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Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Reception

March 17, 1995

Is the microphone on? Now it is. Taoiseach and Mrs. Bruton, let me say again, welcome to the White House. *Ceade mile failte.*

We have been breaking out the green for many years on St. Patrick's Day, but this is truly an historic St. Patrick's Day. For the first time we have invited leaders of all the major political groups from Northern Ireland to join us, and I am delighted that so many are here tonight. Those who take risks for peace are always welcome under this roof.

President Kennedy, with his marvelous Irish understatement, once pointed out, and I quote, "The observance of St. Patrick's Day is almost as old in America as the Irish themselves. And some say they arrived in the 6th century." Actually, the first recorded mention of St. Patrick in America was in 1636, when an Irish ship bearing that name sailed into, where else, Boston Harbor. It, however, did not receive a warm welcome. The Puritans were not well disposed toward the Catholics, but as history shows, it was only a temporary setback as—[*laughter*].

During the Revolutionary conflict, George Washington even paid his own compliment to the holiday in 1776. On March 17th, he ordered that the password of the day be "Boston," and the response, "St. Patrick." By the way, the Colonies' general at that time was a Sullivan.

A few months later, at least a dozen Irishmen signed the Declaration of Independence, and another, Mr. Dunlap of Philadelphia, printed the Declaration for the first time. He also lost the original copy. [*Laughter*] But that setback, too, was temporary because the Irish knew then how to back winners.

The Irish first became a force in our politics in the 1790's when they supported Thomas Jefferson. To their eternal credit, many of their descendants have seen fit to back his Democratic descendants in the years since. Taoiseach, as you know, I am on my mother's side Irish; her name was Cassidy. What you may not know was that the decisive battle for the nomination for President in 1992 was in Illinois and Michigan on St. Patrick's Day.

It is said that Ireland's greatest export is its people. No country has benefited more from that export, Catholic and Protestant, than the United States. These two traditions have been intertwined, and together have contributed immensely to our success as a nation and to our greatness as a people. More than a dozen Presidents descended from Irish ancestors, from Andrew Jackson, the son of immigrants from Carrickfergus near Belfast who was our first President of Irish-Protestant heritage, to John Kennedy, the great-grandson of a cooper who left County Wexford and was our first Irish-Catholic President. I might say we're honored to have his sister as our Ambassador to Ireland and his brother and two of his nephews in the United States Congress today. They're now seeking to expand their stranglehold; one of his nieces is the Lieutenant Governor of Maryland. The next thing you know they'll insist on a position on every city council in America. They have enough relatives to fill that. [*Laughter*]

In the fight for our independence and in the fight to preserve our Union, there were Irishmen from both traditions serving side by side in all-Irish units. In both wars, they were among the most feared warriors. They put freedom over faction, and they helped to build our Nation.

Finley Peter Dunne, the great Irish-American humorist, wrote that a fanatic is someone who is sure God would be on his side if only He knew all the facts. [*Laughter*] Today, with good humor but complete seriousness, I urge all our guests from Northern Ireland and all the parties concerned to put aside all extremism for the common good of peace.

The Prime Minister of Ireland and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, at no inconsiderable risk to themselves, have paved the way to a new era of peace. I urge all of you to follow that path. The tough tasks of compromise still lie ahead. The hard, unending work of democracy is never easy. Even here, after all these years, two centuries of it, we still have our difficulties from time to time, living with those who differ from us. But as you work to forge a new future, free of violence, free of intimidation, with the participation of all the people of Northern Ireland, the United States will stand by you.

American has received so many gifts from Ireland, so many people who have enriched our

Nation, people who continue to come to the present day. We perhaps have many to give back. Some are perhaps financial in nature, but maybe the most important thing we could give to Ireland and, indeed, to a very troubled world today is the example of what is possible when people find unity and strength in their diversity.

We know from our own hard experience, from the blood we have shed on our own land, from the struggles we have been engaged in for a long time and the joys that we draw every day from the increasing diversity of our people, that strength can be drawn from differences, differences which are celebrated, respected, appreciated. That kind of strength can build a future worthy of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Tonight our hopes and our prayers are with all the people of Ireland and especially with you, Mr. Prime Minister, and with your fine wife and your family. We loved having you here. We love every St. Patrick's Day, but this one especially we will remember above the rest.

Thank you. Godspeed.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

The President's Radio Address
March 18, 1995

Good morning. This morning I want to talk about responsibility, the responsibility all parents have to support their children. I'm pleased to be joined by Gerri Jensen, the president of the leading child support enforcement group in America, along with six other conscientious parents who have struggled to raise their children without the child support they were entitled to.

Our generation, at the end of the 20th century, has two great responsibilities: first, to keep the American dream alive and well for all our children and, second, to help our country remain the strongest force for freedom and democracy in the world. We can't do that if we don't have strong families and responsible parenting.

In Washington we're having a great debate about what we ought to do here to support these goals. On one side is the old Washington view that big, bureaucratic, one-size-fits-all Government can provide big solutions to America's big problems. On the other side is the new extreme view that Government is the source of all our problems and if we just get rid of it every problem would go away as well.

I've got a different view based on practical experience. I think we have to chart a course between the old way of big Government and the new rage of no Government. I think Government's job is to expand opportunity while shrinking bureaucracy, to get more jobs and higher incomes with less burden from Government, to empower people to make the most of their own lives through more education and training and technology and support for families and for work, and to enhance our security on our streets and around the world.

To achieve these ends, the Federal Government has to be a partner, a partner with the private sector, with State and local governments, with individual citizens to strengthen our communities, a partner in promoting opportunity and at the same time demanding more responsibility. That's what the New Covenant is all about.

Nowhere is the lack of values, the lack of opportunity and responsibility more apparent than in our own failed welfare system. We all agree we have to end welfare as we know it. I think to do it we'll have to offer more opportunity to move people from welfare to work and demand more responsibility in return, to have a requirement that anyone on welfare who can work must go to work, and to discourage irresponsible behavior that lands people on welfare in the first place by insisting on tougher child support enforcement and responsible parenting. We have to make responsibility a way of life.

I've been working on this issue for the last 15 years. Last year I sent Congress a sweeping welfare reform plan. Congress didn't act last year, but I applaud the new Republican majority and the Democrats, both of them, for making