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by fax



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Washington

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Dear Jonathan,

CHICAGO INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

1. I have tried, but failed, to have a word with you and/or David Watkins in Belfast about my letter of 15 December, and the political problems we face concerning the organisation of an investment conference in Chicago next summer.

2. I now attach a further note by my colleague Robert Culshaw recording the views of Chuck Meissner. I think this reinforces the need for us to be clear how you/Belfast would like us to respond to the Administration. Once you are back from your well-earned Christmas break, could we have a word? Alternatively, I should be very happy to discuss with whoever else in London or Belfast is in the lead on this.

Peter Westmacott

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cc: Mr Watkins, NIO(B)
Mr Gibson, NIO(B)
Mr Lamont, RID, FCO
Chancery, Dublin
Mr Culshaw, BE Washington
Mr Alexander, BE Washington
Minister, BE Washington
Mr McDonald, BE Washington

TO: Mr Westmacott

From: Robert Culshaw

Date: 21 December 1995

cc: Don Alexander
PS
Minister
Ms Life

IRELAND INVESTMENT CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO

1. I tackled Chuck Meissner (Assistant Secretary, at Commerce) about this yesterday. He repeated the standard line about how the initiative had arisen (without mentioning Jean Kennedy Smith): the Irish Government had put it forward, and Brown - immediately after seeing four Irish Ministers - had unveiled it to the press without inserting the usual careful formula about geographical coverage. No detailed planning had yet been done. But it would now be very difficult to redefine the conference geographically, to include only Northern Ireland and the six border counties.
2. I explained our concerns about the effect on the peace process. Meissner entirely understood, but could offer little comfort. He did however say that the current thinking was that the Chicago conference would be run by Department of Commerce, not a White House affair. It might therefore be possible to avoid presenting it as the successor to the May 95 Washington conference (comment: a forlorn hope, in my view). He added that there was also a practical difficulty over available resources to staff and manage another conference: his Irish team at Commerce were already engaged on a spring mission dealing with information technology, and a summer mission on agrobusiness (no doubt Don Alexander has details). They would be hard put to handle a Chicago event on the same scale as last May's. (comment: this does not bode well for HMA's idea of inserting a third conference).
3. It is clear from the tone of Meissner and other Commerce officials that they are uncomfortable with the way this Chicago conference is shaping up, but feel their hands have been tied by their political masters (compare para 3 of Don Alexander's minute to you of 15 December). To influence their thinking, we may therefore need to tackle Ron Brown himself or (if they seem likely to play a major role) senior White House staff directly.

4. Finally, Meissner will be back in Ireland (north and south) in January. I said that if he transited London, we would of course be pleased to offer hospitality and discuss with him a number of non-Irish issues. I have little doubt that, diary permitting, Christopher Roberts would offer him a lunch.

R. Culshaw

R Culshaw
Minister - Counsellor (Trade)