has changed. If anything, there's some evidence that we'd have more trouble passing it.

So if we bring it up in a bill that also has the International Monetary Fund or the Africa trade bill or the Caribbean Basin initiative—all of which I think are good for America—the impact would be, in all probability, to kill them all and to make it even harder to pass fast track early next year. I still believe we'll pass fast track next year when we get beyond this election year. I think it is so evidently in the best interest of the country. That's the first answer.

The second point is, the International Monetary Fund funding will do much more good in the short run because it puts money into the countries that want to buy our food today. Fast track gives the United States the power to open new markets in the future, to enter negotiations to open new markets in the future.

So it's not terribly significant whether we get the fast-track legislation in August, let's say, or September or January or February next year or March, because we still have to start the negotiations and open new markets. We're already going to negotiate in opening agricultural markets, for example, within the World Trade Organization to try to deal with the European subsidy issue that was mentioned earlier.

So I'm strongly for fast track. I think we will pass it next year. I have no evidence that a single vote has changed since it was not passed earlier, and I don't want to kill all the rest of that. We ought to pass the Africa trade bill now, the modified Caribbean Basin bill now. But most important of all, dwarfing everything else, in the near term for these farmers with their prices low is the International Monetary Fund funding, because that will float cash into these countries as a condition for reform, and it will give the money to buy our food. That's more important.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Why have you thrown in the towel on the Middle East?

The President. Well, we haven't. I saw that story. That's just not so.

Let me say first of all, if I thought the process were over, I would say it was over. We have continued intense negotiations to this day with both sides, based on the ideas we advanced earlier, which, as you know, were accepted in principle by Mr. Arafat and not by Mr. Netanyahu, but a negotiation ensued.

Secretary Albright has worked very, very hard on this. We have made a not inconsiderable amount of progress. But differences remain. We haven't thrown in the towel because I think it's a lot better to get an agreement, to get them into final status talks than it is to give up and let this thing drift dangerously toward conflict and dissolution.

So if we come to a time when I think it's hopeless, I'll say it's hopeless and that ideas weren't accepted. But right now, I'm not prepared to say that. I think there's still a chance we can get an agreement, and we're going to keep working for it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu of Israel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks in a Teleconference With Rural Radio Stations on Agricultural Issues and Farming

July 23, 1998

[*Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, acting as moderator of the teleconference, made brief opening remarks and introduced the President.*]

The President. Thank you very much, Secretary Glickman. And I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to speak to people in rural America.

Today, most of our fellow citizens are enjoying the dividends of the strongest American economy in a generation. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years. We're about to have the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, with the highest homeownership in American history. But with the economic crisis in Asia hurting our farm exports, with crop prices squeezed by abundant world supplies, and with farms devastated by

floods and fires and droughts, communities in parts of the South and Great Plains are withering. In Texas, almost three-quarters of the cotton crop is lost; and in North Dakota, retired auctioneers are being pressed into duty just to handle all the families who are being forced to sell their farms.

Secretary Glickman and I are joined in the Oval Office today by several young leaders of the FFA. They represent the future of American agriculture and they deserve a chance to have that future. As the former Governor of a State that depends heavily on farming, I know we must never turn our backs on farmers when Mother Nature or the world economy turns a callous eye.

Our farm communities feed our Nation and much of the world. They also nourish the values on which our country was born, and which has led us now for over 220 years—hard work, and faith, and family, devotion to community and to the land. We simply can't flourish if we let our rural roots shrivel and decline.

For 5½ years, I've worked to expand opportunity for farm families, providing critical disaster assistance to ranchers who have lost livestock, purchasing surplus commodities for school lunches, working to diversify the sources of income in rural America, increasing our use of export credits by a third in the past year alone. But this year's farm crisis demands that we provide more help to farmers teetering on the edge.

Last Saturday I directed Secretary Glickman to buy more than 80 million bushels of wheat to help lift prices for American farmers, while easing hunger in the developing world. Today, in addition to helping citizens in 11 Southern States beat by unrelenting heat, I'm announcing we will provide immediate disaster assistance for farmers throughout the state of Texas to help those whose crops and livestock have been ravaged by drought.

