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Testimony in Support of SCR 4015

By Representative Mary Schneider

House Political Subdivisions Committee, Rep. Donald Longmuir, Chair

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Chairman Longmuir and Members of the Committee:

You may have looked quizzically at this resolution and wondered at its addition to your schedule today, and questioned its value to our state, or even our country. After my testimony you may still wonder, but let me lend a bit of context. Between 1845 and 1852 Ireland lost one million of its population to starvation and 2.1 million to emigration during a multi-year potato famine, when the crop tenant farm families and rural communities needed to survive rotted in the fields, and while the controlling British shipped other Irish crops and livestock to England.

Huge numbers of the emigrants came to the United States through Ellis Island or, like my antecedents, through Canada, possibly without meeting legal requirements, after being turned away when their numbers became too massive and intimidating. In part because of their looks, language, literacy and laughs, the Irish integrated quickly into American life, especially targeting land ownership, particularly for farming, and power professions such as law enforcement, law, and politics, as priorities. Today there are more people of Irish descent in the U.S. than in Ireland. Many are a part of our history, such as 14 U.S. presidents, our famous North Dakotan, Supreme Court Justice Burke, and the Governor of Montana mentioned in the bill. I'll also out a few of the House members cleverly disguised by their more ethnically acceptable names: Representatives Koppelman, LeFor, and me, Deutsch Schneider are also Irish. Plus, there's Rep. Murphy who disguises nothing.

Our interactions with Ireland have been and remain strong: commercially, educationally, culturally, and politically. We are the greatest number of visitors to their island. My first trip was as a penniless 19-year-old student selected by NDSU to spend the summer there on a program SU paid for called the Experiment in International Living. I was able to stay with a Protestant family, Catholic family, and work with a farm family and fishing family, and was one of two students given a tour of a British barracks in the occupied, beleaguered, and barb-wired town of Derry. It was a time of sectarian violence, unrest, political and religious divisions.

Interestingly, at that time the president of Ireland, Eammon DeValera, was American, as was the mayor of Dublin. Since college I have been back to Ireland over two dozen times, getting my advanced law degree in

international human rights there on a Bush Fellowship in 2006. Coincidentally, I was in Derry at that time, when the barracks was finally closed and the last of the barbed wire was rolled up.

This bill is about supporting the 25-year-old Good Friday Agreement. Before that document was more than 900 years of unrest, foreign occupation, repression and violence that lead to the statement that "Ireland doesn't have a future, it's just the past happening over and over again." So why do we even care about the Good Friday Agreement in the U.S.? Well, because of continuing close relationships between our countries, the benefits of peace to our interactions, and because of our role in ending the hundreds of years of conflict and misery.

The Agreement was complicated, contentious, and complex. It restored self-government to Northern Ireland on the basis of "power sharing" with Britain, and it included acceptance of the principle of consent, commitment to civil and political rights, cultural parity of esteem, police reform, paramilitary disarmament and early release of paramilitary prisoners, followed by demilitarization.

The talks were chaired by U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell who was instrumental in the development, finalization and passage of the agreement and its success in implementation and impact on eliminating the most recent violence called "The Troubles" which had raged and led to hundreds of brutal deaths since the 1960s.

Another motivation for passing this resolution is that our legislature was one of the earliest members of the American Irish Legislators Caucus, having leadership and membership in place before the Caucus became recognized as a group by the National Conference of State Legislators in 2021. The group was founded by the head of the Irish Senate, Mark Daly, a young, dynamic and amazing leader. He requested a similar resolution last year but settled for a St. Patrick's Day Proclamation by Governor Burgum since we were not session. The Governor also agreed to be pictured with the Irish flag mentioned in the resolution, and both were forwarded to Leader Daly for inclusion in his Caucus newsletter.

Senator Daly is determined to cement a more long term and lasting Irish peace by enlisting the help of legislators in all 50 states. He believes a little pressure from the 50-state resolution request, relying on the longtime American-Irish bonds, will be valued by his countrymen, and may help keep the Agreement preserved. It's a small ask, and it might just work.

I hope the Committee will pass Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 4015.