

unique needs of rural citizens and remind them of the important contributions rural America makes.

One of the most important concerns facing rural areas is the current agriculture crisis. While the majority of the United States has enjoyed a decade of unprecedented economic prosperity, our nation's family farmers have not benefited from this abundance. In the wake of NAFTA and the implementation of a national farm policy destined for failure, America's farmers have suffered, and many are on the verge of bankruptcy. This economic distress has impacted not just farmers, but the entire rural community.

Ensuring our farmers have the opportunity to compete with international growers on a level playing field is more than an issue of protecting the way of life of rural Americans; it is an issue of national security. No one wants our country to be dependent on third world nations to supply our evening suppers, but if we fail to act now, when our farmers are in need, that scenario could become a reality.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Congressional Rural Caucus to develop a viable alternative to the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act. Now that we are united, our caucus has the strength in numbers to turn Congress's attention to this important issue.

HONORING THE O'NEILL SCHOOL OF IRISH DANCING

HON. ROSA L. DeLAURO

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to thank the O'Neill School of Irish Dancing for taking part in the New Haven's St. Patrick's Day Parade during their visit to the United States. It is an honor for New Haven to host them at this annual celebration.

In my hometown of New Haven, Connecticut, St. Patrick's Day is a very special holiday. Every year the parade committee works diligently to sponsor a group from Ireland to participate in the celebration. This year we are honored to have the O'Neill School of Irish Dancing join us from Bornacoola, representing communities from Leitrim and Longford Counties in Ireland. In all, 57 boys and girls, ages 8 to 15 will travel to the U.S. to perform in the New Haven Parade and will be featured in the big parade in New York. These exceptionally talented young people will be performing a combination of traditional Irish step-dancing with pieces from the popular shows of Riverdance and Lord of the Dance. Our community certainly shares the excitement in their attendance.

Even more impressive than their young talent is the commitment and dedication they have put into making this trip possible. Inspired by the excitement of performing, these young people managed a variety of fundraisers to finance the trip. With tremendous community support and enthusiasm, both in Ireland and in the States, they achieved their goal and were able to raise enough money for the trip. They are truly a remarkable group of youngsters.

On behalf of the New Haven community, I am pleased to welcome the O'Neill School of Irish Dancers—we are certainly thrilled to host them during their visit. My sincere appreciation to the many people who have helped them join us for the upcoming celebration. I would like to extend my very best wishes for continued success. Happy St. Patrick's Day!

THE OCCASION OF THE CONGRESSIONAL RURAL CAUCUS KICK-OFF

HON. EVA M. CLAYTON

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, not long ago I made a statement on the Floor of the House that, I believe, underscores the pressing need for a new and revived Rural Caucus.

I noted that, at the Farm Resource Center, a national crisis line for farmers, those seeking help can not get through.

The line is always busy. Small farmers and ranchers are struggling to survive in America. In fact, small farmers and ranchers are a dying breed. And, because they are a dying breed, quality and affordable food and fiber for all of us is at risk.

Passage of the 1996 Farm Bill sounded the death knell for many of our Nation's farmers and ranchers.

Farmers and ranchers, able to eke out a living from the land in past years, now find it almost impossible to break even. Most are losing money and fighting to stay in the farming business. And, the crisis line is busy.

We are all aware of the problems tobacco is having.

But, in North Carolina, according to a recent news report, the state's top farm commodity, hogs, have experienced a fifty percent drop in prices since 1996. Wheat is down forty-two percent. Soybeans are down thirty-six percent. Corn—thirty-one percent; peanuts—twenty-eight percent.

Turkey and cotton prices are down twenty-three percent, since 1996.

In fact, my friends, at the time I made my remarks, there was no commodity in North Carolina that makes money for farmers. And, the crisis line is busy. In 1862, the year the Department of Agriculture was created, ninety percent of the population farmed for a living.

Today, American producers represent less than 3 percent of the population.

By 1992, there were only 1.1 million small farms left in the United States, a 45 percent decline from 1959! North Carolina had only a little over 39,000 farms left in 1992, a 23 percent decline. In 1920, there were over 6 million farms in the United States and close to a sixth—926,000 were operated by African-Americans. In 1992, the landscape was very, very different.

Only 1 percent of the farms in the United States are operated by African-Americans.

One percent—18,816, is a paltry sum when African-Americans comprise 13 percent of the total American population.

In my home state of North Carolina, there has been a 64 percent decline in minority

farmers, just over the last 15 years, from 6,996 farms in 1978 to 2,498 farms in 1992.

All farmers are suffering under this severe economic downturn.

Just before I made my remarks on the Floor, I spoke with a farmer who was working off the farm—not to earn extra money—but, to earn enough money to save his small farm.

He made no money from the farm, in fact he lost money.

Taking a job off the farm was the only thing he could do to save his farm and pass it on to his children.

The man is seventy years old.

And, the crisis line is busy.

Mr. Speaker, when next you drive through a state where the food and fiber for America is produced—the least expensive and best quality food and fiber in the world—take note of the farm, and the people who are trying to make their living from the land.

It will take us, Congress, to relieve the pressure on the national crisis lines.

Farmers and farm families deserve a chance—a chance for the dwindling number of farmers and ranchers who feed and help clothe us at prices that are unmatched around the world.

I am reminded of the story that the former Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Kika De LeGarza, would tell.

While touring a nuclear submarine, he asked the Commander how long could it stay submerged.

After some reluctance in responding to what the Commander considered top secret information, he finally told the Chairman, "As long as the food lasts."

Food, my friends, is vital to America's defense and national security.

And, the crisis line is busy.

Before the "Freedom to Farm" Bill of 1996, the farm price safety net was shield against uncertain and fluctuating commodity prices.

When that Bill was being considered, we referred to it as "Freedom to Fail." I am sad to report that our admonitions have been far too accurate. We must now correct that error.

If we do nothing about the real problems facing these hard-working citizens, they may not be there at a later time.

And, that will hurt all of us, because we too, as human beings, can stay only as long as the food lasts.

That is why we need a Rural Caucus, and that is why we are here today.

A TRIBUTE—LOUIS BRACH WAS TRULY A HERO

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask that we all pause for a moment to remember a man who we have lost, Louis Brach. Though he is gone, he will live on in the hearts of all who knew him and be remembered for long years by many who didn't.

Mr. Brach was a former mayor, city councilman, as well as, an entrepreneur in Grand Junction. He was known as a wonderful businessman and had the gift of recognizing opportunity well ahead of others. As the owner of