Next week, I'll send Secretary Glickman to Texas and Oklahoma to talk with drought-stricken farmers and assess what other help they require. And once again, I urge Congress: We must provide the $500 million in emergency assistance, sponsored by Senators Conrad, Dorgan, Daschle, and Harkin, for farmers and ranchers throughout the country who have been afflicted not only by drought but also by fires and floods and other disasters. They are our neighbors in need.

With these measures, we can help farmers weather the current crisis. But to strengthen rural America for the long run, we have to do more. First, we have to revive the rural economy with exports. Today, products from one of every three acres planted in America are sold abroad. We have to continue to open new foreign markets and enforce our existing trade agreements. We must give the International Monetary Fund the resources it needs to strengthen and reform the Asian economies so that they will have the money to buy our farm products.

Yesterday, unfortunately, the House of Representatives delayed this critical funding for the IMF. American farmers cannot afford to wait; they need help now. We should also be prepared to donate food generously to those around the world at risk of malnutrition or starvation. As a general principle, I believe commercial exports of food should not be used as a tool of foreign policy, except under the most compelling circumstances.

A week ago, I signed the Agricultural Export Relief Act, enabling U.S. farmers to sell 300,000 tons of wheat to Pakistan the next day. I urge Congress to provide me authority to waive sanctions on food when it is in the national interest, and to work with me to incorporate flexibility in sanctions policy more broadly.

Second, we simply have to strengthen the farm safety net. We should expand eligibility for direct and guaranteed loans, improve crop insurance, which is not working for a lot of farmers today, and extend marketing loans when crop prices are too low.

And we should give farmers more flexibility in planning when to receive Federal income support payments and in planting new crops when their primary crops fail. I proposed allowing our farmers to receive Federal income support payments—early—last spring. There is now some support for it apparently in the Congress; I hope very much it will pass soon.

Third, we must improve the infrastructure in rural communities. We have to preserve universal service and defend the vital E-rate initiative so that all rural homes can count

on affordable telephone rates and rural schools, libraries, and health centers can tap into the promise of the Internet. We have to modernize rural schools and transportation systems, improve the quality of rural health with advanced telemedicine, cleaner drinking water, and safer food.

These steps are in the best tradition of our Nation. Whenever disaster strikes, Americans join together to help see their neighbors through. That's what happened in Florida when brave men and women from across the country help put out the State's fires, and that's what we'll do throughout rural America to save our farmers from losing their homes and crops.

At this moment of broad prosperity for our Nation, we are certainly able to, and we clearly must, help our neighbors on the farm throughout this current crisis so that we can strengthen our rural communities for the 21st century. Now, I'll be happy to take your questions.

Secretary Glickman. Thank you, Mr. President. I get to be the role of moderator today, and our first question comes——

The President. You sound kind of like a deejay.

Secretary Glickman. That's right. You should hear me sing. But we won't do that here. Our first question comes from Shelly Beyer who is with the Brownfield Network out of Jefferson City, Missouri.

Shelly, are you on?

[*Ms. Beyer asked the President if he favors Congress taking steps on fast-track trading authority.*]

The President. Well, Shelly, fast track wouldn't actually help the farmers right now. I would support voting on fast track whenever we think we can pass it. But, you know, we had a huge struggle to pass fast track earlier this year, and we failed. I believe it will pass early next year. I don't believe that any votes have changed.

And keep in mind what fast track does. Fast track simply gives me the authority that previous Presidents have had to negotiate new trade agreements tearing down trade barriers to American products in other countries. By contrast, getting the funding for the International Monetary Fund will immediately create markets for American products.

Let me just give you an example. About 40 to 50 percent of our grains are exported. Forty percent of our export market is in Asia. If you take all the Asian countries except for Japan and China, our exports are down 30 percent because of their economic problems; they're down 13 percent in Japan; they're down 6 percent in China.

