

Al said today that this is the first time a President has ever addressed the IAFF in person. The others made a mistake; that's all I can say. *[Applause]* Thank you. And I was a little slow off the mark. *[Laughter]* But I would like to point out that IAFF has hardly gone unnoticed by past Presidents. One I particularly admire, Harry Truman, sent this letter on August 1st, 1952, to the then-president of your organization, John Redmond. He described you and your union in plain words that I cannot improve upon. So I would like to close with them:

"Your members are at their posts, day and night, ready to accept the call of duty, to protect

the lives and property of their fellow citizens. They do so at risk of life and limb. For their devotion and heroism, they deserve the praise of all Americans."

Amen. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:05 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Alfred K. Whitehead, general president, Harold A. Schaitberger, executive assistant to the general president, and Vincent J. Bollon, general secretary-treasurer, International Association of Fire Fighters.

Statement on Signing Legislation on Guaranteed Loans for Farmers and Ranchers

March 15, 1999

I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 882, a bill that will accelerate the availability of federally guaranteed loans to our Nation's farmers and ranchers to give them continued access to credit that is necessary to operate their farms and ranches.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that it will soon exhaust the funds available to guarantee loans for farm ownership and operations. This bill will make available more than \$450 million in guarantees to qualified farmers and ranchers. Normally, these funds are reserved for beginning farmers and ranchers until April 1, when they are made available to all qualified farmers and ranchers. This bill will not affect a separate reserve for minority farmers.

These additional amounts, however, will not fully address the unprecedented increase in demand for USDA financing caused by low commodity prices, which are expected to continue. For this reason, I recently submitted to the Congress an emergency supplemental request for an additional \$1.1 billion in USDA loan authority. I call on the Congress to work expeditiously to include these amounts in a supplemental bill I can sign that does not include unwise and unnecessary offsets.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
March 15, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 882, approved March 15, was assigned Public Law No. 106-2.

Statement on the Killing of Rosemary Nelson in Northern Ireland

March 15, 1999

The killing today of Rosemary Nelson, a leading human rights lawyer in Northern Ireland, was a despicable and cowardly act by the enemies of peace. Our deepest sympathies go out to her family and friends. It is long past time

for the bloodshed to end once and for all. We urge all the proponents for peace to unite to condemn this act and reject the violence. We urge the parties to move forward with implementing the Good Friday accord.