

This is a very, very important time. The stakes are high; the issues are clear. I knew Al Gore was going to stand up here and say that Scar was the embodiment of the other guys. [*Laughter*] That's what happens when you think you can destroy the environment while you grow the economy. I knew he was thinking that. I knew he was thinking that.

Hillary said the same thing. Hillary said, "That's what happens if those Republicans that have the House get the whole thing. Look at that." [*Laughter*]

Well, we do believe in the balance of forces and the balance of people and in bringing everybody into our big tent. We believe that all the animals in the jungles can live together if they have peace in their heart.

So I want you to leave here determined to make your investment good, remembering why you came, proud of it, and touching everyone you can now about what is still at issue in this great, great cause.

Thank you, God bless you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:08 p.m. at the New Amsterdam Theater. In his remarks, he referred to Peter Schneider, president, and Tom Schumacher, executive vice president, Walt Disney Feature Animation and Theatrical Productions.

Remarks to the National Farmers Union

September 15, 1998

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon; welcome to the White House. Lee, thank you for the award. Thank you for your comments. Thank you for your strength. Thank you for your leadership for our farmers. I've known him for years; I don't think I'd ever focused on what a good speaker he was before. [*Laughter*] He could have been a politician or a preacher in addition to a farmer. It was great.

I want to thank Secretary Glickman for his truly outstanding work, along with Rich Rominger, Carl Whillock, and the others here from the Department of Agriculture, who really try to be your advocates every day.

We have at least three NFU members who work at USDA: Mike Dunn, Larry Mitchell, and John Stencel. And I thank them in par-

ticular. I want to thank Senator Dorgan and Congressman Pomeroy for coming and for being your vociferous advocates. I talked to Senator Harkin right before I came over here today, and he has also been your great friend, along with Senator Conrad and Senator Daschle and Congressman Boswell from Iowa, who couldn't come this morning. But all these people have been up here working hard for you, and I wanted you to know that.

I also would like to say that the National Farmers Union has done a lot of good for this administration and for our efforts here in Washington, from helping to keep our food supply safe to working to expand health care to giving us the first balanced budget in 29 years in just a couple of weeks now. You have been with me every step of the way, and I am very grateful for that.

When I was a boy growing up in Arkansas I knew a lot about agriculture, but I didn't know much about the intersection of agriculture and politics. When I became a Governor and served for a dozen years, many of them very, very hard years in the 1980's on the farms in my State, I came to appreciate what it was like when the National Government had good policy, what it was like when it had bad policy, and what it was like when it had no policy.

I remember there were a couple of years when I was doing everything I could to be creative, and I think when you were head of the South Dakota Farmers Union, the State of South Dakota actually came to me—the Governor then—and asked me for a copy of the banking laws that I had changed in Arkansas, because I changed our State banking laws to try to help the bankers keep more farmers on the farm. And when we had that terrible situation, when the price of land collapsed, all the collateral on the loans was no good. There was no way for people to finance their farms, and they were losing them, and we were able to give some help to our farmers then. But through the whole thing, I always felt so helpless that there wasn't an appropriate national response.

Now I feel especially bad for the farmers because it's been such a good time for the rest of the country. We've got nearly 17 million new jobs now, and the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, and the lowest inflation

in 32 years, the highest homeownership in history, the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the smallest percentage of our people on welfare in 29 years. To somebody living in a city, to tell them that we have a farm crisis more extensive than we've had in decades, it's very hard for them to believe and understand.

You may note that in the local paper today I was criticized for supporting a farm relief initiative in Congress. And Secretary Glickman said, "Don't be upset, this is good news because they have noticed that the farmers are out there." [Laughter]

Yesterday I had a chance to go to New York and speak with some of the leaders in the United States in international finance, from our Nation's point of view, to talk to them about what I think we need to do to try to keep the global economy from further destabilizing, to try to help some of these countries help themselves that are in terrible trouble, to try to keep the global financial crisis from spreading to other countries, and to try to build an adequate trade and financial system for the 21st century that will benefit all Americans.

