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Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process
June 6, 1996

Today's announcement by the British and Irish Governments on the arrangements for the June 10 negotiations on Northern Ireland marks another historic step toward a brighter future for the people. I welcome this agreement, which will enable the negotiation of a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict that has plagued generations.

I commend Prime Ministers Major and Bruton for the perseverance and determination that they have shown in the cause of peace. I have just spoken with them both, and once again I am impressed by their commitment to the peace process. From the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 to the Joint Framework Documents of February 1995 and the joint communique of February 28 of this year, the two governments have worked tirelessly to establish the foundation for successful talks. I am pleased that Senator George Mitchell has agreed to chair the plenary session of the talks. I know that he and his colleagues, General John de Chastelain and Mr. Harri Holkeri, will again make a major contribution to the peace process.

With the start of the talks on June 10, the parties have a real chance to set aside the past and negotiate a future of hope and promise, justice and peace. This is something only they can do. But I want them to know that the United States will continue to stand with them as they work to make that dream a reality. I call once again for a restoration of the IRA cease-fire which will enable the talks to be fully inclusive.

The success of these talks will depend on the vision and generosity of spirit of the elected representatives of the people. My hopes and prayers are with them as they begin to forge a bright and prosperous future for the children of both of Ireland's vibrant traditions.

Remarks on the National Economy and an Exchange With Reporters
June 7, 1996

The President. Good morning. Today we have been given fresh evidence that the American economy is growing steady and strong. What the job report today shows is that when we make tough choices, there is absolutely no limit to what the American people can do to create jobs and opportunity. This report says that in the past 2 months the American economy has created half a million jobs and that for 21 months in a row now, the unemployment rate has been under 6 percent, that real wages for hard-working Americans are finally on the rise because of their growing productivity.

When I took office our Nation faced a very different economic picture. Four years ago unemployment was 7.6 percent and rising, the deficit was skyrocketing, job growth was very, very slow. We put into place a comprehensive and tough economic package to create growth and to generate jobs. We cut the deficit in half, expanded trade to record levels, and invested in our people and their future. The result has been sustained economic growth, based on sound principles. Inflation is low; investment is up; a higher percentage of new jobs are private sector jobs than at any time since the 1920's.

When we put this strategy into place it was bitterly opposed by many people. They warned it would hurt the economy. They did everything they could to derail it, and it survived by the barest of margins in the Congress. Well, 3½ years later, it is now clear that the tough choices produced good results for the American people.

I said we would cut the deficit in half; the deficit will be cut by more than half in 4 years. I said this plan would create 8 million jobs; the latest job figures, including the annual revision of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, indicate that the economy in 3½ years has produced 9.7 million new jobs for the American people. That is growth, and growth without inflation.

We should not turn from an economic strategy that is working. We should finish the job of balancing the budget, of reforming welfare, and of extending the benefits of economic growth to all Americans by passing the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill, by raising the minimum wage, by providing for the portability of pensions, and by extending guaranteed education to the 13th and 14th years. These are the things we should do, building on this strategy, not departing from it.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President, Willie Brown said you shouldn't come to——

Q. The markets are already dropping——

The President. Wait, wait. One at a time, one at a time. What?

Q. The markets are already dropping because of this news. What do you say to that?

The President. Well, let me remind you that the stock market is a lot better than it was when I took office. It's up about 2,000 points, I think—more than 2,000. Whenever we have really robust job numbers—and we had 348,000 this month, and then I think about 160,000 last month—there is the fear of inflation, and that always has an impact in the market.

But if you look at the conditions, I think as the market has a chance to go through this day and the days ahead, there is no evidence of inflation in this economy. These jobs are being created by the productivity of American businesses and the American work force. That's why we're finally seeing some real wage gains now for American workers. And keep in mind, the manufacturing sector has been arguing for years that we can grow more rapidly, we can create more jobs without inflation because of productivity and because of the competition to which we're subject from other countries.

So I think that this thing will work itself out. Over the long period, the market follows the strength of the economy, and that's why the market today is so much higher than it was 3½ years ago.

