

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

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 world's population, but our farmers have the technology and the skill to feed much of the world beyond. Ann and I will carry out this equivocal message to the world: Markets must be open. The United States will not tolerate favoritism and unfair subsidies. We want to compete, and we want our farmers to compete on level ground. And agriculture will no longer be traded away or ignored when we sit down at international negotiating tables. It will be a top priority of ours.

America's farmers will have a strong advocate in the new Secretary. Today, the number of women-owned farms is the highest ever, and Ann Veneman is the first woman ever to hold this position. I'm confident she'll be one of the most successful leaders that this Department has ever had.

Madam Secretary.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:44 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Veneman.