One—but not the only—but one element of the farm crisis today is that the farmers have felt first the crisis going on in the rest of the world. Because with roughly a quarter of the world's people in recession with declining economic growth, representing roughly a third of the world's economy, our agriculture, which depends so much on exports, have felt that quicker than the rest of the economy. But it's an important thing for Americans to be aware of what's going on on the farm today and to be aware that since the farmers, in effect, are the foot soldiers in the frontlines of America's march into the global economy of the 21st century, if we don't do something to help our farmers, eventually all other Americans will feel it as well.

And so I am delighted that you're here, and I thank you for coming. Let me also, once again, say I thank you for making available the opportunity for all these young people to be here. I want them to see their country in action. I want them to learn—much earlier than I ever did—the relationship between the work that's done every day on the farm and the work that's done up here. I

think it's very important. It will make them more effective citizens and more effective in farming in the years ahead.

Now, what's really going on here? I wanted to give this speech today—I realize to some extent I'm preaching to the saved today. [Laughter] But what I hope will happen by your coming here and by this event unfolding is that, maybe, finally, we will break through the national consciousness and the consciousness of the Congress and our friends in the press corps not to panic, not to think that America's not doing well, but to say that at a time when our country is doing well, surely at a time when the rest of us are doing well, we can be more attentive to the genuine needs and the conditions on the farm in America.

Events in the past year have strained many family farms to the breaking point. You know what they are: Flood, drought, crop disease have wiped out entire harvests; plummeting prices at home, collapsing markets in Asia, where our exports are down 30 percent in one year because of the economic crisis in Asia; these have threatened the livelihood of entire communities.

Many farmers this year will see their net incomes drop by more than 40 percent below what they've earned on average for the last 5 years. And of course, in some places, like North Dakota, the drop is much, much steeper. If we don't do something and do it now—I want America to hear this; this is not a false alarm—if we don't do something and do it now, we could literally lose thousands and thousands of family farmers this year.

I want to come back to this and why it's not just about who's competitive in the market. The results are plain to see and painful to watch. Foreclosures and farm auctions are the order of the day already in many communities. I met a farmer named Deb Lungren not long ago who told me that in 1957 her grandfather made \$11,000 on their family farm. And in 1997 she made \$10,000 on the same land. The banks are ready to foreclose on the Lungren home. They don't see how they can possibly make it another year. I'll bet everybody here could tell me somewhere between one and a dozen stories just like that.

Now, again I say, I think every American has got a stake in rural America. Our farms feed the world and us at very low real costs, at very high quality. They also feed our sense of ourselves. They reinforce our values of hard work and faith and family and devotion to community and the land.

When I signed that farm bill, as Secretary Glickman said, in 1996, at a time when crop prices were strong—and I would remind you the alternative was far worse; we would have been in even worse shape if I had vetoed it and we'd gone back to that decades-old law—I tried to make it clear that sooner or later we would have to do more to provide a safety net for hard times, that all the good things in that farm bill could not possibly wipe away the fact that if we have a family farm structure in America with widely varying prices because of market developments around the world, and the inevitable march of nature and disease, that sooner or later there would come a time when we see that if you really wanted a strong market, you had to do more for the family farmers. Well, that time has arrived.

I want to thank Secretary Glickman for all that he's done. And in July we announced that 80 million bushels of wheat, worth a quarter of billion dollars, would be purchased to help hungry people around the world and to help our farmers here at home. I strongly supported Senator Dorgan and Senator Conrad's proposal to provide farmers with emergency assistance. Last month I signed into law new legislation to speed up farm program payments to help farmers who need the money now.

And Secretary Glickman is doing everything else he possibly can to help. I know him well enough to know that from his years in Congress representing Kansas, and his years as Secretary of Agriculture, if there is one single thing buried in the laws and regulations of the Department of Agriculture that he can do that he has not yet done to try to help farm income, he will find it and do it. But with crop and livestock prices still in danger of dropping, with foreign markets still in danger of collapse, and with thousands of farms in jeopardy, we simply have to do more.

The first and most important thing to do is to help the farmers in greatest need, those who have suffered significant losses of crop and livestock. I'll continue to press Congress to enact emergency assistance to do that—critical assistance to help thousands of farmers in keeping with the traditional budget rules that recognize the necessity of providing citizens help in times of crisis. We pass emergency bills for floods, for earthquakes, and we ought to do it for farm failure.

