it. For those of you in Washington, I will repeat it. The way my esteemed friend David Glass tells it, Sam had watermelons for sale on the sidewalk; he offered donkey rides in the parking lot. The only problem was the heat, 110 degrees, 110. Well, the watermelons popped, and the watermelon juice was everywhere. The donkeys did what donkeys do in a situation like that, tracking the stuff all over the place. And according to David, who had a nice successful business of his own, Sam's turned into the worst looking store he'd ever seen. Dave went so far as to suggest to Sam that he ought to find some other line of work. [Laughter]

Now more people work for Sam's company than live in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 380,000 at the last count. This includes the man with that sound career advice, David Glass. [Laughter]

You know, some always think I see the glass as half full or maybe that I'm always emphasizing good news. Well, maybe that's right. But I think it's important that all Americans understand that some things are going very, very well in the United States of America. And one of those things is Wal-Mart. And who would have thought that when Sam Walton bought that first Ben Franklin store that his little venture would grow into a top-rated stock on Wall Street, racking up \$44 billion in sales last year. Wal-Mart is the largest and the most profitable retailer in America, now with over 1,700 stores, enhancing the lives of millions.

And to Sam, or Mr. Sam, as he is known throughout his company, people don't just

punch a time clock and draw a paycheck. As the people here know, his employees are known as associates. And no wonder they all think of him as a partner. When he's asked about the secret of his success, he credits his people. And he says, "The attitude of our employees, our associates, is that things are different in our company, and they deserve the credit." And it's not hard to see why they believe in the company. And it's just plain easy to see why they believe in its unpretentious leader.

There are also the quiet things about Sam Walton, the things beyond the bottom line, if you will. There's nothing corny about calling them what they are: They're good deeds. They are the relief funds set up when tragedy strikes an associate's family; scholarships in every community where there's a Wal-Mart store; benefactor of the University of the Ozarks in Clarksville; the Walton National Literacy Center in Bolivar over in Missouri; education grants for South American students to study in America and then return so they can better help their own countries.

These are the things that enhance the spirit of the community. And yes, of course Mr. Sam's a great businessman. But along with making a good profit, he helps make good citizens of his people by encouraging them to help one another.

And when you ask about Sam Walton, much of what you hear is from friends of many years. Some are wonderful stories that tell you something important about Sam's energy and competitive spirit; like George Billingsley, who used to fly with Mr. Sam in the early days. They'd be in a little Piper Cub heading out to check out one of his stores, and Mr. Sam would decide to check out the competition as well. He'd fly low over a Sears or a K-Mart, you see, tip one wing, and make a wide-eyed George count the cars in the parking lot, scaring him half to death in the process. [Laughter]

I could go on and on about his love of the outdoors. Bud took me into the illustrious quail room just a few minutes ago before we came in here: Talk about his sharp eye for quail, his love for riding around with his gone-but-not-forgotten closest adviser, his dog Roy, in that old red pickup truck, or

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perhaps his legendary driving record. [Laughter] Since 1988 things have gone better; he's had a white pickup, but I hear the driving is about the same. [Laughter]

I could also talk about his love of family, such a mainstay of his life. You talk about Helen Walton who, as Senator Pryor told me on the way down, is the soul of Wal-Mart. Her love of the arts inspires so many. Her faith, her deep faith in God, comes shining through.

The story of Sam Walton is an illustration of the American dream. His success is our success, America's success. And when Sam's grandchildren read about what makes America great, they'll read about people who have grand ideas and great dreams, resourceful people who make imagination come alive with accomplishment. And they'll read about adventurous people who have the drive, ambition, and talent to take big risks and to achieve great things; people who bring prosperity to their community and to their country. Sam's grandkids, like my own little guy over here, his down here, will read about people like Sam Walton.

And sir, you are generous and genuine, tireless and tenacious. You took risks and helped our country grow vigorous and strong. You brought out the best in people. You and Helen have honored the important

things in life: friendship, faith, and family. And at a time when young Americans look for role models, those are noble virtues. And your life is going to help them appreciate that ours is the freest, most blessed country on the face of the Earth. I salute you, sir, for your vision, and I am proud to give you your Nation's highest civilian honor.

And now, may I ask you all to be seated as we honor a man who loves his country, who loves his family, given far more than he's gotten.

And now if Major Cancilla of the United States Army will read the citation, I will present to Sam Walton the Medal of Freedom.

Note: The President spoke at 11:08 a.m. at Wal-Mart Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Helen Walton, Mr. Walton's wife; James L. (Bud) Walton, Mr. Walton's brother and cofounder of Wal-Mart; David Glass, president and chief executive officer of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.; Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt; Senator David Pryor; George Billingsley, Bentonville businessman and longtime friend of the Walton family; and Maj. Russell J. Cancilla, Army Aide to the President.

Remarks at a St. Patrick's Day Ceremony and an Exchange With Reporters

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The President. May I just say to Minister Andrews how delighted I am to be here. I missed the traditional lunch on Capitol Hill, a lunch of genuine friendship between not only the parties here, but normally Ireland is so well-represented, as they were today. And as I think everyone knows, I was down in Arkansas for a Medal of Freedom ceremony. But may I say to our friends from Ireland, particularly the Minister, how sorry I am to miss the luncheon but how pleased I am to receive you here.

It gives me an opportunity to express, once again, the feeling I have and the feel-

ing the American people have about the Irish-American relationship. It is strong. It is good. And it is very, very important to us. And this ceremonial occasion gives me a chance to extend through the Minister to the people in Ireland our respects, our love, and our affection on this very special day.

So Mr. Minister, I'm glad you came our way, sir. And I'm delighted to have had this short visit.

[At this point, Foreign Minister David Andrews of Ireland spoke and presented the President with a crystal bowl filled with