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Week Ending Friday, April 17, 1998

The President's Radio Address

April 11, 1998

Good morning. Across America and around the world, this is a holy weekend for three of the world's great religions. Christians are celebrating Easter; Jews, Passover; and Muslims have just ended their annual pilgrimage, the hajj.

On this special weekend, the eyes of the world and the prayers of so many are focused on Northern Ireland, as an historic peace agreement was reached among representatives of all the major parties to that long and tragic conflict.

I especially want to salute the leadership of Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland, Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain, and the leaders of all the parties who came together in a remarkable display of courage to set aside differences in the pursuit of peace. I also salute the previous Prime Ministers of Ireland and Great Britain, who started and nourished this peace process.

And all Americans should take a special measure of pride that the talks in Northern Ireland were chaired by George Mitchell, the former majority leader of the United States Senate, who has served his country and the cause of peace very, very well. I thank him for his brilliant leadership.

Of course, we understand that the pain and hatred of so many years cannot and will not be washed away in one weekend. So on behalf of the American people, I pledge the continuing aid, support, encouragement, and prayers of the United States to the effort to build a lasting peace and an enduring prosperity in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

In the last analysis, the future of that region lies in the hearts and hands of its people. Like so many Americans, part of my family calls Ireland home. And having been there, having met with so many remarkable Irish men and women, from all sides of the conflict, I have seen the future in their eyes—a future in which children can grow up free from fear; a future rich with the lilt of Irish laughter, not the pain of bitter tears.

There may be those who seek to undermine this agreement by returning to violence, so we are resolved that the acts of peace and courage will triumph over acts of cowardice and terror.

Tomorrow, the dawn will break on Easter morning. All across Ireland, Catholics and Protestants will, in their own way, proclaim their faith in the triumph of life over death. On this Easter, their leaders have lifted their Christian beliefs and have lived them by giving the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland the chance to choose peace over conflict, indeed, to choose life over death.

When I visited Ulster, and later the Republic of Ireland, the great Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, gave me a stanza from a poem he wrote that today hangs on the wall of my office in the upstairs of the White House. Its message has a special meaning today. Here's what it says: ''History says, 'Don't hope on this side of the grave.' But then, once in a lifetime, the longed-for tidal wave of justice can rise up, and hope and history rhyme.'' What a wonderful Easter gift for the Irish, Irish-Americans, and lovers of peace everywhere.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:30 p.m. on April 10 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 11.

Statement on School Crime

April 12, 1998

Today the Attorney General and Secretary of Education forwarded to me an important, but troubling, study on school crime. Although the study shows that the overall crime rate in our schools did not change significantly between 1989 and 1995, it confirms that some schools have serious problems.

Most disturbing, the study found that the number of students reporting gangs in their schools has nearly doubled. This is unacceptable. Gangs—and the guns, drugs, and violence that go with them—must be stopped from ever reaching the schoolhouse door.

Congress can help lead the way by passing the antigang and youth violence strategy that I sent to them more than a year ago. It is based on what we know works—tough, targeted deterrence and better antigang prevention. Through this approach, police and prosecutors in Boston literally disarmed the gangs and brought juvenile gun murders to a halt. We should not wait any longer to help other communities do the same.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 11, and it was embargoed for released until 6:30 p.m., April 12.

Remarks at the White House Easter Egg Roll

April 13, 1998

The President. Thank you. Good morning. Isn't it a wonderful morning? Let me say, I want to thank all the volunteers and all the sponsors who've made this wonderful day possible for thousands and thousands of young people.

I also want to say that the first official White House Egg Roll occurred here in 1878 when President Rutherford Hayes was living in the White House. Now, a lot of things have changed since then, but the most important thing today that you need to know is that for the very first time, hundreds of thousands of young people will be experiencing the White House Egg Roll through the Internet, thanks to Earthlinks, and I want to thank them for that.

I'd also like to thank a number of others, and especially Sun Microsystems, for all the work that's been done to try to open the White House to people around the world and especially around our country. But this day is special because of what Earthlinks has done to let lots and lots of young people who never could come to the White House be part of the Egg Roll.

So, are we ready to start the egg roll?

Hillary Clinton. Bernie's right here.

The President. Bernie, where's the whistle? This is the one thing every year I know, no matter what else happens, I will do right. [*Laughter*] Are you ready, kids? Are you ready?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. I'm going to count to three and blow the whistle. One, two, three!

[*At this point, the President blew the whistle to start the egg roll.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House volunteer Bernie Fairbanks.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Former Senator George J. Mitchell

April 13, 1998

Possible Visit to Ireland

Q. Mr. President, are you going to make a trip to Ireland?

The President. Well, if it would help, of course I would be willing to go, but I think it's important not to make that decision yet. I haven't had a chance to talk to the two Prime Ministers about it or the leaders of the main parties. If they think I should go—and they've got the biggest stake and the closest sense of the public—I would be happy to do it. But I have not decided to do it, and it's really completely up to them.

Q. Do you think that it might constitute sort of unwarranted interference in their affairs for you to go before the referendums?

The President. That's a decision I want them to make. That's why I said I don't think it's my place, really, to deal with this one way or the other. I'm not going to weigh in on it. I'm always willing to do whatever I can to help, but I don't want to do something that would undermine the chances of success. I want to do whatever I can to increase the chances that the parties themselves and the public now will make a decision.

U.S. Ambassador to Ireland

Q. Are you sending Riley to Ireland?