The next thing I think we ought to do—indeed we have to do—is to do what we talked about back in 1996. We've got to reinforce the safety net for farmers and ranchers. That's why last Thursday I announced my support for Senator Harkin and Daschle's proposal to lift the cap on marketing loan rates for a year.

Yesterday our proposal was defeated in the United States Senate. Today apparently it is going to be voted on in its discrete elements. Whatever happens, we must find some way to provide emergency assistance to farmers facing dire circumstances so they have the resources now to plan for next year's crops.

And finally, let me say, we have to revive the rural economy through exports. The speech that I gave in New York yesterday outlining steps we need to take to try to limit and then resolve the global financial crisis, and then plan a better financial and trade system for the 21st century over the long term, will have more immediate impact on farmers if we can implement all these steps than any other group in America.

Farm products from one of every three acres is sold abroad. We must continue to open new markets. We must continue to enforce our existing trade agreements. And we must give the International Monetary Fund the resources it needs to strengthen and reform the economies of our customers in Asia and to try to protect the contagion from spreading to our friends in Latin America, so that others can continue to buy all of our goods and services and especially our farm products.

For 9 months now, since I called on Congress to do this in the State of the Union, there has been no action. The Senate has passed the funding for the International Monetary Fund, but with just a few weeks

left, the House has still not acted. Our farmers and ranchers have a bigger stake in the short run in the passage of this than any other group in America. So I ask you to support that as well and tell the Congress we have to do it and do it now.

Now, these are the steps that I think we have to take. I'd just like to take one step back before I close and say that there has been a debate in America for decades that underlies the skepticism of those who don't support what I propose, who say, "Well, farmers ought to be subject to the market like everybody else—a guy running a dry cleaner, nobody brings the clothes in to be cleaned, he goes out of business." The people who basically believe that, in the face of all the evidence that we have the most productive agriculture in the world, don't understand the intersection between global impacts on farm prices, the financing challenges that family farmers, as opposed to big corporate farmers, face, and what can happen to you just by getting up in the morning if it happens to be a bad day.

I know a lot of you feel like Job, you know? "Test my faith, Lord. I didn't mean it that seriously." [Laughter] But we have an opportunity here; we have an opportunity to break through a kind of a euphoria that's out there about the condition of our economy and let people know what's going on on the farm. We have an opportunity to tie the global financial crisis to what's going on on the farm. We have an opportunity to convince Congressmen who come from suburban and urban areas that the welfare, the health, the strength of their citizens—their citizens'—economy rests in lifting the whole American economy and doing the right thing beyond our borders. And they can see it in your stories, in your lives, in your experience, nothing more fully embodying the best of America than you do.

So let me say—I don't know how else to say this—there is suffering on the farm. There is agony on the farm. This is a horrible affront to everything we have worked so hard to achieve to lift the economy for all Americans. And we cannot afford to walk away from this session of Congress—I don't care if there is an election; I don't care what else is happening—we can't afford to walk away

until we do something to stave off the failure of thousands of productive family farms in America. We cannot do it.

Now, let me leave you with one beautiful quote. Franklin Roosevelt once said that American farmers, and I quote, "are the source from which the reservoirs of our Nation's strength are constantly renewed." For 6 years I have worked to renew America. We're a lot better off in virtually every way than we were 6 years ago. But we cannot walk across that bridge into the 21st century, we cannot truly renew our country, if we leave our family farmers behind. So let's go up to the Hill and tell everybody that we all want to saddle up and go together.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office. In his remarks, he referred to Lee Swenson, national president, National Farmers Union.

Remarks to the Military Readiness Conference

September 15, 1998

I'm pleased to have the second opportunity of this year to meet with Secretary Cohen, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the senior operational commanders of our Armed Forces. Today we're going to focus on the steps necessary to preserve and provide for the readiness of our Armed Forces to defend our interests and security.

Readiness must be our number one priority. It is being monitored and addressed every day at every level of command. Our forward deployed and first-to-fight units are highly ready, and our overall force is fully capable of carrying out our national military strategy. But I'm determined that we don't relax our vigilance to keep our forces ready to protect our security today and well into the 21st century.

In recent months, we've taken some important steps to strengthen our military readiness. This fiscal year we were able to protect important readiness accounts, such as spare parts and flying hours for our pilots, with the help of Congress' support for emergency funding for our peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and its approval of the request I made