

want to thank you for giving me a chance to come by and make my case.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to California State Senator Jim Costa, president, and New York State Senator Steven M. Saland, president-elect, National Conference of State Legislatures; and Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada.

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for Anthony J. Principi as Secretary of Veterans Affairs

March 2, 2001

The President. Thank you all for coming. Liz, thank you for being here, and family members who are here, Mom. We are honored you are here, and thank you so much for witnessing the swearing-in of a good man.

Today we honor a man and swear in a man who has served his country in many ways. Tony Principi came to understand the military in war time as a decorated soldier in Vietnam. As a veteran, he came to understand the Department of Veterans Affairs by serving there. To fill this position, I looked carefully, and I chose well.

America has 25 million veterans. They ask that their Government honor its commitments as they honored theirs. They ask that their interests be protected, as they protected their country's interests in the line of duty. Secretary Principi is prepared not only to lead this Department but to modernize it.

Veterans' claims are often poorly handled, and many veterans are not treated as well as they should be by the health care bureaucracy. Tony and his Department will set new goals for better service. More importantly, we both expect the Department to meet the goals.

As I said to Congress on Tuesday night, we must honor our commitment to veterans by ensuring access to the finest health care. This is a basic obligation of our country. In last year's campaign, I promised American veterans they'd have an advocate in the White House. In Secretary Principi, they

now have a strong and faithful friend at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for your service. Congratulations.

[At this point, Secretary Principi made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary Principi's wife, Elizabeth, and his mother, Theresa. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Principi.

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for Ann M. Veneman as Secretary of Agriculture

March 2, 2001

The President. Well, it's my honor, along with the Vice President, to welcome Secretary Veneman and her sister, Jane, who did a fine job of holding the Bible, and Veneman family members. Welcome to the Oval Office, and thank you all for coming.

Ann is new to the Cabinet but not to the Department she leads, nor the issues that her Department will face. Having served as California's highest agricultural official and in prominent posts here in Washington, she comes to the job very well prepared.

Agriculture represents 13 percent of our Nation's economy and remains central to prosperity at home and competitiveness abroad. In many ways, it is the most crucial of all industries and, yet, the most easily taken for granted. American farmers are without rival in their ability to produce and compete. But they face every kind of challenge, from bad weather to closed markets.

This administration is going to be a friend to the American farmer. In times of emergency, they will get the assistance they need, when they need it. We will support tax-deferred savings accounts, to help farm families guard against downturns. And to keep family farms in the family, we're going to get rid of the death tax.

For many farmers, the greatest challenge today is finding markets for their products. Americans represent just 4 percent of the