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SPEAKING NOTES FOR TAOISEACH'S MEETING WITH "FRIENDS OF  
IRELAND", 17 MARCH 1982

Mr Speaker, thank you for your kind words and for your hospitality in welcoming me to Capitol Hill.

Friends of Ireland: I feel especially privileged, on this St. Patrick's Day, to be able to convey here in Washington in person my warmest congratulations to you all on this happy occasion for our two countries - your first anniversary.

When I welcomed the formation of your group last year I expressed the confidence of the Irish Government that it would lead to a further strengthening of the longstanding links between the Irish and American peoples. In your statement yesterday you recalled the tragic events in Northern Ireland during the past year. I am well aware that the pressures on political leaders which inevitably arose from those events were not confined to the two sovereign states immediately concerned, Ireland and Britain.

Here in the United States there was an understandable reaction among large segments of Irish-American opinion and, indeed, among your people in general. The past year



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has not been an easy time for those political leaders in the United States who have chosen to be true friends of Ireland. Even in the face of the tensions to which I have referred you have already accomplished much. The contacts which you, as a body of American legislators, have initiated with those directly involved in the problem of Northern Ireland and, especially, with Irish legislators will, I feel certain, prove invaluable as we work towards our common objective of peace in Ireland.

Your continued commitment to the basic principles which you have adopted in the face of many pressures is, in itself, one of the most encouraging features of the past year. It is gratifying to realise that we have so many courageous friends of our country in Congress.

On my election last week as Taoiseach, I declared in Dáil Éireann that the first political priority of my Government would be the quest for a solution to the tragedy of Northern Ireland. Our objective is to secure self-determination for all the people of Ireland in a unity based on peace and harmony.

In the Anglo-Irish framework which has developed following the political initiative taken by Prime Minister Thatcher

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and myself at our meeting in December 1980, we will seek the active encouragement of the British Government for this objective.

In this we are greatly encouraged by the continued support of our friends in this country. I thank you especially for your renewed commitment yesterday to Irish unity as the most effective road to peace.

In speaking of the various traditions in our country one is reminded of the dramatic events of two hundred years ago, events which affected alike Ireland and Revolutionary America and which reflected the close interaction between developments in our two countries at that time. On St. Patrick's Day, 1782, London was buzzing with rumours of the imminent fall of the ministry of Lord North, under the pressures of events flowing from the surrender of Yorktown, so splendidly portrayed in the picture by Trumbull in the Great Rotunda of this Capital building. For America, this opened the way for the negotiations leading to the Treaty which confirmed your independence. For Ireland too, it heralded the opening of a period of material and artistic achievement and of intellectual ferment, that of Grattan's Parliament. That period, while all too short, saw the gradual crystallisation of the true Republican and inclusive concept of Ireland, where the people



of whom Grattan was such a distinguished representative, would, as he put it, identify themselves not with a Protestant settlement but with an Irish nation.

A month before that St. Patrick's Day, on February 15th, 1782, a representative gathering of Northern Irishmen who, as one historian has said, represented "the spirit of the Protestant nation" assembled in Dungannon and, asserting the legislative independence of Ireland, rejoiced in the relaxation of laws which had penalised their Catholic fellow countrymen, a development which they saw as "fraught with the happiest consequences to the unity and prosperity of the inhabitants of Ireland". A month after that St. Patrick's Day, on April 16th, 1782, Henry Grattan secured the adoption of a declaration of independence in the Irish Parliament in Dublin. Against this background, it is appropriate that in this anniversary year of Grattan's Parliament we, Parliamentarians of the United States and Ireland, should be about to embark on a closer and more intense collaboration in strengthening the historic ties between our peoples. And what more potent symbol of the unity in Ireland to which we are all committed than that spirit of the Protestant Irish men of Dungannon in 1782?

During my talks with President Reagan this morning we both



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agreed that the formation of the Friends has been an extremely encouraging development. For over a hundred years now the leaders of the Irish nation have been strengthened by the support of those of Irish descent and their friends in this country.

I believe that our people's goal of an Ireland united by peaceful means is fully supported by the great majority of the Irish-American community and that they share our total rejection of violence. However a small number of people in this country have subscribed to activities which can only delay the achievement of that unity. Many of these are simply misguided. I, therefore, commend your stated intention of helping to inform the American people about the real causes of the conflict in Northern Ireland. President Reagan has emphasised that this conflict, and the instability which it represents, is a problem which should concern all of us in the democracies of the Western community of nations.

During my all too brief visit to the United States I have welcomed the opportunity of meeting some of your fellow countrymen who have invested in our economy. My Government will continue to actively encourage such investment which is another aspect of the close relationship between our two countries. American investment in Ireland is an important factor in the creation of a permanent and lasting peace,



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throughout the whole island and in our world.

Friends, as you already know, there was unanimous and enthusiastic support among Irish parliamentarians for your proposal to establish an ongoing relationship which would strengthen the ties between the Congress and the Oireachtas. I am very happy that you have been able to accept an invitation from the Speaker of Dáil Éireann to visit Ireland. I personally look forward to welcoming your delegation to Dublin in this year which is so rich in symbolism for Ireland and America. Let us make it an especially significant one in the development of the links between our two countries.

Friends of Ireland, you have my full support and grateful thanks for the constructive role you have determined to play in the cause of peace and the unity of the Irish people. Thank you.

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