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Exchange With Reporters During Tour of Grand Canyon, Arizona

January 11, 2000

Establishment of National Monuments

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to critics who—[*inaudible*].

The President. I've been working on these things since I first got here. Go back to 1993. We had the Pacific Northwest Forest. We set aside the Mojave Desert National Park in California. We did Grand Staircase Escalante back in 1996. We've been working on the Florida Everglades for years. This whole area of our national life has been very, very important to me.

Keep in mind, I grew up in a national park. I talked about this when I ran for President, and it's been a big part of our administration. So when you come to the end of an 8-year term, you have one year left, everything you do obviously can be characterized in that way. But if it's a legacy for the children of America, for hundreds of years into the future, then that's not a bad gift to give the future.

Q. What do you say to—[*inaudible*].

The President. Well, I don't agree with that. This is the law. I'm acting pursuant to an act of Congress established in the early part of the last century and used since the time of Theodore Roosevelt by every single American President except for three—Presidents Bush and Reagan and Nixon didn't use it. Every other Republican and Democratic President in the 20th century has used this law. And I have used it, and I believe that I've used it well.

We've tried to be, and we will always be, sensitive to the concerns and the legitimate interests of local people, but I think we've done a good job with this. And I think that Secretary Babbitt deserves a lot of credit. We're here in his home State; he's worked this issue very hard. And according to a survey I saw in the local newspaper, over three-quarters of the people who live in Arizona, which means big majorities of Republicans as well as Democrats, believe this is a good thing to do for the future of this State and the future of our country. So I was very gratified to see that public support, and I think it's a good thing to do.

Colombia's Counterdrug Efforts

Q. Mr. President, on the Colombian money, are you satisfied that there is enough nonmilitary funds that are going there, enough economic development, or is it—would you like to see a different mix?

The President. Well, let me answer you in this way. I think we should get as much economic development and democracy preservation and human rights support funding as we can. I think it's important that most of the money go to helping Colombia deal with its drug problems and its other political problems and working with its neighbors to prevent the export of drugs.

The mix in the package I have announced today is the one that I believe has the right balance of good policy and likelihood of passage in the Congress. We consulted extensively with Congress. I called the Speaker of the House yesterday because I know he cares very deeply about the conditions in Colombia, wants the country to survive and do well, understands the historic importance of Colombia as a democracy in South America. And we want to do this together.

So I've tried to put together a package that I thought was good on the merits, while being very sensitive to the most interested Members of Congress in what their priorities are, and I'm really hopeful about it. But this is very, very important to the United States, to our long-term ability to protect our borders from drugs and to our long-term commitment to having all of our neighbors south of the border be democracies and be good partners with us. And so I hope that this proposal will find a ready reception in Congress from members of both parties.

Q. Mr. President, people say that the $1.3 billion just won't stop the drug trafficking. Are they wrong?

The President. No, they're right, but that's not—but that's a misleading statement. It will make it better if the money is well-spent, and it will dramatically strengthen and solidify the Colombian Government in its struggle to preserve democracy, preserve economic growth, and preserve order in the country and be a good neighbor to all of its

partners, not just the United States but the neighboring countries there that are threatened with destabilization.

So will it solve all the problems? Of course not. Will it make a big difference? It certainly will. I talked to President Pastrana last night; he certainly thinks it will make a difference. And as I said, this is something I believe both Republicans and Democrats in Congress who know about Colombia care a lot about, and I hope it will pass quickly.

Gov. Jane D. Hull of Arizona

Q. Are you disappointed that the Governor did not join you today?

The President. She would have been welcome, but I'm gratified that we're doing it. I want to thank Congressman Pastor for being here and Congressman Farr from California for being here and the representatives of the Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. And the most important thing is, I want to thank the people of Arizona for their expressed opinion in that survey supporting this, because this will primarily benefit the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren for generations yet to come in this State and people who will be nearest this magnificent area.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 9:30 a.m. in the Tuweep Valley. In his remarks, the President referred to President Andres Pastrana of Colombia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Announcing the Establishment of National Monuments in Western States at the Grand Canyon

January 11, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you, good morning. I know we're doing the right thing, because look at the day we've got. [*Laughter*] We've got the good Lord's stamp of approval on this great day.

Ann, thank you for your words and for your life and your example. Superintendent Arnberger, thank you and all the staff at Grand Canyon National Park. And through you I'd like to thank all the people who work for all of our national parks. I have spent quite a good deal of time as President in the national parks of America. And I grew up in one. I am, I suppose, therefore, more personally indebted to the people who give their lives to the Park Service than perhaps any of my predecessors. But I want to thank you.

I also want to thank all the people here from the Bureau of Land Management for the work they do and for the remarkable partnership that will be launched here. We have worked very hard these last 7 years to try to get these two agencies to work together, to support each other, to believe in each other, and to have common objectives. And I think we've made a lot of progress. So I want to thank the BLM people who are here, as well. Give them all a hand, thank you. [*Applause*]

I want to thank the environmental groups who are here. I want to welcome the children who are here. We have children from Grand Canyon Middle School and St. Mary's Middle School, and we welcome them. They are a lot about what today is all about. I want to thank Congressman Ed Pastor, of Arizona; Congressman Sam Farr, from California, for joining me; and former Congresswoman Karen English, from Arizona, for being here. Thank you. And I want to thank all the people from the White House who supported me in this decision: my Chief of Staff, John Podesta, who is here; and the head of our Council of Environmental Quality, George Frampton.

I want to thank someone I want to acknowledge particularly who worked with Secretary Babbitt on this, his counselor, Molly McUsik, who played a big role in what we celebrate today. She's not here because she's celebrating an even bigger production: yesterday she gave birth to her son, Benjamin, so she couldn't be here, but I want to acknowledge her and her service.

And finally, I want to say this is, as you can see, a special day for Bruce Babbitt, not only because he has been a devoted champion of the Antiquities Act and of protecting land but also because he is the former Governor of Arizona. And when we served together as Governors, we made it a habit, Hillary and I did, at least once a year at these Governors' meetings to have dinner with