

Week Ending Friday, October 27, 2000

Opinion-Editorial for the Belfast Telegraph: “Why the Good Friday Agreement is Working”

October 19, 2000

In his first Inaugural Address, President Abraham Lincoln called upon Americans to heed “the better angels of our nature” to dissuade them from embarking on a long and bloody civil war.

Just over two years ago, the leaders and people of Northern Ireland summoned the better angels of their nature to negotiate, sign, and approve the Good Friday Agreement in a courageous bid to end nearly 30 years of strife and agony. The Agreement reflected more than the common humanity that unites the people of Northern Ireland, no matter their faith. It reflected their self-interest—their heartfelt conviction that the sacrifices and compromises required for peace would be far easier to bear than the burden of more violence and bloodshed.

George Mitchell said at the time that, as difficult as the Agreement was to negotiate, implementing it would prove more difficult still—and he was right. Two-and-one-half years later, the Agreement is working, but it is straining under intense criticism. I know that many in the unionist community feel deeply uncomfortable with changes relating to security and have concerns that the right to express British identity is being attacked. Nationalists and republicans have voiced concerns of their own about prospects for full equality and implementation of all aspects of the Agreement.

I believe the Good Friday Agreement is fully capable of addressing these concerns. Now is the time to reaffirm its core principles.

- The principle of consent: no decision on changing the constitutional connection linking Northern Ireland with the United Kingdom will be made without support from a majority

of Northern Ireland voters. This expresses respect for British sovereignty in Northern Ireland—and also for the legitimate wish of Irish people to pursue a united Ireland.

- Self-government that is democratic, inclusive, and whose participants use exclusively peaceful means to accomplish their aims. The main institutions of government, an elected Assembly and a power-sharing Executive, contain safeguards for protecting minority interests and for excluding those who use or support violence.

- Strict protection of individual human and civil rights. On October 2, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is now consulting on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The people of Northern Ireland support these principles. And for all of their disagreements, so do Northern Ireland’s politicians.

The reason, I believe, is simple: Devolved government based on the Stormont Assembly and Executive is working. Even politicians from parties professing to be “anti-Agreement” are participating actively, delivering their constituents democratic and accountable regional government. For the first time in 30 years, Northern Ireland’s politicians are producing their own budget and Programme for Government.

This means that problems in the areas of agriculture, health, the environment and education, to name a few, are now the responsibility of local ministers who must answer to local voters. Some may be uncomfortable with power-sharing, but most agree that it is better than being powerless. And foreign investors are taking note of the prospects opened up by these developments—

for example, the 900-job call centre that a Denver-based company recently announced will open in north Belfast.

What's more, the Agreement has enabled government ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to work together to benefit people throughout the island, by developing co-operation in such areas as trade, food safety and EU programmes. Sessions of the North-South Ministerial Council focus on concrete results rather than constitutional debate.

Change this profound is never easy. I applaud the people of Northern Ireland for working to set aside old animosities and to accept even the most difficult elements of the Good Friday Agreement, such as prisoner releases. Yet tough challenges remain, such as adapting the police force in Northern Ireland to earn the confidence and support of all the people, and resolving the issue of paramilitary weapons.

The Agreement offers a chance for a fresh start on policing. It established an independent commission chaired by Chris Patten with a mandate to make recommendations in this highly sensitive area. Some of the Patten Report's proposed changes have distressed those who honour the many sacrifices made by police officers in Northern Ireland.

I urge everyone to reflect on Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan's statement that the police stand ready for the challenges proposed by Patten and that it is his "fervent hope that those in all our communities whom we exist to serve stand similarly ready for change." Everyone in Northern Ireland, including the police, deserve the chance to prove themselves anew under the Agreement. That said, for police reform to work, the entire community must take ownership of the process, taking not just the pain of the past, but more importantly the demands of the future, into account. The opportunity to achieve a police service that is broadly acceptable and fully accountable is too important and too close at hand to be lost to political brinkmanship.

