

Introduction of

**RODNEY E. SLATER
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

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President
International Aviation Club**

**Capital Hilton Hotel
Washington, D.C.
February 2, 2000**

It is a very special pleasure to be able to introduce the Secretary of Transportation, Rodney E. Slater.

Secretary Slater grew up in Marianna, Arkansas, one of the poorest areas in America. His first job was at age six, when he worked in a cotton field with his mother to earn money to buy his first transportation vehicle – a bicycle. After going through the public school system in Arkansas, Secretary Slater was graduated from Eastern Michigan University, and earned his law degree at the University of Arkansas. At Eastern Michigan, he was captain of the football team and a member of the school's National Championship Forensics team. The university presented him its Black Alumni Achievement Award in 1994 and an honorary doctorate degree in 1996 -- just one of a great many honors and awards he has received over the years.

Secretary Slater held a long list of public service positions in Arkansas before coming to Washington. He was Director of Governmental Relations at Arkansas State University and Executive Assistant for Economic and Community Programs for then-Governor Clinton. He was the Governor's Special Assistant for Community and Minority Affairs, and Assistant Attorney General for Litigation in the Arkansas State Attorney General's Office. He was also liaison for the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission.

His career in transportation began in 1987, when he was appointed a member of the Arkansas State Highway Commission. He became its chairman in 1992, but not for long. In 1993, President Clinton chose Rodney Slater as the new Federal Highway Administrator. He held that position for four years – upsizing highway investment in this country by 20 percent while downsizing the staff by 10 percent. He also developed an innovative financing program that is allowing hundreds of transportation projects to be built two to three years sooner, on average, at no extra cost to the federal taxpayer.

Almost four years ago, on February 14, 1997, President Clinton named Rodney Slater as the thirteenth Secretary of Transportation. He is only the third Arkansan in history to hold a position in the President's Cabinet.

He has been very much an activist secretary. Under his leadership, the Department developed a strategic plan that Congress rated the best among all Federal agencies. He also worked with Congress to increase the nation's investments in infrastructure to record levels. He has focused on subjects as wide-ranging as bridge repair, transit construction, transportation safety, and drug interdiction. He has worked to ensure that former welfare recipients, as part of their re-entry into the working world, have access to public transportation. He has also focused the Department's attention on increasing trade with Africa – and on the widely heralded Safe Skies for Africa initiative. As an alumnus of the Department of Transportation, I particularly admire Secretary Slater's determination to pull the Department into a single, cohesive, and coherent organization through his "One DOT" initiative.

But in this crowd, of course, the Secretary is known best for his efforts to liberalize international aviation markets. I learned the other day that the United States now has 41 open skies agreements with trading partners around the world. The Secretary has made that initiative a major Departmental priority. Importantly, though, Secretary Slater has made clear to all of us that Open Skies agreements can't be the end of the story. He had the vision to organize, this past December, probably the most important meeting on international aviation since the Chicago Conference of 1944. Hundreds of high-ranking aviation officials from government and industry came from around the world to debate the future of this critical industry. The meeting was a remarkable achievement and represented a genuine watershed for international aviation policy. It is exciting to think about where we will go from here. I have a feeling that the Secretary will share his thoughts about that question today.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming to our podium the Secretary of Transportation, Rodney E. Slater.