

## FRIENDS OF IRELAND

**HON. JAMES T. WALSH**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 20, 2000*

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of St. Patrick's Day, I am inviting all my colleagues to become a Friend of Ireland. The Friends of Ireland is a bipartisan congressional organization established in 1981 by the late Speaker, Thomas "Tip" O'Neill. Every successive Speaker has carried on the tradition with Speaker HASTERT and Minority Leader GEPHARDT serving as honorary chairmen of the group.

The purpose of the Friends of Ireland is to increase the bonds of friendship and understanding between the American people and the people of Ireland. We look for a peaceful solution to the problems of this troubled land. Our organization is open to all Members of the 106th Congress who share its principles and has attracted widespread support over the years. There are also several Senators who are members of the Friends.

Over the years, the statements of support for peace in Ireland, condemnations of human rights abuses, assistance to the International Fund for Ireland and general expressions of goodwill have made a difference. The voice of the U.S. Congress is listened to very attentively in Ireland both in the Republic and in the North.

I submit this year's St. Patrick's Day Statement for the RECORD:

STATEMENT BY THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND—  
SAINT PATRICK'S DAY 2000

On this first St. Patrick's Day of the new millennium, the Friends of Ireland in the United States Congress join 45 million Irish-Americans of both traditions in celebrating the unique bonds between our two nations. We send greetings to the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese and warmly welcome the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, on his third St. Patrick's day visit to Washington. We share the hopes of the Irish people that the current impasse in the Northern Ireland peace process will be broken soon.

We are deeply troubled by the suspension of the democratically elected Government of Northern Ireland by the British Government and the stalemate over decommissioning. We urge all political leaders in the North to recommit themselves to the spirit and letter of the Good Friday Agreement. We have provided strong and consistent support throughout the peace process to all parties committed to peace, and we reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of the Agreement.

The Good Friday Agreement was endorsed decisively by the people of Ireland both North and South with majorities from both traditions. It is a mandate given to those working on behalf of peace, justice and the creation of a new beginning in Northern Ireland. Successful implementation is predicated on the concurrent resolution of all the interdependent aspects of the Agreement. The successful implementation of the agreement must be the clear goal for all who want to consolidate the progress that has been made and to avoid the danger of failure for yet another generation in Northern Ireland.

At this time, the institutions of devolved government are suspended. The suspension was not caused by any failure of the institutions themselves, nor by any violation of the Agreement, but by an internal political cri-

sis focused on the issue of decommissioning. We encourage the political leaders to bridge this crisis of confidence and secure the reinstatement of the institutions as soon as possible. Their absence creates a gap which the enemies of peace can and will exploit. It is vital that they are not permitted to succeed. The ongoing cease-fire are major confidence building measures, and it should be made clear that any return to violence is not an option. We condemn unequivocally all acts of violence.

We call on all sides to implement additional confidence building measures. Root causes of violence—prejudice, religious intolerance and sectarianism—must also be eliminated. The nationalist and unionist communities must see that politics is working and believe their future can rest with the actions of their democratically elected representatives in the Assembly.

The issue of confidence in the integrity of the democratic institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement must not be seen as confined to the agenda of any one side. It is a shared requirement which all have a vital stake in restoring. Each party is committed under the Agreement to ensure the viability and effective operation of the political process pledged in the Agreement by persuading those who hold weapons that such weapons can have no role whatsoever in a democratic system.

In spite of discouraging setbacks, we believe that a way forward can be found on this difficult issue by building on the progress already made. We welcome the acknowledgment by the IRA that "the issue of arms needs to be dealt with in an acceptable way and this is a necessary objective of a genuine peace process." We also welcome the work in identifying and advancing the context where this goal can most successfully be achieved. We consider a crucial test to be whether the electorate in Northern Ireland can be reassured that their democratic wishes will not be undermined by actual or threatened recourse to guns from any side.

We believe there is now an acceptance of this fundamental principle across the entire political spectrum which offers a basis for reaching an accommodation, provided the parties approach it in a spirit of reciprocal action, and with sensitivity about the real constraints on each side and the need for skillful and patient management of these constraints. We urge renewed dialogue in this spirit using the Independent Commission headed by General de Chastelain. The paramilitaries must put weapons beyond use and make progress on the decommissioning issue.

The British Government must reasonably scale down its military presence in the North. We also give particular importance to the timely implementation of the Patten Report, including the urgent appointment of an Oversight Commissioner and assistants, the early publication of a detailed implementation plan, and the speedy passage of legislation. We believe the publication of the Criminal Justice Review should begin a program of significant reforms. We support changes that ensure a police force with representation from both communities and a criminal justice system which will command loyalty from all people living in Northern Ireland. These are the essential ingredients necessary in the creation of a just and peaceful society.

We also note the importance of moving forward on human rights and equality issues under the Agreement. This includes the creation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the obligation to promote equal opportunity. We emphasize the continuing need to demonstrate public commitment to human rights and accountability through the estab-

lishment of independent inquiries into the Finucane, Nelson and Hamill cases.

We support the initiative taken by the Irish and British Prime Ministers at the beginning of this month to launch a round of intensive consultations to restore the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and deal with the arms issues as quickly as possible.

Over this St. Patrick's Day period, we will be urging all the leaders from Northern Ireland to recognize the importance of what is at stake, the danger of delay, and the need for a genuine and sincere collective effort to overcome these last remaining obstacles to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. All Friends of Ireland in the United States stand ready to help in any possible way.

FRIENDS OF IRELAND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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HONORING MICHAEL KELLY OF  
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA**HON. DON YOUNG**

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 20, 2000*

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Mr. Mike Kelly on the eve of his retirement from Golden Valley Electric Association in Alaska.

Michael P. Kelly has worked for 33 years; 17 of them were as Chief Executive Officer and President of the Golden Valley Electric Association. He is a leader within Alaska's utility industry. Throughout his thirty-three years he has grown Interior Alaska's lone electric co-op into a multi-million dollar enterprise which provides electrical service to an estimated 80,000 people. In fact, during his leadership GVEA has not raised its rates during the last 18 years.

Mike has dedicated his career at GVEA to fighting for projects and progress that have benefited consumers in both Alaska's Railbelt and in Alaska's remote regions. He led GVEA's purchase of the Fairbanks Municipal Utilities (electric) System, and has been the facilitator in the construction of the Northern Intertie Project has served in numerous leadership positions within the industry and in the community of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Not only has Mike been a industry leader but more importantly he has been a community leader within Fairbanks as well as a civic leader within the Great State of Alaska. He serves on the Boards of Denali State Bank and the Fairbanks Memorial Hospital Foundation. Mike is a member of Fairbanks Rotary, a past board member of the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce. He just completed eight years on the University of Alaska Board of Regents and was the President of the Board from 1996–1998.

Mike as a leader in the utilities industry are notable. Mike has received numerous national, state and local recognitions including the Northwest Public Power Association Raver