THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTERING PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTERING PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thursday, April 28, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:08 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. William Keating (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. KEATING. The House Foreign Affairs subcommittee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any point.

And all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length and limitation of the rules.

To insert something into the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

Please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair.

Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking.

Consistent with the House rules, staff will only mute members and witnesses, as appropriate, when they are not under recognition, to eliminate the background noise.

I see that we have a quorum.

I am pleased to be here. This is an interesting hearing, not just in subject matter, but in format. We are in the committee room, some of us live in the committee room; others of us are live in the virtual setting, both witnesses and members. So, we will work through any technical problems, but I do not anticipate anything of any great nature.

So, with a quorum present, I will now begin the hearing, which is entitled, "The Role of Young People in Fostering Peace in Northern Ireland."

I will now begin with my opening remarks.

I want to thank you all for joining us today for this House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber on "The Role of Young People in Fostering Peace in North Ireland."

I believe this topic is especially important, as April marks the anniversary month of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, an historic document that ended a violent time in Northern Ireland, commonly known as "the Troubles."

Last year, we had a hearing focused on Northern Ireland where we invited Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice, two representatives from the Northern Ireland Women's organization, to discuss the role of women in creation of the Good Friday Agreement. During their testimony, as the only group at the table represented by women from both sides of the tradition, our witnesses, Monica and Jane, discussed their contributions to long-term peacebuilding activities, including encouraging and development of integrated housing and education, as well as the removal of the peace walls that still physically divide communities in Northern Ireland.

In addition, these women underlined the important role of the United States in supporting peace in North Ireland. They encouraged our committee to continue to focus on this region and play an active role.

Based on the recommendations, and realizing the urgent need for renewed focus, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick and I wrote a letter to President Biden calling on him to appoint a Special Envoy to Northern Ireland. While this envoy has yet to be put into place, we have heard from the State Department that they will continue to consider its possibility, and we hope they will install a Special Envoy soon.

Finally, these women who talked about the future and the need to provide greater opportunities to young people living in Northern Ireland, they believe that providing economic and educational opportunities to young people would further contribute to the development and prosperity of Northern Ireland, which I wholeheartedly agree.

For decades, the United States has supported and developed young leaders globally. In Northern Ireland alone, the United States has continued to invest in peacebuilding by supporting groups like the International Fund for Ireland, as well as exchange programs like the George J. Mitchell Scholarship Program and the Washington Ireland Program.

Through these initiatives, as well as the efforts of a variety of local youth organizations and non-governmental organizations, including those represented by our witnesses today, youth organizers and leaders have emerged with an eye to the future and are looking for the common solutions to age-old divides. Through these initiatives, many young people are now leading the change and remain focused on our efforts to establish trust among parties and to create common ground.

Bearing these factors in mind, we decided to invite representatives from organizations focused on youth development and two youth leaders. All our representatives are leaders in their respective communities who have been able to coalesce with their peers, despite their varying backgrounds and traditions, among common goals and objectives. They have come highly recommended by long-serving leaders in Northern Ireland, and they are reach accomplished in their own right.

Dr. O'Lynn, Mr. Lynch, Mr. Savage. and Ms. Girvin, we are honored to have you here today with us, and we hope that you share some of your personal experiences of growing up in Northern Ireland and how you view your region's past. We also hope you share with us the policy priorities, whether they be the environment,

mental health, education, housing, justice, economic issues, and why, specifically, these are priorities that are important to you and the work that you do.

Everyone listening, the Good Friday Agreement was signed almost 25 years ago, and has since ushered in nearly three decades of historic economic growth and relative peace across the region. Of course, there have been hiccups along the way, but the success of the Good Friday Agreement, and the opportunities provided to young people through greater economic cooperation, ease of travel, and technological advances have, undoubtedly, brought people closer together.

I hope this hearing can highlight the successes and opportunities to ensure our witnesses' future and other future generations in Northern Ireland, that they have the opportunity to live together in peace and prosperity.

I will now turn to the ranking member, Mr. Fitzpatrick, for his opening remarks.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Good morning.

Thank you, Chairman Keating, for holding this timely hearing, obviously, an issue near and dear to both the chairman and my heart, both being children and grandchildren of Irish immigrants.

And I want to thank the panel of experts for being here today as well and for the work that each and every one of you are doing to promote an integrated Ireland.

And as I have stated oftentimes in the past, Ireland is a steadfast friend, a steadfast ally to the United States. Our political, our cultural, and our economic bonds were forged by young people of each generation as they fought to build a better world.

And the first Irish came with William Penn, who established my homestead of Pennsylvania, and they stood shoulder-to-shoulder as delegates in Philadelphia to sign the Declaration of Independence.

At the height of the famine, the Irish diaspora brought millions to America for refuge. And once here, those young Irish, men and women, strove alongside a multitude of other immigrants of different races, religions, and creeds to create a nation that we are blessed to be here in today.

And fostered by young people, the Civil Rights Movement in America helped inform and inspire a similar campaign for reform in immigration in Northern Ireland.

And today, we stand again at a pivotal moment in our shared history. Despite the return of the devolved government in 2020, the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement are under strain, as Chairman Keating had referenced. The economic, political, and cultural challenges which may threaten the stability of Northern Ireland cannot be ignored; it cannot be underestimated. As the next generation of Irish leaders turn to face these obstacles, the United States must work more diligently to support them.

Our subcommittee on reaffirming the Good Friday Agreement 1 year ago, it was there that I insisted that the administration move swiftly to fill the position of the U.S. Special Envoy for Northern Ireland to further American resolve for the preservation of regional stability and regional prosperity. This position remains unfilled, and as long as it remains unfilled, our government really forfeits

the opportunity to engage all parties in conversations that would sustain the peace.

Our diplomatic position toward Northern Ireland cannot be reactionary. I am grateful that our subcommittee has taken the initiative today to discuss these critical issues that are at stake for Northern Ireland.

Again, thanks to all of our witnesses. Thank you for sharing with us your view about the role that the Emerald Isle's young people play in formulating the future and the steps that Congress can take to make the United States a more active participant in the peace process.

Thanks for the panelists, Chairman Keating, and thanks, once again, for having our guests today.

And I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. I want to thank the ranking member, and thank him for his longstanding support on this issue and the Good Friday Agreement as well.

I do want to introduce our witnesses now.

And I will ask unanimous consent that the written prepared statements of all of these witnesses be part of the record.

And I would like to, first, introduce Dr. Patricia O'Lynn, who is the executive director at Politics in Action, an organization working to amplify youth voices in politics and encourage youth participation.

So, I will now recognize Dr. O'Lynn for 5 minutes, although we are quite liberal in this for this hearing.

And let's see if we have Dr. O'Lynn here.

STATEMENT OF DR. PATRICIA O'LYNN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, POLITICS IN ACTION

Dr. O'LYNN. Thank you, Chairman Keating, for that warm introduction. And also, let me take the opportunity to thank Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and your committee members, for inviting me to give testimony today.

It is an honor and a privilege to have my voice heard on this important topic and, indeed, to speak on behalf of our youth community here in Northern Ireland. I hope it is not immediately obvious, but I can no longer be classified as a young person.

But I would also like to take the opportunity to say I am filled with pride to share a panel with the other expert witnesses. Courtney is a former student of mine; Cormac played a leading role in setting up the organization, and Michael is an inspiration to every professional educationalist in Northern Ireland. And I agree the future is bright for Northern Ireland with these young people leading the way.

According to the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency, as of 2020, there were approximately 242,202 young people age 15 to 24 living, working, and being educated in Northern Ireland. Additionally, it is estimated that, roughly, 600,000 young people have been born in Northern Ireland since the signing of the peace concord, a cohort who has since been named the "peace generation," marked with optimism and hope, given that a great deal has been achieved in Northern Ireland since the peace concord was secured in 1998.

Also, despite the global pandemic and the hardship brought with it, youth unemployment in Northern Ireland is at an all-time low; academic achievement for this cohort continues to outrank the achievement rates in other developed nations, and more and more young people are moving into higher education and higher paid jobs than ever before. In short, there is much for young people to be hopeful about in Northern Ireland.

Yet, in the week leading up to the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, collective youth rioting broke out on the streets of Belfast and further across the province. This outbreak generated cause for concern that the ongoing peace process may be more fragile than originally anticipated, given that such sectarian violence was spearheaded by the young people who were born post-cease-fire, and therefore, did not bear witness to the atrocities of the conflict here in Northern Ireland.

During this week-long spate of violence, cars were set alight; a bus was hijacked and set on fire; petrol bombs were thrown; 88 police officers were injured; multiple communities were left with their property damage, and children as young as 13 were arrested for riotous behavior. The gravity and extent of the violence was evidenced by the level of international media coverage received and the fact that commentators speculated how the riots were a result of collective youth efforts, and therefore, represented some of the worst unrest seen since 1998.

Yet, how much these young people knew about Brexit, or, indeed, the Public Prosecution Service's decision about COVID breaches at a high-profile republican funeral was, indeed, doubtful, as was the extent to which these events drove their active engagement in riots.

In the immediate aftermath of this violence, I was particularly struck by an interview given by a young male who was involved in the rioting. He explained that, regardless of how little he knew or understood about the current State of politics and related decisions, adults and leaders within his own community told he and his peers that a threat had been made to their identity; that the State could not be trusted to support them, and that if they did not defend their identities, they would lose them. It is this dangerous narrative of hostility and otherness which was bolstered by sinister paramilitary forces, encouraging youth onto the streets, in the hope that doing so would create a snowball effect, but also by much deeper and sinister forces leading to their wider disenfranchisement.

[Audio malfunction.]

Mr. KEATING. Well, we need some of that young expertise and technology, I think, to do that, although Dr. O'Lynn was clearly near the end of her opening remarks. I hope that we have her connected for the questioning period that will follow, too, because she brought many important points, particularly as we will want to deal with our witnesses on why there was an uptick in this violence after the period of the Good Friday Agreement by a generation that really didn't have that connection.

Our second witness I would like to introduce is Mr. Michael Lynch. He is the chair of trustees for Integrated—is it Alumni?—a charity working to provide a network for Alumni of integrated

schools and develop support for integrated education in Northern Ireland, one of the most critical areas where we have had progress and great hope.

And we know that he is not going to have any technical problems because he is right in front of us.

So, I would to introduce for your opening remarks Mr. Michael Lynch.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL LYNCH, CHAIR OF TRUSTEES, INTEGRATED Alumni

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Chair Keating.

And may I also extend my thanks and gratitude for being here today and in person. This is my first time visiting the United States, having landed in yesterday, and no better reason to come across the pond. So, I look forward to spending some time over the coming days to explore the Nation's capital. Particularly considering the indispensable contribution from the United States in our peace process over the last three decades, it has been long a personal aspiration of mine to visit the Nation's capital.

I speak today as someone who cares deeply about the place I come from and someone who wants to do what I can to make it better. The conditions that were set out in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement have really laid the foundations for the society we live in today. As someone who has grown up, lives, works, and studies in Belfast and would be around Northern Ireland frequently, I can advocate that it is an amazing place to be. And compared to the generations that have come before me, I am very privileged to live and work in the society that we have today. With that said, it is still very evidence that we have lots of work to do, of which I will address one or two matters today.

I am specifically here to advocate for one of those key policy areas, as, Chair Keating, you made reference to in your opening remarks. And one of those policy areas was also set out in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998. And let me set the scene by discussing some of my own experience.

I grew up on the edge of Belfast, then attended a school called Lagan College from 2007 to 2014. One of my most striking memories was my very first day at Lagan at the age of 11. All the new students were brought into the assembly hall together, and I remember sitting beside someone who came from an area of Belfast that I hadn't heard of before, a primary school that I knew was different. And I got the sense that the person that was sitting beside me probably had a very different upbringing. But, then, realizing in actual fact, that we were very much the same—nervously starting our new school journey. That is true, we were from very different places, but we were being educated in the same classroom together.

Members, today, approximately 7 percent—that is 7 percent of those of school age in Northern Ireland—attend an integrated school. Moreover, a recent poll showed that 71 percent of people in Northern Ireland think that integrated education should be the norm.

I represent a group called the Integrated Alumni. We are a network of campaigners and supporters of integrated education, and

we are primarily past pupils of integrated education talking to our own experiences. We are also a volunteer network, and we come from all walks of life. I work in a software company Monday to Friday, and we, indeed, all come from every walk of life—from hairdressers to lawyers—and we all have something in common: that we care about the place we come from and we want to make it better.

Last month, a piece of legislation went through the Assembly. It was called the integrated education bill. The largest voices advocating for this piece of legislation was the members associated with the Integrated Alumni, our group of young, active citizens. And this is the same for so many other policy areas in Northern Ireland. That piece of legislation went through our Assembly, and we celebrated that and we were delighted that, after quite a substantive amount of effort, the integrated education bill was passed. However, I am still very skeptical and I am worried about the future. And let me explain a little bit why.

The Good Friday Agreement set out to both encourage and facilitate integrated education. That same commitment was also set out in the Education Order of 1989, and again, it was set out in New Decade, New Approach commitments at the beginning of 2020. That is alongside many other independent reports and independent reviews. But, still, to this day, the department of education in Northern Ireland has never established an integrated school. The 69 integrated schools in Northern Ireland were all set up by parents, supported by their respective communities.

There is very clearly an unmet demand for integrated schools in Northern Ireland, but it appears that, really, the only substantive way to enact change is for people to take it upon themselves and do it.

Our elections take place next Thursday, and that will dictate how long it might be until we have a new executive formed. There are, indeed, predictions that it could be up to 6 months of negotiations, and there is a great degree of uncertainty that lies ahead.

And it does worry me because this time 24 years ago, as, Chair Keating, you made reference to in your opening remarks, the people of Northern Ireland were presented with an option to endorse an agreement—an agreement that set out a very positive look to the future of Northern Ireland. But, again, that very provision, as set out in the Good Friday Agreement, to encourage and facilitate integrated education has still not been met.

