

Week Ending Friday, March 22, 1996

**Remarks at a Ceremony Celebrating
Saint Patrick's Day With Prime
Minister John Bruton of Ireland and
an Exchange With Reporters**

March 15, 1996

President Clinton. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome back to the White House.

Prime Minister Bruton. Thank you. And now may I present this bowl of shamrock.

President Clinton. Thank you. It's very beautiful. We're delighted to have you here, and we'd be glad for you to make whatever remarks you'd like.

Prime Minister Bruton. Mr. President, first of all, this gift of a bowl of shamrock symbolizes an Irish greeting. And it's a greeting, first and foremost, which says thank you, thank you to the United States for making a home for so many generations of Irish people who have come here to participate in the greatest democracy in the world.

It's also a way at this particular time of saying thank you to you personally for your contribution to giving us peace in Ireland. The 17 months of the cease-fire during which so many lives were saved, those 17 months would never have come were it not for the courage that you showed and the interest that you took in bringing peace to Ireland. Your interest gave confidence to peacemakers in Ireland, and that interest is something that I believe will be crucial in bringing peace back to Ireland now that it has been, unfortunately, interrupted.

I believe that the important thing we need to reestablish the cease-fire has already been achieved. That is the setting of a fixed date for all-party talks, the 10th of June of this year. As we know, those who are concerned about progress in Northern Ireland, those who are concerned from a Republican perspective, a Nationalist perspective, that adequate progress was not being made, were demanding consistently the setting of a fixed and unconditional date for talks. That date

has now been set. The talks will start on the 10th of June.

Meanwhile, difficult discussions are taking place mapping out the route towards the talks, the various things that need to be done so that talks will start in the best possible atmosphere on the 10th of June. I want to stress that the only qualification required of any party for participation in those talks is that they should not support a campaign of violence. Thus the only qualification required for something that we want very much, which is full Sinn Fein participation in these talks, is the reinstatement of the cease-fire. And I ask the IRA to reinstate the cease-fire so that Sinn Fein will be able to take their unique and deserved part in the talks that will be starting on the 10th of June.

I want to say also, from the point of view of the Irish Government, that it is extremely important that these talks, when they start on the 10th of June, do not become logjammed on one item. Of course, the issue of the decommissioning of arms and the very important and difficult questions that were so lucidly dealt with by Senator George Mitchell in his report, of course those are critical issues which must be dealt with in the talks from the very outset and dealt with in a serious way. But I want to say that, from the point of view of the Irish Government, and we will be participating fully in these talks, we're not willing to allow any one item, be it decommissioning or anything else, to prevent progress on other items. We want to see a total and comprehensive engagement on all of the issues across all of the problems by all of the parties.

And I want to stress that the goal of these talks is truly ambitious. It is a comprehensive agreement, not an internal settlement within Northern Ireland, a comprehensive settlement dealing with the relations between Britain and Ireland, dealing with relations between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, and of course, instituting justice within

Northern Ireland and fairness within Northern Ireland itself.

What we're aiming at in that three-stranded approach is a system of government for the people of Northern Ireland to which both communities can give equal allegiance. All throughout the world where problems of this nature exist, where there are two communities mixed together with differing national allegiances, the tendency has been in the past for one community to be predominant and the other to be subordinate. What we're looking for in Ireland is something different. It is a system of government where both communities will feel equal, where both will have the same loyalty to the institutions each share and each live under. That's something which I believe that deserves to happen; it deserves to happen in this generation.

And I recollect, when I first came to this house, and you, Mr. President—I've given you some shamrock today—you made me a presentation of a book which was entitled "How the Irish Saved Civilization." It was about the role of Irish monks in preserving learning during the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire. And it quite properly, I think, indicated your realization that we of Irish heritage have a capacity to do some things that affect the whole world.

