

Statement on Signing the R.M.S. Titanic Maritime Memorial Act of 1986

October 21, 1986

I have approved S. 2048, the R.M.S. Titanic Maritime Memorial Act of 1986, the purpose of which is to encourage international negotiations to: (1) designate the R.M.S. Titanic as an international maritime memorial and (2) develop and implement guidelines for conducting research on, exploration of, and if appropriate, salvage of the R.M.S. Titanic. Such agreements and guidelines would serve to enhance public knowledge of the Titanic's scientific, cultural, and historical significance. The R.M.S. Titanic is the premier symbol in modern times of both the perils of the sea and the need for high standards of ship safety. The significance of the R.M.S. Titanic stems not only from the durable imprint of the disaster upon the consciousness of succeeding generations but also from the enormous strides made by the international community in promoting safety of life at sea, the study and observation of ice conditions, the maintenance of ice patrols in the North Atlantic Ocean, and the development and improvement of standards for the design and construction of vessels.

Although I support the purpose of this act, I must register my objections to two of its provisions. Section 5(a) directs the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to enter into consultations with foreign nations; section 6(a) directs the Secretary of State to enter into negotiations with foreign nations. If interpreted literally, these requirements would contravene my constitutional authority to conduct foreign relations. To avoid this constitutional difficulty, these provisions must be viewed as discretionary. Entry into negotiations with the appropriate nations concerning the R.M.S. Titanic is, of course, dependent on the willingness of those nations to support the development of the international agreement and guidelines encouraged by this act. I invite interested nations to join us in this endeavor.

Note: S. 2048, approved October 21, was assigned Public Law No. 99 - 513.