

Across America and around the world, Christians gather on Easter Sunday to commemorate the central event in the history of their salvation: the Resurrection of Jesus. This holy day marks that moment in time when good conquered evil, hope overcame despair, and life triumphed over death. Just as spring brings warmth and beauty to the earth after a harsh winter, Easter brings joy and new life to the spirit, reminding us that no mistake or failing of the past can put us beyond the reach of God's mercy.

In this age of great challenge and even greater possibility, Easter's timeless message strengthens us for the tasks before us. As we celebrate in churches and cathedrals, at sunrise services and in family gatherings, we remember that our lives have great purpose and value. We recognize that the life and words of Jesus call us to works of caring and compassion, to giving more than receiving. His death and resurrection are powerful reminders of how God's grace is still at work in the world in which we live today.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to all for a wonderful Easter celebration.

Bill Clinton

Statement on Signing the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996

April 4, 1996

I am today signing into law H.R. 2854, the "Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996." H.R. 2854 would authorize most agriculture programs for fiscal years 1996-2002, including commodities, credit, conservation, rural development, trade, and nutrition.

I am signing H.R. 2854 with reservation because I believe the bill fails to provide an adequate safety net for family farmers. The fixed payments in the bill do not adjust to changes in market conditions, which would leave farmers, and the rural communities in which they live, vulnerable to reductions in crop prices or yields. I am firmly committed to submitting legislation and working with the Congress next year to strengthen the farm safety net.

I am, however, keenly aware that farm legislation is long overdue and American farmers need to know now the conditions under which they are operating. In addition, the bill includes a considerable number of my Administration's proposals. I believe these authorities will enhance our environmental and economic development goals. They will form a lasting legacy of the 1996 farm bill.

The hallmark of the bill's commodity title is the planting flexibility provisions. At long last, farmers will be free to plant for the market, not for government programs. The expansion of planting flexibility will improve U.S. competitiveness in world markets. In addition, this legislation will reduce the adverse environmental effects of production agriculture and greatly simplify farm programs.

I am very pleased with the rural development title of the bill. The Congress has incorporated the Administration's principle that we must continue our investment in traditional infrastructure while expanding the investment in information infrastructure and in human capital. These investments will ensure that all Americans, regardless of how remote an area they live in, will have the opportunity to better their lives and share in the economic growth spurred by the revolution in information technology.

My Administration is keenly aware that there is no "one size fits all" Washington solution to local economic development needs. That is why we proposed the Rural Performance Partnership Initiative, which provides flexibility to States to tailor Federal program funds to their unique situation. I salute the Congress for enacting this proposal, as well as providing \$300 million in additional resources for rural development and agricultural research through the "Fund for Rural America."

I also wholeheartedly endorse the bill's conservation provisions. The bill will enhance contributions to environmental quality and farm income from the Conservation Reserve Program, a program whose importance I have repeatedly stressed. This bill provides more than \$1 billion over 7 years for on-farm conservation measures, including assistance for livestock producers, which will help prevent soil erosion and clear our streams and air. I am also glad to see that farmers will

still have the choice to enroll permanent easements in the Wetlands Reserve Program.

In addition, the bill would provide \$200 million, with the possibility of an additional \$150 million, for restoration of the Everglades. This project is one of the Administration's top environmental priorities, and the funds in this bill are a good downpayment toward our goal. Moreover, I call on the Congress to enact the Administration's comprehensive Everglades restoration plan, including the one-cent per pound marketing assessment on Florida sugar. This assessment would ensure that the benefitting industry pays its fair share.

I am also generally pleased with the trade title, which includes almost all of the Administration's proposed export program enhancements. While the Administration opposed the reduced funding for certain export programs in the bill, it will use these, and newly authorized tools, to expand upon the record levels of agricultural exports we have achieved. This will ensure that America's farmers continue to take advantage of the growing opportunities in the world market.

I am disappointed that the Congress has rolled back an important reform of the crop insurance program, which was enacted just 18 months ago, to ensure that every farmer has crop insurance where it is available. Still, the farm bill embodies a clear commitment to maintain crop insurance as an alternative to costly and unreliable ad hoc crop disaster programs of the past. In this respect, the Administration strongly supports the development of new "revenue insurance" approaches over the coming years so that the crop insurance safety net can play an increasingly large role in the farm economy. This is a key component of our strategy to continue to help farmers manage the risks they face.

While commodity and conservation programs remain the core of any farm bill, much of the future of agriculture and rural America will be determined by many other factors outside the traditional scope of those programs. This bill recognizes the growing importance of those forces and incorporates many of the reforms the Administration sought. While seeking improvements in the farm safety net, I will also charge my Admin-

istration with using the bill's new tools to ensure that agriculture sustains the growth it has achieved, that the pace of environmental improvements is accelerated, and that we create new economic opportunities for farmers and rural citizens.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
April 4, 1996.

NOTE: H.R. 2854, approved April 4, was assigned Public Law No. 104-127.

Remarks at a Tree Planting Ceremony Honoring Those Who Died in the Aircraft Tragedy in Croatia

April 5, 1996

Last year, as we prepared to go to Oklahoma City, Hillary and I planted a dogwood tree here in honor of the public servants who lost their lives there. And this year as we prepare to go back, almost a year later, we are planting, sadly, another tree in honor of Secretary Brown and all the public servants of the United States and the citizens who lost their lives in the plane crash. We hope the prayers of the American people will be with them and their families at this difficult time. We hope everyone will honor the contributions they made to the United States and the welfare of our people.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks at the Plaque Dedication Ceremony for the New YMCA Day Care Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

April 5, 1996

Thank you very much. Governor Keating, Senator Nickles, Mr. Mayor, Lieutenant Governor Fallin, Congressman Brewster, Congressman Istook, to the families that are behind me and the children that just made the walk with us, and their parents, I thank them.

I was especially glad to see Brandon and Rebecca Denny, because they came to see