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DURKAN: OBAMA RECOGNISES SOLIDITY OF NI INSTITUTIONS

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On returning home today to Northern Ireland from a visit to the US which included meeting the new President Barack Obama at the White House, Foyle MP Mark Durkan said:

“I can report back that we found a very warm mood and positive mindset from the St Patrick's Day events in Washington. The new President embraced Ireland and Irish America in a way that could only make others jealous and make us all proud. Even before the President's powerful contributions on St Patrick's Day there was a very clear and strong will that violence must not deflect the democratic determination of the institutions created by the Good Friday Agreement.

“American politicians and others showed a proper concern about the fact of recent violence but they also showed a real regard for the fact that all parties in the Assembly had conveyed a strong united message. I believe it was important that that common determination was voiced in what we all said in the States as well as in what we were saying at home.

“We were able to reassure our friends that contrary to some of the language used by network commentators flown in after the recent murders that there was “no wobble” of our institutions. I equally stressed that we are determined that there would be no wavering from the new policing environment either. People there readily recognised that those now using violence want to see politics set back and policing set back.

“I was able to point out that recent events prove that the institutions now have a life of their own. There isn't any question mark against the Assembly, the Executive or anything else.

“When we created the joint office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister we argued that it could offer a powerful symbolic response to any subversive challenge to the institutions, and so it is proved following the clear united line of all the parties in the Assembly.

“Our American friends also recognised that we had always said that full engagement in the new beginning of policing by all parties would also reinforce the democratic institutions as well as ensure an appropriate, proportionate and properly supported police response to any violence from dissident elements.

“For our part, I argued that the logic of all this is that we should see the completion of Justice and Policing

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as soon as possible and in accordance with the provisions and promises of the Good Friday Agreement.

“American political leaders and Irish Americans are mindful of the different positions of parties on how to take some of those decisions forward, but were particularly respectful of, and encouraged by, the unity of purpose that the parties mustered in the aftermath of the awful murders.”

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