Now, if we could get the International Monetary Fund funding, and those countries could get more money, then they'll immediately have more money to buy our food. So I think that the IMF funding will do more in the short run to boost American farm prices.

Now, over the next year, we've got to get the fast-track authority so that we can continue to open more markets. We will also begin negotiations in the World Trade Organization to try to get every country that signed on to that to lower their agricultural tariffs and other barriers so that we can sell in more markets.

So I agree that we need to do fast track. I am determined to get other countries to lower their agricultural barriers, but all that takes time. And if I had the fast-track authority tomorrow, it would still take time to open those markets and reach those agreements. We need to open the markets now. That's why the International Monetary Fund is more important, because it will flow cash into countries, they'll immediately have money when they can immediately start to buy more food.

[*Secretary Glickman introduced Gary Wergin of WHO Radio in Des Moines, Iowa, who asked the President why Democratic votes in Congress for fast-track trade authority have been difficult to obtain.*]

The President. I believe that what happened was the Members got dug in before they saw the final bill. And I also think that there were more Republicans voting against it than the Speaker thought. This was one issue where, notwithstanding our well-publicized conflicts, Speaker Gingrich and I worked hand-in-glove, and we worked very, very hard.

But the truth is that, for reasons that I wasn't privy to, by the time the bill was actually brought up in the House, the people who were against fast track had been working against it so hard they'd gotten so many commitments, that when—even though the bill, on its merits, I think, was very much deserving of passing and met a lot of the concerns for labor rights, for environmental concerns, and other things, we couldn't get the votes.

The only point I want to make is, to the best of my knowledge, we have not changed either 10 Democratic votes or 10 Republican votes from no to yes. If we don't have those votes, why would we kill the Africa trade bill, which is good for us, or the Caribbean trade bill, or even more important by far, the International Monetary Fund, by tying all this stuff together? Why not pass what we can pass now, get the immediate benefits, and then work on passing fast track when the election is behind us?

I think it's clear that it will pass early next year, because it's manifestly in the national interest, and because, frankly, then a lot of the Members of Congress who got committed against it early, will be forced to look at what the actual details of the bill say and will feel freer to vote for it.

[*Secretary Glickman introduced Stewart Doan of the Arkansas Radio Network, who spoke from KARN in Little Rock.*]

The President. Hello, Stewart. What's the temperature down there?

Mr. Doan. Right about 100, sir. About the same as it was Saturday when you were out at Chenal.

The President. I know. It was over 100 both days I was out there.

[*Mr. Doan quoted congressional leaders who have blamed recent agriculture crises on farm legislation from 2 years ago. He asked the President if he agreed with the characterization and if he favored increasing the guaranteed minimum price for grain, soybeans, and cotton.*]

The President. Well, first of all, I think I would partly agree with what they say. I think that fundamental cause of the crisis today is a price crisis. It's a market crisis caused by a combination of things. You've got adequate—and more than adequate—world supplies. You've got a significant decline in the economic capacity of Asia to buy our food products. You've got a big drop in the currency values in other countries relative to the American dollar, which makes our food, relatively speaking, more expensive, which makes it even harder. And that's a big problem. And then in America, you've also got a disaster crisis. You've got some places where they have no price and no crop. Usually when farmers have no crop, at least the no crop they have has a high price, because the supply has dried up. But now the worldwide supply is so big that they've got a double hit. So that's the fundamental problem.

When I signed the '96 freedom to farm bill, I pointed out that it had a lot of good provisions in it, but it didn't have a real safety net. Let's remember what the good provisions were. Number one, it got the Government out of micromanaging planning decisions. Number two, it had terrific conservation provisions. Number three, it had good rural development provisions. And I had no choice but to sign it, because if I hadn't we would have been back on the '49 farm law, which would have been even worse for the farmers. But I said in '96, the crop prices are not going to be high forever, and when they drop, we're going to regret not having an adequate safety net. So the first thing we have to do is to develop an adequate safety net.

