

Week Ending Friday, December 18, 1998

The President's Radio Address

December 12, 1998

Good morning. This month, as Americans begin to prepare for winter, our Nation's farmers begin to prepare for the spring planting ahead. But this year has been very hard on farmers—for some, the hardest in nearly two decades—and many are strained to the breaking point. Today I want to talk about what we're doing to help America's farmers weather these hard times and to build a stronger safety net to protect them for years to come.

We're living in a remarkable time of prosperity and even greater promise for our future. Our economy is the strongest in a generation, with more than 17 million new jobs, family incomes rising, the lowest unemployment in nearly 30 years, the lowest inflation in more than 30 years, the smallest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years, and the highest homeownership in history.

America's farmers have helped to build this new prosperity, but far too many of our farming communities are not reaping its benefits. Flood and drought and crop disease have wiped out entire harvests in some parts of the country. Plummeting prices here at home and collapsing markets in Asia have threatened the livelihood of some farming communities.

Wherever we live and whatever work we do, every American has a stake in the strength of rural America. America's farmers are the backbone of our economy and the lifeblood of our land. Our farming families stand for the values that have kept our Nation strong for over 220 years: hard work, faith and family, perseverance, and patience. We can't afford to let them fail.

Last summer we took action to ease the immediate crisis on our farms. We began buying millions of tons of wheat and other food to ease the burden of dropping prices here at home and to feed hungry people in

Africa, Russia, and all over the world. I signed legislation to speed farm program payments to farmers, who need the money now to start planting for next spring. And I called on the Congress to take action to help farmers survive this year's one-two punch from Mother Nature and the marketplace.

I am pleased to say that this October, as part of our balanced budget, I signed legislation that included a \$6 billion plan for farmers in need. This November we started putting the plan into action, with nearly \$3 billion in income assistance to farmers who have seen their profits wither as crop prices fell. Today I am pleased to announce the next major step to ease the crisis on our farms, nearly \$2½ billion in emergency aid for farmers who have lost crops and livestock.

But with too many farm families still in danger of losing their land, and with crop prices still far too low, we know we must do more to strengthen the safety net for our Nation's farmers. Government has an important role to play in meeting this challenge, but it's not something Government can do alone. Ultimately, America's farmers will keep America's farms growing strong.

We know that no one can fully predict the changing weather or changing prices, but every farmer knows that crop insurance is one of the best ways to protect against the worst risks of farming. In good times, crop insurance gives farming families the security they need to thrive and grow. And in hard times, crop insurance can mean the difference between a spring planting and a spring sale of the family farm. But far too many farmers don't have crop insurance at all or only buy the bare minimum, not enough to withstand a really devastating year.

We need to do more to enable family farmers to fully protect themselves in hard times. That's why I am pleased to announce the funds we're releasing include \$400 million in new incentives for farmers to buy crop

insurance. We'll give farmers a one-time premium discount of up to 35 percent when they expand their crop insurance, and that will give our farming families greater security and more peace of mind.

Together, these steps will help thousands of farmers around our country to recover from this difficult time and plant a seed of hope for the future, not only for stronger farms but for a stronger America in the 21st century.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:30 p.m. on December 11 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 12. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 11 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Death of Lawton Chiles

December 12, 1998

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Governor Lawton Chiles. Lawton Chiles was a close friend of mine for many years. He served the people of Florida as an elected official for over 40 years, always putting the interests of ordinary people first with his unique political style. As a leader, he has been an indefatigable champion of Florida's children and families and a steadfast protector of the environment. He displayed courage time and time again, most recently challenging the Nation's top cigarette makers and emerging victorious.

Lawton was a statesman, a role model, and one of the most successful and respected public officials in the later half of the 20th century. He set a benchmark for how public servants will be judged and, I believe, created a legacy that will endure for generations.

Lawton never forgot the thousands of ordinary citizens he met, as he walked the highways and backroads of his State, whom he served so well. And they will never forget him.

Remarks at the Arrival Ceremony in Tel Aviv, Israel

December 13, 1998

President and Mrs. Weizman, Prime Minister and Mrs. Netanyahu, first of all, on behalf of my family and our entire delegation, I would like to thank you for coming out here at this very late hour to welcome us. Hillary and Chelsea and I and all the Americans have been looking forward to this trip. I am delighted to be back in Israel.

As President Weizman said, this is the fourth time I have come here as President to reaffirm America's unbreakable ties to Israel, to reaffirm our unshakable commitment to Israel's security, and this time to fulfill the pledge I made at the Wye talks to speak with the people of Israel and the Palestinians about the benefits of peace and to stand by you as you take risks for a just, lasting, and secure peace. The United States will walk this road with Israel every step of the way.

Peacemaking has opened historic opportunities to Israel, but each step forward has been tempered with pain and understandable feelings of ambivalence when questions arise as to whether agreements are being implemented fully.

We share the conviction that without security, the peace process always will be clouded for the vast majority of Israelis who seek only to live normal lives as a free people in their own country, and we are determined that Israel's just requirements for security be met. At the same time, we believe that, for two peoples who are fated to share this land, peace is not simply an option among many but the only choice that can avert still more years of bloodshed, apprehension, and sorrow.

That is why I am here. In the past few weeks, the people of Israel, through their Government and Knesset, have endorsed the Wye River agreement, recognizing the promise it holds for putting the peace process on track and creating a positive environment for dealing with the complex and difficult final status talks.