On the question of paramilitary organisations, the Good Friday Agreement is both clear and unequivocal—in it, all parties commit themselves to the total disarmament of all such groups. The IRA's decision to

allow independent inspectors to view arms dumps last June and to verify that the weapons are not moved or used represented unprecedented progress. The IRA also committed itself to resume contacts with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and to put weapons "completely and verifiably beyond use" in the context of full implementation of the Agreement.

Republican leaders say these commitments will be met. I welcome that, and look forward to further, timely progress in this vital area. I urge loyalist paramilitaries to make similar undertakings, even as courageous political leaders work to bring an end to the dangerous feuding under way in that community. All sides must work together to renew momentum toward the goal spelled out in the Agreement: total decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons.

But perhaps harder still will be what George Mitchell called the "decommissioning of mind-sets". The confidence that is the foundation of peace is all too easily eroded by distrust, defensiveness, and fear. It is almost always easier to fall back on old habits than it is to fulfil new hopes.

In making decisions that will determine Northern Ireland's future, political leaders must pause and consider whether their actions will advance the cause of durable peace and genuine reconciliation. Every political leader is subject to short-term political pressures. But in Northern Ireland, I believe it is critical for all to consider how their actions in the heat of the moment today will be felt a year, a decade, a generation from now. It is human nature to take the good for granted and to focus on our frustrations, giving in to those frustrations would be a tragic mistake, with terrible consequences.

On my last visit to Northern Ireland in 1998, I met with the families of the victims and the survivors of the Omagh bombing. That visit was a vivid reminder of the alternative to peace—and it made clear the determination of the people of Northern Ireland to overcome the sorrow and bitterness of the last 30 years and build a better future.

During the recently completed inquest into the Omagh bombing, that determination

to build was still on display—as was the profound frustration that the dissidents responsible for the attack have not been brought to justice.

For a durable peace to be achieved, both of these emotions must be harnessed effectively. And there should be no mistake about it: US law enforcement will aggressively target any effort from whatever quarter to undermine the peace process through illegal activities from the United States.

The Good Friday Agreement represents the very best hope for lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Fully implementing, it will make Northern Ireland a beacon of hope for those who struggle for reconciliation and peace in every corner of the world—from the Balkans to the Middle East.

I hope to be able to visit Northern Ireland soon, and to confirm that the will of the people is being heeded.

William J. Clinton

NOTE: This opinion-editorial was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 20. An original was not available for verification of the content of this item. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Memorandum on Waiver and Certification of Statutory Provisions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization

October 19, 2000

Presidential Determination No. 2001–02

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Waiver and Certification of Statutory Provisions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization

Pursuant to the authority and conditions contained in section 538(d) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2000, as contained in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2000 (Public Law 106–113), and as provided for in the Joint Resolution Making Further Continuing Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2001, and for Other Purposes (Public Law 106–306), I hereby determine and certify that it is important to the

national security interests of the United States to waive the provisions of section 1003 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987, Public Law 100–204.

This waiver shall be effective for a period of 6 months from the date hereof. You are hereby authorized and directed to transmit this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register*.

William J. Clinton

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 20. An original was not available for verification of the content of this memorandum. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on Signing the Ryan White CARE Act Amendments of 2000

October 20, 2000

Today I am very pleased to sign into law S. 2311, the “Ryan White CARE Act Amendments of 2000,” which reauthorizes and expands health care and essential support services for hundreds of thousands of Americans living with HIV and AIDS.

The broad bipartisan support in the Congress for this bill sends a clear message that together we can continue to reach out to individuals and families living with HIV and AIDS. Since its creation, the Ryan White program has provided thousands of people with HIV care and support services in their communities and access to cutting-edge therapies that would have remained beyond their reach. It has helped them stay out of the hospital and live healthier and better lives.

During my administration, funding for the Ryan White CARE Act has increased by more than 300 percent, and funding for basic AIDS research and HIV prevention has increased by over 80 percent. Our strong commitment to addressing the HIV epidemic has begun to pay dividends. The latest data show that the number of Americans diagnosed with AIDS has declined for the first time in the history of the AIDS epidemic, deaths from the disease have declined by over 40