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came from that—I said, ''You know, every time we have these Saint Patrick's Day events, the Prime Minister of Ireland and all of the leaders of all the factions in Northern Ireland, they come here to the United States and they thank us for helping to promote the peace in Ireland. But the truth is, we should be thanking them because it's the only time we can be absolutely sure there will be peace between Republicans and Democrats in the United States. When they come here, all the Irish Republicans and the Irish Democrats in the United States and all the people who claim to be Irish on Saint Patrick's Day actually behave in a very civil and cooperative way toward one another.''

I think it's worth remembering that when Saint Patrick came from England to Christianize Ireland, he did it without a sword, without the order of law. It was the only time in all history that a whole nation had converted without any force or bloodshed. He did it by carefully listening to the Irish people, understanding what they needed to do, how they could change, how they could not, and treating them with a profound amount of care and respect.

We pray now that the Irish people on opposite sides of this last divided peace process will heed the example of Saint Patrick and give us an even bigger celebration here next year.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Marjorie Mowlam, United Kingdom; Social Democratic and Labour Party leader John Hume; and Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble.

Statement on National Missile Defense Legislation

March 17, 1999

I am pleased that the Senate, on a bipartisan basis, included in its national missile defense (NMD) legislation two amendments that significantly change the original bill, which I strongly opposed. By specifying that any NMD deployment must be subject to the authorization and appropriations process, the legislation now makes clear that no decision on deployment has been made. By putting the Senate on record as continuing to support negotiated reductions in strategic nuclear arms, the bill reaffirms that our missile defense policy must take into account our arms control objectives.

We are committed to meeting the growing danger that outlaw nations will develop and deploy long-range missiles that could deliver weapons of mass destruction against us and our allies. Next year we will, for the first time, determine whether to deploy a limited national missile defense against these threats, when we review the results of flight tests and other developmental efforts, consider cost estimates, and evaluate the threat. In making our determination, we will also review progress in achieving our arms control objectives, including negotiating any amendments to the ABM Treaty that may be required to accommodate a possible NMD deployment.

This week the Russian Duma took an encouraging step toward obtaining final approval of START II. We want to move ahead on the START III framework, which I negotiated with President Yeltsin in 1997, to cut Russian and U.S. arsenals 80 percent from cold war levels, while maintaining the ABM Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability. The changes made in the NMD bill during Senate debate ensure these crucial objectives will be fully taken into account as we pursue our NMD program.

Statement on Patients' Rights Legislation

March 17, 1999

Today the Congress is beginning its work on patients' rights legislation. This issue is critical to assuring Americans high quality health care in the 21st century, so I am pleased that we are moving forward.

Unfortunately, the proposal by the Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee falls far short of the legislation the American people deserve. Because it applies patients' rights only to those in self-insured plans, this proposal leaves 120 million Americans in insured and individual