And at times like this, when our politics has been quite stagnant, it is young people that have really stood up to ensure that they are enacting the change that sometimes is left as a void within our politics.

So, to conclude briefly, within our written evidence we have identified five key ways of incorporating how the United States can both support us directly and indirectly, which includes, indeed, the establishment of a Special Envoy to Northern Ireland. It includes enacting a civil forum, and as well, the continued support from the United States in ensuring that we have full implementation of all the principles set out in the Good Friday Agreement.

Thank you very much, again, for the opportunity of being here.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lynch follows:]

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber

THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTERING PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Submission from the Integrated AlumNI

Presented by
Michael Lynch
Chair of Trustees

Thursday 28th April 2022

Foreword from our Chair

We are very grateful for the opportunity to address members of the Sub-Committee at this important congressional hearing entitled: 'The Role of Young People in Fostering Peace in Northern Ireland'.

I watched with interest a hearing that took place to this Sub-Committee last year: "Reaffirming the Good Friday Agreement" with Monica McWilliams, Jane Morrice, and Amb. Mitchell Reiss. The sentiments from the hearing articulated how Northern Ireland is at such a crucial moment in our journey towards peace and reconciliation. The very roadmap that set out our journey in 1998, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, is still to be wholly implemented. We've been on this journey for 24 years.

*The Agreement set out the provision "to facilitate and encourage integrated education". However, the establishment of all 69 integrated schools in Northern Ireland has been community-led, with limited or no support from the Department of Education. In 2022, the reality is that only **7%** of our school age population attend an integrated school. 71% of parents in Northern Ireland would like to send their children to an integrated school, but the provision does not exist to meet that parental demand.*

We are a charitable network of volunteers formed of past pupils from integrated schools, alongside campaigners and supporters of the integrated movement. We advocate that the furtherance of integrated education in Northern Ireland will directly impact on our journey to fostering true peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

We will only achieve this ambition with political will. Many other facets of the Agreement remain fragile, including the very political structures that govern us. Whether by design or coincidence, we are all aware that this hearing happens one week to the day in which the people of Northern Ireland will take to the polls to decipher what the future of our political institutions look like.

Northern Ireland is not unfamiliar with volatility. At times of our most volatile, the United States has been a key broker to engaging with both communities in Northern Ireland. The US has shown commitment and dedication to Northern Ireland which is widely recognized. As we enter the next chapter, the opportunity is evident for the US to continue to offer their hand of support as we, once again, embark in somewhat unchartered territory.

This written submission aims to set out:
- *The work of the Integrated AlumNI in building a more prosperous and reconciled Northern Ireland*
- *Testimonies of those who have experienced integrated education and why this should be a policy area of focus*
- *How the United States can help us on that journey*

We would once again like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Sub-Committee.

Michael Lynch
Chair of Trustees
Integrated AlumNI

Our work

We are a network of campaigners and supporters of integrated education in Northern Ireland. Formed in 2013 as a group of past pupils of integrated schools, the network has now morphed into a wider group that consists of current and past pupils of integrated schools, alongside teachers, academics, donors and wider supporters of the movement.

Now as a registered charity, the Integrated AlumNI and lobby and campaign for the furtherance of the integrated education movement.

Our Purpose

To the advancement, furtherance and promotion of integrated education and its benefits within Northern Ireland. We advocate for the advancement, education, assistance and promotion of both the current pupils and alumni of integrated education. We aim to contribute to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland through integrated education.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

- Lobbying and campaigning policymakers
- School support and pupil development
- Building capacity through the recruitment of new members

Our message

The first integrated school, Lagan College, opened its doors in 1981 with 14 Catholic pupils and 14 Protestant pupils. Now with 69 integrated schools in Northern Ireland, these schools educate those of all faiths and none, and from all traditions, together. But being Integrated is much more than the makeup of the pupil population. It's an ethos and commitment, it's a curricular approach and it's inclusive in the make-up of teachers and the Board of Governors. The planning is supported by the Council for Integrated Education.

Integrated education, whilst being community-driven, has also been a recommendation of multiple reports and publications:

- 1998 Belfast / Good Friday Agreement;
- 2005 (Westminster) Northern Ireland Affairs Committee examining Hate Crime
- 2009 Consultative Group on the Past;
- 2020 New Decade New Approach Agreement
- 2020 Review of Hate Crime Legislation
- 2021 Executive Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitary Activity.

The Integrated Education Bill passed by the Northern Ireland assembly in March 2022 will create a clear definition of Integrated Education, establish a strategy to help develop Integrated Education and put parental choice at the forefront when planning to open new schools. It places greater accountability on the Department of Education to do all these things. Whilst the Integrated AlumNI celebrated the success of the Bill, it should be noted many of the steps forward were already part of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and yet never delivered. There is a sense of disappointment and frustration amongst past pupils of integrated schools that we have needed to legislate for the changes in education that Northern Ireland was promised 24 years ago.

The first day of Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, September 1985

Students from Hazelwood Integrated College lobbying elected representatives to support the Integrated Education Bill, 2022

THE VOICES OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

	Without integrated education my parents wouldn't have been able to raise me in their mixed marriage the way they wanted to, outside the world of religion. It allowed me to be educated without having to attend conventional RE classes in a state/CCMS school and left me in a position to make an educated decision for myself when I was old enough on if I wanted to follow a religion after being taught about acceptance and understanding.	*Integrated education is a practice, and at its core translates into listening to and learning from diverse groups outside of Northern Ireland's institutionalized segregated system. Integrated education isn't the only answer, but it is the start of working towards the common good within Northern Irish civil society.*
	Stephen Mackessy *formerly Hazelwood Integrated College*	*Matt O'Neill* *formerly Hazelwood Integrated College and North Coast Integrated College*
Integrated education is vital to the progression in Northern Ireland. Firstly, from a segregation point of view, it educates young people together teaching them mutual respect, tolerance and respect. They become friends, learn and grow from each other. Secondly, integrated education creates a collaborative and supportive environment where all can reach their academic potential and all skills and talents are developed. Confidence and self belief is at its core - and to summarize it's both a fair and societally advantageous system which counteracts the alternative - a selective, segregated - and outdated school system - which polarizes society along both ethical and economic lines.	*I care deeply about Integrated Education because, without it, our hugely and multiply traumatized society hasn't a chance at healing and thriving, let alone surviving. There are no other circumstances where a friendship group can include someone with an immediate family member killed on Bloody Sunday, another whose relative works for the police, another who is a native Irish speaker, another who has moved here from their native English home. These organic threads intertwine and are guided skillfully by an ethos that directly acknowledges and challenges sectarianism and looks beyond simple tolerance to an active celebration of diversity. We must leave fear and bitterness behind. We - all of us: those here now, those who have left, and those who are no longer with us - deserve better. Integrated education is a fundamental and non-negotiable element of a successful, peaceful future.*	*I care about integrated education because it allows children from different backgrounds to interact and socialize with each other and helps to break down the barriers of prejudice and intolerance between different communities. Also, integrated education represents normal society, in no other environment are we segregated based upon religion or identity and the fact people get to 18 and have never interacted with people from other communities until they go to University or enter the workforce is a sad indictment of this society.*
Treasa Harkin, *formerly Oakgrove Integrated College*	*Nora Murray-Cavanagh* *formerly Oakgrove Integrated College*	*Keir Herink* *formerly Lagan College*

Schools are at the heart of all communities and their role in peacebuilding is vital. In providing a safe space for children & families of all backgrounds to come together, they allow relationships to build and grow. Integrating our education system is crucial to changing the dynamics of our segregated society and building strong foundations of friendship instead of barriers of division.	*I am a believer that integrated education is the foundation for lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Celebrating our cultures and traditions, from childhood years, will nurture understanding and respect in future generations. It is our responsibility to continue to champion a hopeful and peaceful path as we seek to make integrated education widely available to all children.*	*Integrated education plays a fundamental role in bringing a divided society together through the classroom and learning together. For many, it represents the first-time young people from different backgrounds will see themselves and others as part of one community.*
Neidin Hendron *formerly Drumragh Integrated College*	*Emma Butler* *Teacher, Priory Integrated College*	*Christopher Millar* *formerly Priory Integrated College*
Integrated Education provides an inclusive teaching environment for every child in our communities. Currently it is not accessible to all yet remains an imperative step for Northern Ireland to move forward. Integrated education reflects society, nurtures tolerance and facilitates the development of young people as individuals with unique abilities, backgrounds and cultures - a system that should only be celebrated.	*I care about integrated education because it enables us to celebrate rather than fear difference. It taught me that you did not have to agree with everyone else's opinions or views but that you did need to respect them. It values the individual and their aspirations whatever they may be. To me integrated education is key to the development of an inclusive Northern Ireland. Now is the time to make integrated education the norm.*	*Integrated education shaped my education by allowing me the chance to feel safe, welcomed and respected in a school environment. The education broadened my horizons and enabled me to meet others I would not have had the opportunity to meet or interact with.*
Tara Curran *formerly New-Bridge Integrated College*	*Laura Mullin* *formerly North Coast Integrated College*	*Nicholas Emery* *formerly Lagan College*
Northern Ireland is made up of so many distinct communities, not just Protestants and Catholics, they need to be educated together or we won't ever see our full potential as a people. For my future children to grow up in a better place we need integrated education.	*I support integrated education because I believe that educating children from diverse backgrounds is a positive step toward a more inclusive society.*	*Integrated education is the next step in the peacebuilding process. It's a vaccine to prevent future conflict and a steppingstone to tracking even trickier issues - like integrated housing. We've reached in impasse. Further peacebuilding is impossible without further integrated education.*
Mark Francos *Supporter*	*Morgan Murphy* *Supporter*	*Adam McGibbon* *formerly Lagan College*

Our ask

We recognize the long-standing contribution that the United States has made to supporting, delivering and maintaining peace in Northern Ireland. There is an opportunity now to think wider than the political realm and improve chances for a lasting peace and reconciliation across all aspects of life in Northern Ireland.

We see this dialogue an opportunity to create **real impact.** Real impact for the betterment of the people of Northern Ireland. **How?**

1. The United States Administration should formally publish a position on integrated education in Northern Ireland to ensure it remains within the debate.

On Thursday 17th February 2022, President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins spoke to the role of education in peace building in Northern Ireland. He commented:
"To focus on education, a theme of your conference, 93 percent of schools in Northern Ireland remain segregated, meaning that most young people are educated in either a state-funded school that predominantly attracts Protestant families, or a state-funded school maintained by the Catholic Church. Young people in Northern Ireland are segregated not only by the schools they attend, but also by the languages they speak and the sports they play: where some schools offer Gaelic football and hurling, others provide rugby or cricket, usually exclusively."

Furthermore, Richard Haass, in remarks to the American Ireland Fund on 19th March 2003 said: *"This reality explains much of my enthusiasm for integrated education in Northern Ireland. As an American, the concept of integration in education is a powerful one. As an American, I cannot help but believe that diversity brings great riches. We Americans cannot claim a fully integrated society. But we have made huge strides, and our country is better off for it. Integration doesn't erase prejudice in a society, but it does provide an environment where a child or adult can learn that "the other person" is very much like him or herself. If we expect children to work side by side later in life, a good starting point would be to let them sit side by side as they learn to read or grapple with geometry. Integrated education alone won't resolve all the challenges remaining in Northern Ireland. But it is one piece — a central piece — of a mosaic that is being created by countless dedicated individuals to form a new, inclusive society built on mutual respect and tolerance.*

The US taking a vocal position on this matter and contributing meaningful dialogue to the conversation adds legitimacy. It illustrates that integrated education is internationally regarded as one of the most important mechanisms to true reconciliation.

2. The United States Administration should continue to articulate the importance of the full implementation of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement

The United States should be vocal and actively oppose any attempts of bypassing some of the fundamental principles agreed as part of the Agreement.

Further considerations

INTEGRATED ALUMNI

3. The United States should articulate the importance of a civic forum in Northern Ireland

The concept of the Civic Forum, formed within the framework of the Agreement, was a consultative body that consisted of members of various civil bodies. It last met in 2002. In respect of integrated education, we understand that there is an overwhelming demand from parents for the further provision of integrated schooling. However, on this matter, alongside many others, there is a lack of a significant framework to encourage a culture of open dialogue on policy that moves away from legacy and division. Equally, the forum may act as a device to structure debate around identity, culture and symbolism. Reinstating the Northern Ireland Civic Forum, as per the conditions of the Good Friday Agreement, may also go some way to helping a degree of voter apathy.

4. A US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland should be appointed

Given the wider circumstances and sensitivities around the forthcoming election, namely the protocol and the possibility of an extended period of negotiations, consideration should be given to furthering the dialogue between the United States and Northern Ireland, and channeling that through a new ambassadorial role in the form of a Special Envoy.

5. The US Administration should facilitate opportunities for those who have experienced integrated schooling in Northern Ireland to build links in the United States.

Through the simple act of telling our stories in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK, the past pupils of integrated education have been able to access further support and educate policymakers and opinion-formers about the burning need for further integration. We know that the integrated movement as a whole would benefit from more opportunities to tell our stories in the United States.

WE THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you very much, and I look forward to asking some questions.

I think we have next—and the good news is I think, with Dr. O'Lynn, we will be able to reconnect with her after the opening statements are given.

I would like to now introduce Mr. Cormac Savage. And you are the founder and current honorary president of the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland, a union representing tens of thousands of students in schools in Northern Ireland. He is currently a freshman at Harvard, where he is studying government and Romance language.

So, thanks for taking time out of school, out of your education, to do this, and I certainly look forward to your testimony.

So, again, with some flexibility, we will welcome your words for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CORMAC SAVAGE, HONORARY PRESIDENT, SECONDARY STUDENTS' UNION OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. SAVAGE. Thank you very much, Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and Representatives, not only for allowing me the privilege to address you in this forum, but also for your continued passion and care for Northern Ireland and our peace processes. It is so, so warming, as an Irish person, now a resident in the United States, to see just how much the U.S. Congress really cares for our peace process. So, thank you very much.

