

remarks, he referred to Leland Swenson, president, National Farmers Union, who presented the President with the organization's 1998 Golden

Triangle Award for outstanding leadership on issues affecting rural America.

## Remarks to the Military Readiness Conference

*September 15, 1998*

I'm pleased to have the second opportunity of this year to meet with Secretary Cohen, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the senior operational commanders of our Armed Forces. Today we're going to focus on the steps necessary to preserve and provide for the readiness of our Armed Forces to defend our interests and security.

Readiness must be our number one priority. It is being monitored and addressed every day at every level of command. Our forward deployed and first-to-fight units are highly ready, and our overall force is fully capable of carrying out our national military strategy. But I'm determined that we don't relax our vigilance, to keep our forces ready to protect our security today and well into the 21st century.

In recent months, we've taken some important steps to strengthen our military readiness. This fiscal year we were able to protect important readiness accounts, such as spare parts and flying hours for our pilots, with the help of Congress' support for emergency funding for our peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and its approval of the request I made to reprogram \$1 billion of our defense budget for readiness.

We struck a prudent balance between short-term readiness and longer term modernization, so that our fighting forces will have the cutting edge technology they need to avoid long-term

readiness problems and to dominate the battlefields of the future.

The service chiefs and the commanders in chief have worked tirelessly also to improve the quality of life for our men and women in uniform and to recruit and retain a new generation of Americans for our all-volunteer forces. I want to thank them for that and say that I am well aware that we're going to have to do more in this area as well.

For example, the services have established standards to reduce the burden on our troops of the high tempo of operations and deployments. We've reduced the number and the duration of some deployments overseas, putting units on standby status in the United States instead.

Again, I want to call on Congress to support our ongoing engagement for peace in Bosnia in a way that does not force us to take money away from readiness and training. We will continue to monitor readiness, to deal quickly and effectively with any problems that do arise.

And now I want to hear directly from Secretary Cohen and from our senior military leaders on this critical issue to our security. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:17 p.m. at the National Defense University at Fort McNair.

## Statement on the Appointment of the Assistant to the President and Special Counsel and Two Senior Advisors to the President

*September 15, 1998*

Today I have asked Gregory Craig to join the White House staff as Assistant to the President and Special Counsel, reporting to me in connection with matters arising from the Referral submitted by the Office of Independent

Counsel to Congress. Joining Deputy Chief of Staff John Podesta, the Counsel to the President, Charles Ruff, and my personal attorney, David Kendall, in their representation before House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Craig will