

There are systematic problems here that have nothing to do with the overwhelming difficulty of the task, because we have not put our minds to it: setting national standards and having some national measure of whether our kids are meeting those standards, whether they're in south Alabama or north-east Maine; making sure that when teachers teach math and science they have actually had the requisite academic background. This is the only advanced country in the world where people teach—regularly teach math and science to our children without not only a major or even a minor in the subject in school—because of the teacher shortage in these areas—requiring our students to take more courses if they want to go to college or even to have a high school diploma. It's breathtaking when you see what happens as more and more students go all the way through high school without taking algebra or trigonometry or calculus or physics or chemistry.

You know, we say this is an age of science and technology. We've done everything we could to hook up all the schools to computers—hook up computers to all the schools and classrooms. But unless we have trained teachers and students taking those courses, we are going to continue to fare poorly compared to other countries.

What is the practical matter? We have such a powerful economy; maybe if only half of our kids get it, we'll be able to keep the economy going, but the society will not be as strong as it should be if half of our young people drop out because they never got on the escalator when they were in the seventh grade, the eighth grade, the ninth grade. So anyway, it's a big issue.

The Irish peace process—I could talk about the Middle East or Ireland or anyplace else. I'm grateful for the fact that the United States could play the role it's played in Ireland, the role it's played in Bosnia, the work that the Secretary of State is doing now with our allies to try to keep Kosovo from causing a new turmoil in the Balkans, the fact that I will become the first President ever to take a real trip to sub-Saharan Africa ever in the history of the country, starting at the end of this week. Why? Because I'm thinking about what it's going to be like for us 20 or 30

or 40 years from now, as well as in the immediate future. I want to get a settlement and legislation passed in this tobacco case to end this whole chapter of our history in a way that will enable us to save a thousand lives a day and protect the health of our children in the future.

These are the things that we try to do. So when you go home tonight, before you go to bed, I want you to think about why did I come to this dinner? Why did I do that? Why did I show up there? Why didn't I stay home and watch pro basketball or whatever? And I hope that the reasons will be part of your vision for America in the 21st century.

I'm grateful for what we've achieved, but what we've achieved simply imposes on us an even greater obligation to use the success of the country, the confidence of the country, the elbow room that this kind of new prosperity gives us, to really look at the long-term challenges our people face and to meet them.

We've got 3 years to do it, and I am convinced that 3 years from now this country will be in even better shape than it is today thanks to the support of people like you.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 p.m. in the South Drawing Room at the Decatur House. In his remarks, he referred to Leonard Barrack, national finance chair, and Steve Grossman, national chair, Democratic National Committee; Mayor Lee R. Clancey of Cedar Rapids, IA; Rudy Crew, chancellor, New York City public schools; and Wilmer Cody, Kentucky commissioner of education.

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

March 17, 1998

President Clinton. Good morning. Please be seated everyone. This is a wonderful day for all of us here at the White House. It's a great pleasure to welcome the Taoiseach here. Bertie Ahern has given great leadership to the people of Ireland and to the peace process. This is his first St. Patrick's Day here since assuming office, and we're very grateful for his presence. We welcome him.

And I want to turn the platform over to you. Thank you.

Prime Minister Ahern. Thank you very much, President and Vice President. It's a great honor for me to be here, my first opportunity as Taoiseach of the Irish people, to be at the White House on St. Patrick's Day. I'm delighted to participate in this wonderful ceremony and to present to you some shamrocks from the land of your forebears.

The presentation of shamrocks to the President of United States is a very apt symbol of very close and friendly relations between our two countries. St. Patrick used the shamrock as a religious symbol of unity and diversity, similar to the motto of the United States, *e pluribus unum*. And it remains a potent, unifying symbol, which is embraced by both traditions on the island of Ireland.

The United States and Ireland are countries which enjoy long-established bonds stemming from our intertwined history. And as you generously acknowledged, Mr. President, Irish Americans historically and still today have enriched Americans' way of life with the values of their heritage: love of family, faith, and hard work, a devotion to community, and compassion for those in need. They are things that we still live dear to. And for its part, the United States has been a constant resource of inspiration and support as Ireland has navigated its sometimes difficult history.