Now, let me just—you asked about the proposals by Senator Harkin and others; let me just run through some of the things that I have proposed, and then I'll answer your question about their proposal. First of all, Senators Dorgan and Conrad have a $500-million bill up there—it's passed the Senate and I hope and believe will pass the House—which would improve and expand crop insurance; it would compensate farmers whose crop and pasture land is flooded; it would provide emergency feed assistance to livestock producers who are suffering from drought and allow us to use export enhancement funds that are left over in future years for food aid and other purposes. These things I think will be quite helpful.

Now, in addition to that, I've asked the Congress to help strengthen the safety net by extending the term of marketing assistance loans, by allowing flexibility for farmers to receive advanced AMTA payments. I asked for that last April. The Speaker and other House Republicans are now saying in the last week or so they are open to that. That would have I think a lot of impact.

And I, finally, asked for a provision that would improve credit ability and modify the one-strike policy for farmers who have had a debt write-down, and I've also proposed to let USDA guaranteed operating loans be used to refinance. So if we were to do all these things, I think we'd strengthen the safety net.

Now, in principle, I think it's clear that the commodity loan cap is not working, and it needs to be modified. The question is, how should we modify it, and how are we going to pay for it within the context of the balanced budget? But in principle, I don't think there's any question that what Senator Harkin and Congressman Gephardt and others say is right, that the present cap is too low.

And there are some people who think this system is fine the way it works, but I don't. I think what it will do is inevitably reduce the number of family farmers, even if it doesn't reduce the acreage being farmed. And I don't think that's a good thing for America. So I would like to see a system where farmers don't fail because of acts of God.

[*At this point, Secretary Glickman made brief remarks, noting his Department will continue to provide responsible policy that will not artificially keep farm prices too low and allow farmers some flexibility in marketing. He agreed there are problems with current farming laws. He then introduced Mike Hergert of the Red River Farm Network in Grand Forks, ND, who asked what farmers could expect in terms of fixing the crop insurance program.*]

The President. Well, first of all, we've expanded the size of the program, which I thought was important; it was way too small in '93 when I took office. We've more than doubled it, and we've expanded farmers' choices by creating new varieties of crop insurance. And we've introduced the concept of revenue insurance in a large majority of the grain-producing parts of the country.

But I still think there are some other things that have to be done. I think that even though we've improved the program by offering coverage on preventive planning since '93 and increasingly based the coverage on farmers' individual yields, it's just not working for most farmers. And what we're trying to do now is to look at all the ways we can help our farmers get through tough times that we can pass in the Congress.

Maybe Secretary Glickman would like to talk about this, but I must say, I've been waiting for someone to ask this question, because when I was home last weekend talking to the farmers, that's the only thing they said. They said, this crops insurance is a joke; it doesn't really help anybody. So maybe, Secretary Glickman, that's too blunt for me to say that our Government's crop insurance program is a joke, but maybe you should talk a little more about some of the things we're looking at to improve it.

[*Secretary Glickman noted problems getting Congress to fully fund recently passed agriculture legislation, funding which could aid farmers in the Dakota-Minnesota regions whose wheat crops are badly affected by a disease called "scab." On crop insurance, he compared conditions to the way bankers lend money, that those whose farms have suffered much crop damage in the past are akin to bad credit denying a bank loan. He noted the difficulty in running the crop insurance program like a private insurance company, to be actuarially sound, which the law requires, but pointed to current legislation introduced by Senators Kent Conrad and Byron L. Dorgan which provides funds to supplement crop insurance. The Secretary agreed that it is a great challenge.*]

The President. Mike, Senator Dorgan and Senator Conrad were just here with us in the Oval Office just a few minutes ago, and we were talking about this. I think the provision in their bill is going to pass—I believe it will. But I would just say to any of our listeners there, if you have got any ideas about what we can do with this program, this insurance

program, to make it fairer and more affordable and more functional, or how it could be modified in some ways, I would urge you to directly contact Secretary Glickman or write to us here at the White House. Because I am hearing from farmers all over the country that it's simply not working, and as Dan Glickman said, it's really not like buying car insurance or home insurance or something like that. It's almost like buying flood insurance in a 25-year flood plain where you just have no control over what's going to happen. But we have a national interest in seeing that land, which is highly productive, in North Dakota be planted.

