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I am very concerned and disappointed, however, with many of the provisions in S. 2796. Earlier this year, I submitted water resource legislation to the Congress directed at certain fundamental issues. First, the bill included several high-priority Corps initiatives addressing important needs currently facing the Nation. Second, the bill proposed a number of much needed water project reforms. Finally, my Administration developed this bill with a Federal cost of about $1 billion within a framework of overall fiscal discipline that helps ensure that only the most worthwhile projects are funded.

The version of this legislation as passed authorizes roughly $5 billion in new Federal spending according to Corps of Engineers estimates, an amount that far exceeds a reasonable assessment of the available future Federal budgetary resources for this program. The vast majority of the new projects and modifications to existing projects in this bill have not completed the study phase or are under review and simply are not ready for authorization at this time. Until these proposals have completed the appropriate prior planning and review, including the review required for water resources project proposals under Executive Order 12322, neither the executive branch nor the Congress knows which of them will raise significant concerns regarding scope, feasibility, environmental acceptability, cost-sharing, or other issues. I strongly recommend that the Congress await completion of this process before reaching a decision on authorizing future projects and project modifications. Particularly in view of the Congress' directive to study benefits of an independent review of Corps of Engineers water projects, we need to find ways to strengthen the project planning and review process. I am pleased, however, that the Congress decided to drop proposed authorizations totaling more than $550 million for local infrastructure projects that should not become a responsibility of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Furthermore, my Administration proposed improvements to the procedures used for deauthorizing dormant projects, changes to close a loophole in the existing ability-to-pay law, an increase in the local cost-share for structural flood damage reduction projects, and a program to clean up brownfields. I am disappointed that the Congress did not authorize any of these important reforms.

Finally, section 601(b)(2)(D)(iii) provides that appropriations for certain water resources projects within the Everglades shall not be made unless technical reports on those projects have been approved by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. This provision is a direction to the Congress regarding how the Congress will exercise its authority to appropriate funds. The provision does not limit the authority of agencies to spend funds that the Congress has appropriated.

Notwithstanding our concerns, the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 authorizes the Army to undertake much needed and important projects for improvements to the Nation's ports and harbors, and the restoration of our aquatic resources, including America's Everglades, and deserves enactment into law.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
December 11, 2000.

NOTE: S. 2796, approved December 11, was assigned Public Law No. 106–541.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in Dublin

December 12, 2000

President's Visit to Ireland

Q. Mr. President, why do you keep coming back to Ireland?

The President. Well, I got invited. And you know, I've had a special interest, in my tenure here, in the peace process. And the *Taoiseach* and Prime Minister Blair have worked hard, as the parties in Northern Ireland have, and there's still a little work to be done. So I thought maybe if I came back, I could help a little, and I hope I can.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. What's your message to the politicians, to the people of Northern Ireland and, indeed, to the paramilitaries?

The President. Well, first, I think the people, by and large, have embraced the peace and are in some ways leading the process. And I don't think they want to go back. I think the leadership of the Irish Government, the *Taoiseach* particularly, and the support of the British Government have helped. I think the incredible success of the Irish economy has helped.

I think people can see the benefits of peace. So my message is, to those parties which aren't involved in the process, they ought to join and not wreck it. There's too much to be gained, and too much has already been gained. And to those who are part of the process and have disagreements, I hope they'll try to work them out.

Q. Mr. President, do you care to comment on the suggestion that after you leave the White House, you might be prepared to become a special peace envoy to Ireland?

The President. [*Laughter*] Well, I think the new President, whoever it may be, will want to have a new team in place, and I will support that. I want to support whatever decisions the new administration makes on foreign policy. And if I can be a resource, I will. If I can ever help the Irish, of course I will.

But I think in terms of my Government's representation, that will be entirely up to the new President, and I will support whatever decisions are made on that.

Q. Taoiseach, do you expect the President's visit, and especially the visit to Belfast tomorrow, to move the process forward? At the moment, it's caught up in the old difficulties over demilitarization—and all the rest of it. Do you expect the President——

Prime Minister Ahern. Well, first, I say it's a great honor for us in the Irish Government and, I think, everybody in Ireland that the President is here. He is more and more welcome than I think even his other two visits. We're so pleased, and I think everybody in this country is pleased, and all of you in the media know that from the reaction over the last number of weeks since it was confirmed.

Of course I think the President can help. To expect all of the problems to be resolved in one go, of course, is impractical. But the very fact the President's coming has helped in the last few weeks for people to focus on still what are difficulties and to try to narrow down those difficulties and to look at the possibilities—and they are only possibilities—of what we can do.