And that solidarity is as vital today as it was during the Great Famine, which we've celebrated in the last few years, of 1845 to 1848, when the United States gave a new home and a new future to hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women. And the ties between our two countries, Mr. President, are now, of course, copper-fastened by an extremely vibrant economic relationship. And the flows of trade, investment, and tourism between Ireland and the United States have reached unprecedented levels. U.S. investment has made a crucial contribution to Ireland's current prosperity. And equally, as a very profitable location for investment, Ireland has contributed to cooperate and to assist corporate wealth of many great U.S. companies.

Mr. President, I'm very conscious that the principle of unity and diversity has been one

of the major domestic themes of your Presidency. The leadership that you have provided on this theme has been inspiring, not only within the United States but also internationally, where it has an immediate renaissance in places such as Bosnia and Middle East and, of course, in Northern Ireland.

And in Northern Ireland, your inspiring vision of peace, based on the acceptance of diversity, has been matched by your constant support for a process which has experienced its shares of ups and downs. And you've been true to your promise made here a number of years ago, that you would be a friend of Ireland, not just on St. Patrick's Day but every day. And your act of support for the process has not only been constant but also impeccably fair and balanced. And for that, I want to thank you.

The encouragement, the access which you and your administration have provided to all of the participants and that your administration has provided for all of us has inspired us all in good days and sustained us on bad ones. And perhaps the greatest resource that you have given us is Senator George Mitchell, who in his chairmanship of the talks so aptly represents the qualities of good will, of wisdom, impartiality, and tenacity, which the United States has brought to the Irish peace process.

We're now entering, President, as we've spoken this morning, a decisive period in the talks. The core issues have been well and truly aired over the past months. As George has said recently, we are now in the end game; success will require courage, a willingness to compromise and, perhaps above all, a generous vision which transcended partnership, focuses on the common interest of all who are in the talks and all who share it.

Our task will be greatly assisted by the continued support and encouragement which we know that we can count on from you, Mr. President, and from Mrs. Clinton, from your administration, and from our friends on both sides of the aisle of Congress.

Mr. President, I want to thank you for everything you've done. I want to thank you for all that you've contributed to the cause of peace in Northern Ireland. And in presenting you with the unifying symbol of

shamrock, I wish you and your family a very happy St. Patrick's Day.

[At this point, Prime Minister Ahern made brief remarks in Gaelic and presented the President with a bowl of shamrocks.]

President Clinton. Thank you very much, Taoiseach, and thank you for the bowl of shamrocks. We will proudly display it as a lasting symbol of our shared values and common heritage.

I think I should say in the interest of full disclosure, that my Cassidy relatives in Ireland sent me these cufflinks and this tie to wear on this day, so that I would be properly attired for your visit. *[Laughter]*

Since last St. Patrick's Day, Ireland has chosen not only a new Prime Minister but also a new President—Mary McAleese of Belfast, the first Northerner to hold that office. We also share Ireland's pride in the fact that President McAleese's predecessor, our good friend, Mary Robinson, now serves as United Nations Human Rights Commissioner.

I also want to acknowledge the announcement by a great friend of Ireland and great Ambassador, Jean Kennedy Smith, that she intends to leave Dublin this summer. We thank you for your dedicated principled service to our country.

Mr. Prime Minister, our cultures have enriched one another time and again as impassioned voices called back and forth across the Atlantic. Just as generations of American writers have been inspired by Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett, the great Irish musician, Van Morrison, sings of growing up in Belfast, reading Jack Kerouac while a distant radio signal played Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, and Hank Williams.

Last year an Irish American, a retired high school teacher named Frank McCourt, won our Pulitzer Prize for his remarkable "Angela's Ashes," a memoir of growing up poor in Limerick and New York City in the 1930's and '40's. This writing pulls no punches, a fact admirers and critics in both of our countries have been quick to note. But his Limerick and his Ireland have changed. We are delighted that Ireland has enjoyed the best run of economic growth in the developed world during this decade, just as Amer-

ica continues to profit from the labors of your sons and daughters.

This is a holiday, a day for laughter and celebration. But let me say something about which we are all very serious. Northern Ireland now has an unparalleled opportunity for a just and lasting peace. The Taoiseach and his government and Tony Blair and the British Government have gone the extra mile to create an atmosphere in which negotiations can succeed. George Mitchell has been a very distinguished chairman of the peace talks, and we thank you for your comments, Taoiseach.

