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To : Andrew Patterson, Anglo-Irish  
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Interview with President Clinton on St. Patrick's Day

in the White House,

Peter King, Republican Congressman

and Mr. Frank McCluskey, Chairman of the Friends of Ireland

in Congress - Inside Politics, Saturday, 20 March, 1993

Interviewer: (Jim Dougal) Good afternoon.

Despite considerable speculation that President Clinton was about to appoint a Peace Envoy or to send a representative on a fact-finding mission to Northern Ireland, the new Clinton administration has put that decision off for the time being. But when he welcomed the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds to the White House for St. Patrick's Day, the President threw his weight behind the continuing efforts to revive the talks process. It was clear, however, that the question of an envoy had been put on the back burner.

President Clinton: We decided, after our consultations, that that is certainly an option that I should leave open, both of those options, and have under serious consideration. As you know talks began last year and then were suspended and I am very hopeful that the British and the Irish Governments will get back together and begin serious dialogue soon. I think that is a precondition as I said for the other talks proceeding and I am going to stay in touch closely with Prime Minister Reynolds, we are going to talk frequently and I expect to have an Ambassador in Ireland pretty soon and I will make those decisions at what seems to me to be the appropriate time. I have not made them now and I don't think it would be appropriate to make a final decision on that at this time.

Interviewer: Mr. President, have you taken on board the Unionist concerns and anger in Northern Ireland at suggestions that you might send somebody who would attempt to mediate peace (unclear)

President: Well I don't think that the United States can make peace in Northern Ireland and I don't think that the Unionists and Nationalists or anyone else would expect that. I think that we have a deep concern about the future of Ireland. We have a deep concern about ending the violence and abuses of humanity which have been there and I want to do whatever I can to support that process. I do believe and I'll say again I do believe that the dialogue that was opened, not all that long ago, between these two Governments in Ireland and Great Britain, offer the real chance of producing a framework within which peace could occur and I am going to continue to stay on top of the situation involved and I will make those decisions at a later time when I think they are appropriate. I think it is inappropriate now for me to do more than just to say that I think the Governments should in earnest embrace the opportunities that are before them and I will be as supportive as I can and whenever there seems to be something else I could do by taking further action then I will do it. I don't want to do anything to undermine the peace process, I want to do something that will support it and reinforce it.

Interviewer: President Clinton, speaking on St. Patrick's Day, after a meeting at the White House with Albert Reynolds. But Peter King, a Republican Congressman from New York says he believes there is considerable support within Congress for the idea of a Peace Envoy now and for legislation opposing what he calls human rights abuses in the Province. I asked Mr. King, who has campaigned for Gerry Adams to be allowed into the United States, how he first became interested in Northern Ireland matters?

Mr. King: Well I am of Irish descent so that gave me my first interest in the Irish issue but also I am concerned about human rights. When you combine the two, being of Irish descent and being concerned with human rights, obviously you have to be concerned about whats happening in the North of Ireland and I have been involved in the issue for more than 15 years and its an issue which regrettably seems to not only not get better it seems to if anything get worse every year.

Interviewer: What is your view on whats happening in Northern Ireland at the moment?

Mr. King: I think right now there is a very brutal status quo. I don't think either side, loyalist or nationalist, is able to improve their position militarily. I think that politically there is a log jam, the British Government is not getting anywhere with the talks and I think right now there is nothing happening except that people on the ground are still suffering.

Interviewer: You are only recently elected to Congress. What do you think as a member of Congress you can do about that situation?

Mr. King: The main thing is to focus attention, to introduce or to be involved in legislation such as a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, a Special Envoy for the North of Ireland, McBride principles. All of these serve to focus attention on the injustice in the North of Ireland. Also we could put pressure on the administration, on President Clinton, on the State Department, to speak out and denounce human rights violations in the North of Ireland and also to take some positive steps such as appointing a Peace Envoy, by letting Prime Minister Major and the British Government know that we are as concerned about human rights violations in Ireland as we are anywhere else in the world.

Interviewer: What kind of support do you have for those views in Congress?

Mr. King: I think there is substantial support for legislation which opposes human rights violations in the North of Ireland, issues such as a Peace Envoy. I think you will find a pretty sizeable majority supporting that. I think if the McBride principles came to a vote you would see support on that. There is a feeling in the Congress that the British policies have not worked but quite frankly what I think holds back the Congress to some extent is the fact that the Dublin Government puts a reign or puts a restraint on Irish Americans and unlike the Israeli Government, of course, which encourages Jewish Americans, the Dublin Government also often tends to tell Irish Americans to slow it down and not to get as actively involved. I think that if the Dublin Government became more aggressive you would see much more legislation go through Congress and the Congress be much more active on the issue. But if you took a secret ballot, if you ask members of Congress how they feel, I think a solid majority would vote for legislation such as the McBride principles and a Peace Envoy to Northern Ireland.

Interviewer: You are a member of the Republican Party, now are the views which you hold not more likely to be held by Irish American democrats.

Mr. King: Well certainly in the Congress I would say that the views that I have would be supported by a higher percentage of democrats than republicans but there are still a number of republicans, people such as Ben Gilman, who happens to be Jewish by the way and Hamilton Fish, who happens to be Protestant. Both of them are republicans and both of them are very active on the Irish issue but in all fairness, I have to acknowledge that you would find more support among democrats than you would among republicans but combined you would, I believe, have a majority of the House of Representatives.



