

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

enough dilapidated buildings to use in the film. And so in order to film in Ireland, they actually had to construct new dilapidated buildings. That is true economic progress. Meanwhile, Van Morrison's music continues to inspire people seeking to end the violence. And of course, most importantly, in the last year the negotiators did the job with the Good Friday agreement. The people of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic overwhelmingly endorsed it, and as the *Taoiseach* has said, enormous progress has been made in its implementation.

We are grateful for the work of the leaders in Northern Ireland, in Ireland, and in Great Britain for their support and their efforts in this regard. We are grateful, in particular, for the *Taoiseach*, for Prime Minister Blair, for Mo Mowlam, and all those who have taken an especially leading role. We are grateful for the Nobel Prize winners, John Hume and David Trimble, and all the other leaders of the various factions in Northern Ireland.

But as Bertie said, the enemies of peace are still rearing their head. We saw it in Omagh. We saw it on Monday with the murder of Rosemary Nelson. We saw it with another act of violence yesterday.

Now, in a few short weeks, the time will come to bring the new institutions to life so that the people of Northern Ireland finally can begin to take their destinies into their own hands.

To fully implement the Good Friday accord, the parties simply must resolve their differences. And to do it, they have to have the same spirit of cooperation and trust that led to the first agreement. They must lift their sights above the short-term difficulties. They must see that distant horizon when children will grow up in an Ireland trouble-free, and not even remember how it used to be.

You know, on Saint Patrick's Day, we all rejoice in being Irish; even people that aren't Irish in America claim to be Irish. I told the *Taoiseach* at the Speaker's lunch—we just came from that—I said, "You know, every time we have these Saint Patrick's Day events, the Prime Minister of Ireland and all of the leaders of all the factions in Northern Ireland, they come here to the United States and they thank us for helping to promote the peace in Ireland. But the truth is, we should be thanking them because it's the only time we can be absolutely sure there will be peace between Republicans and Democrats in the United States. When they come here, all the Irish Republicans and the Irish Democrats in the United States and all the people who claim to be Irish on Saint Patrick's Day actually behave in a very civil and cooperative way toward one another."

I think it's worth remembering that when Saint Patrick came from England to Christianize Ireland, he did it without a sword, without the order of law. It was the only time in all history that a whole nation had converted without any force or bloodshed. He did it by carefully listening to the Irish people, understanding what they needed to do, how they could change, how they could not, and treating them with a profound amount of care and respect.

We pray now that the Irish people on opposite sides of this last divided peace process will heed the example of Saint Patrick and give us an even bigger celebration here next year.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Marjorie Mowlam, United Kingdom; Social Democratic and Labour Party leader John Hume; and Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble.

Statement on National Missile Defense Legislation

March 17, 1999

I am pleased that the Senate, on a bipartisan basis, included in its national missile defense (NMD) legislation two amendments that significantly change the original bill, which I strongly

opposed. By specifying that any NMD deployment must be subject to the authorization and appropriations process, the legislation now makes clear that no decision on deployment has