

and wishes to make a case, I will be glad to listen, but no decision has been made yet. And I'll do what I think is in the best interests of our relationships and in the best interests of conforming to obligations we have.

Q. Mr. President, may I speak in Chinese?

President Bush. Are you with the Chinese press, because your English is perfect.

Q. Yes.

President Bush. You speak better English than I do. [*Laughter*]

Human Rights/Former President Bush

[*At this point, the journalist spoke briefly in Chinese and then resumed in English.*]

Q. —about the gathering outside of the Falun Gong. The State Department has decided to sponsor a resolution to condemn the human rights. And for the past few years it has been failed. And I just wonder, Mr. President, what are you going to try to tell the Chinese side how to improve their human rights?

And my second question is regarding—the Chinese seem very warm to your father; they come, delegation after delegation, visiting your father. Are you going to be taught by your father regarding your China policy?

President Bush. Well, the Chinese, I'm convinced, like my father because he married well. [*Laughter*] My mother is very well respected in China, as is my dad, because they spent time there, and they befriended a lot of folks who are now leaders.

It will come as no surprise to our Chinese guest that I'm a believer in religious freedom, and I will make a—state it politely and as clearly as I can that ours is a nation that respects religious freedom; ours is a nation that honors religious freedom; and that our relationship will move forward, but it will certainly be a lot easier to move forward in a constructive way when our people with whom we conduct our affairs honor religious freedom within their borders.

Q. Thank you.

President Bush. I'd like to thank the press for not violating the beeper policy. [*Laughter*]

Q. We didn't want to get Gordon in trouble again. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. Gordon became an international figure. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:03 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to American University scholar Gao Zhan, detained in China since February 11, and her husband, Xue Donghua, and their 5-year-old son, U.S. citizen Andrew Xue, who were held separately for nearly a month; and Assistant Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe. Vice Premier Qian referred to President Jiang Zemin of China. The Vice Premier spoke in Chinese, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Prepared for Delivery to a Friends of Ireland Luncheon March 15, 2001

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Taoiseach*, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland John Reid, First Minister David Trimble, Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams, Secretary

Powell, Majority Leader Lott, other Members of Congress, thank you.

I thank the Speaker for the invitation to come here to celebrate the shared history and heritage that unite Ireland and

America. It is a great honor. And I promise that my remarks today will be briefer than the last time I spoke on Capitol Hill.

Some of you may be aware that I don't attend a lot of formal lunches like this. But I had a change of heart when I saw that the Speaker's menu included Tex-Mex food. I just couldn't pass up the chance to try a green burrito.

On Saint Patrick's Day, we all get to be Irish for a day. There has been a lot of speculation about whether I'm part Irish. I must be. People say I talk like James Joyce writes.

Today I will speak plainly about an extremely important topic, peace in Northern Ireland. The United States will remain unwavering in our support of peace. We will remain unwavering in our support for all parties who show courage and leadership on behalf of peace. And we will remain unalterably opposed to anyone who would destroy peace by preaching or practicing violence.

Much of the progress toward peace in the past several years has been aided by the engagement of the United States. As I told Prime Minister Blair—and as I will tell Prime Minister Ahern tomorrow—the United States stands ready to continue that engagement. The reason is simple: Peace in Northern Ireland is in America's strong national interest.

The peace that holds today has many authors, from President Clinton to leaders from Britain, Ireland, and Northern Ireland to American political leaders, such as Senator Mitchell. The Good Friday agreement remains the best hope for lasting peace for the people of Northern Ireland. The goal of the United States is to see that agreement fully implemented.

There are two reasons for this. First, this is what the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland voted for back on May 22, 1998. And they did so by a very large margin. Second, the Good Friday agreement embodies principles of fundamental fairness without which peace will never breathe.

What are those principles? First, as stated in the agreement itself, "it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts . . . to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent." The second principle is that of territorial integrity, that borders should never be changed through violence. Third, that terrorism is always and everywhere wrong. And fourth, there is the principle of equality of representation and equal treatment regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity.

The progress the parties have made in putting these principles into practice has made a difference—a big difference. And no one knows this better than the people of Northern Ireland themselves. Trade, investment, and jobs are up. Violence is down from previous levels. More people are moving into Northern Ireland than are moving out. In most places on most days for most families, life is normal. They don't have to worry when they get on a bus, go to a store or church, or send a child to school. And no one can put a price on that peace of mind.

But no one can or should take this progress for granted, no one on either side of the border, either side of the Irish Sea, or either side of the Atlantic. It may be tempting for the parties to think they face a choice between further progress and the status quo. But in fact, the actual choice is probably between progress and a return to violence, because extremists on both sides still seek to destroy the agreement. Delay and impasse create a vacuum that they will try to fill. We must not let them.

The talks that Prime Ministers Blair and Ahern convened in Belfast last week created an opportunity to restore momentum toward resolving these issues and fully implementing the Good Friday agreement. Keeping the process moving forward will mean compromise, hard work, and trust. Trust is critical to resolving tough issues facing the parties: building a police force

that has the respect of all the people; putting arms finally and forever beyond use; achieving a normal security presence throughout the society; making sure the new political institutions are here to stay. Now is the time to act—as Yeats said, “Do not wait to strike till the iron is hot, but make it hot by striking.”

The parties in Northern Ireland, many of whose leaders are represented here today, have shown themselves capable of rising to the occasion and moving forward with wisdom and confidence. And as you do so, know that the United States will be ready to help in any way the governments and the parties find useful.

It’s been said that Ireland is a place where “the inevitable never happens and the unexpected constantly occurs.” Three years ago, the parties unexpectedly gave us the Good Friday agreement. Weeks later,

citizens in all parts of the island defied all expectations by voting to approve the agreement in overwhelming numbers. This year on Saint Patrick’s Day, let us all resolve to push for peace, a lasting, real, and needed peace.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President delivered the remarks at approximately noon in the Rayburn Room at the U.S. Capitol. The prepared text referred to First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, Northern Ireland Executive; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; and former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland. This text was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 23. The remarks as delivered were not released.

Exchange With Reporters in Portland, Maine March 23, 2001

Expulsion of Russian Diplomats

Q. In response to the fact that the Russians responded in kind—

The President. They can make whatever decisions they deem necessary. Our country took the right course of action.

Q. What message does it send, though, do you think?

The President. It says that we will be firm and consistent in our foreign policy. [At this point, the President continued his tour of the Salvation Army Senior Center.]

Tax Relief Legislation

Q. One more question, Mr. President.

The President. Same subject?

Q. No, on tax cuts. Even if, with retroactivity, the size of the package were to get bigger than \$1.6 trillion, is it worthwhile if it provides more money for people up front during this slowing economy?

The President. Well, I think we can accelerate tax relief—we should accelerate tax relief—and keep the size of the tax relief package at the same level. I’m confident we can do both. And I’ve told those who think it ought to be smaller and those who think it ought to be bigger that it ought to be \$1.6 trillion.

The key thing is to make sure that we have tax relief that’s meaningful, and to get as much money in the people’s pockets as quickly as possible to provide a stimulus package.

Q. But how do you do both?

The President. Well, that’s what we’re going to work with the Congress on, is to make sure that we come with a size of the package that fits into the budget and at the same time, get money into people’s pockets as quickly as possible. There are ways to do that. You could delay one aspect