

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Agriculture Communicators Congress

June 30, 1992

The President. Thank you for that welcome. And to those of you from outside the beltway, as we say, welcome to Washington on this humid day. This Herb Plambeck memorial get-together -- [laughter] -- some of you may know the dean down there, but it's always a pleasure to see him and see so many of you.

Let me just say a word about our Secretary of Agriculture. He came into this job with considerable experience in agriculture, both out in the field and then in Congress. In my view, he has done an outstanding job for American agriculture. Not only has he worked hard here domestically, the concerns of the farmers very much on his mind, but I can tell you from watching him in action he has done a superb job in terms of negotiating to try to achieve a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round of GATT. And I am very, very grateful to him.

I'm delighted to see Sara Wyant and Marsha Mauzey and Dave King and Taylor Brown. And once again, let me say welcome to all of you.

Before I get into the agricultural topics, I'd like to make a short statement that I hope will be of interest to all of you, indeed, to all Americans. This morning Ambassador Malcolm Toon briefed me on his trip last week to Russia. He went there to determine whether the American POW's or MIA's could possibly be alive there; went there, the full cooperation pledged by Boris Yeltsin before he left. His report makes clear that Boris Yeltsin stands by his pledge, providing us access to Russian officials and opening up the KGB archives. But Ambassador Toon also reports that his search has yet to uncover any evidence that American POW's or MIA's are currently being held in Russia.

As President, I take it to be an article of faith, a solemn covenant with those who serve this country: The United States will always make every possible effort, take every possible action to learn the fate of those taken prisoner or missing in action. Our aim remains a full accounting for every POW and MIA, nothing less. I'm grateful to Malcolm Toon for pursuing this important mission. He's home now. He's left some people there, and we are going to try to get to the bottom of this so we can allay the concerns of every family who might possibly be involved.

At my instruction, Ambassador Toon will continue his work with the full support of the Russian Government, including an exhaustive search of the Soviet archives. And the government, this may interest you, has promised to make a definitive statement on this issue within the next few weeks. They are taking their role very seriously. And we're going to pursue every credible account of American POW's or MIA's held by the Soviet regime.

Now to the issue at hand, the matrix of this wonderful get-together. First, my thanks to all of you for the great job you do in keeping the farmers and the ranchers and the agribusiness owners not just well-informed but the best informed in the entire world. I know you have their respect and gratitude and certainly mine, too.

Democracy works because at its heart is one fundamental principle, freedom. Freedom is about human rights, self-determination, peace among nations. It's also about the free flow of ideas and information, and that's where your job comes in. That's why your work is so important not only to democracy and free enterprise but also to agriculture.

Thanks, in part, to the job that you do every single day, agriculture is America's number one industry. There are still a lot of people in this country that don't understand this, so let me repeat it: Agriculture is America's number one industry.

The news lately has been taken up with urban issues. But I want you to know that rural issues are equally important. And my growth agenda that I'm trying to get through the Congress will benefit all