So, my name is Cormac Savage. I am 19. I am from a small town in Northern Ireland called Downpatrick, which is the first place our patron saint landed when he came to our island.

And when I was 17, during the COVID lockdown, I founded the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland. It is an organization which is for 11-to 19-year-olds in school. We are across community, and we choose to view our young people as neither Catholic nor Protestant, nor Unionist nor Nationalist—just simply students.

And that's exactly how I think peacebuilding and reconciliation needs to be in Northern Ireland. So, we are diverse and we are exactly what form, in my view, should take. We have fought for students on exams, mental health, and, in general, the coronavirus and how it has impacted a lot of our young people.

We grew from 12 students to 50,000 in the space of a year, and I think that really shows how young people are really engaged in Northern Ireland to want to get in and make sure that they can make change of policy.

So, a year ago, you heard from two inspirational women, Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice. And they spoke to you at great length about decommissioning in Northern Ireland. And those two women are people I admire greatly, and that was a wonderful hearing.

But today, our hearing is about young people and our perspective on the Good Friday Agreement, and I think that that means we have to take a slightly different tone. And I believe the tone we take today is the one we must continue to take, as we discuss the Good Friday Agreement.

A year ago, you sat here and you heard Professor McWilliams and Ms. Morrice speak to you decommissioning guns. Now I think that approach needs to change for my generation. We require you to stop talking about decommissioning guns and start talking about decommissioning mindsets.

So, the Good Friday Agreement predates me. It is 24 years; I am 19. It is, for a lot of the older generations, the end of a conflict. It is the culmination of 30 years of toil by people like John Hume who called for a peaceful agreement for a conflict that had ravaged our society. For me, it isn't the end of a conflict. It is the beginning of a reconciliation.

I think that that is the shared story of a lot of our young people. So, what our young people will argue is that we need this new approach that does not answer—you know, for reconciliation—that does not answer bombs and bullets and peacebuilding, nor is it going to end in segregation and division, but bringing communities together.

I have a very different experience of conflict than my parents. They grew up with bombs and bullets; whereas, I have grown up in the shadow of bombs and bullets, but absolutely free from their crossfire. And that is largely because of the Good Friday Agreement.

The work of peacebuilding has happened. You know, we now must accept the challenge of reconciliation. And it has been really encouraging to hear from the United States a lot of the rhetoric around protecting the Good Friday Agreement, in particular, the Ad Hoc committee to Protect the Good Friday Agreement, which have done absolutely incredible work and have largely saved Northern Ireland from potential violence to the Brexit negotiations. So, I want to pay tribute to them, in particular.

But there is one key thing that stems from the discussion around the Good Friday Agreement, in particular, in the United States, which is the best way to protect the Good Friday Agreement is to implement it.

In April 2023, we are 25 years from that agreement, and still, we have no bill of rights. We are still fighting over Irish language rights in the Assembly. It is still going to be something that is talked about after our Assembly election. And our young people are still under segregated education. We still do not have civic forum. And we have still not had reconciliation.

Integrating housing, integrated education are the stuff of dreams. These should be reality in Northern Ireland. They should become—as Michael noted, 7 percent of young people are in integrated schools. That was a commitment under the Good Friday Agreement, and no question that we need to ask, now is that how we protect the Good Friday Agreement? How do we implement the things that we agreed to 24 years ago as an end to our conflict?

So, for my generation, that document wasn't the end. And that's what I really want all the Representatives to realize today, for my generation, that document represents a beginning, the start of a process of reconciliation. And the United States helped us start on that path, and I would like to see the United States help us reach our final destination.

You know, I grew up in a very, very Catholic-majority time. I went to Catholic school for preparatory school and secondary school. And my sporting life revolved around the Gaelic Games. And then, I was, outside of school, a member of the Scouts. And a quirk of Northern Ireland is that, in scouting, we are divided in Scouting Ireland and Scouting U.K.

So, if you can join the dots there, I didn't meet a Protestant until I was 14. I never had a meaningful relationship with a Protestant until I was 14. And that is sort of simply not good enough. And that is what we need to talk about when we look at our peace process.

You know, when I met a Protestant when I was 14, I was in the U.K. Parliament, and we were a group of young people who had been put together to represent our various communities. And I didn't ask where anyone was from. I didn't ask what their identity was, because I didn't care. My parents aren't sectarian. No one in my family is sectarian. I just never had the opportunity. It is something I call "the accident of the reality of Northern Ireland."

And it is something that I think, as people here, we need to really, really look at tackling. Because Northern Ireland now is a peaceful society, but we are not a reconciled one. So, as we talk more about protecting the Good Friday Agreement, we really need to look at implementing the parts of the Good Friday Agreement that are challenging and the representative process.

So, I want to again thank you all for the opportunity to be here today, and I am happy to answer all of your questions. But I want to thank you for the opportunity and your interest in Northern Ireland, and your passion for our peace success.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Savage follows:]

Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick and Representatives I want to begin by thanking you all for not only the opportunity to address you in this forum but also for your continued commitment to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and for placing such importance on hearings like this to hear from Northern Irish people and collect our experience and perspective.

My name is Cormac Savage, I'm nineteen and I'm from a little town in County Down called Downpatrick – the final resting place of our patron saint and one of the first places he came when he arrived on our island. When I was 17, during the initial COVID lockdown, I set up the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland. It's an organisation that functions as a vehicle to give high school students aged 11-19 in Northern Ireland. We're a cross community organisation that chooses to view students as neither Catholic or protestant – nor unionist or nationalist – but simply students. We're diverse and we're exactly what form in my view reconciliation should take. We've fought for students on exams, the pandemic, mental health. We're entirely student led and student driven and the students who now lead the Union epitomise the best Northern Ireland has to offer.

A year ago, you heard from two exceptional women - both of whom I admire greatly – Professor Monica Mc Williams and Jane Morrice. Professor McWilliams and Ms Morrice often aren't given enough credit for the mountains they moved during the negotiations that led to the Good Friday agreement. They spoke to you at length about decommissioning after the agreement, but our hearing today is different – it's about young people and our voice. As a young person, Members of Congress, my view is that young people need you to stop talking about decommissioning guns and start talking about decommissioning mindsets.

The Good Friday agreement predates me. For many in our society the agreement marked the *end* of conflict - it was the cumulation of 30 years of toil by people like John Hume who fought to make it a reality. For my generation the Good Friday Agreement is not the end it is the beginning. I was born in 2003 – my experience of conflict is not the same as my parents. I am a peace baby – a child of post-conflict Ireland. We don't remember the bombs and bullets in the same way, we grew up in their shadow, free from the crossfire.

The work of peacebuilding has happened now our focus must be the challenge of reconciliation. A new approach is needed for the new generation of peace babies. One which ends division and segregation, one which educates us together and one which makes us one community instead of two. That is the purpose of the agreement to which I feel so attached and that the United States has done so much to support.

Much of the focus on Northern Ireland in Brexit has been because of the US commitment to protect the Good Friday Agreement but overlooked is a simple truth: the best way to protect the Good Friday Agreement is to implement it.

In April 2023 we will be 25 years since our new beginning and 25 years on we have had peace, but we have not had reconciliation. We have no Bill of Rights, the fight for Irish language rights goes on, our young people are still under a system of segregated education

and the victims of our conflict have still received no redress for what was inflicted upon them and their families.

The promise of a fully integrated society has not materialised, and the reality is that too many young people in Northern Ireland have grown up in only one sect of our community. I was 14 before I had a meaningful relationship with a protestant. Not because I was sheltered, not because I or my parents were sectarian, nor because there was any advantage to segregation. It was an accident of reality.

I went to publicly funded Catholic primary school until the age of 11, then to Catholic Secondary school until the age of 18. Sporting life revolved around the Gaelic Games, my town was 85% Catholic and outside of school I was in the scouts. In Northern Ireland scouting exists under two organisations – Scouting Ireland and the UK Scouts. There was simply never the opportunity to meet someone from the other central tradition. I'd met protestants through Shared education programmes with other schools, but they were stilted, and we didn't form *real* relationships.

When I was 14, I became a Member of our Youth Parliament. For the first time I was with young people from across our community and it changed my perspective. We didn't care whether we were catholic, protestant, neither or other – we were just all young people, working together as young people. We weren't reminded of our differences and asked to make friends in the name of peace – we were put together to work for common good and became friends because who we were politically and religiously did not matter.

That's what we need in Northern Ireland and that's what we did in the Secondary Students' Union – students working together irrespective and ignoring of our backgrounds but forming relationships based on what we had in common. We have more in common than divides us – let's reinforce that when we bring our young people together.

What Northern Ireland needs is a plan for integrated education – agreed by the parties and led by international experts in educational transformation. What we need is a Bill of Rights. What we need is a legacy plan that our victims feel compensated under. Ultimately – what we need is the Agreement we're discussing today implemented.

The United States has been a player on the island of Ireland in our social, economic and political development since our independence and so should it continue to be in Northern Ireland. If after our election May 5 we cannot broker a deal to restore government – the administration should offer an independent broker. Senator George Mitchell's masterful diplomacy shouldn't be a one off, it should be the staple American interaction with Northern Ireland.

If you want to protect the Good Friday Agreement, help us implement it. Give us the resources and the support we need to mainstream integrated education and pass a Bill of Rights.

For my generation that document wasn't the end of a conflict it's the start of a new society and a process of reconciliation. The United States helped us start on the path to peace, now, we need your help in reaching the final destination of reconciliation.

Representatives I wasn't to thank you for taking the time to hear our perspectives today and for your collective commitment to our peace process. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you very much.

And, you know, I was thinking before your statement that we are just not getting your perspective on the situation in Northern Ireland. We are really—and I think I am speaking for most people, but, clearly, for myself—we are looking for an action plan from young people. To me, that is the greatest hope in going forward.

And your points are right on target, that, indeed, let's talk about implementing what has been in place for 25 years and completing that as an action plan. And we can forward and spring forward from that, I think, more successfully. But your point preempted a later question I had—right on target.

So, I would like to introduce our next witness, Courtney Girvin. She is an activist and a master's graduate in conflict transformation and social justice from Queen's University, Belfast.

While attending an alternative education provider, Ms. Girvin became involved in an organization for young people of diverse backgrounds to lobby education providers, employers, and local governments to invest in Northern Ireland's youth.

So now, I would like to recognize Courtney for 5 minutes, or more, if she would like.

STATEMENT OF COURTNEY GIRVIN, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Ms. GIRVIN. Hi. I, first of all, would like to thank Chairman Keating, his staff, and the committee, for having this conversation today.

And I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Patricia O'Lynn, who has been a very positive influence in my life and has helped me empower my own voice in a very particularly difficult period of my life, and who has helped me become the person that I am today. So, I would like to thank her here today.

And as mentioned within my written testimony, I am as old as the Good Friday Agreement. I was born in 1998, and therefore, I really am a "peace baby." I am very thankful to have been spared the fear and anxiety of my parents who lived in a military society, all daily public political violence.

Much like I was born in 1998, my mother was born in 1970, which was the height of the Troubles. And some of the stories that I heard of her childhood and of my father's childhood are completely unrecognizable to the city that I know and love today.

However, I would want to emphasize that this is a peace process, and the Good Friday Agreement is part of the peace process. And peace process in Northern Ireland did not stop in 1998, and it did not stop after subsequent political agreements. As other witnesses have stated, there is still much work to do in actually implementing the original document.

Northern Ireland remains a divided society. Less than 10 percent of young people are educated within integrated education. Much of our social housing remains segregated. And the ironically named peace walls loom and remain over our society.

My own experience, I grew up in a Loyalist part of East Belfast, where questions of flags, parades, and policing were very much my bread and butter and much my format. I did not meet a Catholic until I was 14 and stopped going to school and was in an alter-

native education provider, in which, ironically, due to the lack of funding, we weren't segregated and we learned together.

Those areas most impacted by the conflict continue to see high levels of poverty and rates of mental illness, as part of intergenerational trauma. Our summers continue to be characterized as hot, and not due to rising temperatures of the result of climate change, but due to the sporadic violence, which Patricia referred to in her opening statement.

I was asked to explain today how young people in Northern Ireland view the Good Friday Agreement. In short, it is complex. Young people in Northern Ireland are not a homogenous grouping and have a broad spectrum of opinion.

As mentioned within my written testimony, many of our young people do not get the opportunity to learn about the conflict or the peace process. This is intensified further by the fact we are educated separately.

Similarly, the constructive ambiguity at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement means that we continue to have a lack of consensus about what the past was. At the time, I think that this was a success of the Good Friday Agreement, as it was something that both sides of the divide could sign off to, as they could both put their own mark on what it was.

However, 25 years later, we still cannot agree on what actually happened. And, of course, this is going to stagnate our own understanding and learning about what it was.

Furthermore, a lack of top-down transitional justice mechanisms beyond policing reform has enabled communal myths and divisive historic memories to flourish. As we do not learn about the conflict or the peace process within neutral and safe environments of schooling, young people are forced to get their information about the past and about the peace process from murals on the wall and adults who very quickly will take advantage of young people and fill them with stereotypes and biases.

Young people are fascinated about social issues, such as climate change, mental health provisions, and reproductive justice, and many more things. I would say many of my colleagues take the bull by the horns, for lack of a word, and set up their own organizations, such as Pure Mental NI and Stop Street Harassment NI.

But we must reckon with our past. Young people have a desire to move beyond our troubled past. But, as we have seen in the legacy, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren still want the truth about what happened in the Franco regime, and I still hear that here today in Northern Ireland.

We must reckon with our past to move toward a peaceful future. I ask the committee to continue to invest in our young people, but also our young people from marginalized backgrounds who have yet to see the benefits of peace.

And I would like to take this moment to remind our local representatives that running from the hard questions of the past—policing, flags, and parades—is a disservice to our youth and our future.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Girvin follows:]

Courtney Girvin (she/her) BA International Relations and Conflict Studies, MA Conflict Transformation and Social Justice.

