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Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Reception

March 17, 2000

The President. Thank you. Welcome to the White House. I want to join Hillary in thanking our entertainers. I welcome you, *Taoiseach*, and all the members of your government and your entourage and all of our guests from Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Members of Congress who are here. I want to thank the members of the British Government who are here, Peter Mandelson and British Ambassador Christopher Meyer; Sean O'hUiginn, your Ambassador here, and Brian Cowen, the Irish Foreign Minister; and all the Government.

And I want to thank our Ambassadors to Ireland, Governor Mike Sullivan, and to Great Britain, Phil Lader. And our former Irish Ambassador, Jean Kennedy Smith, is here with a fair measure of her family we welcome here.

I want to say that I do love Seamus Heaney's poetry, and I love what he quoted, that I quoted. I actually wrote a book in 1996 and cribbed his words, "of hope and history." But you know, he's done better than having me quote his lines. He's done better than winning the Nobel Prize. He's actually managed to make "Beowulf" interesting. [*Laughter*] And in honor of that, if we don't get this mess straightened out pretty soon, I may appoint you to succeed George Mitchell. [*Laughter*] Anybody that can make "Beowulf" interesting is my guy. [*Laughter*]

I also want to join others in thanking my great friend Senator George Mitchell for the magnificent work he has done. I want to thank all those who met with me today from the various parties in Northern Ireland for saying that you would continue the search for peace.

I was thinking, when Hillary said that I was singing "Danny Boy"—which was rude, I realize, but I couldn't control myself. [*Laughter*] I'm one of the few Americans that knows all the words to the second verse. [*Laughter*]

First Lady Hillary Clinton. Shall we sing it?

The President. And I believe the second verse is more beautiful than the first and really the mark of a life well lived, if someone you really loved would kneel at your grave and tell you that they loved you. And so I thank you, sir, for that gift tonight.

And I was thinking—just one other thing. I have nothing to add to what I said last night, and most of you were at the American Ireland Fund dinner. But the lines from "The Cure at Troy" which Seamus read are far more remarkable when you fully understand their context. The man who is saying that—the chorus is singing this chant:

> Hope for a great sea change on the far side of revenge,
> Believe in cures and miracles and healing wells.

They're saying that about Philoctetes, who was a Greek in the Trojan Wars, who was very important to the military efforts of Ulysses because he had a magic bow. And legend had it that the gods always blessed Philoctetes, and whenever he brought his magic bow into play, the Greeks always won. But after a battle in which he was badly wounded in the leg, he was dumped unceremoniously on a god-forsaken piece of rock in the Aegean and abandoned for a decade, where his foot rotted into a stump. He never saw another living human being. He turned into a virtual feral beast.

And then, Ulysses came up with this great idea that they could finally win the Trojan War if they made this big horse and filled it full of soldiers and made it look like an act of friendship, and then they would trick the Trojans and win the war. But he was sent the message that he couldn't win without Philoctetes. So he said, "After I stuffed this guy on this island and left him to die, and I thought he was dead, and now I know he's living, how in the wide world will I ever get him to come and do anything for me again?"

So he takes a young guy and he goes to the island, and the young guy goes up and starts talking to Philoctetes. That's what this whole play is about. And he basically pretends to be someone else. And finally, Ulysses realizes he's never going to get the guy off until he goes out and fesses up. So he goes up and tells him who he is, what he did, and he just says, "I have to ask you to come with me. I cannot do this without you."

And against all the odds, Philoctetes forgives him, limps down to the boat with his bow, sails off into the Aegean, and the rest is history. But the important thing you need to know is, after this beautiful chorus which Seamus read, as he is sailing away from this island where he spent 10 years all alone, finding within himself not hatred but the strength to love a man who had abandoned him, he looks back at the island and says, "It was a fortunate wind that blew me here."

When Nelson Mandela—we have the Ambassador from South Africa here—when he took me to Robben Island, that's all I could think of. After 27 God-forsaken years, it was a fortunate wind that blew him there. And to all of you on this, my last Saint Patrick's Day, it was a fortunate wind that blew me into your presence.

But for all of that, I kept thinking to myself as the children were up here playing their bells so beautifully, that this whole thing really has to be about them. And we can compliment each other from now until the end of our lives, with all of our beautiful words and all of our warm memories. But unless the wind blows all of us toward final peace, we will have let them down, and all of our poetry will have fallen on deaf ears.

So on this Saint Patrick's Day, let us remember, if we have the eloquence of Seamus and the heart of Philoctetes and the goodness of Saint Patrick, we can do what we were meant to do in this fleeting life.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

Now, I want to ask our most distinguished guest to say a few words, but before I bring the *Taoiseach* up, let me tell you this: I have worked with two of his predecessors. I liked them both very much. They wanted very much to make peace. They did everything that could reasonably have been expected of them. But this man is very special. And everybody involved in this process knows it. And if we make it, it will be in no small measure due to the heroic and wise efforts of Bertie Ahern.

Taoiseach.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:50 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; Peter Mandelson, United Kingdom Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; former Senator George Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; and former President Nelson Mandela and Ambassador Sheila Sisulu of South Africa. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's Radio Address

March 18, 2000

Good morning. In recent months, we've seen a rapid increase in the price of oil, and many are concerned about the effect on our economy. It's important to remember that while prices are higher now than they have been for some time, our overall economy is still the strongest it's ever been. Inflation and unemployment remain at historically low levels. But high oil prices are causing hardship for many Americans—Americans on modest incomes that have to drive a long way to work, independent truckers that have big fuel costs.

We need to take action now for both the short and the long term, to protect consumers and strengthen America's energy security. In the short term, I'll continue to work with foreign countries to help close the gap between production and consumption. Several important oil-producing countries already have expressed their support for a production increase. But we also need to take a longer view, one that rejects environmentally damaging alternatives like drilling in the protected and treasured natural habitats of Alaska.

Today I am announcing important new steps to reduce our reliance on foreign oil and fossil fuels, to protect our environment, and to keep our economy strong. First, to reduce the likelihood that future heating oil shortages will harm consumers as they did this winter, I am proposing the creation of an environmentally sound home heating oil reserve in the Northeast that could supply additional heating oil to the market in the event of a future shortage.

Second, to ensure that we have all available tools in the event of a crisis, I'm calling on Congress to immediately reauthorize the