And it's my view that if we in Ireland can devise political institutions, form a society where you have two communities with radically different allegiances, and let us not minimize the differences of allegiance that exist between Unionists and Nationalists, if we have the imagination, the spirit, and the confidence to devise institutions in these talks that will start on the 10th of June, I believe that we, Irish people and people of Irish heritage, will again be contributing a model to the world, a beacon of hope to the world similar to the one to which you drew my attention when you presented me with that most excellent book.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Clinton. Thank you very much Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Bruton, members of the Irish delegation. Senator Mitchell, it's good to have you back. And I want to thank you in the beginning for the beautiful Irish crystal and the shamrocks. Especially this year, I need a shamrock or two—[laugh-

ter]—and I will try to put them only to public use. [Laughter]

When the Prime Minister hosted me in Ireland last year at Dublin Castle in a room called St. Patrick's Hall, it struck me that he would be back here for St. Patrick's Day. And I'm glad to have him back in this house which was itself designed by an Irishman more than 200 years ago, especially since one in four of all American Presidents trace their roots back to Ireland.

I want to thank the Prime Minister for being here especially this year because of the extraordinary physical efforts he has made in the last few days. He first accepted my invitation, along with President Mubarak of Egypt, to join us at Sharm al-Sheikh in Egypt. So he has been to Egypt just in the last couple of days before coming here. And I know he was at an event last night and made a speech. So we certainly can attest to his physical stamina, as well as his leadership ability, and to the evidence that this gives once again to Ireland's willingness to stand for peace, not only within Ireland and in Northern Ireland but throughout the world. And that's something that all of us are very grateful for.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank you in front of the American people for the wonderful way you made me and the First Lady feel at home when we were in Ireland. I will never forget that great sea of Irish and American flags on College Green in Dublin. And I will also never forget that I have not yet collected on my golf game at Ballybunion. [Laughter] I expect to be back there as soon as I can.

I thank you for also recognizing the importance of the historic bonds between our countries. This Nation is flooded with Irish-Americans in every walk of life, contributing mightily to our welfare and to our future. And just as Irish-Americans love our own country, we also love the land of our ancestors. So there is a fervent and deep desire in this country to do what we can to support the peace that took root in Northern Ireland a year and a half ago, to see it grow stronger, to see it endure. I want to thank two Irish-Americans who have worked so hard for that, our Ambassador, Jean Kennedy Smith, and Senator Mitchell. I thank them for their efforts.

Let me say that when I was in Northern Ireland last year—the American people have heard me say this repeatedly, but I want to repeat it again—the thing that impressed me most was the obvious deep desire of people in both communities for peace. It was overwhelming. It was palpable. It was loud. It was unambiguous. It was exuberant. It was determined. It seems to me that that alone is enough to send a message to those who would resort to bombs and bullets that their ways are the ways of the past and that the people cannot be denied the future they have decided upon.

So I want to salute again the Prime Minister for all the work he has done to move the peace process forward, from the joint framework document to the twin-track process with Prime Minister Major. He has shown that he's willing to take risks for peace, and he's achieved some significant breakthroughs for which we're all grateful.

In the aftermath of the terrible bombings in London, his courage and his commitment are making a difference again. The February 28th announcement by the Irish and British Governments was truly a milestone achievement. It sets a firm date for all-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland. And that is the goal we have been working for; June 10th, a firm date, is the goal we have been working for. Violence has no place in this process.

I applaud what the Prime Minister said today: The cease-fire must be restored. It must be restored because it is a right and decent and honorable thing to do. And it must be restored because, as the Prime Minister said, that is the only way the talks can be inclusive. And unless everybody is involved in all-party talks, unless the all-party talks are all-party talks, that process cannot truly go forward. I want to commend the Loyalist leaders on the restraint they have shown at a time of significant challenge and for working to maintain the cease-fire in the face of the recent assaults.

We want to do all we can here to sustain the momentum for peace. We want to work closely with Prime Minister Bruton and his colleagues, with John Major and the British Government, with all the parties involved to support their efforts to end the violence and

move the process forward. We can't allow anyone to hijack the future of peace in Northern Ireland. We can't allow anyone to deny the children their hopes and the just destiny they should have.