So I think the whole concept behind the requirement that it be, quote, ''actuarially sound'' misperceives the facts there. And I don't believe the Congress meant to say we don't want anybody planting in North Dakota anymore because they've had floods and disease and pests and everything. I don't believe that was the intent of the act of Congress. So I think this is one where an honest error was made, and we would like to correct it and if you've got any ideas, for goodness sakes, give them to us.

[*Secretary Glickman next introduced Bart Walker from WGNS in Murfreesboro, TN, who said that economic success in his area has driven up population, which resulted in family farms being turned into subdivisions. He noted that most students majoring in agriculture at Middle Tennessee State University are going into related fields but not actual farming. Mr. Walker asked the President if there are plans for low-interest loans for programs that would enable and encourage students to take up farming.*]

The President. Yes. We actually have a program that provides low interest loans for first-time farmers, as well as a program in the Department of Agriculture that gives kind of technical support and assistance for new farmers. And one of the things that I've asked Secretary Glickman to do is to assess the adequacy of that program and to look at some of the things that we're doing in nonfarm communities, setting up community financial institutions that make extra loans and things of that kind to see if they might be relevant to first-time farmers.

As I said at the beginning of our interview here, I got the national officers of the FFA here with me. And these young farmers are the future of America. The average farmer is about 59 years old in America today. And I'm very concerned about that in places where, like in Murfreesboro, where you're doing very well economically, if a farmer chooses to sell his or her land to a developer, and you subdivide it, well, there's nothing I can do about it and probably nothing you would want to do about it. You don't remove the right to do that if that's what the market is dictating. But I think where young people want to farm and are able to farm, if they can get the credit they ought to be able to get the loans at affordable terms and at good repayment terms.

One of the things that we've done for college loans since I've been here that I think might have some applicability to first-time farmer loans I want to look at is to structure the repayment in a way that's tied directly to income. So, for example, if a young person wants to go to college and then take a job as a schoolteacher, and another would go to college and takes a job as a stockbroker, and they borrow the same exact amount of money to get out of college but the stockbroker has an income of 3 times the schoolteacher's, under the new provisions of our college loan program, the schoolteacher can pay back the money with a ceiling on it as a percentage of his or her income. So if a young person wants to go into some sort of public service—to be a police officer, a nurse, a schoolteacher, a social worker, something like that—they can do that.

Well, if you think about the early years of farming and how meager the income might be, there may be something we can do to structure the same sort of loan program for first-time farmers. So we're looking at a lot of other options. But we do have—to go back to your first question—we actually do have a program in the Department for first-time farmers to provide for loans and for technical assistance to help them get started.

[*Secretary Glickman noted that the Agriculture Department's outreach office provides technical assistance to first-time farmers. He then introduced Bill Ray of the Agrinet Farm Radio Network in Kill Devil*

Hills, NC, who welcomed listeners to the Outer Banks.]

The President. That's near Kitty Hawk, isn't it?

Mr. Ray. That's exactly right.

The President. I went there once, about 26 years ago. It's beautiful.

Mr. Ray. Well, a lot of folks would like to have you back,Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

[*Mr. Ray asked the President what long-range plans he recommends to help food producers in the Nation.*]

The President. Well, over the long haul, I believe that the provisions of the '96 bill—let me just say what I think we ought to keep. I've said what I think is wrong about it. Let me say what I think we ought to keep. I think it would be better if we could avoid having the Government go back to micromanaging the farmers planting decisions. I think letting the farmers make the decisions about what crops they're going to plant is the right thing to do. I think we ought to keep the strong conservation provisions of the farm bill of '96.

And finally, I'd like to keep, and even strengthen the rural development provisions of the farm bill. One of the things that we haven't talked about is, there are a lot of people who live in agricultural communities who farm, who—either they—either the farmer or the farmer's spouse gets a significant income from other kinds of work. And so what I would like to see is—I'd like to see us do more on rural development, because the more we can diversify the economies of these small towns, the more people can afford to farm because they'll have a salaried income coming in, too, which will help them to deal with the problems of the bad years. So I think those are the good things to keep.