Interviewer: You have been called Gerry Adams' mouthpiece in Congress. How do you answer that?

Mr. King: Well I am a friend of Gerry Adams but I represent the voters of the third congressional district in New York. I speak for them and I speak out on issues that I think are important but I am really accountable to no one other than the voters of my constituency but I am certainly willing to listen to people such as Gerry Adams or Havel or Lech Walensa or any other human rights leaders around the world.

Interviewer: Aren't you though articulating the kind of views which Gerry Adams would articulate?

Mr. King: I am sure there are any number of views which Gerry Adams and I have the same views as other issues we disagree on but just because Gerry and I happen to have the same views certainly doesn't mean that I am his mouthpiece. I think Gerry knows me well enough to know that I speak my own mind and I certainly know Gerry Adams well enough to know that he speaks his own mind. So no, I am speaking for myself, but I do believe that the American people should have the opportunity to hear Gerry Adams and let them decide how they feel on his views and I am very hopeful that President Clinton will allow Gerry Adams the opportunity to visit this country and be heard the same as the British Government is heard.

Interviewer: What are you doing about that?

Mr. King: Gerry Adams will be applying for a visa very soon. I will be actively supporting that, I will be working with the State Department, I will be working with the White House and using whatever leverage whatever pressure I have to stand with those who believe in free speech. This isn't an Irish issue. This is an issue of free speech, that the American people are entitled to hear all sides of all issues and on the Irish issue, certainly Gerry Adams, who represents the party which

is the majority nationalist party in Belfast for instance, he certainly should be allowed to come here and articulate his position and state his case. My point is there are no heroes and there are no saints in the North of Ireland, including the British Army and I am saying all of the combatants should be allowed and encouraged to take part in the peace process which is why I think Sinn Fein should be part of any peace talks.

Interviewer: You're saying that the British Government and the other parties should now be talking to Sinn Fein?

Mr. King: I think Sinn Fein should be part of any peace talks that go on. It's incredible to think that you are ever going to reach peace in the North of Ireland without having Sinn Fein at the table. I mean Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams as a member of Parliament for eight years, the majority of nationalist Councillors in the Belfast City Council, belong to Sinn Fein. Obviously they represent a very significant portion of the nationalist community and to expect there to be peace without their being part of the peace process makes no sense. Sinn Fein has to be at the peace table.

Interviewer: Congressman Peter King. Among the many groups which will closely watch what policy President Clinton does adopt towards Northern Ireland will be the Friends of Ireland. A group set up in Congress in 1981 by leading Irish Americans including Senator Edward Kennedy and the former Speaker of the House of Representatives Tip O'Neill. The current Chairman is Congressman Frank McCluskey from Indiana. He says he has been encouraged by the recent dialogue which he would like to see resume.

Mr. McCluskey: Hopefully the strands of talks that had been going on with some interruptions as we all know and we all hope will resume again soon, as you know Taoiseach Reynolds in the last two days has called very strongly that they should start again as soon as possible. I understand given Irish

election schedules that maybe May or June or something like that but I think there has been a feeling of some progress. Obviously the violence goes on, quite frankly as we all know the violence in the last two or three years has been worse than previously. I remember it well when all this started up but the talks hopefully will start soon and who knows there may be an American semi-participant in all that given the administration's pledge for an Irish Peace Envoy if you will.

Interviewer: Do you though believe that most members of this Congress, indeed in both Houses, would support some kind of a fact-finding envoy?

Mr. McCluskey: I think so. There is definitely strong support I think among the Irish American community here in the United States. Mr. Clinton did not make that pledge for no reason. I think he knew what he was doing politically when he did it. I have heard of no criticism of the move in the House and I think everyone looking at it from the stand-point of goodwill could help it turn into a very successful move. I did have British parliamentarians here in my Office last week downgrading the idea of any great potential and definitely not wanting to see an envoy as such or an active participant but I think from what I heard from them and from what I am hearing from the Administration since, the idea of, calling it a fact-finder, could be calling the position a fact-finder position could be quite acceptable.

Interviewer: Okay, the fact-finder went to Northern Ireland and came back and presented a report to the President. What would happen then?

Mr. King: Well I guess we would have the political moral suasion of the President of the United States as far as talking to the parties but obviously I don't think Bill Clinton, I don't think Bill Clinton or anyone would presume



to, in essence, tell the parties or mandate the parties, what they have to agree to, ultimately it's going to have to be a reconciliation among the parties involved. I think Bill Clinton would like to consider himself a friend and perhaps even if the fact-finder or envoy position were excelled to an adviser but we, as you all know we have our own problems and the parties here do know what their concerns are so hopefully, hopefully it could help but ultimately reconciliation is going to have to occur among the parties involved.

Interviewer: Would there though be the possibility of some further economic help?

Mr. McCluskey: That's interesting. I have already been in consultation with the Appropriations Committee, for example, about the Fund for Ireland this year. We don't know exactly what the administration will propose. I would hope and assume it's at least at previous levels but I think the whole world realises that we are into tough economic times and the concerns always are for, as you know, jobs at home and it is an item which could lend its adherence or bring its adherence some criticism but I for one think there will be an ongoing effort to provide similar amounts for the Fund for Ireland but I don't see any big increases coming, given the whole tenure of the foreign aid debate in the United States and our own economic problems.

Interviewer: The Chairman of the Friends of Ireland in the United States Congress Frank McCluskey. And that's all from Inside Politics for today. Do join us again next week at the same time.