Personal Background

I was born in January of 1998, 3 months prior to the signing of the historic Good Friday Agreement that stopped the violence and brought peace to Northern Ireland. As a child, I grew up in a loyalist area of East Belfast that has a culture of parades, flags, bonfires, and paramilitary style murals splashed on the walls. However, as a child I had little to no knowledge of the political context of these symbols, how they can be viewed as hurtful and oppressive, or how they had contributed to the political deadlock of our local governing institutions. You only have to look at the Haass-O'Sullivan talks to understand how raw issues of the past, flags, and parades remain for those within our political establishment and the older generations. Professor Dominic Bryan stated that the contention related to symbols in the public realm is an evolution of the conflict, as the guns and bombs have disappeared new areas of contention have arisen as a fight for the public space emerges via contesting emblems (5). I will return to this issue in the section examining the Good Friday Agreement in detail. However, returning to my earlier point, as a child these symbols were little more than decoration that marked my summer holidays. As a child the Twelfth of July was an opportunity to have a hot dog before 12pm from a street food van as flute bands marched by in colourful uniforms. Flags, painted kerbstones, and images of masked men with guns seemed little more than decoration. These experiences were my normal and lacked their political contexts through the eyes of a child with little knowledge and understanding of the conflict. Unfortunately, as I will now discuss, there was little place to discuss the meaning and contentious nature of these symbols in a safe and structured environment.

In Northern Ireland we have two main periods of schooling; primary school for those aged 4-11, and then secondary school for those aged 11-16 to complete their GCSEs. If a young person successfully achieves 5 A*-C grade GCSEs, they are able to study for an additional two years for their A level examinations.

My experience at primary school did little to illuminate the fact that I live in a society that is classified as "post-conflict" or as a "divided society". Like most young people in Northern Ireland I attended a single-faith primary school. Currently, less than 10% of schools (both primary and secondary) are classified as being integrated education in which students from both dominant community backgrounds are educated together (1). My experience of religious education was dominated by typical Christian stories based on the problematic assumption that we all identified as Christian. There is a famous joke in Northern Ireland that person A asks person B are they Protestant or Catholic, person B responds they are Jewish, and person A asks again are they a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew. This illustrates two things. One, how religious identity markers of Protestant and Catholic in the Northern Irish context have become heavily contorted and intertwined with political affiliations. Secondly, how little consideration is given to other faiths. This very problem is replicated in the Good Friday Agreement itself as our politicians are forced to identify within a framework

of Unionist, Nationalist or other. However, the issue I wish to highlight is that despite this Christian religious education we failed to learn that there could be different versions of Christianity. Therefore, for a long time, I had no knowledge of the fact that I was a Protestant and that there are multiple ways to practice Christianity. So if I had no knowledge that I was a Protestant and what this meant in a general sense of the word, then I had even less knowledge about what being a Protestant meant in the context of living in Northern Ireland. Therefore, my initial religious education did not prepare me with any knowledge about who I was, or what religion meant in the context of the society that I lived within. This lack of structured knowledge meant that I got my understanding of what religion was via dangerous and uninformed communal myths.

My first encounter of the term Catholic was from the older kids in my community, they told us younger ones that Catholics has broken our bus stop, and that you could identify someone as Catholic if their eyes were too far apart. Therefore, I rationalised in my childhood brain that Catholics must be bogeymen that came out at night to destroy innocent bus stops and that I should avoid people with strange eyes. This bogeyman image perpetuated within my community impacted us so much so that when asked by researchers if we would be friends with a Catholic, we all said no. For context, researchers from Queen's University Belfast conducted an experiment when I was P7 (aged 10-11) as my class was interviewed in a group setting. We were shown pictures of different people and given their identities and then asked if we would befriend that person. For example, they showed us pictures of people who were Jewish, Muslim, Black, Gay etc. and explained who they were before asking us if we would befriend that person. For the most part, we happily agreed to befriend almost everyone except the person who we were told was an Irish Catholic. An entire room of almost thirty 10-11yr olds refused to be this person's friend because they were Catholic. I remember that my teacher told us that she was disgusted with us, but to us we were told that this person vandalised our bus stops. Looking back retrospectively makes me think two things. One, we did not receive any information within a controlled and safe environment to talk about what any of these labels meant and therefore received our information elsewhere from communal myths. Therefore, looking back I am disgusted that we did not receive the proper education and knowledge about who we were and who are neighbours in the other community were, and were forced to rely on dangerous and non-factual community hearsay. Second, this reminds me of the famous quotation by Nelson Mandela in which he argues that no child is born hating another because of their skin or religious background, and that hatred is learned. I would say that this picture of a Catholic individual did not invoke hatred from myself or my classmates, rather we were like parrots mimicking what we had heard in the environment that surrounded us. We repeated what we heard from the older kids, as they repeated what they heard from their generation of older kids in a cyclical fashion. However, left unchallenged these mimicked communal myths could grow to become seeds of hatred even among children who never experienced the conflict in the same way in which our parents had.

My first encounter with the term Protestant had been through a schoolyard game in which we all would ask one another if we were pigs (coded as Protestant) or cows (coded as Catholic). I remember being asked if I was a pig or a cow for the first time by one of the

older kids in my neighbourhood and I answered that I was neither as I very clearly did not moo or oink. The older girl then persisted that I was either a Protestant or Catholic and I had little idea of what these terms meant. So naturally I asked my mum who very nervously asked where I had heard this, had I been playing in areas that I was told I was never to ever go near under any circumstances (aka the Short Strand interface area)? She then informed me that I was Protestant and that that question could be very dangerous. Not one to head this warning, me and the rest of my class began to ask one another if we were pigs or cows, always answering pig before having a giggle, and then repeating the process of asking again. We eventually developed to ask if we were plates or cups with similar coding. So my knowledge of religion and the conflict consisted of that fact that I was a pig and Catholics were bogeymen who could be identified via their eyes. Of course this knowledge remained unchallenged as school failed to provide a channel to challenge these communal myths and stereotypes, we were educated separately and therefore could never interact with young people from the other side, and we also lived separately. More than 90% of social housing in Northern Ireland remains segregated on the grounds of religious background (2). Therefore, we lived and learned within our insulated communities. Looking back these are almost humorous anecdotes of how I tried to make sense of the world I found myself in, however as previously mentioned left unchecked these funny childish assumptions could grow into hateful and suspicious stereotypes.

Similar to our religious education, our education of history does little to inform young minds of the conflict or the peace process. For most part the question of Irish history was off the table as we learned about the Stone Age, British Monarchs such as Henry VII and Elizabeth I – far removed from anything related to the place in which we lived due to the contested nature of our history. The first opportunity to learn about the conflict in Northern Ireland is through GCSE history. However, history is an elective GCSE meaning that not every child will get the opportunity to study our history within a controlled setting focused on fact. Furthermore, not every school teaches the period of the conflict known as the Troubles starting from the Northern Irish Civil Rights Movement to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, as some schools chose to focus on the earlier historical period related to the third Home Rule Bill crisis and the eventual partition of Ireland (3). This is problematic as it means many of our young people do not get the opportunity to learn about the conflict in a fact-focused manner that is free of bias. As previously stated, this leads to dangerous situations as young people fill the void of their knowledge on this topic via a biased lens of divisive communal historical memories which demonise the opposing side (4). Part of the reluctance to study history within educational settings derives from the fact that we have no agreement about what the Troubles was. This is reflected within the Good Friday Agreement as it is reliant upon a constructive ambiguity, this will be discussed in further detail in the section examining the Good Friday Agreement.

As for political education? It was not on the curriculum until A Level. How can young people learn about the political institutions of power-sharing, or what the Good Friday Agreement is without a political education? This is made more problematic by the fact that many working-class young people, particularly working-class Protestant boys, do not reach the A Level stage to make that decision to study political education for the first time. Therefore,

our education system does not provide a safe or neutral space to discuss who we are as individuals, our histories, or our politics. Many young people in working-class areas who fail to reach A Level never get the opportunity to learn about the conflict or the Good Friday Agreement in a factual manner, and therefore become reliant on communal myths to fill the gaps. Many of these young people become stuck in poverty traps and are taken advantage of by paramilitary thugs. The influence of paramilitarism upon our working-class young people is evident today twenty-plus years after the ceasefires. In the summer of 2021 young people were directed to engage in street violence as paramilitary figures stood within crowds of adults who cheered them on (6). For young men within my community who fail to achieve within education and become stuck in poverty traps the allure of paramilitarism and the ability to achieve and gain status in other means is tempting. Especially as they failed to get the opportunity to learn about the opportunities that have arisen from peace.

Due to personal difficulties in my early teens, I was unable to continue my secondary education within a mainstream traditional schooling setting. I attended the Belfast Hospital School and then completed my GCSEs in Open Doors which were both alternative education providers. Due to a lack of funding, these programmes had no choice but to be integrated and therefore, this was the first time I had the opportunity to meet people from a Catholic/Nationalist background. We learned together over the course of two years during a contentious period of time as the decision was made to no longer fly the British flag 365 days per year. However, unlike other cross-community schemes in which people from the two communities are stuck in orange and green hoodies for photo opportunities, despite this tumultuous period we had built relationships with one another. We may not have agreed with each other, but we respected each other as individuals and as friends to not fall out over political issues. I want to stress that this is no small feat in the context of Northern Ireland. This experience drastically changed my life as I got to really meet the other community in a genuine manner.

Some of us who attended the alternative education programme had the opportunity to attend a conference hosted by the Department of Employment & Learning (now known as the Department of Communities) to talk about our experiences of education, employment, and training programmes. Through this experience I found myself involved with the NEET Youth Forum. This forum was formed by third-sector charitable organisations who worked with vulnerable young people, and empowered them to find their voice and lobby local government to provide better outcomes for young people. This group consisted of both young people from PUL (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist) and CNR (Catholic/Nationalist/Republican) backgrounds. However, more than this these labels were not ones of importance, the young people in this group were multi-faceted individuals with experience of living with mental health illnesses and learning difficulties, experience of being an LGBTQ+ young person, experience of living in the care system etc. We were more than just a Protestant or just a Catholic and that was empowering. For the first time, this label was not the most important one in my life.

I was involved with the NEET Youth Forum for 3.5 years and during this time we lobbied for better outcomes for young people. One of the most important things that you can take from

my testimony in terms of how young people view the Good Friday Agreement would be this. As previously explained the educational system is not set up to inform young people about what the Good Friday Agreement is but they know that we live in a very different time period compared to that in which are parents grew up. We know that we have peace, and we want to talk about the present and the future – not the past. As a scholar of transitional justice, I now know the importance of transitional justice mechanisms exploring the past - however I will discuss this further in the section related to what you as a committee can do to support the peace process and young people's understandings of the GFA. My experiences as a young person lobbying for change informed me that young people want to move on from issues of flags, parades, and policing – we want to talk about social issues such as equal marriage, access to abortion, climate change, better education and employment opportunities for young people so that we have a future here etc.

The Good Friday Agreement & The Peace Process

One of the first times I got to learn about the Good Friday Agreement with any real substance was at A Level Politics. I had the opportunity to learn about the context of the agreement and what it had achieved, and the different strands of governance. The first time I got to study the document in any great analytical detail was during my undergraduate at university. As previously mentioned, many young people do not get the opportunity to learn about the Good Friday Agreement and what it achieved. Therefore, without this knowledge many young people dismiss the Good Friday Agreement as part of the past associated with topics related to flags, parades, and policing. We want to move on from this part of our history and therefore let's not talk about the Good Friday Agreement. However, as previously mentioned many young people in Northern Ireland do not get the opportunity to learn about the history of the conflict or the peace process in a neutral manner free of bias. Therefore, there is a lack of appreciation for what the Good Friday Agreement achieved and simultaneous lack of understanding of how it continues to stagnate meaningful post-conflict transition.

First and foremost, the Good Friday Agreement brought peace to Northern Ireland in a manner that previous agreements had failed to do so. For the first time, Unionists and Nationalists agreed to share power and govern via consociationalist mechanisms. Similarly, paramilitaries from both sides agreed to put down their weapons in the pursuit of peace. This is an incredible achievement and one I am incredibly thankful to have benefited from as I grew up in relative peace compared to my parents. However, the reason that peace was achieved was due to the constructive ambiguity of the Good Friday Agreement. You could read this document as a stepping stone to Irish unity or as securing the current union within the British state. Furthermore, issues of the past such as victims and what the Troubles actually was were neglected within this agreement. This agreement started a pattern of behaviour within our political representatives in which they failed to agree on fundamental issues of the past and therefore failed to deal with them at all. To date, Northern Ireland has had a fragmented piecemeal implementation of transitional justice mechanisms. The lack of an agreed upon truth has enabled communal myths and divisive truths to remain

uncontested. Local politicians have abused safety net protocols such as the petition of concern mechanism to prevent social issues that young people are passionate about such as equal marriage to be discussed within legislative chambers.