Again let me say, I will do everything I can to support this process. The Prime Minister and I had a very good meeting before coming out here. I think we are in clear and complete accord on how we should proceed.

And finally, let me thank again—the American people should know that there is no country in the world that has contributed more consistently over the last several decades to peace in other parts of the world than Ireland. And I thank them for the work that they have done. From Lebanon to Cyprus to Bosnia, the Irish are always there to take on the most demanding issues in the rest of the world.

They have made an important contribution to the international police task force in Bosnia, which is now led by an Irish commissioner. And I certainly look forward to working with Prime Minister Bruton when Ireland assumes the European Presidency in July. Even to Americans who are not Irish, I would say to you, with Ireland making so many labors for peace in so many places in the world more consistently over more years than any other nation in the world, it is the obligation of the United States to work hard to help to achieve peace in Northern Ireland. We are going to do some good work. I think we are going to prevail.

And so on this happy day for all Irish-Americans, I thank you for remembering the book that I gave you. I read it with great fascination. It gives every Irish person in the world a unique set of bragging rights. [Laughter] And on this day of bragging rights, Mr. Prime Minister, I am delighted to welcome you and all of your delegation back to Washington.

Thank you very much.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, how far can your administration go in helping to guarantee that the talks will actually take place on the date stipulated and that there will be progress after that?

President Clinton. I'm not sure how to answer your question in the sense that I don't know that any country can guarantee the results of a peace process within another country. I can tell you that Senator Mitchell is still on the case, and we are still on the case, and we plan to reach out to all the parties, to stay in touch with all of them, and to make our views known and to do whatever we can to support the disciplined, coordinated, and, we believe, proper approach that has been announced by the Prime Minister and by Prime Minister Major on February 28th. My own view is if we can start the all-party talks and all the parties are part of the all-party talks, which means we have to restore the cease-fire, and then if all issues are approached in good faith and in a comprehensive and disciplined fashion, the chances of a successful outcome are pretty good.

You know, again, it's not for me to comment on the substance of these things, but it seems to me that if you look at the differences between the parties on a lot of these matters about what life for the people of Northern Ireland would look like on the other side of this process, those gaps are not too difficult to bridge. I have seen wider gulfs bridged just in my time here in the White House.

So I believe that the real problem is overcoming this enormous accumulation of distrust, the emotional scars and baggage of the past, and the belief that somehow somebody is going to be tricked by somebody else into an outcome in which one side gets what it wants and the other side is left standing at the station. I think if we can overcome that and get this process started with everybody in good faith, that the actual facts of the matter can be resolved. That's what I believe.

Q. Mr. President, if you had an opportunity to directly address the seven people on the ruling body of the IRA, as opposed to Gerry Adams, these people who have total mistrust and distrust of the British administration, what would you be saying to them to convince them that they should trust John Major and the British administration at this point in time?

President Clinton. Well, first of all I would say to them, you don't have to trust them at all. You can take these things as they

come. But I can say that the United States, that our involvement here presumes the integrity of any agreement which would be made, and that what you ought to do is to realize that all you do, as every poll shows, is weaken your case among Irish, whether they're Catholics or Protestants, every time you blow up a building and kill somebody when we can get these talks started with people representing you and your views in the talks.

There's no—you don't have to all of a sudden start trusting people. You just have to show up, start, go to work, and if your representatives and people who have the same concerns that you do reach an agreement in good faith, then it will be very hard for that agreement not to be carried, first of all, because the United States has placed its good faith, if you will, in the ultimate outcome of the product and, secondly, because the whole world is looking at this. You can't go through an agreement like this, come out and have everybody say, okay, these are the following six things we're going to do, and then see it come a cropper. I mean, that's what I would say to them.

