

home. And they'd been married over 50 years. And the first 20 or 30 minutes we talked, all he did was tell me jokes and tell me stories and think about the old days. And I was walking out and for the only time in our life, he grabbed me by the arm. And I looked around, and he had big old tears in his eyes. And I said, "This is really hard on you, isn't it?" And he said this, he said, "Yes, it is. But," he said, "you know, I signed on for the whole load, and most of it was pretty good."

When you were up there singing "Stand By Me" tonight and I thought about how the American people have stood by me through thick and thin, I would just like to say to all of you, when I talk about community, that's what I mean. [Applause] Now, wait a minute. You don't have to sit down, because I'm nearly through. [Laughter] Don't sit down. Don't sit down. I'm nearly through. Here's the point I want to make: The reason I wanted you to come here tonight, the reason I'm thankful for your contributions,

the reason I'm thankful for what you do is, this country has got to get over believing that our political life is about beating each other up and hurting people, instead of lifting people up and bringing them together. That is what I've tried to do. That is what we stand for. And if we remember that, we're going to do just fine in the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Willie E. Gary and Gloria Gary; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair-designate, and Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair-designate, Democratic National Committee; Bishop Harold C. Ray, Redemptive Life Fellowship, who gave the invocation; Bishop William H. Graves, vice chairman, NAACP Board of Directors; vocal group the Drifters; and Ernestine Diller, who sang the National Anthem.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Luncheon March 17, 1999

Well, I'd like to say, first of all, Mr. Speaker, thank you for inviting us here, for a wonderful lunch. We welcome all of our friends from Northern Ireland and the Republic—[inaudible]—welcome them home.

Father, we thank you for your invocation and for the plug for the town of my roots. You should know that after—I'm convinced that the chamber of commerce there encouraged this, because after the invocation he came over to me and said, "Don't you ever come back to Ireland without going there." [Laughter] So I thank you.

Taoiseach, Secretary Albright, Secretary Daley, and to all the Members of Congress. I congratulate Senator Kennedy on his award from the American Ireland Fund.

The Speaker said something I'd like to pick up on. You know, normally, at this time of year, for the last several years, John, David, Gerry, Seamus—somebody's come here and thanked some American for supporting the Irish peace process. But the truth is that we should all be thanking you, because it's only when you come

here that you bring us all together—[inaudible]—add to that, to your citation. [Laughter] But we're very grateful.

Let me also say that we look forward to the day when this will be a total celebration. What a different year we had this year, *Taoiseach*, because of the Good Friday accords. We're grateful that Senator Mitchell was able to take a leading role—[inaudible]—all you have done. We know, not only in Ireland but indeed in other places, that the closer you get to peace, the more desperate the enemies of peace become. And we have seen the tragedy of the Omagh bombing. We have seen the tragedy of the murder of Rosemary Nelson. We just had another loss last night—[inaudible].

This is perfectly predictable. It happened in the Middle East. I've seen it happen all over the world. Whenever people in responsible positions stick their necks out, there's always someone who knows the best way to rekindle a sense of mistrust necessary to destroy the peace is to kill someone and focus on violence.

Your presence here today is a strong commitment to the peace process and therefore gratefully noted. And all I can say is, I think I can speak for every Member of Congress in this room without regard to party, for every member of our administration—you know that we feel, *Taoiseach*, almost an overwhelming and inexpressible bond to the Irish people. We want to help all of you succeed. It probably seems meddlesome sometimes, but we look forward to the day when Irish children will look at the Troubles as if they were some part of mystic Celtic folklore, and all of us who were alive during that period will seem like relics of a bygone history.

We hope we can help you to achieve that. And believe me, all of us are quite mindful that it is much harder for you—every one of you here in this room who have been a part of this—than it is for us. We don't mean to meddle, but we do want to help.

And we've had a lot of great Speakers of the House who were Irish: McCormack, O'Neill,

Foley. I think we ought to rename the Speaker "O'Hastert" after—[laughter]—his words today, because they were right on point.

So you know that across all the gulfs of American politics, we join in welcoming all of our Irish friends. And right now, I'll ask *Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern to take the floor and give us a few remarks.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately noon in Room H207 of the Rayburn House Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Father Sean McManus, who gave the invocation; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; Social Democratic and Labour Party leader John Hume; Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble; Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams; Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, Northern Ireland Assembly; and former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Ceremony With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland

March 17, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Happy Saint Patrick's Day—and what a beautiful day it is.

We are following the custom today, which is, first of all, I received my shamrocks, for which I am very grateful. And with the year ahead I'd say we are very much in need of them, and we'll make good use of them. I would like to ask the *Taoiseach* to come up now and make his remarks, as is customary, and then I'd like to say a few words about where we are in the peace process.

Mr. Prime Minister, welcome back to the United States.

[Prime Minister Ahern made remarks on the peace process.]

The President. Thank you very much, *Taoiseach*. Thank you for the beautiful crystal bowl of shamrocks, its promise of spring, which is reflected in the weather we enjoy today, and

its symbol of our shared heritage, our shared values, and our shared hopes for the future.

Let me say first a few words of tribute to you for your leadership of the Republic and the success you have enjoyed. Last year was Bertie Ahern's first Saint Patrick's Day in Washington as *Taoiseach*. I talked then about Frank McCourt growing up in poverty in Limerick, about Van Morrison growing up in Belfast and hearing a new world through music, about a generation of children growing up in the shadows of the Troubles. Together on that day, the *Taoiseach* and I reaffirmed that the parties in Northern Ireland had the chance to find common ground.

Now, a year later, look at what's happened. First of all, as I told the *Taoiseach* over lunch, Frank McCourt's book "Angela's Ashes" is being made into a movie. But Ireland and Limerick are doing so well economically, as I had a chance to see for myself last summer, that the producers could not find in all of Limerick