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**DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION**

Excerpts of Speech by Rep. Chris Smith  
The American Ireland Fund 16<sup>th</sup> National Gala  
*March 12, 2008*

Looking back, it is always tempting to diminish, trivialize, understate or under appreciate what were, at the time, enormous inequities, hardships and threats faced by a particular people.

For example, some modern historical revisionists would have us believe that the manifest cruelty of Soviet and East bloc communism really wasn't so bad after all, despite hard evidence to the contrary.

For good or ill, time often softens collective memories, except perhaps for those who actually lived the nightmare.

Over the course of history, Ireland has endured the imposition of a wrenching disproportionate level of political upheaval, injustice and pain. Few people on earth have suffered as much and for so long.

However, buoyed by faith in God and the dream of freedom, the strong willed Irish people, throughout the centuries, have exhibited remarkable fortitude, conviction, and an indomitable spirit that no amount of collective amnesia can obscure.

With the latest "troubles" behind it, Northern Ireland has now joined the Republic of Ireland as an oasis of peace, reconciliation, reconstruction and investment. The animosities that festered and killed have been replaced with the new paradigm of sectarian harmony that has all the earmarks of being durable, sustainable and irreversible.

Robust debate has replaced the gun. Votes have replaced the car bomb.

And you know as well as I that the talented politicians of all political parties elected to lead in the Northern Ireland Assembly are the first to insist that there is a no going back— not now, not ever.

As a member of Congress for 28 years, who passionately believes in human rights, including and especially in my ancestral home, Ireland, I joined members on both sides of the aisle in trying to encourage peace and social justice.

Believing that credible law enforcement—absent the taint of collusion—was the linchpin for progress, I put together and chaired twelve Congressional Hearings focused primarily on police reform, and I wrote laws to ensure that U.S. police training was in no way complicit with RUC cops who had gone bad – or as The Right Honorable Christopher Patten put it, the “bad apples.”

Today, reform on all fronts, including policing, has been stunning.

Last September, you may be interested in knowing I, along with Congressman Mike Doyle, as co-chairs of the Autism Caucus signed an MOU with members of the newly founded All Party Northern Ireland Assembly Autism Caucus to share best practices and legislate idea, a collaboration that both here and there, would have been unheard of a few short years ago.

Finally, in the strongest terms possible, I want to thank the American Ireland Fund, (and its 10 affiliated funds abroad,) for effectively showing the way forward.

To you, peace and reconciliation, integrated education, community development and the celebration of arts and culture aren't just benign words, but tangible projects and programs.

By investing in those initiatives that brought and continue to bring people together for the common good – mitigating sectarian bias in the process – you have given not just Ireland but the world a clear path to follow.