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It is most fitting that the feast day of the Patron Saint of Ireland should be held on the threshold of spring, the season of promise, for the Irish have always been a people of promise. With warm hearts and a deep spirituality, they embraced the promise of salvation that Saint Patrick brought to their beautiful island 16 centuries ago and preserved their faith through the tumult and chaos of the Dark Ages.

In the 19th century, suffering from famine and oppression in their own land, millions of Irish men and women recognized the promise of freedom and opportunity in America. Often enduring great hardship, they journeyed west to begin a new life in a new land. With strength and humor, courage and determination, they made America's promise a reality for themselves and their children and enriched our history and heritage with their achievements. In business, labor, education, the arts, public life, and so much more, Irish Americans have made lasting contributions to the life of our nation.

Today Irish Americans and the people of their ancestral homeland share a strong commitment to the promise of peace. In the spring of 1998, the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland sought to fulfill that promise when they voted overwhelmingly in support of the Good Friday Accord. America remains committed to the Irish people as they continue working to forge a brighter future, for, while the road ahead is long, the promise of peace is still within reach and its rewards are great.

As Irish Americans gather once again to honor Saint Patrick and to reaffirm their pride in their Irish heritage, Hillary and I extend warmest wishes to all for a wonderful celebration.

Bill Clinton

Proclamation 7281—National Poison Prevention Week, 2000

March 17, 2000

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Children face many dangers growing up, including some which we cannot foresee or prevent. But the danger of accidental poisoning from medicines, household chemicals, or other substances used routinely in the home is something we can—and must—stop. Each year during National Poison Prevention Week, we assess our progress in saving lives and reaffirm our national commitment to preventing injuries or deaths from poisoning.

We have indeed made progress in the nearly 4 decades since the Congress first authorized this annual observance. In 1962, almost 450 children died of poisoning after swallowing medicines or household chemicals. By 1996, that tragic statistic had been reduced to 47. Our goal is to reduce it to zero.

The first and most effective means to achieving this goal is the proper use of child-resistant packaging, which the Consumer Product Safety Commission requires for many medicines and household chemicals. While this special packaging is child-resistant, however, it is not childproof; therefore, it is essential that adults keep potentially poisonous substances locked away from children.

Our second line of defense is America's poison control centers, where lifesaving information is only a phone call away. If a poisoning does occur, parents or other caregivers can call one of these centers and immediately learn the appropriate actions to take to mitigate the poison's effects. Last month, I was proud to sign into law the Poison Control Center Enhancement and Awareness Act, which authorizes $140 million over the next 5 years to fund our Nation's poison control centers, to carry out a national public awareness campaign, and to establish

a national toll-free poison control hotline. Each year, more than 2 million poisonings are reported, a million of which involve children, and this new funding will ensure that callers have immediate access to the vital services and information they need to save lives.

I thank the Poison Prevention Week Council, which brings together 35 national organizations to distribute poison prevention information to pharmacies, public health departments, and safety organizations nationwide, for its vital role in the progress Americans have made in reducing accidental poisonings. By following its lead, properly using child-resistant packaging, keeping poisonous substances locked away from children, and keeping the number of a poison prevention center close by the telephone, we can greatly reduce accidental poisonings.

To encourage the American people to learn more about the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take responsible preventive measures, the Congress, by joint resolution approved September 26, 1961 (75 Stat. 681), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week of March of each year as "National Poison Prevention Week."

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning March 19, 2000, as National Poison Prevention Week. I call upon all Americans to observe this week by participating in appropriate programs and activities and by learning how to protect our children from poisonous substances.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:31 a.m., March 20, 2000]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 21.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 13

In the morning, the President traveled to Cleveland, OH, and in the afternoon, he traveled to Chicago, IL. In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC, arriving after midnight.

March 14

In the afternoon, the President had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. Later, the President was presented a portrait by photographer Arnold Newman in the Oval Office.

March 15

In the evening, the President traveled to Baltimore, MD, and later, he returned to Washington, DC.

The President announced his intention to nominate Bernard Daniel Rostker to be Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

March 17

Over the course of the afternoon, the President met separately in the Oval Office with the following Irish leaders: Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon and First Minister David Trimble, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, and Labour Party leader John Hume.

Later in the afternoon, the President participated in a Saint Patrick's Day ceremony with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in the Roosevelt Room.

In the evening, the President and the First Lady hosted a Saint Patrick's Day reception in the East Room.

The President declared a major disaster in Alabama and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding on March 10–11.