

I said something before when I was here, I'll say again: I don't think you can possibly imagine the impact of a success in the Irish peace process on trouble spots throughout the world. That's another thing that's been very important to me as the President of the United States, because I have to be involved in Latin America and Asia and Africa, the Balkans.

And so I care a lot about this. But I also—I want you to know how much people around

the world look to your—and draw courage from what you do here.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:15 p.m. in the Office of the *Taoiseach*. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at a Reception Hosted by Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in Dublin

December 12, 2000

Thank you very, very much. First, let me say to the *Taoiseach*, I am delighted to be back in Ireland, glad to be with him and Celia, glad that Hillary and Chelsea and I could all come together at once. We've all been here, sometimes together, sometimes at different times. I thank you for your friendship and the work we have done. I thank your predecessors who are here and all the members of the Dáil. I thank the ministers of the Government and Members of our Congress who are here, and the citizens of Ireland.

I have often wondered how I got involved in all this. [Laughter] I have pondered all these deep explanations. For example, less than a month ago we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the White House. And you may know that America's most famous home was designed by an Irish architect named James Hoban, who defeated an anonymous design presented by Thomas Jefferson. [Laughter] Maybe there's something in Hoban's spirit in the house that infected me.

In the Oval Office of the President on the mantle, there is a beautiful ivy plant which has been there for almost 40 years now. It was given to President Kennedy by the then-Irish Ambassador to the United States as an enduring sign of the affection between our two people. Maybe I got the political equivalent of poison ivy. [Laughter]

When I started coming here, you know, I got a lot of help in rooting out my Irish ancestry. And the oldest known homestead of my mother's family, the Cassidys, that we've been

able to find is a sort of mid-18th century farmhouse that's in Rosleigh and Fermanagh. But it's right on the—literally right on the border. And in my family, all the Catholics and Protestants intermarried, so maybe I was somehow genetically prepared for the work I had to do. [Laughter] Maybe it's because there are 45 million Irish Americans, and I was trying to make a few votes at home. [Laughter] The truth is, it just seemed to be the right thing to do.

America has suffered with Ireland through the Troubles, and even before. And we seemed paralyzed and prevented from playing a constructive role when I became President. I decided to change America's policy in the hope that, in the end, not only the Irish but the British, too, would be better off. I think it is unquestionable, after 8 years of effort, thanks to the people and the leaders of Northern Ireland, of the Republic, and of Great Britain, that the people of Ireland and the people of Britain are better off for the progress that has been made toward peace.

So when the *Taoiseach* and our friends in Northern Ireland, the leaders of the parties, and the British Prime Minister asked me to come back to Ireland one more time, Hillary and Chelsea said, yes—[laughter]—and I said a grateful yes.

I also want to say to all of you, with reference to the comments Bertie made about the Irish economy, I think every one of you that has played any role in the remarkable explosion of

economic opportunity in Ireland and the outreach and impact you're having beyond the borders of your nation, is also a part of the peace process, because you have shown the benefits of an open, competitive, peaceful society.

And nobody wants to go back to the Troubles. There are a few hills we still have to climb, and we'll figure out how to do that, and I hope that our trip here is of some help toward that end. But as long as the people here, as free citizens of this great democracy, and as long as their allies and friends in the North increasingly follow the same path of creating opportunities that bring people together instead of arguments that drive people apart, then the political systems will follow the people.

So it is very important that all of you recognize that whatever you do, whether you're in politics or not, if you are contributing to the present vitality of this great nation, you are helping to make the peace hold. And for that, I am very grateful.

Let me just say in closing, when I started my involvement with the Irish peace process, to put it charitably, half the political experts in my country thought I had lost my mind. [Laughter] In some of the all-night sessions I had making phone calls back and forth over here through the whole night, after about the

third time I did that, to put it charitably, I thought I had lost my mind. [Laughter] But I can tell you that every effort has been an honor. I believe America has in some tiny way repaid this nation and its people for the massive gifts of your people you have given to us over so many years, going back to our beginnings. I hope that is true.

For me, one of the things I will most cherish about the 8 years the American people were good enough to let me serve as President is that I had a chance to put America on the side of peace and dignity and equality and opportunity for all the people in both communities in Northern Ireland, and for a reconciliation between the North and the Republic. I don't know how I happen to have such good fortune, and even though it gave me a few more gray hairs, I'm still grateful that I did.

Good luck. Stay with it, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the Arrol Suite at the Guinness Storehouse. In his remarks, he referred to Celia Larkin, who accompanied Prime Minister Ahern; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Bertie Ahern.

Statement on the Ethiopia-Eritrea Final Peace Agreement December 12, 2000

I congratulate the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea for the final peace agreement signed today in Algiers. My relief and happiness on this occasion mirrors the sadness I felt when I witnessed

two allies and friends embroiled in a tragic conflict. I look forward to resuming our strong cooperation with Ethiopia and Eritrea across the spectrum of bilateral issues.

Remarks to the Community in Dundalk, Ireland December 12, 2000

Thank you very much. First let me thank the *Taoiseach*, Bertie Ahern, for his leadership and his friendship and his kind and generous words tonight.

Mr. O'Hanrahan, thank you so much for the gift and your words. Joan McGuinness—it's not

easy for someone who makes a living in private business to stand up and give a speech before a crowd this large. If you look all the way back there, there's a vast crowd. You can't see it in the dark, but all the way back here there are just as many people. So I think we ought