

Testimony of

The Honorable Orrin Hatch

February 6, 2003

Remarks of Chairman Orrin G. Hatch

Before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee

Executive Business Meeting

On Designating February 11, 2003, as "National Inventors' Day"

I am pleased that the Judiciary Committee will today report favorably a resolution to designate February 11, 2003, as "National Inventors' Day," I have introduced with my colleague, the Ranking Minority Member of the Judiciary Committee, Senator Leahy. He and I have worked together on many issues related to intellectual property, and I am pleased to be joined by him in offering this resolution designating the anniversary of the birth of perhaps America's greatest inventor, Thomas Edison, as a day to honor all of America's inventors.

Doing so is particularly fitting this year. Exactly one hundred years ago this year, on the shores of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Orville and Wilbur Wright achieved what mankind had dreamed of for centuries: the first heavier-than-air, machine-powered flight in the world. While that flight covered only 120 feet and lasted only 12 seconds, it launched a revolution in air travel that continues to this day.

Throughout history, inventions have helped people discover new worlds, build communities, and cure sickness and disease. From the Wright Brothers to Philo Farnsworth, from Thomas Edison to today's high tech entrepreneurs, America's inventors have immeasurably enriched our lives. America's technological prowess and high standard of living all stems from the creativity, determination, and entrepreneurial drive of men and women who turned dreams into realities.

It is no coincidence that the United States is the most powerful technological force in history. Nor is it a coincidence that creative people from all over the world flock to our shores to pursue their dreams.

Our Founding Fathers understood that an agrarian nation would never grow to be an economic and technological giant unless there was an incentive for inventors to create and for other inventors to study and improve upon the creations. From this foresight, enshrined in Article 1 section 8 of our Constitution, came the American system of intellectual property protection, which give inventors and authors the ability to enjoy, for a limited period of time, the exclusive economic benefits of their genius.

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One of the most significant results of the Founders' foresight was the creation of the U.S. patent system, which today has issued over six million patents - from the light bulb to life-saving pharmaceuticals. What the patent system really comes down to is what President Lincoln, a patent holder himself, noted many years ago: it "adds the fuel of interest to the spark of genius."

Today intellectual property-based enterprises (patents, trademarks and copyrights) represent the largest single sector of the American economy -- almost 5% of the Gross Domestic Product - and employ over 4 million Americans. More than 50% of U.S. exports now depend on some form of IP protection.

America is forever indebted to our inventors. So this year, on the centennial of mankind's first flight, I hope my colleagues will join me in recognizing February 11 as "National Inventors' Day."

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