

Friends of Ireland

Ireland has always had friends in the U.S. Congress. Irish immigrants and those with Irish roots traditionally brought Irish affairs to the floor of both houses of Congress.

But the political battles on Irish independence — both in historical memory and contemporary affairs — have been championed by American politicians from a range of backgrounds. While some framed their interest in Irish affairs as part of their family's immigration story or the history of their community, others saw in Ireland a story that resonated with the American people and the fundamental ideals that formed the basis for American government.



Congressman Brendan Boyle, Friends of Ireland Co-Chairman Richie Neal, and Speaker Nancy Pelosi cross the Irish border at Bridgend, Co. Donegal with Joe McHugh TD and Mayor of Derry John Boyle in 2019.

Celebrating 40 Years

Twenty-six bipartisan legislators founded the "Friends of Ireland" in 1981. Among them was a young senator from Delaware, Joseph R. Biden Jr., who now serves as the 46th President of the United States. Another two of the founders, Senator Patrick Leahy and Senator Edward Markey, still serve in Congress and remain members of the caucus.

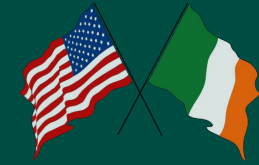


Irish Ambassador Dan Mulhall and Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney with Chairman Richie Neal at a meeting of the Friends of Ireland caucus in 2019.

"It will strive to inform Congress and the country fully about all aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland...to serve the cause of peace and to facilitate greater understanding of the positive role America can play."

— Friends of Ireland, 17 March 1981

For credits and further information, please visit:
www.dfa.ie/usa

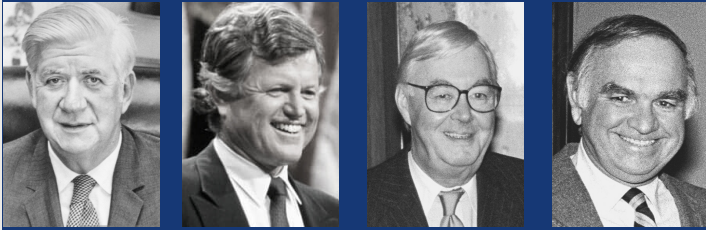


Congressional Friends of Ireland



Celebrating 40 Years 1981 – 2021

The Four Horsemen



In 1977, four Democrats — Speaker Tip O'Neill, Sen. Ted Kennedy, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Gov. Hugh Carey — wrote a St. Patrick's Day statement, urging President Carter to call for peace and cooperation in Northern Ireland.

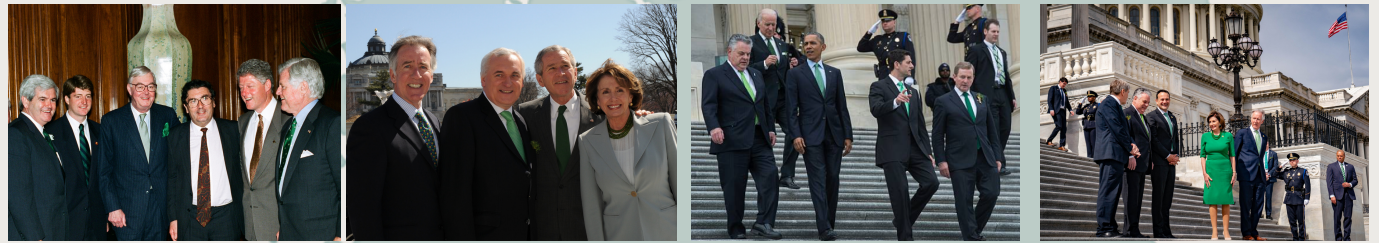
They were heavily influenced by John Hume — civil rights leader, Northern Ireland politician and, later, winner of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize — who bore testament to the injustices of the Troubles during his trips to Washington from the early 1970s. They shared his ideals: the rejection of terrorism in Northern Ireland, in favour of dialogue, equality, and human rights for all.

Congressional Caucus

Each St. Patrick's Day, as the Four Horsemen reiterated their call, the number of co-signers who supported their St. Patrick's Day statements steadily increased. In 1981, twenty-six lawmakers, representing both parties, established themselves as the "Friends of Ireland."

"We look to a future St. Patrick's Day, one that we can foresee, when true peace shall finally come and Irish men and women everywhere, from Dublin to Derry, from Boston to New York to Chicago and San Francisco, shall hail that peace and welcome the dawn of a new Ireland."

— Friends of Ireland, 17 March 1981



The Speaker of the House hosts a Friends of Ireland luncheon in the Capitol during the Taoiseach's annual St. Patrick's Day visit to Washington. The President, Vice President, and other distinguished guests attend.

The Good Friday Agreement

On 10 April 1998 in Belfast — less than two decades after the Friends of Ireland declared their hope for a future, peaceful St. Patrick's Day — the Good Friday Agreement was signed.

A multi-party agreement between the British and Irish governments and most of Northern Ireland's political parties, it effectively brought an end to the conflict and replaced it with a peace process that continues today.



President Clinton awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the Honorable George Mitchell, a founding member of the Friends of Ireland, who, as US Special Envoy for Northern Ireland, helped to negotiate the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.