

GAE Committee Public Hearing Testimony - March 7, 2016

Support for House Joint Resolution 6, RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE REUNIFICATION OF IRELAND

Chairman Cassano, Chairman Jutila and Members of the GAE Committee, my name is Brian Anderson. I am testifying before you as a citizen, rather than in my normal capacity as a union lobbyist.

I urge the committee to pass HJR 6. My relatives left Northern Ireland in the last century because of the discrimination, intimidation and violence that was visited upon Catholic Nationalist families. This discrimination was perpetrated by the British government and Unionist politicians.

I have visited Northern Ireland twice. Once in the midst of the “Troubles” in 1983, and then again this past summer. The contrast between conditions was stunning. Sectarian tension and violence have dropped greatly. Yet, things are still a long way from solved. Intimidation of the predominantly Catholic Nationalist community still occurs on a regular basis. Unionist/Loyalist leaders still engage in condemnation of accepting the nationalist community as fellow citizens deserving of respect and still engage in discrimination against Catholics. There were several bonfires in which the burning of effigies of nationalist elected leaders took place this summer. Unionist parades to intimidate Catholic neighborhoods once again took place this past July “marching season.” The “peace wall” separating Catholics and Protestants in Belfast is still up and locked on weekends and evenings. Sadly, it seems that it is still needed to keep the peace.

Connecticut played an important role in helping to bring about the Good Friday peace accords. Congressman Bruce Morrison and Senator Chris Dodd helped to establish a diplomatic agreement between nationalist leaders, unionist leaders, the Irish government and the British government.

Connecticut was one of the first states to pass the MacBride Principals, a set of anti-discrimination standards that corporations doing business in Northern Ireland need to meet in order to be eligible for doing business with Connecticut’s pension funds. The MacBride Principals are cited as a major step in lessening discrimination against Catholics and were an important tool in bringing relative peace to the region.

It seems to follow that passing such a resolution, in the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Irish Republic, is fitting and proper. I had the opportunity to meet with Sinn Fein leaders on my recent trip. One of them, Fra McCann, was not long out of prison when I met him 1983. He is now an elected member of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Mr. McCann impressed upon me how appreciative people in Northern Ireland are of the support that the peace process received from the United States and particularly

Connecticut. He said that he had high hopes for a peaceful reunification of Ireland. The Nationalist community has made great efforts at outreach to the Unionist community. This shows in the vast lessening of violence and the normalization of daily life in places such as Belfast.

Though I would not want to speak for them, it seemed that the Nationalist community, while seeking one, united Ireland, has come to an understanding that this will only come about when the Unionist community willingly accepts such a unification.

This aspirational resolution keeps attention on fulfilling the hopes of peace and nationhood that Irish people, Protestant and Catholic, continue to strive for. It lets all of the parties to the peace accord know that we are aware and appreciative of their progress. And that we Americans, some of Irish ancestry, some not, are still paying attention.

Thank you for your consideration.