Go ahead, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Q. Aren't you concerned that higher interest rates will drive——

President's Visit to San Francisco, CA

Q. Mr. President, Willie Brown says you should not come to San Francisco because of gay protests against your stand on same-sex marriage and so forth. Are you going? What do you think of that?

The President. Well, I think that Willie Brown is a great mayor, but I believe that I should not cancel my trip to San Francisco. I promised Senator Feinstein and her husband I would come to their home. I have a long-standing commitment to go by and see the Presidio and see what we've been trying to do there to help the people of California.

And on the issue, let me just say I believe the record is clear. I don't think any President has ever been more sensitive to the fundamental human concerns or the legitimate interests of gay Americans than I have. And I have been roundly criticized for it in many quarters. But from the time I ran for office in 1992, I expressed my position on the whole concept of marriage in the law. That is—it's been my position all along. I can't change that position. I have no intention of changing it. I have also said I have no intention of being a party to letting this legislation moving through Congress become an excuse for diverting and dividing the American people and getting into a round of gay-bashing. I am bitterly opposed to that. I will not participate in it. But I have no intention of canceling my travel plans.

Yes, go ahead, Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, CNN].

Senator Bob Dole

Q. Mr. President, do you think—what do you think of Senator Dole's latest effort to finesse the Republican Party platform on the issue of abortion rights? And do you think—as a follow-up, do you think it would be right for you and Senator Dole to sit down during these final days of his in the Senate?

The President. Well, I'd be happy to do that. As I said, there is this one issue, this Kassebaum-Kennedy bill, that we both agree on, and I would do anything I could to work with him on it and to let him leave his many years in the Senate with a good, positive memory that this was something that was done for the American people.

I have always said that elections would be decided based on the honest differences between candidates, but we should not waste one single day preventing something from being done when we have areas of common agreement. And if I could do anything to work with Senator Dole to help achieve that and to leave

him with a good, positive, lasting accomplishment for the American people as he leaves the Senate, I would be more than happy to do it.

Q. What about the abortion rights platform position of Senator Dole?

The President. Oh, I'm sorry. Well, I think it is a good thing for anyone to urge that we lower the rhetoric and stop lobbing these verbal bombs at one another. But when you lower the rhetoric, the stark difference in our policies remains there. He is in favor of a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, and I am not. So there is a real difference there that I don't think can be papered over. But I think anything that restores civility to this debate is a positive thing, and I applaud him for saying that.

Economic Growth and the Federal Reserve

Q. Do you believe that today's unemployment and employment report is a sign or a signal that economic growth can be higher and faster than the Federal Reserve seems to think it should be?

The President. Well, I believe it is a sign that we can grow the economy without inflation if our workers and our businesses are productive. But I would remind you that what Chairman Greenspan has said in the past is that at least he has no preconceived notions of how fast the economy can grow. And the Fed will now have a month to evaluate this. They don't meet until next month some time. And if they see that we are producing this level of job growth with no inflation, then I would think the interest rates should stay down, not only the Fed rates but the rates that the market sets.

This is a terrific commentary not only on the actions we took early to get the interest rates down and opening markets which helps to create higher wage jobs for Americans but also in the increasing productivity of the American work force, which will only be accelerated if we can increase the education level of our workers.

Peter [Peter Maer, NBC Mutual Radio].

U.S. Aircraft Tragedy in Croatia

Q. Mr. President, you've been briefed, we know, on the circumstances that led up to the plane crash that killed Commerce Secretary Brown. What are your personal reflections on what you were told, and what assurances have you been given that steps are being taken to prevent this from happening again on future VIP trips?

The President. Let me say, first of all, I had an extensive briefing yesterday by the Commanding General of the Air Force and by the general whom he put in charge of the review. And as you might imagine, for me it was a very painful personal experience because of my relationship with Secretary Brown and because of the people that were on that plane that I knew and those business leaders that we relied on and that relied on us.

