

## Mr. Reagan in farmer Miller's boots

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**Abstract:** First he had a chance to loan the sandbag-slinging President a pair of mud boots.

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**Full Text:** By alighting unexpectedly in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the other day Ronald Reagan was able to lift the whole town's flood-soaked spirits, not to mention quite a few sandbags atop the levee. But for some the visit underlined a recurring riddle of the Reagan presidency: if Ronald Reagan is all heart, why are his policies so heartless The answer may be that Mr. Reagan cannot bear to see close up the consequences of what he has wrought from afar. In Washington he can be a tough-minded, budget-cutting ideologue; in the provinces he often seems soft on suffering If you happen to be down on your luck, the quickest way to engage Mr. Reagan's sympathies is to get in his line of vision. The slowest way is to get in his line of rhetoric Greg Miller, a farmer in the Fort Wayne area, was fortunate. First he had a chance to loan the sandbag-slinging President a pair of mud boots. Then, as the two toiled side by side along the St. Mary's River, Miller recounted his sad tale It seems that heavy rains last summer destroyed many crops in the county, including a large portion of his own. So Miller applied to the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), a federal agency, for a \$100,000 emergency loan. The money would help him plant new crops this spring Well, as Miller told the President, the FmHA said he was eligible for a loan but never sent him the money. Now Miller was getting edgy. Would the President please look into the matter and see what's what Sure thing, said Ronald Reagan, as he hoisted another sandbag. After all, what are presidents for If this were a fable, it would end about here, with the President handing Miller a check for \$100,000. But, since this is a true story, it gets more tangled Federal officials found there were two Greg Millers in the county, both of them farmers. Furthermore, both had applied for emergency loans, both had been approved, and neither had received any money There followed a predictable muddle. FmHA functionaries in Indiana and Washington scrambled to process at least one Miller loan -- preferably to the Greg Miller who had been the President's sandbag companion. But since they could not tell one Greg Miller from the other, they sent checks to both That was nice for the two Millers, and it got everybody else off the hook, including Mr. Reagan. But it did nothing for the 658 other farmers in Jay County who had applied for emergency loans and were still hoping to hear from the Farmers Home Administration. As Greg Miller No. 1 remarked, "There are guys who need it a lot worse than I do.' What we have here is a textbook case of the President's second-guessing himself. For the problem he attempted to solve last week was the very one he had created last year when he shaped the 1982 budget. In that budget he slashed 70 percent off the 1981 farmers' emergency loan program, cutting it from \$5.1 billion to \$1.6 billion Credit: By Richard J. Margolis; Richard J. Margolis is a writer on social issues who lives in Georgetown, Conn.

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