I think that we should redouble our efforts in agricultural research. Secretary Glickman mentioned this. I hope that we can get the actual dollar figure I recommended for ag research funded in this year's budget, because we get such a huge return from ag research.

The second thing I'd like to say is I think if we can get an adequate farm safety net in this present structure, and then we can continue to open farm markets and get fair treatment with the fast-track legislation, with the new agricultural negotiations we're going to have through the World Trade Organization, with the funding for the International Monetary Fund, then I think the future for our farmers actually looks quite good.

If you look at the all the new things that are coming out of agricultural research, if you look at all the new applications of farm products that are being developed, and if you look at the growth of world population and the projected agricultural production in other parts of the world, I would say that the next 30 years for our farmers will probably be very, very good if we can continue to invest in research and stay ahead of the curve, and if we can continue to open new markets, and if we're smart enough and honest enough to recognize that we're always going to have bad years, we're always going to have act of God, we're always going to have things like this go wrong—especially when there's some evidence that there is a lot of change in our climate, that's warming the Earth's climate and leading to more disruption—so let's put in an adequate safety net, pay for it, deal with it, and say it's an investment in America's future. I think if we just do those things, our farmers are going to do quite well.

[*Secretary Glickman introduced Tony Purcell from the Texas State News Network.*]

President Clinton. What's the temperature down there?

Mr. Purcell. We're pushing 100 degrees right now for the 19th day in a row.

President Clinton. Well, I'm surprised you're not shorted out. I'm glad we can hear each other.

[*Mr. Purcell thanked the President for providing emergency disaster funding for areas suffering losses during a heat wave. He then asked what kind of relief might be available for agribusinesses suffering losses.*]

President Clinton. Depending on the dimensions, there are standards in the Federal law for my disaster declarations, but normally, when a disaster declaration affects an entire State in agricultural losses, then small businesses that are affected by it and communities that are affected by it are also eligible for other kinds of assistance. And I tell

you what I will do; I'll have our people do some research on it and get back to you directly on it.

But let me also just say, there's one thing in this bill that's coming up that I think could be quite helpful. I've mentioned this several times, the bill by Senators Conrad and Dorgan that's got $500 million more in emergency assistance. A lot of the problems in Texas are livestock problems, even though you've lost most of your cotton crop and had a lot of other problems.

We had a program which permitted the Federal Government, in times of disaster for people with their livestock, to buy up surplus feed and give it to the livestock farmers. That was suspended in 1996 in the farm bill until 2002. Under our provision, under this emergency provision, we'd get some of that back, and we could get some feed down there to those livestock folks that I think would be very, very helpful. So that's another thing we're trying to do for the farmers. But I believe that there is some community and small business assistance that can flow, too. If Secretary Glickman can answer the question now, fine; if not, I'll have somebody directly contact you later today.

[*Secretary Glickman mentioned there are several disaster assistance programs, and he said he'd get those to the region. He said the President is sending him to Texas and Oklahoma, and he intends to meet with people at Texas A&M to discuss the nature and extent of the damage from heat wave. He noted that emergency loans will be triggered to respond.*]

The President. But if I could, to go back to your question about the nonagricultural losses related to the agricultural crisis—as Secretary Glickman said, some of our emergency programs were funded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. And we have—obviously, you have a Governor's emergency management person there who works with us on that.

Then, we also have some programs funded through the Small Business Administration, some programs funded through the Commerce Department, some programs funded through the Housing and Urban Development Department. We'll just have to do an inventory. And I would urge all of the people who are listening to us through your network there to make sure that their mayors or Members of Congress or State officials have access to Secretary Glickman when he comes down there and give him as complete a picture as you can of what the problems are. And, obviously, we'll do our best to bring to bear whatever resources we can legally provide to help you deal with the terrible difficulties you are in.

