

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
EXCHANGE OF TOASTS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
LIAM M. COSGRAVE  
PRIME MINISTER OF IRELAND

THE STATE FLOOR

10:17 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Cosgrave, ladies and gentlemen:

Betty and I have had the luck of the Americans to have you with us tonight. (Laughter) You have been in our country before and are very obviously our friend, but on this very special day we have had the great pleasure to welcome you on your first visit as Prime Minister of your country.

On this St. Patrick's Day of the United States Bicentennial year, all Americans know there is a bit of the green in the red, white and blue of the United States. (Laughter)

We honor the history of our nation and the great contributions that all of you from Ireland have made to American independence, as well as growth.

No country could be more welcome, or entitled, to join in our Bicentennial celebration than Ireland. We are proud of the Irish chapter of development and achievement as far as the United States is concerned. The very high proportion of Irish-Americans in George Washington's Army is no blarney. (Laughter)

As I observed this morning, Mr. Prime Minister, 11 signers of the Declaration of Independence were Irish-Americans, and the White House itself, where we are dining tonight, was designed by a native of Kilkenny, James Hoban, in 1792. We are told by our historians that the Irish may even have had a hand in discovering America. I say by Irish historians. (Laughter) So we won't get into some conflict with some other friends of ours.

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Saint Brendan the Navigator may have crossed the Atlantic in the sixth century, and I believe that some of your hearty countrymen will attempt the same crossing this May in a boat much like Saint Brenden's. We will welcome them, Betty and myself, to the Irish-designed White House when they arrive. (Laughter)

The Irish contribution to America is not restricted to the past. Today, some 20 million Irish-Americans are building energetically on the great legacy of their ancestors. They are helping our country to make an even greater achievement as we enter our third century.

Many distinguished Americans of Irish heritage are here tonight to honor you and Mrs. Cosgrave. Their contributions are in a wide variety of endeavors, whether it is education, medicine, the law, religion, the theater, the arts, the building trades, business. It covers all aspects of our society.

But, no where have Americans of Irish descent been more prominent than in Government and in politics. We have some good evidences of that here tonight. The Irish have that love of people, gift of language, warmth of heart and capacity of courage that makes them grand and great competition.

We pay tribute to the long, long friendship, as well as the kinship, of the Irish and the American people. But, while honoring the past, Mr. Prime Minister, we face the challenge of the future. As we value your friendship, so we value your cooperation with us on these great issues that we have to face on a day-to-day basis.

Your visit and the talks we had this morning have great importance, not only for the American-Irish relations but for our efforts to work together on the issues confronting our entire world community. Ireland, not only in the past but the present, has much to give to the world. Possessed of an ancient civilization and very rich culture, the Irish are devoted -- as we are -- to democracy, individual freedom and constructive participation in international political arenas.

Ireland is a leader in the quest for a just peace among nations. They have contributed very actively and effectively in the United Nations, and you have done much to perfect the United Nations peacekeeping effort throughout the world.

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Distinguished Irishmen have served as the Presidents not only of the United Nations, but of the League of Nations, and you should all be very proud of that responsibility.

More recently, Ireland has taken a very effective role in the European Community, and we deeply appreciate the achievement of close consultations between this community and the United States during your term as President of the European Community.

Mr. Prime Minister, I know from our discussions this morning that we are both determined to expand the relations between our two countries. We have dedicated ourselves to peace and to progress of not only our nations but all peoples, with a firm commitment to cooperate with one another, with all humanities, to a common purpose.

Mr. Prime Minister, this is one of the finest traditions of this wonderful day, which is dedicated to St. Patrick. I can assure you that today is not only a great day for the Irish, but it has also been a great day for Betty and myself.

Let me say we thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, and Mrs. Cosgrave, for sharing St. Patrick's Day with us and to all of the people, some 215 million Americans, it is a great occasion for us in our Bicentennial year.

So now I ask all of you to join with me in a toast to the Prime Minister of Ireland and to the special, the very special, relationship between Ireland and the United States, past, present and future, and to all of the Irish everywhere.