The Good Friday Agreement has failed to deliver true peace in the sense of dismantling master status communal labels and living as one community. We live in separate communities divided by the walls of identity and physical walls of contesting emblems, flags, and so-called peace walls themselves. We are educated separately in a system in which schools are reluctant to teach young people about our conflicted past, and who can blame them when our peace agreement failed to deliver mechanisms that would help navigate issues of the past. I could talk on length about the pros and cons of the Good Friday Agreement but will refrain from doing so. In short, young people's relationship with the Good Friday Agreement is complex and multi-faceted. Denied the opportunity to learn about the agreement in any great depth until our later schooling years, the Good Friday Agreement sits as something that is both appreciated for achieving a more peaceful society and resented for its lack of ambition and its manipulation from the dinosaurs of Stormont. In the next section I will suggest what you can do as the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Asks to the American Sub-Committee

I would like to as the American Sub-Committee of Foreign Affairs to consider committing to the following asks:

1. Invest in our young people in Northern Ireland. Provide opportunities to empower young people who need it most, young people who cannot see past cyclical tit for tat violence, young people who have been failed by the system and see paramilitarism as the only opportunity to make something of themselves. Give young people the opportunity to experience a world beyond what happened at interface areas. Invest in grassroots community relations projects that are building meaningful relationships between young people and fostering genuine change as opposed to tick box exercises.
2. Champion young activists from Northern Ireland who are fighting and championing issues close to them such as street harassment, climate change, the commission of abortion services, better mental health provision etc. Champion our voices and our experiences of what living in a post-conflict and divided society is like, and how we can continue to improve.
3. Clearly tell Northern Irish politicians that peace is a continued process that did not stop at the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. As a divided society we have a lot of work to do in terms of building peace at a grassroots level and this starts with serious consideration of how we integrate the very structure of our society. Take integrated education. 71% of people in Northern Ireland agree with the principle of integrated education, however, thinking practically what would an integrated school look like? Would current schools be changed to integrated schools? What about the fact that the very map of Northern Ireland is divided into Unionist and Nationalist

areas, would a young Nationalist feel safe to attend school in a PUL area? Challenge our politicians to really think about the next steps to peace and what does a concrete vision of peace look like. Challenge our politicians to stop kicking difficult issues such as dealing with the past into the long grass and finally deliver on issues of truth and justice.

Thank you for your engagement in Northern Ireland and for platforming young people's thoughts on the Good Friday Agreement and peace as a whole. I could have written a book on this topic and would be happy to answer any further questions at any stage in the future.

Sources

1. Integrated Education Fund, more information found here
2. The Irish Times, Issue of segregated housing in Northern Ireland, more information found here
3. The Guardian, Is the curriculum dividing Northern Ireland's schools, more information, found here
4. Dealing with the past; the administration of justice. With specific reference to the Colombian and Northern Irish conflicts. Undergraduate Dissertation
5. Professor Dominic Byran research portal, more information here
6. Summer 2021 riots, more information here

Mr. KEATING. Thank you very much.

And now that we, I think, have the technical issues over with, I would like to go back, if we could, to our first witness, Dr. Patricia O'Lynn. And take your time and conclude your remarks, please. We will now go back to Dr. O'Lynn.

STATEMENT OF DR. PATRICIA O'LYNN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, POLITICS IN ACTION

Dr. O'LYNN. Thank you, Chairman Keating, and apologies for the technical difficulties all the way over here in Larne, Northern Ireland.

And where I left off, I just wanted to say that, despite the same set that I have been engaging with, most young people in Northern Ireland are law-abiding, pro-social, exceptional citizens, as our panel has just demonstrated. They are focused on peace, prosperity, and progressivism.

And for what it is worth, I do not anticipate a recapitulation of the violence that we have seen in previous years, not only because people do not want it, but because our young people will not allow it. However, I think it is important for us to say that a new conflict is being waged across the north, one which bears the trappings of all society's transitioning to peace—intergenerational trauma, and poverty, exclusion, and "othering." And this is a war that is not felt evenly across the north and disproportionately by our young people.

My own work experience has focused on engaging with some of the most exceptional, talented, and compassionate young people you can imagine. Coincidentally, they are the young people who are out rioting. They are committing criminal offenses, have been incarcerated, find themselves as teenaged mothers removed from school, and some of the most tragic circumstances, losing their lives to suicide and other related ills.

From my own PhD research, I find that the central underlying factor which has created these social ills and ruined our young people's lives has been oppression. And I, as an elected representative and a leader of an organization, I have committed my life and my career to amplifying those voices of exploited youth.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, States that all young people have a right to make their voices heard and to have their voices acted on. And how tragic is it that the voices that are really rarely heard are the young people rioting in the streets, losing their lives, becoming drug-addicted, or incarcerated?

So, when we are looking to the future to sustain peace, we must learn from our past and look at the lessons that we should have learned already. And what are they? Well, the central, underlying factors that sparked the conflict was wide, mass-spread experience and feelings of oppression.

In 2016, I was fortunate enough to be accepted onto the Washington Ireland Program. That program changed my life. Not only did I have the pleasure of interning with Senator John McCain, but I was immersed in a culture where I got to live with an amazing American family, and I was forced to debate with others from

Northern Ireland of diverse political backgrounds, issues that were no-go's and unseen to discuss in Northern Ireland.

More importantly, this program taught me how to critically reflect; how to disagree respectfully, but how not to resent. It changed how I viewed myself and what could be possible for me. Indeed, I accredit most of my career success, the ability to become elected in Northern Ireland and move into leadership roles, to the time I spent on this program, the mentorship I received, and the friends I made—not just from Northern Ireland, but in the United States of America.

And so, the main contribution I want to make to this conversation today is I cannot help but think how young people who are involved in riots, criminally, and all the other social ills that they are experiencing would fare if they had access to a specialized-in-scope program like the Washington Ireland Program.

When I was recruited, I was a PhD student. I come from a stable family background, and I have all the support networks I need to flourish, but these young people do not. They are fighting a war of their wound that stems from the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and as far as we can see, with our mental health crisis and all other crises I have mentioned, it has no end in sight.

The United States brings a long track record of proven success in Northern Ireland, and you have the ability to leverage outside resources; provide new ideas; help the parties, the governments, and young people with the challenges I have mentioned.

One way we can demonstrate our commitment is by designing that bespoke program or initiative exclusively for young people on the cold face of conflict in Northern Ireland. I believe wholeheartedly that, until we amplify these voices, reach into these marginal spaces, listen to these young people and see the world through their lens, and understand what peace might look like for them, then we will continue to be in the situations that we are in today and that we faced in April 2021.

Again, thank you so much for having me here today, and I am delighted to answer any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. O'Lynn follows:]

SUBMISSION TO US HOUSE SUB-COMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT & CYBER

Topic: What can we do to enable young people to sustain peace in Northern Ireland?
Author: Dr Patricia O'Lynn, PhD.
Role: Executive Director of Politics in Action

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Keating for that warm introduction and also let me take this opportunity to thank you, your staff and committee members for inviting me to give testimony today. It is an honour and a privilege to have my voice heard on this important topic and indeed, to speak on behalf of our youth community here in Northern Ireland (NI).

Context

According to the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA), as of 2020, there were approximately 224,202 young people aged 15-24 living, working, and being educated in NI. Additionally, it is estimated that 600,00 young people have been born in NI since the signing of the peace concord; a cohort who have sense been named the 'peace generation' marked with optimism and hope given that a great deal has been achieved in NI since the peace concord was secured in 1998.

Also, despite the global pandemic and the hardship brought with it, youth unemployment in NI is at an all-time low, academic achievement for this cohort continues to outrank achievement rates in other devolved nations and more young people are moving into higher education and higher paid jobs than ever before. In short, there is much for young people to be hopeful about in NI.

Yet, in the week leading up to the 25th anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, collective youth rioting broke out on the streets of Belfast and further across the province. This outbreak generated cause for concern that the ongoing peace process may be more fragile than originally anticipated given that such sectarian violence was spear-headed by the young people who were born post cease-fire and therefore did not bear witness to the atrocities of the conflict here in NI.

During the 7-night spate of violence, cars were set alight, a bus was hijacked and set on fire, petrol bombs were thrown, 88 police officers were injured, multiple communities were left with damage done to their property and children as young as 13 were arrested for riotous behaviour. The gravity and extent of the violence was evidenced by the level of international media coverage received and the fact that commentators speculated how the riots were a result of collective youth efforts thus naming the unrest as some of the worst seen since 1998. Yet, how much these young people knew about Brexit, the politics of the UK's withdrawal from the EU or indeed the Public Prosecution Service's decision about covid breaches at a high-profile republican funeral was indeed doubtful, as was the extent to which these events drove their active engagement in the riots.

In the immediate aftermath of this violence, I was particularly struck by an interview given by a young male involved in the rioting who explained that regardless of how little he knew or understood about the current state of politics and related decisions, adults and leaders within his community told his peers that a threat and an insult had been made to their community identity,

that the State could not be trusted to support them, and that if they did not defend their identities, they would lose them. This dangerous narrative of hostility, otherness and exclusion was bolstered by sinister paramilitary forces encouraging youth onto the streets in the hope that doing so would create a snowballing effect, but also by much deeper and systemic forces leading to wider disenfranchisement.[1]

Before, I go any further, it is important to note that most of our young people are pro-social, law-abiding citizens with a thirst for positivity, progression and peace. Despite the unrest of April 2021, we have not seen a return of violence on mass here in NI, nor do I anticipate that we will see a full recapitulation of The Troubles in the format they previously took.[2]

However, the ceasefire generation are facing a different type of conflict, one which is often present in many societies transitioning to peace. It includes intergenerational trauma, poverty, exclusion, othering, poor mental health, reduced service provision and in the wake of both Brexit and the Global Pandemic, the aftereffects of isolation and related social ills. It would seem that a new war is at play, in the North, one in which many young people experience hardship and one in which not all young people experience equally.

Personal Experience

Chair Keating, Committee members and expert witnesses, I am 32 years old. Throughout my career I have had the privilege of working with some of the most gifted, talented, and compassionate young people you could imagine. Coincidently, these young people are also deemed to be the most marginalised and excluded from society. They have engaged in riots, criminality, drug misuse and anti-social behaviour. More often than not, they have been incarcerated, school removed, placed under the care of the welfare system, found themselves to be school aged parents and in some tragic cases lost their lives prematurely to suicide and other related social ills.

My own doctoral research focused on better understanding of these experiences from the perspective of young people who had been excluded from the mainstream school system. My key finding was that school exclusion was the manifestation of oppressive relational dynamics experienced within and outside of the mainstream school, in communities and most other spaces these youth occupied- a theme I will return to throughout this session.

Now, as an elected representative here in NI, and as the Executive Director of Politics in Action (PIA), I have committed myself to ensuring these voices are amplified and heard. What I have learned

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[1] A number of skilled academics have looked closely at the primary drivers of the recent unrest. One of whom is Dr Colum Walsh who has produced a detailed report which sought to understand the riots from the perspective of those who were physically closest to them, and then present findings in a way that could enhance understanding and contribute towards prevention. His report found that multiple factors led to the recent unrest including (but not limited to) (i) lack of connection to the community; (ii) the normalisation of violence; (iii) gendered and social norms towards violence; (iv) the enduring presence of paramilitaries; (v) a lack of hope amongst youth rioters and their communities and (vi) the need for more effective role and responsibility clarification of local services such as youth workers. His report is an important read for anyone seeking to understand the current climate disenfranchised young people are facing and what can be done to support them to engage pro-socially on issues they care about.

[2] Unfortunately, we do not ample time today to highlight the positive contributions young people have made to sustaining peace in NI since the signing of the GFA nor indeed, throughout the pandemic. Suffice to say the contribution as been substantial and continues to grow. Further examples of specific contributions and movements are available upon request.

throughout my own research and work experiences is that the central factor leading these young people astray is the multi-layered feeling and experience of oppression. At the same time, we know that The Troubles in Northern Ireland resulted from feelings and experiences of oppression on a grand scale. And so, we must ask ourselves, what lessons can be learned from the past to enable us to create a brighter future with and for our young people to play a role in sustaining peace?

For a start, we know that peace has not been evenly felt in across Northern Ireland. We also know that the areas most effected by the conflict and its legacy continue to host the highest rates of poor educational attainment, poor mental health, a lack of integration and reduced social provision- In short, oppression.

Thankfully, research has also shown us that in addition to the need for shared housing, education, social care and economic provision, to sustain peace, we also need to ensure that all residents, especially young people, feel a sense of belonging and connectivity, that they are given opportunities to achieve positive recognition and secure representation they can identify with.

Article 12 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that *all* children have the right to have their views heard and for them to be taken seriously. Yet, it is the young people who are the hardest to reach that rarely have their voices heard or sought out. Instead, they are stigmatised, their views downgraded and ignored.

Anti-oppressive practitioners have demonstrated that when effort is dedicated to engaging young people in a critical analysis of their experiences, new opportunities for change can emerge. If channelled correctly, the voices of these excluded youth could become a catalyst for authentic change and sustained peace.

With that in mind, I want to give a few examples as to the United States could work with NI, the UK and Southern governments to develop opportunities for young people to turn away from violence, engage in critical analysis of their experiences and to re-channel their current behaviour towards sustaining peace.

What can America do to help young people sustain peace in NI?

Chair, in 2016, I was accepted onto a year-long programme that could change my life both personally and professionally, called the Washington Ireland Progamme. As part of this initiative, I travelled with 30 of my classmates, all of whom came from different religious and political backgrounds to live and work in Washington DC.

During this time, I lived with an American host family and was employed by Senator John McCain. I was exposed to an entire spectrum of political beliefs, many of which differed from my own. I was immersed in a new culture and taught how to value diversity, how to engage in critical analysis, how to debate and reflect on my own values, beliefs and thought patterns. Most importantly, I learned how to disagree respectfully and without resentment.

This programme changed how I viewed myself and what might be possible for my future. I attribute much of my career success and entry in to political and leadership roles, to the lessons learned and mentorship I received while on this programme.

However, I am also acutely aware that I became a participant as a PhD student from a stable family background, good qualifications and the necessary resources to flourish in my future. I cannot help but think that if a programme such as this was designed, funded, and run exclusively for disenfranchised youth from disadvantaged areas across NI what the outcomes might be.

Secondly, I watched with enthusiasm, the testimony given by Professor Monica Mc Williams, Jane Morrice and the Honourable Mitchell Reiss. Each of whom made valuable contributions calling upon the reinstatement of the Civic Forum, the appointment of a US Envoy to Northern Ireland further investment in the legacy process and support for a new process to enable group transition away from paramilitarism. All of which I endorse and support.

However, if we are serious about supporting and enabling young people to sustain peace in NI, a new initiative should be created with the aim of giving voice to marginalised youth on issues, causes, consequences and potential solutions to the oppression they experience.

While NI currently has a Youth Forum and a Youth Parliament, such initiatives are rarely populated by those who have been involved in rioting, criminality or who have been school excluded. Nor do they have the resources to build the capacity of youth who have been marginalised from mainstream statutory services and democratic institutions.