I'm not asking all these people to start trusting each other and loving each other overnight. That's not what all-party talks are about. All-party talks are about everybody shows up; here's the agenda; here are the four or five items we have to resolve; you go to work on them. If you don't resolve them, you certainly haven't lost anything. If you do resolve them, you have perhaps given yourselves and everybody else a chance to walk away from a terrible way of spending your life toward a more fruitful future for your children.

Q. Mr. Clinton, how confident are you that the IRA will listen to your words and the other impassioned words that have been addressed to them?

President Clinton. I don't know the answer to that. I just know that if you look at—what's happened in the past hasn't worked. What's happened in the last couple of years has a chance of working. And the people whose lives are most affected prefer peace to war and prefer progress to violence.

And I would say again, if you look at the substantive differences here, yes, there's the

decommissioning issue that has to be addressed and has to be resolved. Senator Mitchell did a very good job, I thought, of dealing with that whole issue. But if you look at the other—the sort of governance questions, the questions about how the people in Northern Ireland will live, how do you assure that everybody will be treated with dignity, that everybody will be treated fairly, that everybody will have their say, those issues, it seems to me, can be resolved.

There is nothing to be lost here by taking a leap of faith. You know, everybody can always go back to behaving in the terrible way they once behaved. I mean, you know, there's nothing—that's true, by the way, of every human being in the world—every time somebody decides to try to make a change in his or her life, one of the things you always know is, if the change fails, you can always go back to doing what you were doing. If it's ultimately unsatisfying, if it leads to a dead end what is to be lost in trying? Nothing, nothing.

That's the argument I make: It's in everyone's self-interest to go forward. It is in no one's self-interest to keep their foot on the brakes of this process.

Q. At what level, Mr. President, is your administration in contact with Sinn Fein or the IRA?

President Clinton. I think the only thing that's appropriate for me to say to you, sir, is that we have worked hard over this entire process to maintain what we thought was an appropriate level of communication with the parties involved. And that's all I think I should say about it.

Q. Do you feel that the administration's allowing Gerry Adams to enter this country at this time has been beneficial for the peace process?

President Clinton. Yes. If I didn't think so, I wouldn't have done it.

Q. Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:47 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Finola Bruton, wife of Prime Minister Bruton; former Senator George J. Mitchell, Special Assistant to the President for Northern Ireland; Prime Minister John Major of the United Kingdom; and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at a Reception Celebrating Saint Patrick's Day

March 15, 1996

The President. Thank you very much. And welcome to the White House. Happy Saint Patrick's Day. To the Taoiseach and Mrs. Bruton and all of our friends from Ireland and my fellow Americans, we are delighted to have you here with us again. To our friends from Northern Ireland, party leaders John Hume, David Trimble, John Alderdice; the Lord Mayor of Londonderry, John Kerr, thank you for traveling all this way to be part of this celebration.

To Senator Mitchell and Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, and to all the Irish-Americans here who have played a special role in strengthening the bonds between our peoples, let me say to you a very special thank you and urge you to redouble your efforts in the days and months ahead.

I want to say a special word of appreciation, too, to the Irish-American members of our administration, our Secretary of Education Richard Riley; the Director of the Peace Corps, Mark Gearan. And General McCaffrey is here; I take it he's elevating his Irish roots today, our new drug czar. And since our trip to Ireland, the Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown, has asked for honorary designation—[laughter]—leaving himself open to all sorts of unusual historical analogies. [Laughter]

I want to say to all of you it's no secret that Hillary and I love this time of year. This day got off to a very promising start; the Taoiseach gave me a bowl of shamrocks. It had two benefits. First of all, this being an election year, I need all the shamrocks I can get. [Laughter] And secondly, this is the one day of the year when I am more green than the Vice President. [Laughter]

When Hillary and I came home from Ireland, I told her that I didn't know whether I would ever have 2 such days like that again in this lifetime, but if I didn't, I couldn't imagine two better ones anyway. I will never forget the waving sea of Irish and American flags at College Green in Dublin, never for-