I know that the talks we'll have now, the talks during the course of the day and tomorrow and the visit to Dundalk tonight, will allow people to see all that we have achieved. And I think now, what we're doing is, we're dealing with some of the side issues that are still residual issues out of the Good Friday agreement, and we still have to deal with those. And we are dealing with them, and this visit will help that.

Q. Taoiseach, will you miss Bill Clinton when he steps down?

Prime Minister Ahern. I will, yes. No doubt about that.

Q. Mr. President, when you were here, you called on the parties to take a risk for peace. Are we now at a situation where you will call on the parties again to take a further risk?

The President. Well, I think we have to keep going. I don't think there's—I don't think reversal is an option. And as I said, the people are not there. It's obvious to me, from all the human contact, just the increasing cross-border contacts, that the people want this thing to go on. And I think the leaders just have to find a way through the last three or four difficult issues, and I think it can be done.

I'll do what I can to be helpful.

Q. You really care about this, don't you?

The President. Yes, I do. I always have. You know—let me just say, the Americans—you know, the American people, about 40 million of us have some Irish blood. And we also have had a unique relationship with Great Britain. It's been—I mean, they burned the White House in 1814, but since then it's been pretty good. [*Laughter*] You know, we fought two World Wars together; we stayed through the cold war together. And the way it used to be was a source of immense pain to a lot of Americans. Many of the American people who have wanted to be involved had no constructive way to do that. And I hope and believe we've changed that over the last 8 years.

So to me, it's just a question of you've just got to keep going and keep bringing more and more and more people in, because the Irish have proved that you can do this.

I said something before when I was here, I'll say again: I don't think you can possibly imagine the impact of a success in the Irish peace process on trouble spots throughout the world. That's another thing that's been very important to me as the President of the United States, because I have to be involved in Latin America and Asia and Africa, the Balkans.

And so I care a lot about this. But I also—I want you to know how much people around the world look to your—and draw courage from what you do here.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:15 p.m. in the Office of the *Taoiseach*. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at a Reception Hosted by Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in Dublin

December 12, 2000

Thank you very, very much. First, let me say to the *Taoiseach*, I am delighted to be back in Ireland, glad to be with him and Celia, glad that Hillary and Chelsea and I could all come together at once. We've all been here, sometimes together, sometimes at different times. I thank you for your friendship and the work we have done. I thank your predecessors who are here and all the members of the Dáil. I thank the ministers of the Government and Members of our Congress who are here, and the citizens of Ireland.

I have often wondered how I got involved in all this. [*Laughter*] I have pondered all these deep explanations. For example, less than a month ago we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the White House. And you may know that America's most famous home was designed by an Irish architect named James Hoban, who defeated an anonymous design presented by Thomas Jefferson. [*Laughter*] Maybe there's something in Hoban's spirit in the house that infected me.

In the Oval Office of the President on the mantle, there is a beautiful ivy plant which has been there for almost 40 years now. It was given to President Kennedy by the then-Irish Ambassador to the United States as an enduring sign of the affection between our two people. Maybe I got the political equivalent of poison ivy. [*Laughter*]

When I started coming here, you know, I got a lot of help in rooting out my Irish ancestry. And the oldest known homestead of my mother's family, the Cassidys, that we've been able to find is a sort of mid-18th century farmhouse that's in Rosleigh and Fermanagh. But it's right on the—literally right on the border. And in my family, all the Catholics and Protestants intermarried, so maybe I was somehow genetically prepared for the work I had to do. [*Laughter*] Maybe it's because there are 45 million Irish Americans, and I was trying to make a few votes at home. [*Laughter*] The truth is, it just seemed to be the right thing to do.

America has suffered with Ireland through the Troubles, and even before. And we seemed paralyzed and prevented from playing a constructive role when I became President. I decided to change America's policy in the hope that, in the end, not only the Irish but the British, too, would be better off. I think it is unquestionable, after 8 years of effort, thanks to the people and the leaders of Northern Ireland, of the Republic, and of Great Britain, that the people of Ireland and the people of Britain are better off for the progress that has been made toward peace.

So when the *Taoiseach* and our friends in Northern Ireland, the leaders of the parties, and the British Prime Minister asked me to come back to Ireland one more time, Hillary and Chelsea said, yes—[*laughter*]—and I said a grateful yes.

I also want to say to all of you, with reference to the comments Bertie made about the Irish economy, I think every one of you that has played any role in the remarkable explosion of