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NOTE: The President spoke at 2:23 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of the District of Columbia; Evan S. Dobelle, president, Trinity College; Calvin W. Lowe, president, Bowie State University; and William B. DeLauder, president, Delaware State University.

Radio Remarks on Signing the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000

June 20, 2000

Today I'm signing into law the Agriculture Risk Protection Act, which makes the Federal crop insurance system more inclusive and affordable. The bill also includes $7.2 billion in emergency farm assistance to help farmers suffering from plummeting crop prices.

While this bill is important, it still fails to fix what is plainly an unsuccessful farm policy. We should be targeting assistance where it's truly needed instead of making payments to farmers who haven't planted a crop and don't need our help. That's why we need to revise, revamp, and improve the 1996 freedom to farm bill—to build a safety net that adequately protects our Nation's farmers.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at approximately 11:30 a.m. on June 19 in Room 200 at the Joseph C. Lanzetta School (Public School 96) in New York City for later broadcast. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 20. These remarks were also made available on the White House Press Office Actuality Line. H.R. 2559, approved June 20, was assigned Public Law No. 106–224.

Statement on Signing the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000

June 20, 2000

Today I have signed into law H.R. 2559, the "Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000," which authorizes permanent reforms to the crop insurance program, provides temporary farm income assistance in FY 2000, and provides funding and authorities for other agricultural and nutrition programs for FY 2001.

I support the reform of the crop insurance program that is included in this bill, because it is generally consistent with principles my Administration has advocated over the last 2 years. I have heard many farmers say that the crop insurance program was simply not a good value for them, providing too little coverage for too much money. My FY 2001 budget proposal and this bill directly address that problem by making higher insurance coverage more affordable, which should also mitigate the need for ad hoc crop loss disaster assistance such as we have seen for the last 3 years. The reforms in this bill will put risk management where it belongs: in the hands of producers. The bill will also expand coverage to more crops and provide incentives for new insurance product development, which will extend risk management to more producers and foster innovation in the risk management marketplace.

The bill includes a number of other provisions that I also support. The bill expands research authorities and funding for biomass and bioproducts, including next-generation ethanol, which will benefit producers by increasing the demand for agricultural products, and will diversify rural economies while cleaning our air and fighting global warming. The bill also provides income assistance to producers of a number of different crops, such as fruit and vegetable growers, and producers whose crop and pasture land has been flooded. In addition, the bill includes important reforms I requested to the Child and Adult Care Food Program and allows the use of school lunch application data to identify more children eligible for Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

However, I am signing H.R. 2559 with reservations because its income assistance component is not targeted, is counter-cyclical, and does not require recipients to enroll in crop insurance. If there was any doubt that the 1996 Farm Bill failed to provide an adequate farm safety net, it should be dispelled by this bill that provides significant supplemental farm income assistance for the third year in a row.

As I said when I signed the 1996 bill, the fixed Agricultural Marketing Transition Act (AMTA) payments simply do not adjust to changes in crop prices or revenues, and the

prolonged financial stress in the farm sector has required the Congress to repeatedly step in on an ad hoc basis to supplement farm bill assistance. To respond to the needs of producers suffering from continuing low crop prices and inadequate farm bill assistance, and to provide a sensible approach for the reauthorization of the farm bill in 2002, I proposed counter-cyclical farm income assistance in my FY 2001 Budget, which would provide higher payments on those crops with the most depressed prices and revenues. I am disappointed that the Congress did not adopt this proposal, and instead chose again simply to double the AMTA payments without regard to the hardships facing individual producers this year. Payments in this bill will be based on what producers grew prior to 1996, not what they are growing now, and some payment recipients may not even be growing covered crops anymore, having switched to other commodities or livestock production. We need to move beyond this kind of untargeted, patchwork fix to secure a stronger, more reliable farm safety net that provides dependable assistance to family farmers based on their current farm income.

Another crucial component of my farm safety net proposal is to significantly increase funds for conservation programs, such as the Conservation and Wetlands Reserve Programs, and a new Conservation Security Program. These programs can boost farm income to a wide range of producers, while providing environmental benefits for all Americans. I am disappointed that virtually no funds were included for these programs, and I will continue to seek substantially increased funding for them this year. Additionally, we want to work with the Congress to prevent an unintended sequester.

This bill's farm income assistance will help many producers get through what is shaping up to be another tough year, and the crop insurance reforms should enhance producers' ability to survive natural disasters for years to come. But I would hope that the experience of the last 3 years has taught those who shape farm policy on Capitol Hill—as farm families across the country have learned first-hand the hard way—that we need to build a stronger, better farm safety net on which American producers, their families, and communities can depend.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
June 20, 2000.

NOTE: H.R. 2559, approved June 20, was assigned Public Law No. 106–224.

Statement on European Security and Defense Policy

June 20, 2000

I welcome the progress the European Union made at the Feira Summit to develop a common European security and defense policy. It will strengthen Europe's ability—and responsibility—to act in times of crisis. It will improve cooperation between the European Union and NATO. It will advance European unity while maintaining the vitality of the transatlantic alliance. I look forward to early implementation of the agreed steps, including the establishment of NATO–EU working groups and regular meetings with non-EU allies.

I also welcome the EU's commitment to create a standing roster of police officers who can be deployed to support peacekeeping missions. As we have seen in Bosnia and Kosovo, there is a critical need for international civilian police who can fill the gap between local police and military peacekeepers in countries emerging from conflict. We will continue to work with Europe to ensure such forces can deploy rapidly when they are needed.

Statement on Senate Action on Hate Crimes Legislation

June 20, 2000

Today the Senate held a historic and long-overdue vote on hate crimes legislation. I applaud the Senate for passing this crucial measure, and recognize the efforts of Senator Kennedy on this important issue. This amendment recognizes that hate crimes are different from other crimes. When Americans are targeted just because of who they