

Prime Minister, Ireland is a great friend and ally, and I want to thank you for your friendship over these years.

We discussed a variety of issues. In particular, we talked about Northern Ireland. And the *Taoiseach* gets a lot of credit for showing a steady hand during a difficult period. And yet, as a result of perseverance and hard work, Northern Ireland is a different place than it was last year. And we congratulate the leaders there. And I just want the folks to know, what I told the *Taoiseach* is true, that the United States will continue to stay engaged and will be very supportive of helping the process move forward.

And there's more work to be done, we fully understand, in Northern Ireland. But also, there's a really interesting chance for people from our country to see the investment opportunities available in Northern Ireland. And this May, there's a Northern Ireland investment conference, which the United States will strongly support. And *Taoiseach*, like I told you, we'll send a strong delegation to look at the opportunities available there.

So thanks for coming. Thanks for your friendship. And once again, happy Saint Patrick's Day.

Prime Minister Ahern. Thank you very much, President. And I want to thank the President. It's the eighth year that he's afforded us an opportunity of representing the Irish people here. And as always, we've had a very fruitful discussion on a range of issues, and obviously important to me is the ongoing process in Northern Ireland. And the President and his people have been really helpful as we move now to the remaining issue, the evolution of policing, which we've discussed.

And the investment conference, which is just around the corner—it's a—I've said it several times before: The investment conference is a—really a one-off chance, an opportunity for Northern Ireland to bring some of the big investors of the world to see the opportunities that are there, the opportunities that they had not had a chance of being able to get any benefit from for the last 30 or 40 years. And now they have that. And I think it will show Northern Ireland is a place with well-educated people, hard-working people, people who are good at business if given a half a chance.

And it is hugely important to us that in the organization of this that the President has helped both the British Government and the Irish Government to get this together. We've gone through that today, and I think the—*[inaudible]*—of the President to make sure that there's a high-powered delegation to United States is hugely helpful. I want to thank the President for that.

And I also want to thank him for the assistance that he's given to us on a range of issues that we've had an opportunity of talking about.

President Bush. Thank you, Bertie. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

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

March 17, 2008

Taoiseach, thanks. Small island; huge impact on the United States of America. *[Laughter]* Laura and I are glad you're here. We welcome you back to the White House on this Saint Patrick's Day. I can't think of a better way to celebrate it than with the *Taoiseach*. Thanks for the bowl of shamrocks. As you said, this is the eighth time I had the honor of receiving this from you. And I want to thank you for your friendship—your personal friendship—and all you've done to strengthen the deep and lasting bond between our two nations.

Also proud to be here with John O'Donoghue, the Speaker of the Dail. Welcome. Members of my Cabinet who are here, thank you for coming. Members of the United States Senate and the United States Congress who've joined us, we're glad you're here. And I know the *Taoiseach* is glad you're here too. *[Laughter]* He was asking me, "Are you in session?" I said, "No, they're out of town." He said, "Well, you must be feeling better about that." *[Laughter]* We'll be having lunch with you soon.

How about members of the fire department of New York's Emerald Society? I

thank you for coming. They proudly carry the title “New York’s bravest,” and rightly so.

And finally, I will be introducing soon Ronan Tynan to entertain us a little bit. He is a wonderful representative of your country. He’s a dear friend of the Bush family, and we’re so thankful he is here with us today.

You know, *Taoiseach*, you were awfully diplomatic to talk about the fact that the architect came back to rebuild the White House after 1814. What, of course, you didn’t say was why the White House needed to be rebuilt in the first place. [Laughter] And so I’m proud to welcome the Ambassador from Great Britain, our dear friend. [Laughter] Thanks for coming.

I don’t know if you know this, but America held its first Saint Patrick’s Day celebration in Boston in the year 1737. I don’t think you were there, Congressman, but—[laughter]—shortly thereafter. [Laughter] Nearly 40 years later, in the midst of the Revolution, at least 9 of the 56 signatures on the Declaration of Independence were inked by Irish hands.

We’ve had a long relationship, *Taoiseach*. Our history has been one where the United States and Ireland have made liberty our common cause, and both of our nations are richer for it. Our partnership is based upon principles, and it’s also based upon people. Ireland founded itself—found itself in the grip of poverty and famine in the 19th century, and millions of Irish came here to our soil. They were drawn here by a promise that success would be attainable to all those who were willing to work hard. And that’s certainly what happened.

It’s an interesting poster that somebody brought to my attention that said this: “In the United States, an industrious youth may follow any occupation without being looked down upon, and he may rationally expect to raise himself in the world by his labor.” You know, occasionally, people did look down, but not anymore, because Irish have been unbelievably productive people for the United States of America. They’ve made a huge contribution. They’ve become an essential thread in the American fabric.

