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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 17, 1995

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND PRIME MINISTER BRUTON
AT ST. PATRICK'S DAY RECEPTION

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State Floor

10:00 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Is the microphone on? Now it is. Taoiseach and Mrs. Bruton, let me say again, welcome to the White House. Ceade mile failte. (Applause.)

We have been breaking out the green for many years on St. Patrick's Day, but this is truly an historic St. Patrick's Day. For the first time we have invited leaders of all the major political groups from Northern Ireland, and I am delighted that so many are here tonight. (Applause.) Those who take risks for peace are always welcome under this roof. (Applause.)

President Kennedy, with his marvelous Irish understatement, once pointed out -- and I quote -- "The observance of St. Patrick's Day is almost as old in America as the Irish themselves. And some say they arrived in the 6th century." Actually, the first recorded mention of St. Patrick in America was in 1636, when an Irish ship bearing that name sailed into -- where else -- Boston Harbor. (Applause.) It, however, did not receive a warm welcome. The Puritans were not well disposed toward the Catholics, but as history shows, it was only a temporary setback as -- (laughter and applause.)

During the Revolutionary conflict, George Washington even paid his own compliment to the holiday in 1776. On March 17th, he ordered that the password of the day be "Boston," and the response, "St. Patrick." By the way, the colonies' general at that time was a Sullivan.

A few months later, at least a dozen Irishmen signed the Declaration of Independence, and another Mr. Dunlap of Philadelphia printed the Declaration for the first time. He also lost the original copy. (Laughter.) But that setback, too, was temporary -- (laughter) -- because the Irish knew then how to back winners. (Laughter.)

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The Irish first became a force in our politics in the 1790s when they supported Thomas Jefferson. To their eternal credit, many of their descendants have seen fit to back his Democratic descendants in the years since. (Applause.) Taoiseach, as you know, I am on my mother's side Irish -- her name was Cassidy. What you may NOT know was that the decisive battle for the nomination for president in 1992 was in Illinois and Michigan on St. Patrick's Day. (Applause.)

It is said that Ireland's greatest export is its people. No country has benefited more from that export, Catholic and Protestant, than the United States. These two traditions have been intertwined, and together have contributed immensely to our success as a nation and to our greatness as a people. More than a dozen presidents descended from Irish ancestors -- from Andrew Jackson, the son of immigrants from Carrickfergus near Belfast, who was our first president of Irish Protestant heritage, to John Kennedy, the great grandson of a cooper who left County Wexford and was our first Irish Catholic president.

I might say we're honored to have his sister as our Ambassador to Ireland, and his brother and two of his nephews in the United States Congress today. (Applause.) They're now seeking to expand their stranglehold -- one of his nieces is the Lt. Governor of Maryland. (Laughter and applause.) The next thing you know they'll insist on a position on every city council in America. (Laughter.) They have enough relatives to fill that. (Laughter.)

In the fight for our independence, and in the fight to preserve our union, there were Irishmen from both traditions serving side by side in all-Irish units. In both wars they were among the most feared warriors. They put freedom over faction, and they helped to build our nation.

Finley Peter Dunne, the great Irish American humorist, wrote that a fanatic is someone who is sure God would be on his side if only He knew all the facts. (Laughter.) Today, with good humor, but complete seriousness, I urge all our guests from Northern Ireland and all the parties concerned to put aside all extremism for the common good of peace. (Applause.)

The Prime Minister of Ireland and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, at no inconsiderable risk to themselves, have paved the way to a new era of peace. I urge all of you to follow that path. The tough tasks of compromise still lie ahead. The hard, unending work of democracy is never easy. Even here, after all these years, two centuries of it, we still have our difficulties from time to time, living with those who differ from us. But as you work to forge a new future, free of violence,

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free of intimidation, with the participation of all the people of Northern Ireland, the United States will stand by you.

America has received so many gifts from Ireland -- so many people who have enriched our nation; people who continue to come to the present day. We perhaps have many to give back. Some are perhaps financial in nature, but maybe the most important thing we could give to Ireland, and indeed, to a very troubled world today, is the example of what is possible when people find unity and strength in their diversity. (Applause.)

