

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

*Mar. 17 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999*

been made. By putting the Senate on record as continuing to support negotiated reductions in strategic nuclear arms, the bill reaffirms that our missile defense policy must take into account our arms control objectives.

We are committed to meeting the growing danger that outlaw nations will develop and deploy long-range missiles that could deliver weapons of mass destruction against us and our allies. Next year we will, for the first time, determine whether to deploy a limited national missile defense against these threats, when we review the results of flight tests and other developmental efforts, consider cost estimates, and evaluate the threat. In making our determination, we will

also review progress in achieving our arms control objectives, including negotiating any amendments to the ABM Treaty that may be required to accommodate a possible NMD deployment.

This week the Russian Duma took an encouraging step toward obtaining final approval of START II. We want to move ahead on the START III framework, which I negotiated with President Yeltsin in 1997, to cut Russian and U.S. arsenals 80 percent from cold war levels, while maintaining the ABM Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability. The changes made in the NMD bill during Senate debate ensure these crucial objectives will be fully taken into account as we pursue our NMD program.

## Statement on Proposed Patients' Rights Legislation

*March 17, 1999*

Today the Congress is beginning its work on patients' rights legislation. This issue is critical to assuring Americans high quality health care in the 21st century, so I am pleased that we are moving forward.

Unfortunately, the proposal by the Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee falls far short of the legislation the American people deserve. Because it applies patients' rights only to those in self-insured plans, this proposal leaves 120 million Americans in insured and individual plans without the guarantee of critical protections. Millions of Americans should not be held hostage to the hope that their State might pass legislation providing these protections. In fact, while States have the authority to pass patient protections for these plans, not one has enacted all of these protections. That is why we need strong Federal legislation to ensure that all health plans provide patients these important rights.

Even for those it does cover, the Chairman's proposal leaves out many of the most fundamental protections. For example, it does not have an adequate enforcement mechanism to ensure that patients are compensated when they are injured or die as a result of a health plan's decisions; it does not assure patients access to specialists, such as oncologists or heart specialists; and it leaves our continuity of care protections. That is why every major patient, doctor, and nurse advocacy organization has concluded that this proposal is simply inadequate.

Today represents the first test of whether this new Congress is serious about providing Americans with a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights to assure high quality health care. I urge the Committee to do everything it can to pass this test and give Americans the health care protections they need.

## Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to George J. Mitchell

*March 17, 1999*

*The President.* Well, thank you very much. I am very grateful for your warm reception.

I take it you had a good time inside. *[Laughter]* You not only put me out of the White House,