During these St. Patrick's Day events, I will speak with the party leaders who have come here to Washington. I will tell all of them on all sides the same thing. I will say it as clearly and emphatically as I possibly can: This is the chance of a lifetime for peace in Ireland. You must get it done. You must do it for yourselves and your children. It is too late for those who have already been killed by the sectarian violence of the last three decades. But you can do it, and you must, now.

To get an agreement, there must be compromise. No party can achieve all its objectives. The party leaders must lead, and leading means looking forward. And it means being strong enough to make principled compromise. Concessions that today might seem hard to accept will seem so much less important in the light of an accord that brings hope and peace and an end to violence. No one will be the loser if agreement is reached. Everyone will benefit from a chance to build a peaceful future. The parties must look at the larger picture, to the ultimate goal: a Northern Ireland for all, free of cowardly acts of violence, free of the division and despair that have robbed too many children of their futures for too long.

Mr. Prime Minister, today you ask me to stay personally involved in the peace process. I will do everything I can. The United States will continue to stand firmly against extremists on both sides who want to use violence to thwart a peaceful, just solution that the vast majority of the people in Ireland, whom I was privileged to see in late 1995, clearly still want.

As they negotiate, the parties, too, must continue to demonstrate by words and deeds that they reject violence. They must do everything possible to prevent further bloodshed.

Here on the edge of the 21st century, there is a growing global community of people committed to peace, to democracy, to social justice, to putting the divisions of the past of religion and race, of ethnicity and tribe, behind them. From Guatemala to Mozambique, even now to Bosnia, the unceasing desire of people for a peaceful, decent life is overcoming the forces of hate and bigotry and violence. Ireland, its leaders, and its peacekeeping forces have helped to contribute to the progress of this peace all around the world. There has not been a day in the last four decades when an Irish peacekeeper has not been somewhere on duty as a sentinel for peace in a distant part of the world.

Now all the people on the island of Ireland can be sentinels for peace, if only their leaders will make the principled agreements necessary to give them that chance.

Again, let me say, the days I spent in Ireland in 1995 are perhaps the most memorable days of my life. As we rejoice today in the spirit of St. Patrick, the heritage of Irish and Irish-American people, let us remember what the spirit of St. Patrick was, and how he became the first and only person ever to bring Christianity to a distant, alien place without the sword. And let us bring a future to Ireland worthy of that great achievement of St. Patrick.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator George J. Mitchell, independent chairman of the multi-party talks in Northern Ireland.

Remarks on Proposed Legislation To Expand Medicare

March 17, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you. Senator Kennedy is even more exuberant than normal today, but you have to forgive him and me and Senator Moynihan and isolated oth-

ers—this is St. Patrick's Day, and we're feeling pretty good, the Irish are. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Congressman Stark, for your long leadership and your willingness to push this legislation. Thank you, Senator Moynihan, for making it utterly clear, so that no one can dispute it, that this legislation presents no threat to the integrity of the Medicare program or the security of the Trust Fund. Thank you, Sherrod Brown, for your initiative and your leadership. As always, thank you, Senator Kennedy.

And I'd like to say a word of thanks to one person who has not spoken here today, our Senate Democratic leader, Tom Daschle, who has worked so hard to help one particular group of Americans here: Americans who retired early, in part because they were promised health care benefits which were then denied to them. This will take care of them, and we can keep the promise that others made to them. And I think we have to do it. And thank you, Tom Daschle, for fighting for them.

I'd also like to thank Leader Gephardt and Congressman Dingell and all the Members of the House caucus who are here—thank you very, very much. And I can't help noting that this may be the first public appearance in Washington for the newest Member of this caucus, Representative Lois Capps, from California.

Let me begin with a point I have made over and over to the American people since the State of the Union Address. This is a remarkable time for our country. I look out at all these young people who are working here, and I think how glad I am they are coming of age at a time when America is working, when we are making progress, economically; we're making progress on our social problems; we're making progress in our quest for peace and security in the world.

But everybody knows that the world is changing very rapidly. And so the question is, what should we be doing in the midst of good times? I believe the last thing we should be doing is sitting on our lead, if I could use a sports analogy. Good times give us the confidence, the resources, and the space not only to dream about the future we want in the 21st century but to take action to deal with it. It is wrong to sit idly by when we can