For example, my own organisation, Politics in Action, exists to give young people in shared education a voice on current political and social issues which matter to them. We link young people to elected representatives, giving them a platform to make their voices heard and follow up to ensure their voices are given due weight. However, we do not and are not reaching those young people who voices have never been heard, nor are we operating in what I would classify the most disadvantaged and hardest to reach areas. This is something we aspire to do and are working towards, but in the meantime, the board and I are agreed that these are the young people who need our service the most because it is this catchment of young people who are the most oppressed, who are at the highest risk of being lured onto the streets and into violence and, it is these young people who are the least likely to want peace because from their perspective, they have never experienced the peace we have benefited from.

The United States brings a long track record of proven success in NI and has the ability to leverage outside resources and provide new ideas to help the parties, the two governments, and young people with the challenges I've mentioned above.

Conclusion

And so, Chairman Keating, Ranking members and expert witnesses, in concluding, this hearing comes at an ideal time, when in a post-pandemic world, we are faced with an opportunity to build back better, to enhance the work of our previous leaders who, through the scaffolding of the GFA and on-going efforts to sustain peace in NI, have laid the foundations for young people to become the baton holders and play their own leading role in Northern Ireland.

With that in mind, my main contribution is that for peace to be sustained in NI and for young people to play a leading role, we need to first reach into the marginal spaces where excluded youth are stuck. We need to understand the world through there lens, listen to their lesser heard voices, treat their views with respect by adhering to the UNCRC and acting accordingly.

One way we can demonstrate our commitment is by designing a bespoke forum or initiative which will empower these marginalised young people to have a seat at the table and feed back to our cross Atlantic partners on their lived experiences and generate a deeper understanding of what peace would look and feel like for them.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you very much.

I will now move to the questioning period of our program. I will recognize, first, myself for 5 minutes, and then, hopefully, our other members will have some questions as well.

But I am going to move, Dr. O'Lynn, from my prepared question because I was struck with your testimony. Before I was in Congress, I was a district attorney, chief law enforcement enforcer in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in my region. And I instituted programs alternative to prosecution, mental health diversion, many other things. And I was struck by your comments that the main common denominator, if I can paraphrase you, for what occurred in the troubles of so many of these young people, including suicide and criminal involvement, comes from oppression. Can you expand on that, No. 1.

And, No. 2, what is the jurisdictional issue? Are there criminal justice or prosecution issues that have alternatives like that to deal with young people, to get to these main causes that exist? Or, if not, what would you recommend? Dr. O'Lynn?

Dr. O'LYNN. Thank you, Chairman Keating. Two great questions.

First of all, we do have diversion programs in Northern Ireland and we are engaging in restorative conferencing. And I am an advocate of early intervention. And although I know such programs have strong enough success rates, I believe that, once young people are labeled, they become stigmatized and they move back into the communities and cultures that are creating or suffering oppression, which makes it difficult for them to thrive and move away from their previous experiences that leads to re-offending.

When I talk about the core denomination being oppression, it is a much more complex answer to try to give. If we try to put structure around my answer and look at the structural level of society, as my colleagues here have stated, young people are kept apart by education, by housing. They have community leaders telling them that their community is being failed, that they are failures, that they are being left out, and if they do not turn to violence, no one is going to come and help them.

At a cultural level, these young people have very few opportunities to engage in cross-community initiatives or, indeed, be educated or live together. And 9 times out of 10, they are marginalized or excluded from their schools. So, they enter into these communities that have their own complexities; do not have adult supervision, or do not have what I would classify as appropriate pro-social adult supervision.

And at the individual level, the young person level, in light of everything I have discussed, they are still evolving young people. They are vulnerable. They have been left out and are missing a sense of belonging. They identify with our current elected representatives and have very few opportunities for cause of recognition, other than to act out in order to cope with the cards they have been dealt in life.

And——

Mr. KEATING. If I could pause for a moment, and just see if either Mr. Lynch, Mr. Savage, or Ms. Girvin can comment on what Dr. O'Lynn was talking about herself. I mean, I was, with such activists as Ms. Girvin and Mr. Savage, when you both said you

hadn't seen someone from the other faith until you were 14, it is, think about that in such a concentrated geographic area, that that is the case. So, could you comment on what Dr. O'Lynn was talking about here?

Mr. SAVAGE. It is shocking, but the norm is that I haven't met someone from the other faith until I was 14.

But one thing I want to note is the riots that we were talking about out here that happened last summer with the bus, where there was a bus that burnt down in Belfast, this——

Mr. KEATING. Excuse me. Could you move the microphone closer? I am sorry.

Mr. SAVAGE. Yes. Is that any better?

Mr. KEATING. That's better. Thank you.

Mr. SAVAGE. Good.

The riots that we discussed earlier last summer that were purportedly to be over the Northern Ireland Protocol, but were, in reality, being spun to be a breach of COVID regulations at a republican funeral—there is actually another story to that and those young people.

Those riots were global news, as Dr. O'Lynn noted, but, then, they sort of disappeared out of nowhere. And what wasn't covered by the media was why they ended. And I believe why they ended was that there was a policy change just the day before, which was that our education minister, as a response to lasting infection rates of the coronavirus, reopened our youth centers. And those gentle people who were on the streets during the pandemic didn't have access to youth facilities, suddenly, had somewhere to go and couldn't be, in my opinion, targeted by these older people and used as almost child soldiers to go and fight riots that they, oftentimes, do not know a lot about.

I mean, I have seen the images that Dr. O'Lynn mentioned in her opening statement, and it does really paint a story of a lot of times these young people who riot do not have any strong beliefs that are anti-peace, and certainly, do not have strong opinions about the Northern Ireland Protocol and international trade tariffs. I mean, I was 17 only 2 years, and I can tell you, I think it would take a lot to get a 17-year-old incensed over international trade tariffs.

Mr. KEATING. I think—I think we share that.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SAVAGE. Yes. So, I mean, I think that there is another story there; that these are young people here who are manipulated, and they are taken advantage of by older members of their community. And the best way to protect them is by investing in them.

And if we look back at that decision by the education minister to open the youth centers, and how that ended that problem, that tells us everything about where we need to go in Northern Ireland. It is about investing in these young people, investing in these marginalized communities, and that will end the threat of violence from these young people.

So, that is one thing, I think, that wasn't covered in the media that I think we really, really need to note, because it paints a picture of just how Northern Ireland society functions, and how our young people react to the world around them.

Mr. KEATING. Yeah.

Mr. LYNCH. If I may comment briefly, and really, I will be echoing the sentiments of both Cormac and Patricia.

Civic conversation in Northern Ireland has really been vital over the past decades. And coming back to some of our earlier sentiments around there is still elements of the Good Friday Agreement that have yet to be fully implemented, one of the most fundamental, I think, in this is around a civic forum. Young people really feel that they sometimes do not have a voice or do not have an opportunity to articulate their views around civic society and how they can really make a difference in their own communities they are living in. And actually, in many of these communities there is no real mechanism for them to do so.

And so, whenever Patricia, for example, was talking about WIP and some of the other cross-community programs that exist even in smaller, tighter-knit communities, that is essential. And I think one of the best ways for us to develop a framework around that is going back to the initial agreement 24 years ago, looking at the concept of a civic forum and actually getting to a stage where we can implement an initiative like that.

Mr. KEATING. Great. Actually, at the end of that hearing, I made quite a point of the fact that the civic forum requirement had just drifted away and had not been followed up at all. And I agree with that. I think if you want to engage people, they have to have the opportunity to engage.

So, I am pleased to recognize for questions Representative Meuser from the State of Pennsylvania.

Representative Meuser, you have 5 minutes or more, if you would like, for questions.

Mr. MEUSER. Thank you, Chairman Keating. Thank you all very much. And, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick. I appreciate you holding this hearing and this discussion. Very, very revealing, very informative, educational.

I appreciate the specifics, but also the passion that our witnesses our speaking to us, all three, or four.

I did have the occasion of visiting Ireland a number of years ago, or 10 years ago or so, on a vacation, not for really any other reason. Family has Irish ties, as most do, it seems, as did the family I drove with, and we saw family there. And it was just a wonderful experience, and I am surprised I haven't been back.

When I came back, I was asked why didn't I go to Northern Ireland, and I really didn't have a good answer for it. And I said, my next trip, that is where I need to go. So, that has stuck with me and that will be my plan.

Dr. O'Lynn, I would like to just start with you, please. You mentioned you dedicated your life to—and I think you said—inclusionary or very much of the main focus of much of your statements, how non-inclusionary are the schools and the children, and the lack of diversity. Could you just expand upon that a little bit, what your dedication would be in the most specific terms you can?

Dr. O'LYNN. Yes, of course. So, what I mean when I say that is I am dedicating my career to creating opportunities for the most excluded and marginalized youth to have their voices heard, but not just heard, but also acted upon.

So, for example, in Northern Ireland, we have the Washington Ireland Program. We have Youth Forum by the department of education, and we also have a Youth Parliament. But, traditionally, the young people that engage in those things are not involved in riots; they are not involved in criminality. There is a class divide as well as a sectarian divide. And I believe my place in this world is to act as a conduit to communicate the voices of exploited youth to decisionmakers and, indeed, I am part of the entity, the exact theme down the line.

Mr. MEUSER. And who is pushing against you? Who is against this inclusion? Who is keeping, for instance, Ms. Girvin from meeting a Catholic by the time she is 14 years old?

Dr. O'LYNN. I do not want to speak on behalf of Ms. Girvin because I know she is more than capable of speaking herself, but I think, as I mentioned earlier, there is three levels of societal organizations: structural, community, and individual.

I think there are structural barriers keeping our communities apart in terms of living, in terms of education, and in terms of equal opportunities at a cultural level. You know, our communities are still separated by walls, as a very physical manifestation of how people are kept apart. Generally, society runs along quite well. We have mixed workplaces, but we do not have the level of opportunity for the most marginalized youth to come together at an early age and learn how to navigate society.

And it has been applicable that, when we have those structural, cultural, and community barriers, that at an individual level, you will feel not just incapable, but unworthy of interacting on the forums and the opportunities that I have mentioned. In short, these young people that I am talking about need serious, serious capacity-building, serious investment, and dedicated intensive wrap-around services. And that is what I mean when I say that is what my career is dedicated to.

Mr. MEUSER. Yes, and I appreciate that. Do you find—and, Ms. Girvin, I want to get to you; in fact, have you speak for yourself. Do you find the educators are inclined to teach in an inclusionary manner? Is that one of your obstacles or something that you were in conflict with?

Ms. GIRVIN. I would find that—so, I went to a single faith primary school. And from a very early age, I will say that I had very little knowledge about what a Protestant was and what a Catholic was. And my first understanding of what a Catholic was the older kids in my community, and we were told by them that the Catholics had come and vandalized our bus stop. So, to me, at 10 years old, I thought a Catholic was similar to a bogeyman, and we were told we could identify them because their eyes were too far apart.

I do not believe our educators are intentionally exclusionary, but the fact that our education system is set up in a way structurally that, if I lived on the Falls Road, I would attend one school and never meet a Protestant. Likewise, if I lived on the Shankill, I would attend another school and never meet a Catholic.

And the current system in which we would have cross-community engagement, I would say is one-off opportunities and often photo opportunities, and we will stick our young people in orange

and green hoodies and mark them out, rather than enabling them to build relationships with the other side.

And I fell out of school when I was 13–14 and was told that I would amount to very little. And it was thanks to the likes of Dr. O'Lynn who provided that wraparound support and provided an education that empowered me and encouraged me to look at the system that I found myself in and taught me beyond the curriculum. And I was able to become the person I am.

I would like to say that our educational curriculum does not look at the Good Friday Agreement and it does not look at the conflict, potentially, because it is such a hotbed topic and people are uncomfortable to talk about it. So, a lot of our young people actually do not get to learn about the conflict or the peace process, unless they choose to do it optionally at 16.

And this isn't good enough, and this is enabling our young people to get their information from leaders who do not want the best for them. And when I refer to these leaders, I am talking about paramilitary influences.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. MEUSER. Yes, thank you. And whoever might have said to you, tell them, at the age of—I guess you are 24 or 25—that you are advising and directing Congress on how to help improve Northern Ireland, and you are.

Chairman, I appreciate your indulgence. May I have another 90 seconds or so?

Mr. KEATING. Certainly.

Mr. MEUSER. All right. Thank you, Chairman Keating.

So, the only other question for each of you—and, Dr. O'Lynn, perhaps I will start with you, but, then, I would like Mr. Savage to comment. If you were sitting in my seat, you are a Member of Congress from Northern Ireland, what would you do? And Mr. Savage provided us a couple of ideas here, which, frankly, I agree with each and every one of them. Maybe each one of you could just say in a 30-second period or maybe expand a little bit, what would you do, if you were in my seat, to help the relationship with Northern Ireland and help Northern Ireland in general?

Dr. O'Lynn?

Dr. O'LYNN. Thirty seconds, no question.

I would absolutely to establish a U.S. Envoy to Northern Ireland and work to establish a civic forum, as the exponential broker that used to be in the past.

There are others things I haven't had the chance to talk about today, such as investing in the direct transition process away from paramilitarism and providing people a table. And my main cry would be that we work together to establish a bespoke initiative specifically for youth who have been incarcerated, who have engaged in rioting, and who are suffering with any of the social ills I mentioned previously, in a similar format to the Washington Ireland Program.

Mr. MEUSER. Thank you.

Mr. Savage?

Mr. KEATING. Yes, Mr. Savage wants to respond, Representative.

Mr. SAVAGE. In my written submission, I noted a couple of these ideas. But I think I do sum this up—and I will repeat this a num-

ber of times today—that the United States focus on protecting the Good Friday Agreement needs to be supplemented with implementing it. So, what the United States needs to be focusing on is the civic forum and trying to bring a civic forum back, which is permitted in the Good Friday Agreement.