We know from our own hard experience, from the blood we have shed on our own land, from the struggles we have been engaged in for a long time, and the joys we draw every day from the increasing diversity of our people, that strength can be drawn from differences -- differences which are celebrated, respected, appreciated. That kind of strength can build a future worthy of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Tonight, our hopes and our prayers are with all the people of Ireland, and especially with you, Mr. Prime Minister, and with your fine wife and your family. We loved having you here. We love every St. Patrick's Day, but this one especially, we will remember above the rest. Thank you. Godspeed. (Laughter.)

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON: Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, ladies and gentlemen: It really is a proud moment to be here on St. Patrick's Day representing the government of a country that now, thanks above all to you, Mr. President, and indeed, of course, to many others, is now at peace. (Applause.)

And, as if to celebrate this wonderful happiness that we feel, there's been marvelous sunshine here in Washington today. Some might say that we brought it from Ireland -- I have to tell you that's not the case. (Laughter.)

This is a family day; we celebrate the great Irish family. And my wife, Finola, was in touch with our children at home in Ireland to see how they got on on St. Patrick's Day. And they, of course, were at the parade in Ashford, as it happens. But they told us that they could hardly get out of the car because of the hail stones that were falling. (Laughter.) So, obviously all of the sunlight has come over to Washington.

I want to say that this is a celebration of the great Irish family throughout the world. There are 70 million people of Irish extraction in different parts of the world. But I think there's nowhere in the world that Irish people feel a greater sense of celebration and elation on St. Patrick's Day than they do here in the United States, where there are 40 million people who justly claim Irish ancestry. (Applause.)

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This United States has been very, very good to the Irish. Irish people came here in the poorest of poor condition, and they've been able to prosper to the point that now, I think, there are more people of Irish extraction in the boardrooms of American companies than there are of any other ethnic group.

And, indeed, I suppose -- we're heading off tomorrow, Finola and I and our party, to the city of the First Lady, to Chicago. And we're certainly looking forward to that. But we're going from there to a place called Festus, Missouri.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Where?

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON: Festus, Missouri. (Laughter.) The reason we're going there is that my great grand-uncle left my home to go to Festus. He went via California, New York, and I think -- I'm not quite sure where else -- Iowa. Yes. But he finally ended his career in Festus, Missouri.

And his story, his life story is sort of an example of the story of so many millions of Irish people across the Atlantic to this wonderful country. He started off working in California as a common laborer. That is what he put down in his biography. And he finally ended his career in Festus, Missouri, as a very successful businessman. He founded a bank, and he even had the courage to go into politics. (Laughter.) And some say that in fact one of the ways he made money was by selling mules to both sides in the American Civil War. (Laughter.) So he showed flexibility. (Laughter.) I don't know how much I have succeeded in inheriting that characteristic from him, or not, but there will be various versions of that. (Laughter.)

I want to say how much we in Ireland particularly appreciate the role that you have played personally, Mr. President, in bringing peace to our country. (Applause.) Anybody who lives in Ireland can tell you how much of a difference this now makes to us. People are free to travel. There are, I think it's three or four times as many people traveling from Dublin up to Belfast to do shopping, to make contact with people with whom they'd lost contact perhaps over the last 25 years. There's been a whole weight lifted off our shoulders. We're a happy land now, thanks to the stand and the courage that you and your colleagues have shown, Mr. President. (Applause.)

And you, in doing this as the leader of the world's greatest democracy, are simply following in the stand for decency that the United States has taken on so many occasions in the history of this world in recent times. And we speak here on the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war -- a war where the United States had the courage to stand against tyranny

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and win. We're all the better for that. But we also stand, looking back on 50 years of peace. Comparative peace, at least, since the end of that war. And, again, the courage of the United States has been the key factor in preserving the peace in the world over that 50-year period.

I want to thank you again, Mr. President, for the tremendous good that you've done for our country. And I hope that very soon -- this year or next -- it will be possible for you to come to Ireland -- North and South. (Applause.) And may I formally invite you to to do so -- and, indeed, to bring, I hope, your wife and your daughter, so that your family can receive in person the thanks of the great Irish family for all that you have done for us. (Applause.)

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