Today I announced that we were going to give $100 million to Texas and 10 other States just to help with utility bills, with air-conditioning, with fans, with other things, for all these people who don't have adequate cooling. We've had 100 deaths now between—basically between Dallas on the West and then across Arkansas and north Louisiana, and then to Tennessee and north Alabama and Mississippi, and all in through that 11-State area, all the way over to the East Coast because of the record heat. And I'm hoping that we can help you with that as well and save some more lives.

[*Secretary Glickman noted the program was out of time and invited the President to make closing comments.*]

The President. Well, I would just like to say, first of all, that I'm very concerned about the problems that are being faced up and down and North and West and East and South in the farm belt. They're significant and they're different from place to place in our country. We're doing our best to respond. I'm trying to listen to your elected representatives here. I'm trying to move the system here as quickly as I can. I hope you will urge your representatives to vote for the Conrad-Dorgan bill to get some more emergency assistance out there. I hope you'll support us in building a more permanent, adequate farm safety net and in building new markets for our farm products.

But if you have any more ideas, I would urge you to get in touch with the Secretary of Agriculture or with me. We did this interview in part just to reach out and show our concern to farmers and to rural America and to ask for your ideas. If you have any ideas about anything else we can do, if there's something we're overlooking, we want to get

on it; we want to be responsive. We know that it's not the best of times for a lot of our farmers, and we want to be there for you. America is doing very well as a whole, and we think you should be part of that.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:12 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Environmental Legislation

July 23, 1998

I am pleased that the House of Representatives, in a bipartisan fashion, today rejected an unwise and unwarranted attempt to deny the American people the facts about global warming.

With much of the country suffering a stifling heat wave, and with each month so far this year setting a new record for global temperature, the American people expect and deserve a fair, honest, and informed debate on the issue of climate change. Some in Congress would have stifled that debate by effectively imposing a gag order on Federal agencies. Thankfully, the House voted to remove this language from the VA–HUD appropriations bill.

Unfortunately, the bill still contains other provisions that would restrict our ability to move forward with cost-effective steps to reduce the greenhouse gases that cause global warming. And appropriations bills moving through Congress would cut by nearly one half my proposed research and tax incentives for energy efficiency and clean energy technologies—measures that would reduce energy costs for American families while curbing greenhouse gases.

Americans have demonstrated time and again that we can protect our environment while growing our economy. We can and must meet the challenge of climate change in the same way. I urge Congress to join us in this critical endeavor.

Remarks at a Birthday Celebration for Jazz Musician Lionel Hampton

July 23, 1998

Thank you. I would say you gave a better speech for me than I played a song for you. [*Laughter*]

Let me say to Lionel Hampton and this wonderful orchestra, to all of you who are here who made this evening possible—LeVerne, thank you. Max Roach, thank you for coming. All of us who have been your fans for so long are honored to be in your presence. Thank you, Reverend Jackson. Thank you, all the Members of Congress who are here. A very, very special word of thanks to two perfectly wonderful men and fellow travelers along the road of jazz music and progressive politics—[*laughter*]—John Conyers and Charlie Rangel. Thank you for making this evening possible.

You know, Hillary and I have loved many things about the opportunity to serve here, but maybe none more than the opportunity to share with America the great gifts of our artists. And this is a special night. Lionel Hampton is 90 years old this year. You should know that he has played for every President since Harry Truman. I was minus one when Harry Truman became President—[*laughter*]—so he's been at this a day or two.

It's been a long time since he joined Louis Armstrong and gave him a hit song and revolutionized jazz music forever. I was telling Hillary when Hamp was up there playing and singing, I said, ''You know, my ears are going. I can't even hear the pitch anymore, and there he is, hitting the pitch.'' [*Laughter*] All of you who've ever played or tried to sing, the idea that he hit the pitch is something. And they played magnificently tonight. They lifted our spirits; they lifted our hearts.

I am personally indebted to Hillary and Charlie Rangel and John Conyers for cooking this night up, and I think all of us are. And I just want to say that even though your real birthday was a few months earlier, what the heck, you only turn 90 once—[*laughter*]—we think it ought to be a year-long celebration.

So I would like to ask the White House magnificent chef who does these things for