My suggestion on integrated education would be that integrated education in Northern Ireland, I think the latest figure suggests that almost 70 percent of parents and 90 percent of the whole population supports integrated education. So, it is very much tragic that it has not been implemented. And that is because our politicians kind of worked right away to make it happen, but they won't offend anyone or compromise their own beliefs.

So, the United States' place there would be to fund an international panel of experts from across the world, non-Northern Irish, who will act independently to come up a plan for our education system to transition to a place of integrated education. And that would be my suggestion, and I think that it is possibly the most worthwhile thing you can do for Northern Ireland, to help us muddle through the transition to reconciliation in terms of education.

I would also suggest that the United States needs to understand that Senator George Mitchell moved a mountain when he helped us negotiate the Good Friday Agreement. And the United States' involvement in our peace process should not end there; it should begin there.

And I think that, after this election, if we end up in a situation where, as a consequence of the current political climate in Northern Ireland, we do not have a government, the United States needs to step up and offer an independent chair to chair the negotiations between the parties to get back into government.

The United States, with its history in Northern Ireland, has an incredible sway over our politicians. I think that we need to really see the United States begin to use that.

And, I mean, the integrated education commission I think should be a priority in Northern Ireland. Because if you really want to talk about reconciliation, you need to make sure that young people like myself and Ms. Girvin do not get to the age of 14 without meeting a Protestant. We need to make sure that, when I am sitting in my primary school class at the age of 4, I am learning to read and write with a Protestant beside me.

And I would say as well, outside of the classroom, when it comes to investing in programs in the interim, you need to invest in programs that do not put our young people beside one another and say, "You're a Catholic. You're a Protestant. Let's make you friends." You need to invest in programs that teach young people how to write a resume, how to do their taxes, or programs like the organization I founded, which said to young people, let's give you a voice in your education. So, you need to invest in programs that are beneficial to us not as Catholics or beneficial to us as Protestants, but beneficial to us as people and in our development.

So, I think that those are some key "asks" that I would have. I honestly believe that you need to also step in on the other issues which are plaguing our society, like compensation for victims. So, many of the victims of our conflict have still received no compensa-

tion for what they have been through. It is a sticking point in every political discussion in Northern Ireland that relates to the conflict. It is one of the reasons we find it difficult to talk about the past. And that is somewhere that the United States could act as an intermediary.

Your role as a country in Northern Ireland and as an influencer is to help us sit at the table and to chair the talks, and act as an independent mediator. When it is the British government or the Irish government, and now, the EU as well, there is a perception by one side that a side is being taken. The United States is independent. It is powerful and it has immense sway over us.

So, I think that that is a sleeping dragon of assistance that needs to be awakened as urgently as possible, and I think that the key "ask" for me would be a panel of experts funded by the United States to help us into the transition in our education system.

Mr. MEUSER. All right. Well, thank you. Chairman, I am——

Mr. KEATING. The chair will recognize Representative Malliotakis——

Mr. LYNCH. I am happy to——

Mr. KEATING. If we could hear briefly from Mr. Lynch on that?

Mr. LYNCH. I will be very brief, and I will echo some of Mr. Savage's comments.

I think, in respect to integrated education, I think back to 2003, when Richard Haass had a huge part to play in Northern Ireland reconciliation. He made a very poignant statement about integrated education, and that made waves back in 2003.

And even if the United States administration could set out their position on integrated education, then that in itself could have a really good impact.

And one other point to remember, when you do visit Northern Ireland, please make contact with us and visit an integrated school. When George Bush visited Loughview Integrated Primary School in 2008, again, that was a real show of strength. So, when the Member does visit Northern Ireland, please make sure to visit an integrated school.

Mr. MEUSER. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Incidentally, we did have a congressional delegation visit planned. It was interrupted with COVID issues. And part of that was to go to an integrated school.

I would like now to recognize, from New York, Representative Malliotakis.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Thank you very much, Chairman.

I am very impressed with the young people that we have here today.

I have been to Ireland twice. I was a member of the State legislature prior to coming to Congress, and with the Irish legislators, I was able to visit. And we did go to Northern Ireland. Very, very impressed. Such a beautiful country, and you are both very fortunate to be from there.

I wanted to just sort of, I guess, followup on some of these questions. And I have to say that I am very pleased with the United States history also and its involvement in the Good Friday Agreement.

And the Good Friday Agreement States that facilitation and encouragement of integrated education and mixed housing are essential in the reconciliation process. But, despite this, education in Northern Ireland remains highly segregated along sectarian lines with only 7 percent of schools being formally integrated. And you touched on this today, as to why it is so important and your desire to see more integration.

Most recently, in March of this year, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed legislation which places a statutory duty on the department of education to provide further support to the integrated school sector.

A two-part question: are you hopeful? Does that legislation make you hopeful? And, No. 2, what are some of the other areas where we need to tackle this segregation? I believe housing is another issue. If you can talk a little bit about those?

Mr. LYNCH. Absolutely, and, in fact, thank you very much for your question.

And the first part of the question, are we hopeful? Absolutely, for a number of reasons. If nothing else, what this piece of legislation has brought to the fore is a very active debate. We recognize that this day 1 week is our Assembly elections. So, we will be electing like six MLAs, and they are all now out on the doorsteps asking their constituents what issues matter to them. And now more than ever, one of the most common responses is educating our children together.

So, this is now very much at the fore of people's minds. We have been living in this hiatus since the Good Friday Agreement of just struggling to get to the next stage. And now, this is at the very fore of the debate. So, if nothing else, that is a really positive step forward.

As I made reference in some way in my opening statement, there have been many reports and reviews around educational reform in Northern Ireland. There was an independent review into integrated education that took place a number of years ago. There were provisions set out in the Good Friday Agreement, the initial Education Order of 1989. There is an abundance of literature, also, on this topic area.

But, still, we have struggled to make substantive change when it comes to implementation. So, with that, as much as I am hopeful, I am cautious. And I think a key deciding factor to how it will play out over the coming weeks and months will be the outcome of our elections this time next week. That will really set the playing field in terms of their education ministries and their interpretation of the legislation.

It does place a statutory duty to facilitate and encourage integrated education, but, with that in mind, we have had, you know, equally, a number of pieces of legislation that have kind of come close to that in the past, but we still haven't managed to get over the line.

In terms of other issues to reference, housing is something you also alluded to. I think this is a wide-encompassing puzzle. I recognize that integrated education will not be the single answer to reconciliation in Northern Ireland. There is a number of challenges around geography-imposing, as reference, and also, just around en-

suring that we have this continued debate around issues that matter.

We have referenced climate change. We have referenced mental health and the cost-of-living crisis. These all play into a wide sort of facet of activities that we need to start to debate. That is where we come back to the initial agreement, as set out in 1989, that really puts into play the idea and where we can start to implement the best way to live in a reconciled society.

And that is why I think looking to one or two key "asks." When we talk about a civic forum and when we talk about continually implementing the Good Friday Agreement, that's really the next stage to continuing the process.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Well, thank you.

If anyone else wants to add to that, that is fine. Or else, I do have one additional—would you like to add?

Ms. GIRVIN. Yes. Yes.

Mr. SAVAGE. I will speak first.

On the question just about am I hopeful, following the integrated education bill, I am a big supporter of that bill. I read that bill. I thought it was fabulous. It was one of the real first strides where we have integrated education.

But what didn't make me hopeful was the reaction to that bill among the Assembly members. There was a campaign to kill that bill that was waged by one of our political parties, where they really, really put out attack ads on social media and everything against individual members of the Assembly, just to try to make sure that bill wouldn't pass. And that, for me, was something that really—I really struggled with it. It really struck me.

Because if people actively wage a campaign to ensure that there isn't additional support given for our young people to be educated together, then you will put all of your political resources and political capital into that. Then, what are your priorities?

So, when I referenced earlier that we needed an independent international commission to come in and try to manage a transition in Northern Ireland for integrated education, that is why. Because our politicians in Northern Ireland, they are out of step with those they represent, in particular, on the issue of integrated education. So, I just wanted to note that, in particular.

Mr. KEATING. I think Ms. Girvin wanted to answer that, too.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. And I have an additional question, if I may, after——

Mr. KEATING. Did you want to answer that, too, Ms. Girvin?

Ms. GIRVIN. Yes, if that would be OK.

Mr. KEATING. Certainly.

Ms. GIRVIN. I will answer the previous question as well.

And when asked what I would advise, and used to deny, I would say that, while integrated education is very, very important, I would also like to State that it is not as easy as saying, "Let's integrate the school." And our geography and our very maps are lined by "no-go" areas and interface areas in which violence often occurs.

And I would also like to point out that, while it has been mentioned that our young people are some of the best achievers in terms of A levels, some of the most marginalized young people that Dr. O'Lynn works with do not achieve five A-to-C GCSEs, which,

then, increases their exclusion from better opportunities of education, employment, and training.

And I would say I am hopeful for the future, but, as a young person living here, I see young people resentful of the slow process of change. And many of our great young minds are moving away and we are losing that talent, and we are losing our creativity and that imagination.

What I would suggest that you see next time you are there having a visit in Northern Ireland, come and speak to some of our amazing young leaders and come and speak to some of our community leaders who are on the ground and doing the work.

When we were talking about the violence last summer, it was young people on the ground talking to other young people and asking them, "Why are you engaging in this? You know, you're the one who is going to end up with the criminal record, not the people who are pulling the strings and cheering you on from the sidelines."

And so, I would say, come speak to our young leaders. Empower them. Look at initiatives, like in our city, that are on the ground, encouraging the most marginalized young people to come see beyond what happened at a bus stop on Friday night on Falls Road or what happened on a Saturday.

I also wanted to encourage our politicians to take a stand and actually work with us, rather than fight these issues, and initiate top-down truth initiatives that can inform a better curriculum in which to learn about the conflict and the peace process here.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Thank you.

And my additional question is for Dr. O'Lynn, or anyone else who would like to weigh in.

I am curious, from your perspective, how has Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol impacted the lives of people in Northern Ireland, and if you see a practical change to day-to-day lives.

Dr. O'LYNN. So, that is a great question. In short, I think what Brexit has done, it has stoked divisions that were previously lying a little bit lower than what they were in the past. Personally, I have not seen massive destruction to my life. Northern Ireland has always struggled with getting certain packages or access to different materials from different markets. I do not believe that Brexit has made that any worse. Indeed, I believe we are in an advantageous situation where we have the best of both worlds. Very few people are focusing on the positives that can come out of this situation.

In terms of education, I would say—sorry—and exclusion, I would say that no school or exclusion society exists in a vacuum. There are microcosms of society, and the educators I work with daily report that, in some instances, things have become more polarized within the classrooms and they see more extreme behavior and behavioral responses, not just as a result of Brexit, but, indeed, the global pandemic.

And if you will indulgence me just a minute longer, I would like to just nuance on some of the responses that the panel gave to the previous question.

And I am delighted to hear Michael and Courtney nuance the statements about integrated education because it is so important

that we realize that, whilst it is an important movement, it is not the panacea.

Now I will put it in context before I end up in trouble in work tomorrow. It is my own party that brought that piece of legislation. I am a deep supporter of integrated education, but it is based on contact theory; i.e., you bring young people together. You educate them. You send them back to segregated communities, and they go back to the segregation. So, we still need to really focus and hone in on integrating housing.

But, also, more importantly, what integrated education does bear is endorse critical thinking and challenge young people to reflect on their perspectives; and also, to challenge themselves to think beyond their binary thinking.

And just one more point, if I may. This may be slightly cheeky. One place in the education system that is wholly integrated is our school exclusion centers, because, as Ms. Girvin said earlier, they do not have the financial luxury of being separate. The resources are low. So, if you are excluded or removed from the mainstream system, you are put into an integrated school exclusion center, if you are lucky. And there are deep lessons that can be learned there.

Mr. KEATING. OK. Thank you.

I would like to recognize Representative Titus from Nevada for 5 minutes.

Representative Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to followup on some comments that were made to the previous question about young people's general engagement.

I taught political science at the university level for many years. And at times, students were very engaged. Sometimes they were very liberal, more so than the teacher. Sometimes they were more conservative than the teacher. Sometimes they didn't really care who was in politics.

Now I know you all are very engaged. I am kind of preaching to the choir here. But I wonder about young people in general.

In this country, 18-to 25-year-olds are the least likely to vote. They do not turn out. But there are some who are very engaged and they seem to engage around issues like the environment, something that everybody can kind of get together on.

I wonder how, generally, young people are in terms of voting patterns, or what issues might unite you, like environment. Any of you can answer.

Mr. SAVAGE. If I can speak to this, given my experience working with young people in the Secondary Students' Union for the past 2 years.

One thing that I will note is that a lot of our young people might not engage in the political process in the way we expect them to or want them to. And that is because they do not feel it reflects them.

I mean, if you look at the Northern Ireland news in the last month, it has been about Brexit; it has been about the Northern Ireland Protocol. And as I noted earlier, a lot of young people do feel disconnected, unsurprisingly, from trade tariffs. It is not some-

thing that they particularly understand, and myself included a lot of the time, or are passionate about.

But what I note is, when I was in the Secondary Students' Union, we brought young people in, young people who maybe didn't know the most about politics, weren't that engaged in public life. But, as soon as we gave them a vehicle and invited them to deal with an issue that they all understood, it was education; it was what they lived; it was there every day. They were talking about the issues that were 9 to 3:30 for them every day. And once we gave them a vehicle and a platform to engage on those issues, that opened the door to them, engagement on larger issues.

So, what we did was, in the Secondary Students' Union, our initial campaign was about A-level grading, and then, we moved after that to examinations in the next year in the context of the coronavirus.

But, then, we realized that we really had an opportunity here. We had a lot of young people engaging in this work that had never really engaged before. So, what we did then was we started to look at mental health. We offered a mental health report which was massive in policymaking in Northern Ireland, and I am very, very grateful the policymakers took it very seriously. It was based on a survey of 3,000 young people—I am sorry—2,300. In 24 hours, we were able to get 2,300 young people to respond to a survey on mental health.