To you, Mr. Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER COSGRAVE: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, distinguished guests:

On behalf of my wife and myself I would like to say how very grateful we are to Mrs. Ford and you, Mr. President, for your very kind invitation to come here and particularly for your extremely generous and cordial remarks tonight.

I can assure you we feel very much at home. In fact, we felt completely at home since our arrival in the United States. Our American friends have lived up to their great reputation for hospitality, and while we claim to have played some part in the development of the United States, it is customary on this day each year to commemorate St. Patrick. I don't think even in his most optimistic and spiritual experiences that he ever thought he would be commemorated in this fashion here tonight. (Laughter)

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You, Mr. President, remarked on the Irish contribution in military terms, and in politics, and in science and medicine and law and in the other learned professions and also in scholarship and learning generally.

Again, we have had some political experiences, but I don't think these either came from St. Patrick, although we would often like to avail of his aid in settling some of our problems.

As you remarked, we indeed sometimes have a theory in Ireland, some of the historians, but I don't vouch for the accuracy of it, that there were two St. Patrick's. Up to now, though, we have had to get along with one. (Laughter)

As you remarked, we do claim that Saint Brendan the Navigator reached America. Sometimes we think, or like to think, that he got here before Columbus. I hope that the craft which comes here to celebrate your Bicentennial year later this year will reach the shores of the United States safely. (Laughter)

I would like particularly to stress the very great honor which Ireland has felt at being invited to commemorate, thanks to your invitation, Mr. President, the second Bicentennial of American independence.

As I said today, in speaking to the very gracious invitation from the Congress of the United States, we value the American contribution, not merely to democracy but to the defense of freedom, and we appreciate the immense contribution which America and American influence, help and assistance, both financial and otherwise, has made to the rehabilitation of Europe and indeed the free world after World War II.

We in Ireland are deeply conscious of the help which your great country gave to us. We have many happy recollections of the substantial economic and social benefits that flowed from the help received under Marshall aid and the generous assistance.

We are at present particularly interested in the extent of American investment in Ireland because we believe that it affords America an opportunity to expand in Europe, to get a foothold in Europe from Ireland as a member of the European Economic Community, and at the same time to enable Ireland to develop on a scale and to an extent which we have never known in the past.

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In the past, as you remarked, Mr. President, many of our countrymen came to America, came to America because it provided not merely freedom from oppression, but freedom to work and freedom to develop. Indeed, I recall the words of a well-known Irish politician 100 years ago in which he said, when he came to America, "I have found a greater Ireland here than I have left behind."

Indeed, I couldn't help recalling, Mr. President, when you talked about the fact that this great house was designed by an Irishman that it has some similarities with the house which my colleague, the Foreign Minister, and I spend a lot of our time working in in Dublin, Leinster House. It is where Parliament meets.

There is one similarity that I think we certainly share, and that is generally there are more people looking to take our places and yours (Laughter) outside a house than in it. (Laughter)

I am sure, Mr. President, I happen to speak for you, but speaking for myself, at any rate, I will endeavor to try and at least look after my own place. (Laughter)

On behalf of all of my colleagues, we would like to express our very sincere congratulations, not merely to you, Mr. President, and to your gracious wife and to the Government and all the distinguished people who have come here tonight, but to the people of the United States, all the people, particularly those who have sprung from an Irish background and who have come in the past, in the distant past, as well as in the more recent past, from Ireland to help to make a contribution to building up this country.

They are proud of that tradition. We are proud of their place in politics, in peace and war, in trade and commerce. We are particularly proud, Mr. President, that in recent years a great many of your countrymen have come to Ireland and have been extraordinarily successful on the race course. (Laughter) I see them all around me here. (Laughter)

In fact, I am very glad to see that they have turned up because I am sure it is only a prelude to further successes in the future. (Laughter)

Mr. President, Vera and I would like to thank Mrs. Ford and you and all your colleagues for the very kind invitation to share with you in celebrating the Bicentennial events in this year, to pay tribute to your Government, your country, to all the people of the United States, and to wish the same success in the future as you have had in the past and to invoke in wishing you that the blessing of God and St. Patrick on your efforts.

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I will ask you to rise and drink to the health of His Excellency, the President of the United States, and Mrs. Ford.

END (AT 10:33 P.M. EST)