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Campaign Finance Reform Legislation

Q. Mr. President, are you prepared to send your suggestions on campaign finance legislation to the Hill, and——

The President. Pretty soon.

Q. ——what would you like to see in it?

The President. Well, wait until I send them up there, but we'll be sending some principles up here pretty soon.

Q. Not today?

The President. Maybe today.

Q. Mr. President, to follow up, I mean, do you still support limited soft money contributions?

The President. I think we ought to get rid of labor union and corporate soft money. And I know we need to make sure we have—to make sure that shareholders and labor union members have got a say-so on how their money is spent.

Assistant Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe. Thank you all very much.

The President. Just getting warmed up. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you, Barney.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:22 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to his dogs Spot and Barney. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Letter to the Senate Majority and Minority Leaders on Campaign Finance Reform Legislation

March 15, 2001

Dear _____ *:*

As the Senate prepares to consider campaign finance reform legislation, I wanted to highlight my principles for reform. I am committed to working with the Congress to ensure that fair and balanced campaign finance reform legislation is enacted.

These principles represent my framework for assessing campaign finance reform legislation. I remain open to other ideas to meet our shared goals.

I am hopeful that, working together, we can achieve responsible campaign finance reforms.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

Campaign Finance Reform: President Bush's Reform Principles

Protect Rights of Individuals to Participate in Democracy: President Bush believes democracy is first and foremost about the rights of individuals to express their views. He supports strengthening the role of individuals in the political process by: 1) updating the limits established more than two-decades ago on individual giving to candidates and national parties; and 2) protecting the rights of citizen groups to engage in issue advocacy.

Maintain Strong Political Parties: President Bush believes political parties play an essential role in making America's democratic system operate. He wants to maintain the strength of parties, and not to weaken them. Any reform should help political parties more fully engage citizens in the political process and encourage them to express their views and to vote.

Ban Corporate and Union Soft Money: Corporations and labor unions spend millions of dollars every election cycle in unregulated "soft" money to influence federal elections. President Bush supports a ban on unregulated corporate and union contributions of soft money to political parties.

Eliminate Involuntary Contributions: President Bush believes no one should be forced to support a candidate or cause against his or her will. He therefore supports two parallel reforms: 1) legislation to prohibit corporations from using treasury funds for political activity without the permission of shareholders; and 2) legislation to require unions to obtain authorization from each dues-paying worker before spending those dues on activities unrelated to collective bargaining.

Require Full and Prompt Disclosure: President Bush also believes that in an open society, the best safeguard against abuse is full disclosure. He supports full, prompt and

constitutionally permissible disclosure of contributions and expenditures designed to influence the outcome of federal elections, so voters will have complete and timely information on which to make informed decisions.

Promote Fair, Balanced, Constitutional Approach: President Bush believes reform should not favor any one party over another or incumbents over challengers. Both corporations and unions should be prohibited from giving soft money to political parties, and both corporations and unions should have to obtain permission from their stockholders or dues-paying workers before spending treasury funds or dues on politics. President Bush supports including a non-severability provision, so if any provision of the bill is found unconstitutional, the entire bill is sent back to Congress for further adjustments and deliberations. This provision will ensure fair and balanced campaign finance reform.

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Trent Lott, Senate majority leader, and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader. Copies of this letter were provided to all other Senators.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Shamrock Presentation Ceremony With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland

March 16, 2001

Taoiseach, thank you very much, sir. We're so honored you're here. Laura and I welcome you and welcome our guests. Thank you all for coming. We accept this crystal of shamrocks, not just as a symbol of Ireland but as a symbol of a strong friendship between our nations, our shared values and shared history and shared hopes. Thank you for continuing this Saint Patrick's Day tradition. And we really appreciate this wonderful gift.

But Saint Patrick's Day is also a time for everyone to reflect on Ireland's many gifts to the world. We are thankful, first, for all that Ireland and the Prime Minister have done to further the cause of peace in Northern Ireland. There's an Irish expression, "the work praises the man." The peace that holds today in Northern Ireland is no small measure a tribute to the Prime Minister and his courageous leadership. And I assured him, and will continue to do so, that the United States stands ready to help in any way that the governments involved need.

The world is also thankful for the thousands of peacekeepers Ireland sends to other troubled corners of the globe, everywhere from Kosovo to East Timor. And we're thankful for the generous development aid Ireland sends to the world's poorest nations.

But Ireland's most precious gift to the world has been the Irish. No nation has benefited more from Irish talent and industry than the United States. You've given us Presidents, nine signers of the Declaration of Independence. In fact, so many Irish served as volunteers in the Continental Army, a Lord in Parliament lamented, "We have lost America through the Irish." [*Laughter*]

Today, over 44 million Irish-Americans reinforce the natural bonds of friendship between our nations. The United States is proud of our strong ties of trade and investment and proud that they have contributed to the strong economy that you have led. We look forward to working even more closely with Ireland, particularly now that it serves on the U.N. Security Council.

According to legend, Saint Patrick returned to Ireland after hearing the Irish people beckon him in a dream to come and walk among us once more. Well, today, it is a world that beckons the Irish to continue walking among us and sharing with us the rich culture, the large hearts, and good works.

So Mr. Prime Minister, America is proud to call Ireland a friend, not just on Saint Patrick's Day but on every day.

Welcome.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:36 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the Prime Minister Ahern.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Reception

March 16, 2001

Thank you very much. It sounds like we invited some rowdy Irish-Americans.