Ms. TITUS. Wow.

Mr. SAVAGE. And for me, if that does not say we are engaged, we care, then I do not know what does.

And we moved after that to, then, look at issues at our annual conference on everything from the environment and its sustainability to LGBTQ rights. And honestly, education we used to get people involved. And the reason that more young people aren't involved or voting, as you noted, Representative, in the political process is because they do not feel it reflects or represents them.

If you look at the order of business in the Northern Ireland Assembly, chances are most of it will be sort of esoterical legislation that young people do not understand, and maybe it does not impact them.

But, if we can make sure that opportunities to engage on issues that impact young people and reflect their needs are given to them, then that opens the door to engagement that goes far, far beyond that.

Ms. GIRVIN. I would also agree with what Cormac had said. And I think engagement with politics is—there are different ways that we can engage in politics. Of course, we can go differently and we can put our number—here, we have two voting systems. We can do our STV 1, 2, 3, or when we are voting with our Westminister elections, we can put our "X" on a box.

And I think part of the issue and why young people do not engage in politics, traditionally, is because we do not have the education, and our curriculum is not set up to deliver political education, nor is it set up to deliver local historical education, either.

And as I said previously, it is only until you reach the age of 16 that you can have that optional module of history, and even then,

it is not taught. Likewise, the first time I engaged in political education was when I was 17 at A level.

But I would say that young people engage in politics every day on the ground, and many of our young people have been the ones leading the teams to have these bills that we have now seen that are much more progressive for Northern Ireland come through the Assembly.

Like Stop Street Harassment NI has worked with our justice minister, Naomi Long, and worked on getting cat calling and make it illegal. Likewise, we have a lot of climate unrest, and our young people engage in the strikes for climate. These are all political actions. Whether we see it as important as putting an "X" box or not, these are political actions that our young people are taking every day. And——

Ms. TITUS. But do you think the young people will have an impact on the upcoming election? Do politicians seek you out and try to encourage young people to vote?

Ms. GIRVIN. I do not think so. I think the way that our political system is set up is why we share a card with the consultational system. It is orange-and-green politics. So, they have very traditional voter voices, particularly, our dominant Unionist Party, the DUP. And I do not think they are interested in what young people have to say. They are not interested in the issues that young people are interested in. And they do position themselves against what young people are interested in. They are anti-LGBT. They are anti-human rights.

But, as I say, our young people push on the ground. They set up organizations. They lobby other political parties to bring their views and issues forth. And thankfully, with the reform of the Petition of Concern, the DUP can no longer use what was meant to be a safety net to block these issues.

But I would say I have seen changes in the arrangement of the local institutions. We have seen more Green MLAs be elected. We have seen the likes of People Before Profit be elected. These are parties that did not get elected prior to the peace generation being able to vote.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you very much. It is always encouraging to me to see young people. You are the agents of change. And so, it is nice to hear how involved you are and you are getting others as well.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

The chair will now recognize Mr. Titus from Minnesota.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Oh, Mr. Phillips, right. Right?

[Laughter.]

Mr. KEATING. We just had Ms. Titus. Mr. Phillips—I am sorry—from Minnesota.

Ms. TITUS. I haven't gotten married lately to Mr. Phillips.

[Laughter.]

Mr. KEATING. Yes. Well, he is not on right now and he is not elected. You are, Representative Titus.

So now, it is Representative Phillips from Minnesota.

Mr. PHILLIPS. OK. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And greetings, everybody.

Having spent some wonderful time in Belfast and done business in Portaferry, of all places, I have great affection for Northern Ireland.

I am so grateful to all of you for joining us today.

My question is about housing. After the agreement was signed in 1998, I know that there was a distinct effort and a commitment between the U.K. and Northern Ireland to provide public housing to those who wished to live in multi-denomination communities. And despite that, I know most people still live in segregated communities, despite an overwhelming majority of those surveyed wanting to cohabitate in communities with both major religions.

So, my question is, how is housing driving either division or opportunities to provide more reconciliation? And starting with anybody who wishes to take the question.

Ms. GIRVIN. I am, I suppose, speaking anecdotally. And as I said, I lived in a segregated area of Northern Ireland, and I lived close to an interface area. So, I suppose to clarify an "interface area," it is when a majority Loyalist area and a majority Republican area are on like a boundary. So, we can see each other from across the road. And normally, this is where the likes of bottles and bricks and things are thrown at each other in the summer months.

But just up the road from where I grew up, we did have an integrated parties project, for lack of a better word. And I had an opportunity to speak to some of the young people there, and it flourished. But, as tends to be the case, when political tensions are high, and when issues of Brexit and things like that become orange-and-green issues, our paramilitaries are very much active.

And what happened in that particular community was paramilitary leadership went in and they told the Nationalists living in that area that this was not an area that they were to live in. They broke the policy of having no flags, as a lot of these integrated housing areas will try to keep the space neutral, of course, for obvious reasons. The flags went up, and shortly afterwards, it became a Loyalist eState, rather than an integrated area.

And so, I think part of the issue is, when we try to have these projects, and we try to break down these barriers, there are people in our society who want to go back to the past, who enjoy being in a position of control and feeding off the fears of local people in general.

And I know, speaking from when I lived with my mother, I put a Black Lives Matter sign in my window during the height of the George Floyd protests, and my mom was terrified that we were going to be put out. And I said, "Mom, but how come they're allowed to fly a flag that says UVF on it?" I said, "That's a terrorist organization." And she was absolutely petrified that we were going to put out of an eState where we have lived for 20-plus years.

I suppose, while that is not a statistic and while that is not fact-based, that would just be my anecdotal experience of the issues in getting integrated housing.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Housing matters, yes.

Does anybody else want to address that question?

Dr. O'LYNN. Yes, if I could, Congressman?

I think what Ms. Girvin has said is very important, but it is also important to note that, in the areas that remain deeply segregated

by peace lines, there is tremendous activism going on, tremendous efforts at peace work.

I am sure Professor McWilliams highlighted, for example, there is a cross-community women's group that continues to meet on the interface between the Shankill and the Falls Road on a weekly basis that does fantastic peacebuilding work. And more and more, we see young people engaged in cross-community initiatives, where they have the opportunity, trying to do the same thing, build bridges across the divides.

And at times, you do get the sense that it is more the structural and the deviant sort of criminal paramilitary aspects of society that is holding us back, which creates a hesitancy of a readiness. But, still, I believe readiness is there.

And also, when we talk about young people and young adults coming through, the majority of young people here who are moving into higher education, further training, or apprenticeships are moving into shared living spaces in the center of the city, and further affiliated with our higher education placement.

There is also a mass class dynamic at play here. Those of us who have the privilege to own our own properties opt for neutral areas and opt for neutral areas where the schools are accessible; childcare is good, and there is a good standard of living.

So, I believe the readiness is there, but there are structural criminological aspects that are deterring people and giving the perception that readiness is not there.

Mr. PHILLIPS. OK. I see my time has expired.

I want to thank you all again for joining us today.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you very much, Representative.

And I would just like to say this hearing has been something that I think has been very important. There are a few other issues going on in Europe right now, as we all know, and we have paid a great deal of attention to those issues, as we should. But this is an issue that I think has been very concerning to so many people in the United States, so many Members of Congress, including people that were here that participated in the Good Friday Agreement originally.

But I do think that many of the issues that we have discussed point to this, and I think our witnesses did an extraordinary job of bringing these issues forward. The Good Friday Agreement is fragile. The Good Friday Agreement has been an enormous success in terms of going from point A to point B in terms of violence. However, it hasn't been fully implemented.

And I look back at our own history in the United States. And here in our country after the Civil War, after slavery was abolished, we had a period in the United States where there was such a focus on unity and a union, that we ignored dealing with the issues that had to be dealt with at that time to truly make civil rights real for individuals.

And for decades and decades and decades, we didn't deal with those issues. And the laws that were there and that were put in place going forward weren't implemented successfully. And we are living with, in our own country, the results of not dealing with those issues today.

And I think you brought forward that the issues in Northern Ireland, segregation that still is very real in terms of the actual day-to-day lives hasn't been dealt with, either. And the idea that I think Mr. Savage brought up that, as we move forward on these issues and want to engage a new generation, we have to broaden our roles, too, in terms of other issues of interest that are just, some of them, existential like climate change, that can bring people together. Once people are together and working on those issues, that facilitates things greatly.

We are also remembering here in our own history Jackie Robinson, a baseball player who broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. And, you know, baseball was a common interest, but it was that intervention that helped, I think was a major point in our moving forward in our own country. And we saw the same thing in South Africa with soccer.

But we have critical existential issues in front of us and things necessary for a generation of people's progress: education, housing issues that you mentioned. So, these are common areas that will bring people forth, I think, in a very meaningful way.

But I think, fairly or unfairly, the success of the Good Friday Agreement in fully being implemented is going to rest on your generation. That is why I think this is so important. It is unfortunate that it has been the case, but I do believe you will be the "make it or break it" generation.

And I became so concerned—and I think Dr. O'Lynn mentioned this in her testimony—when I began to hear years ago how a new generation of violence is springing forward. And that was a generation that did not have the direct connection to that time period of the Troubles. And that is something that should be of great concern as well.

So, we have to come together on these issues. And I think, as we did with our past hearing, the idea of civic forums, engagement in that respect; the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all aspects has to be dealt with.

And the timing of this hearing, it is coming at a very important time as well, because the elections are just days away. And when I was in London and spoke to Foreign Minister Truss about the urgency in dealing with some of the protocol issues in Brexit and getting it behind us before these elections, it was a great concern because we saw the government devolve around some of those issues. And I believe, all of us here believe that division is much deeper than the protocol issue.

And if we cannot reconcile this, and the outcome of those elections should be, for instance, if Sinn Fein wins, and this is the first minister, is that going to result in a devolution again? Are we going to keep going backward in a cycle?

So, what all of you have expressed here, all four of our witnesses identifying where we are in a very real sense, that is where you begin to move forward, acknowledging the fact that things have not been implemented; that we haven't gone forward with the things that are already on our plate before—we can pretend that we are moving forward without dealing with that, but these things have to be done. But it will be done with your generation.

I think the programs that we had, like the Washington Ireland Program that Dr. O'Lynn participated in, she said today that changed her life. And look at how she has moved forward herself in a leadership role, trying to make those changes.

And you two have, with your leadership and your connection with your organizations, you are doing the same thing. It is so important, and we are here to help.

The United States, I take great pride anytime I am talking to someone from Ireland, when they say, "You were the indispensable partner in the Good Friday Agreement," that is something that I think all of us here in Congress, as well as so many citizens in the United States, feel we are a part of that success. Well, if we are a part of it, I hope we can continue to be a part of it, and hopefully, become indispensable in terms of assisting all of you in what you have to do to make sure that is fully implemented, and then, go beyond there.

So, this has been a very important hearing to me. I think it is an important hearing to those who care about the progress that is necessary in Ireland, given the fact that so much progress has already occurred.

And I think a generation is necessary, not just to come together, but to move us forward on these other issues. I was first elected in the Massachusetts legislature when I was 23 years old. And at that time, people said the biggest reason they shouldn't have elected me, I was too young. Hopefully, I will be out of here before they say I am too old.

[Laughter.]

But the real issue is this: that you are dedicating so much of your lives now and your attention, and your great talents, toward this. If we can be helpful—I think you heard from the members of this committee that asked questions the tone—in fact, some substance of those questions—was, indeed, what can we do to be helpful?

I think we can engage. I think we could do things as we had planned, and hopefully, can reconstitute coming back, showing interest by visiting schools that have desegregated, albeit only 7 percent of them are. I think we can engage on issues of climate change together.

And I think that a person very interested in this hearing today, who made an effort to come, was Ambassador Mulhall. And he is very importantly involved in promoting a group in the U.S. college system for Irish involvement for the American students. So, maybe that is another network to tap into as well. I will be talking with him later today.

But, in any case, thank you for what you are doing. Thank you, Ms. Girvin. Thank you, Dr. O'Lynn.

This has been a hearing where we took the virtual hearing and the physical hearing and put it together. I think, other than a few minor snags, it went very well.

I want to thank you for being here. And we are here to continue to work together at a cause that not only is important to Ireland, but you could go all around the world, and you could do it in the United States.

As we did with the Good Friday Agreement, when I go to other parts of the world where the causes of conflict seem hopeless, I always point to the Good Friday Agreement, but we have to finish the job and inspire not only young people in Ireland, but young people globally, and particularly young people here in the United States, to also engage in working together on those very important common goals.

So, with that, this hearing is adjourned. Thank you. Thank you so much.

[Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber

William R. Keating (D-MA), Chair

April 28, 2022

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building by the Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber. Pursuant to H. Res. 8, Members who wish to participate remotely may do so via Cisco WebEx (and available by live webcast on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/):

DATE: Thursday, April 28, 2022

TIME: 10:00 a.m., EDT

LOCATION: 2172 Rayburn House Office Building

SUBJECT: The Role of Young People in Fostering Peace in Northern Ireland

WITNESSES: Patricia O'Lynn, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Politics in Action

Michael Lynch
Chair of Trustees
Integrated AlumNI

Cormac Savage
Honorary President
Secondary Students Union of Northern Ireland

Courtney Girvin
MA, Conflict Transformation and Social Justice

By Direction of the Chair

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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Europe, Energy, the Environment, & Cyber* HEARING

Day *Thursday* **Date** *04/28/2022* **Room** *2172 RHOB*

Starting Time *10:08* **Ending Time** *11:46*

Recesses ____ (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

William R. Keating

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☑
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To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

The Role of Young People in Fostering Peace in Northern Ireland

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☑ **No** ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Dr. Patricia O'Lynn's Testimony
Mr. Michael Lynch's Testimony
Mr. Cormac Savage's Testimony
Ms. Courtney Girvin's Testimony

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *11:46*

Julia Ellings
Subcommittee Staff Associate

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

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