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Remarks by
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Nine months seems like a short time. But the past nine months is the longest period of unbroken peace in Northern Ireland in a quarter century. In the silence of the guns, hope has been reborn in Northern Ireland. It has been joined by a twin: opportunity.

The purpose of this conference is to build on hope by creating opportunity.

The business of this conference is to take advantage of new opportunities -- to take mutual advantage. No one -- not in this country, not in Northern Ireland, not in Ireland -- wants a handout. Dependency breeds dependency. It builds nothing.

I've met with many people in Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland, people with different backgrounds, of different faiths, holding different political views. I expected a chasm of differences that might take a generation or more to bridge. I found instead the foundation of that bridge already in place. Across the wide span of that society, all agree that a good job is the best social program, steady work the strongest safeguard against the conditions that breed hatred and violence. This is the clear message I heard from all sides: the United States can be most helpful by encouraging trade with and investment in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

Many have asked why, after having been Majority Leader of the United States Senate, I accepted the position of Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State for Economic Initiatives in Ireland. The answer is simple. I want to do my part in what I believe will be an historic transformation. Anyone even remotely familiar with the history of the region must recognize

the significance of this moment. The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 set in train the sequence of events that brings us together today. The vision and courage of British and Irish leaders, of Prime Ministers John Major and John Bruton, and Albert Reynolds before him, have laid an unswerving course. President Clinton seized the opportunity to contribute to the peace process. He has chosen a wise, prudent course. I am proud to be a part of this effort to promote commerce in the service of peace.

Increased trade provides mutual benefit to open societies with open markets such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States Studies. Studies show time and again that trade creates and sustains jobs on both sides of the exchange. To take but one example: Exports from the U.S. to affiliates of U.S. companies in Europe comprise 30% of our exports to Europe. These exports represent jobs in America that otherwise would not exist.

Many of you will have a chance to investigate business partnerships during panel discussions this afternoon and tomorrow morning. There is much being done and still much to do.

Significant Economic development assistance is being provided by the European Union, under the leadership of Commissioner Wulf-Mathies. EU infrastructure programs supply the sinew to strengthen the economic muscle of the area for the long haul. The EU's response to peace in Northern Ireland was quick and generous, an additional \$400 million for projects intended to help those with the least in Northern Ireland and the six border counties. This is on top of an impressive array of ongoing programs, including the outstanding joint Interreg program which seeks to develop crossborder cooperation primarily through enhancement of the communications infrastructure. These ambitious and successful EU-supported programs continuing through the end of this century, will make Northern Ireland and the border counties even more attractive places to do business.

The EU is also a part of the extraordinary international partnership that is the International Fund for Ireland. Created almost a decade ago, this consortium of nations, including the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union, has been of immense assistance. Nearly 3,000 programs have created almost 30,000 jobs. Perhaps most importantly, the development and implementation of IFI programs instill and reinforce the virtues and habits of cooperation within and among communities. The IFI projects I have seen are most impressive; even the smallest in scale yield benefits, beyond their size, in building community spirit.

At the national level, the governments of the United Kingdom

and Ireland pour vast resources into blighted areas for urban and rural regeneration. This is public investment that complements and fosters private enterprise.

Public officials working in tandem with community groups and private individuals to promote the common good: that is an ideal that citizens north and south work hard to realize. Making Belfast Work is one of many examples of public-private partnerships that provide resources for the community development that creates the conditions to welcome business with open arms.

The joint IBEC-CBI Council works for the benefit of businessmen and entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland and the border counties. Groups such as Co-Operation North advance mutual understanding and respect by promoting practical cooperation by means of exchanges, training, and seminars.

I must also mention the spirit of partnership that evokes the best impulses of people on both sides of the Atlantic. The ties that bind us are old, tight and thick. I can only begin to mention all the extraordinary work that goes on day after day among people from all walks of life and points of view. From the Ferris Scholars, training managers of the future from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with substantial private, corporate, and government support to the Habitats for Humanity using sweat equity to build homes in Belfast, Americans are making more and more connections with the people of Northern Ireland.

These include institutions of learning. The Distance Learning Consortium for International Management in the United States and the European Union, just formed by five partners, including Queen's University and the University of Ulster of Northern Ireland, and Virginia Commonwealth University, Portland State University, and Montana State University in the United States.

I am confident that this Conference will promote these links and encourage more partnerships, business-to-business, people-to-people. Sustained business development is not a few deals that fade with yesterday's headlines. Sustained business development is the thorough, methodical building on the fundamentals of community, industry, and plain hard work. This Conference is not an end in itself. It is the beginning of a process which will require a long, sustained effort.

A final word to American businessmen, especially those with no previous experience in Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland. Based on what I have seen, I believe that you will find eager, able, and willing partners at all levels of

society: national and local governments friendly to business, community organizations creating local conditions conducive to business, and individual citizens with sharp minds and strong loads, anxious to work with you and for you for mutual benefit and profit.

About a hundred years ago, a young penniless couple left Ireland seeking opportunity in a new land of promise. For them, life in America was harsh. Much was new, but there was little promise, and their children ended up in an orphanage. For the children life was a little less harsh, but it was still very difficult.

But as so often happened with immigrants to America, the full promise of opportunity was realized by the next generation.

One of the orphaned sons of Irish immigrants was my father. Because of the openness of American society and because of the dynamic combination of peace, freedom and opportunity, I was able to become the leader of the United States Senate.

I know that I speak for many Americans when I say that nothing could give me greater gratification than to help in the process of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, to enable the people there - all of the people there - to enjoy the full benefits of peace, freedom, and opportunity.

Hope and opportunity have been reborn in Northern Ireland. Now we must nourish them.