And that’s what we celebrate on Saint Patrick’s Day. Our countries are more than just partners; we are family, *Taoiseach*. And

today, more than 35 million Americans claim Irish ancestry. America is richer for every Murphy, Kelly, and O’Sullivan. I should have said McCain, but—[laughter]. Well, I just did. [Laughter] After all this history together, the United States and the Republic of Ireland continue to stand side by side in firm friendship. We were friends in the past; we’re friends today; and, *Taoiseach*, I am confident, after my time in office, the next President will be friends with Ireland. We are cooperating to build prosperous economies and—with vibrant trade and sound investment between our countries.

I want to congratulate the *Taoiseach*. He was very generous in his praise about America’s role, previous administration’s role, hopefully our role in helping Northern Ireland have a peaceful future. But, *Taoiseach*, the truth of the matter is, I said on TV in there that you’ve had a steady hand, and you’ve been supportive. And I do want to applaud those who are here who’ve shown great courage, who’ve been able to put together—put beside—behind them a terrible past and focused on a hopeful future. And it was my huge honor, Martin, to welcome you and Dr. Paisley to the Oval Office. It was an historic moment for me, personally. And it was really, really positive.

But I came away with the impression that obviously the United States needs to help, and we will. But nothing will happen without clear conviction and determination by the folks who live in Northern Ireland. And there’s more work to be done, *Taoiseach*. As you said, the devolution of policing is important, and we support that. But we can also help by sending a clear signal that we’re interested in investment opportunities. And so the Northern Ireland investment conference in May will be held. And I want to repeat what I told the *Taoiseach*, is that we will send a high-level delegation to not only send a signal that we support the efforts of the folks in Northern Ireland, but we expect our folks to be able to find good investment opportunities—for the good of both.

And so, *Taoiseach*, I, like you, marvel at the success that’s taken place since my short time as President and know full well that more progress can and will be made.

You know, there's an old Irish proverb that says: "There is no strength without unity." And so on this Saint Patrick's Day, we can all take pride in the way that the United States and Ireland have come together to enrich each other in the world.

My last time as President to have a Saint Patrick's Day with you, *Taoiseach*. Perhaps when we join the ex-leaders club, we'll sit back and put our feet up—[laughter]—and talk about the good old times. In the meantime, I know you're going to sprint to the finish, as am I, for the good of our countries.

Thank you for coming. God bless the people of Ireland and the United States. And now I welcome Ronan Tynan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the Dail Eireann John O'Donoghue of Ireland; FDNY Emerald Society Pipes and Drums, who performed prior to the remarks; the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the U.S. Sir Nigel E. Sheinwald; and First Minister Ian R.K. Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Northern Ireland. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.

Remarks at the Jacksonville Port Authority in Jacksonville, Florida *March 18, 2008*

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you for the warm welcome. It's nice to be back in J-ville. It's an interesting place to come, isn't it? I've been in your stadium. I've been in your church. I've never been on the docks. But if you're interested in trying to figure out one of the reasons why this is one of America's most vibrant cities, you got to come to the docks.

And I want to explain why these docks are important to not only the citizens of Jacksonville but also why what happens here is important to the overall economy in the United States.

Before I do, I do want to thank *Senor Morales*. Thank you for your leading here as the chairman of the Jacksonville Port Authority. Thanks for being the kind of American we love, somebody who comes from abroad, recognizes the great blessings of the United

States of America, and contributes mightily to our success.

I appreciate the executive director, Rick Ferrin. I've just had an interesting tour of this facility by Magnus Lindeback, Captain Magnus Lindeback. [Applause] Magnus, it sounds like some of them have heard of you around here. [Laughter] I'm going to talk about Magnus a little later on. He's a fellow who came to America with a dream and now employs a lot of good, hard-working folks because of goods that are shipped from here to other parts of the world and for goods that are shipped from other parts of the world to here. See, everybody here is working as a result of trade—trade that happens and occurs right here on these docks.

The Governor of the great State of Florida, Charlie Crist, has joined us. Mr. Governor, proud you're here. Thanks for taking time. Two Members from the United States Congress have come—this must be a special occasion—[laughter]—Ander Crenshaw, Congressman from this district, doing a find job, and Congresswoman Corrine Brown. Madam Congresswoman, we're proud you're here.

Daniel Davis, president of the Jacksonville City Council, appreciate you coming. A lot of other State and local officials, port authority employees, Coastal Maritime employees, thanks for greeting me here. Appreciate you coming.

One thing is for certain: This is a challenging time for our economy. You know that; I know that; a lot of Americans understand that. In the short run, the strains on the economy have been caused by the turmoil in the housing market, which has required focused and decisive action. And that's exactly what the Federal Government's doing.

There are problems, but the key is to recognize problems and to act early, which we have done. For example, we brought together what's called the HOPE NOW Alliance. It's a private sector group that is helping large numbers of homeowners refinance their mortgages. We want to help people stay in their homes. And millions of people are going to be affected by this program. And it makes sense to help some person who is creditworthy find the capacity and understand where to refinance. The more people