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Senator George Mitchell

Background Note

Senator Mitchell was born to Irish parents with the name of Kilroy but was adopted as a child and took his new parents' name: his adoptive father was a janitor and his mother a Lebanese immigrant. His upbringing in Maine made him a strong believer in the Democratic Party's working-class roots. After working his way through law school as an insurance clerk he became a lawyer and then an aide to Senator Edmund Muskie, with a brief stint in Army counter-intelligence along the way.

He was appointed to the US Senate in 1980 to fill Senator Muskie's last two years and was elected in his own right in 1982. His major achievement as a Senator was the passage of a Clean Air Bill which took him ten years. Senator Mitchell spent the 18 months prior to his retirement as Senate majority leader, in attempting to get President Clinton's health care reform through Congress but the task of coping with the anti-reform onslaught by Republicans and other special interests proved beyond even his tenacious skills as a negotiator.

In his 14 years as Democratic Senator for Maine, Mitchell associated himself with the Friends of Ireland, though not so prominently as Senator Edward Kennedy. In December 1993, together with Senators Kennedy, Moynihan and Clairborne Pell, and House members Tom Foley and Frank McCloskey, Mitchell signed a solemn appeal to "all those who have relied on bullets and bombs in the past - Lay down your arms". He was also a signatory to a letter circulated by Senator Kennedy in January 1994, which sought a visa for Gerry Adams.

Senator Mitchell has always made a point of meeting Irish political leaders . He hosted a Sunday Breakfast meeting for President Robinson in Washington in 1993.

Senator Mitchell was appointed by President Clinton as Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State, for Economic Initiatives in Ireland on 1 December 1994. His overall brief was to ensure that the end of violence produces a real peace dividend in Northern Ireland. Specifically Senator Mitchell was to lead the efforts of all US Government agencies that are

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promoting economic development in Northern Ireland. He was also to liaise between the US and the EU in an effort to revitalise the economy of N.I. and the border counties. Senator Mitchell took up the post on the 10 January 1995.

From 24-26 May this year, Senator Mitchell supervised the White House Conference for Trade and Investment in Ireland. The Conference provided a uniquely prestigious showcase for the attractions of Ireland, North and South, as a location for US investment and business partnerships in the new context created by peace. As a follow-up to the White House Conference Senator Mitchell visited Ireland from 30 June to July 6 last. In Dublin Senator Mitchell had meetings with the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Ministers of Finance, Enterprise and Employment, and Tourism and Trade.

Senator Mitchell had been on stand-by for several weeks prior to the joint communiqué by the two Governments on 28 November, waiting for his appointment to head the International Body on Decommissioning.

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