

that has the respect of all the people; putting arms finally and forever beyond use; achieving a normal security presence throughout the society; making sure the new political institutions are here to stay. Now is the time to act—as Yeats said, “Do not wait to strike till the iron is hot, but make it hot by striking.”

The parties in Northern Ireland, many of whose leaders are represented here today, have shown themselves capable of rising to the occasion and moving forward with wisdom and confidence. And as you do so, know that the United States will be ready to help in any way the governments and the parties find useful.

It’s been said that Ireland is a place where “the inevitable never happens and the unexpected constantly occurs.” Three years ago, the parties unexpectedly gave us the Good Friday agreement. Weeks later,

citizens in all parts of the island defied all expectations by voting to approve the agreement in overwhelming numbers. This year on Saint Patrick’s Day, let us all resolve to push for peace, a lasting, real, and needed peace.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President delivered the remarks at approximately noon in the Rayburn Room at the U.S. Capitol. The prepared text referred to First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, Northern Ireland Executive; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; and former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland. This text was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 23. The remarks as delivered were not released.

Exchange With Reporters in Portland, Maine March 23, 2001

Expulsion of Russian Diplomats

Q. In response to the fact that the Russians responded in kind——

The President. They can make whatever decisions they deem necessary. Our country took the right course of action.

Q. What message does it send, though, do you think?

The President. It says that we will be firm and consistent in our foreign policy. [At this point, the President continued his tour of the Salvation Army Senior Center.]

Tax Relief Legislation

Q. One more question, Mr. President.

The President. Same subject?

Q. No, on tax cuts. Even if, with retroactivity, the size of the package were to get bigger than \$1.6 trillion, is it worthwhile if it provides more money for people up front during this slowing economy?

The President. Well, I think we can accelerate tax relief—we should accelerate tax relief—and keep the size of the tax relief package at the same level. I’m confident we can do both. And I’ve told those who think it ought to be smaller and those who think it ought to be bigger that it ought to be \$1.6 trillion.

The key thing is to make sure that we have tax relief that’s meaningful, and to get as much money in the people’s pockets as quickly as possible to provide a stimulus package.

Q. But how do you do both?

The President. Well, that’s what we’re going to work with the Congress on, is to make sure that we come with a size of the package that fits into the budget and at the same time, get money into people’s pockets as quickly as possible. There are ways to do that. You could delay one aspect

of the total tax relief package for one year, for example. I mean, there are ways to get it done. The key thing is that good people are coming together to try to effect good, sound fiscal policy and to stimulate the economy.

Q. So, Mr. President, if something like what Senator Domenici has proposed happened, there would be some give elsewhere to keep it within the \$1.6 trillion?

The President. I think we ought to work to keep it within the \$1.6 trillion. I've sent that message. I hear Members of Congress saying, "Now we have the opportunity to load up the tax relief package for different projects." And my message is, keep it at \$1.6 trillion. There are others who, of course, want to diminish it, as well. And my answer to them is, let's keep it at \$1.6 trillion.

Q. Would you oppose anything like a rebate that brought it above \$1.6 trillion?

The President. Well, we're working with the Congress to keep it within the bounds of \$1.6 trillion. I saw what Senator Domenici said; he was talking about accelerating by about \$40 billion. Well, that's a rounding number when you're talking in terms of trillions.

Campaign Finance Reform Legislation

Q. If campaign financial legislation that banned soft money from individuals and that did not include paycheck protection in labor unions reach your desk, would you veto it?

The President. Well, I'm watching the debate very carefully. My message is, I would like a bill to sign, and I want all parties involved in the debate to know that I'm anxious to sign a bill. I look forward to a bill and am confident that they will be able to come up with a bill that I can sign.

Q. [Inaudible]—any one position?

The President. Well, let me put it to you this way. I would—I believe they can come up with a reform that will meet the parameters that I've laid out that I can sign.

Expulsion of Russian Diplomats

Q. Mr. President, are you worried about this tit for tat with the Russians and that it could get out of hand and hurt U.S.-Russian relations?

The President. No, I believe we can have good, strong relations with the Russians. They'll just understand my administration is one that takes firm positions when we think we're right. That doesn't preclude the ability for Mr. Putin and me, for example, to meet at some point in time and have a good, honest discussion about common interests, areas where we can work together, and be able to discuss our disagreements in an open and honest way.

Tax Relief Legislation

Q. Are you unalterably opposed to the idea of some kind of midterm review? I know you don't like the word "trigger," but anything that takes a look to see whether surpluses really materialize?

The President. Well, it depends on what it is. There's a lot of ideas now being floated out in the Congress, and I'm open-minded to any good idea. And I'll listen to what different Members have to say. The key thing is that we have meaningful, real tax relief, where everybody who pays taxes gets relief and where, to the best extent possible, accelerate the tax relief to get money in people's pockets to serve as a stimulus to the economy.

Q. So a trigger is not out of the question?

The President. Again, any suggestion that people give I'm willing to listen to. Obviously, one of my concerns is that a tax relief package be undone because Congress wasn't fiscally responsible in its spending. I won't support a measure that says to Congress, spend all the money you want and, therefore, diminish the tax relief plan that we've gotten passed for the people, because one way is, to make sure that the surpluses don't exist, is if Congress isn't fiscally responsible with the people's money.

Expulsion of Russian Diplomats

Q. [Inaudible]—speak to President Putin before you have a face-to-face meeting in June?

The President. Maybe. I'm not sure yet.

Education

Q. Maine's education—[inaudible]—worried that your plan for a national testing—

The President. I'm going to address that today. I appreciate you asking that question. The Governor is here somewhere—the Governor and I talked about that. Maine has got a very strong accountability system, and it has enabled the public elected officials to address problems. When I talk about accountability systems, I talk about those developed by States and local jurisdictions, and Maine is a perfect example.

One of the reasons I've come to this State is, not only is it a special spot in my heart because of an address down the road here, but this is a State where accountability and education go hand in hand. And in no way, shape, or form would I want Federal policy to undermine the good work that Governor King and others in Maine have done.

So when I talk about local accountability and a willingness to set standards, I think of places like Texas and a place like Maine.

Gov. Angus S. King, Jr., of Maine. We've been doing testing in the 4th, 8th, and 11th grade in Maine since 1986. We published the results on the Internet by school, by

school district, and it's accountability with a capital A.

The President. Yes. I know there's—I'm aware that there was some consternation about proposals that I'm working with both Republicans and Democrats on in the Congress. People have got to remember I was a Governor, and I wasn't particularly happy when the Federal Government began to tell us what to do, particularly when it came to educating our children. And consistent in the plans that I'm working with the Congress on is that philosophy that we trust the local people. And the people of Maine have been very fortunate to have a Governor of this caliber to look after the public education system here.

And as the Governor will tell you, the whole basis of reform is strong accountability, because you don't know whether—unless you measure, you don't know whether children are learning. And anyway, I'd better save some of the remarks for the speech. That way you'll pay attention.

Governor King. I've got a motto for you, Mr. President: Does it work, and how do you know?

The President. There you go. I may copy it.

Anybody hungry? You look like a man who could use a meal. [Laughter]

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:10 a.m. during a tour of the Salvation Army Senior Center. In his remarks, the President referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to the Chamber of Commerce in Portland
March 23, 2001

Man, Governor, you fired them up. [Laughter] I appreciate so very much, Governor, your being here. I know the good people of this State appreciate how you

conduct yourself in office. Like your predecessor, my friend Jock McKernan, you brought a lot of class to your statehouse. I love your style, and I really appreciate