But I have to tell you, I felt a great sense of respect for General Fogleman that the Air Force was completely thorough and prompt and brutally honest in its evaluation of what went on. And some steps have already been taken to avert the possibility that any of these errors could be made again, and I am convinced, absolutely convinced, that others will be taken.

I also would tell you that if you had sat through the briefing as I did—I kept thinking that this peculiar mix of circumstances, if only one or two little things had happened the crash might not have occurred. That whole unit over there was working so hard to do so much different kind of work, but that this is why—because the risks are always there, this is why the procedures, the rules that the Air Force puts in place, are so important to be followed.

And so I would say that the American people should feel reassured that the top leadership of the Air Force got to the bottom of this, did it in a hurry, and was completely honest, with no back-covering at all in its straightforward report on this accident.

Church Burnings in the South

Q. Sir, there was another fire at a black Southern church last night, sir. Do you think there is a national conspiracy or a resurgence in racism in America?

The President. Well, I'm going to have more to say about that tomorrow at my radio address. All I can tell you right now is we are working very hard to get to the bottom of this. When I was in Louisiana last week, where several of these bombings—these burnings have occurred, I spoke personally to the United States Attorney about it to get a personal report on what the status was in Louisiana of those cases and to reaffirm my determination to do everything we could to get to the bottom of it. So I'll have

some more to say about it tomorrow. We will be doing everything we can.

Senator Bob Dole

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on Wolf's question, you have just a few days left before Senator Dole leaves the Senate. Would you like to invite him here at this moment?

The President. Well, we have had some indirect communication back and forth about how we ought to proceed from here on out. I don't think we should discuss it in a press conference.

I do want to say again how much I feel, along with all Americans, that I thank him for his years of service in the Senate. I do believe he is trying to pass this Kennedy-Kassebaum bill. I'd like to try to help him do it. And I would like for him to feel that he is leaving the Senate on a positive note.

I can't say that I have the same good wishes about the next 5 months, but I would like to do that. And so I hope we can work it out.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:50 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Charles H. Coolidge, Jr., USAF, who was in charge of reviewing the U.S. aircraft tragedy in Croatia.

The President's Radio Address
June 8, 1996

Good morning. This morning I want to talk with you about a recent and disturbing rash of crimes that harkens back to a dark era in our Nation's history. Just 2 days ago, when the Matthews-Murkland Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, was burned to the ground, it became at least the 30th African-American church destroyed or damaged by suspicious fire in the South in the past 18 months. And over the past few months, Vice President Gore has talked with me about the pain and anguish these fires in his home State of Tennessee have caused. Tennessee, sadly, has experienced more of them than any other State in the country.

We do not now have evidence of a national conspiracy, but it is clear that racial hostility is the driving force behind a number of these incidents. This must stop.

It's hard to think of a more depraved act of violence than the destruction of a place of worship. In our country, during the fifties and sixties, black churches were burned to intimidate civil rights workers. I have vivid and painful memories of black churches being burned in my own State when I was a child. In 1963 all Americans were outraged by the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that took the lives of four precious young children. We must never allow that to happen again.

Every family has a right to expect that when they walk into a church or synagogue or mosque each week they will find a house of worship, not the charred remnants of a hateful act done by cowards in the night. We must rise up as a national community to safeguard the right of every citizen to worship in safety. That is what America stands for.

As President, I am determined to do everything in my power to get to the bottom of these church burnings as quickly as possible. And no matter how long it takes, no matter where the leads take us, we will devote whatever resources are necessary to solve these crimes. Today, more than 200 Federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI are working with State and local authorities to solve these cases. Fire investigators, national response teams, polygraph examiners, and forensic chemists are combing through fire sites, interviewing witnesses, and following leads. A task force chaired by our Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Deval Patrick, and our Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Enforcement, James Johnson, is coordinating these efforts. FBI Director Louis Freeh and ATF Director John Magaw are also serving on the task force. To date there have been a number of arrests. Two of those in custody are known members of the Ku Klux Klan. So we are making progress, but we must do more.