

Daniel Rooney
Ambassador-Designate to Ireland
Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 24, 2009

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, it is my honor to be here today as the President's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Ireland. I would like to thank the President and Secretary Clinton for the confidence they have demonstrated in nominating me. I was always warned against the sin of pride but I offer the following in a spirit of humility and in recognition that I have been blessed by many opportunities in this great nation.

First, I believe that an American Ambassador must have a great love for, and knowledge of, our country and our people and be able to advance the interests of the United States in a professional, effective and creative way. It is my intention to serve in that manner.

I am passionate about America and what we stand for. Like millions of others, I was deeply stirred by President Obama's declaration to people and governments around the world last January, when he said: "Know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more." For me, this is the essence of diplomacy, a belief in the human spirit and that we can improve our world by engagement and development of shared interests, including peace, business and culture.

America has indeed been one of the most generous nations in history, motivated by the memories of countless generations of immigrants who found refuge and prosperity here and who wanted to give something back to the world. And there has been no greater friendship than that between America and Ireland. Millions of Americans of Irish decent have forebears who left their homes and families for the opportunities that America offers and built great lives in all 50 states. Irish Americans have excelled in all walks of life including public service -- as Presidents, Members of Congress, and Supreme Court Justices. But what is particularly important for Ireland is that over the past 30 years, America has played a key role in catalyzing and nurturing peace.

I have been deeply involved in the Irish peace process since the Troubles began in the early 1970s. It is important to remember today that there was nothing preordained about the ultimate success of the peace process. It would not have prevailed without the determined diplomacy and patience of good people in Ireland, the UK and the United States. If ever there was a rousing justification for diplomacy and an example for other conflicts around the world, it is the Irish peace process and its combination of diplomats, Presidents, Taoiseachs, Prime Ministers, political leaders, community leaders, church leaders and especially quiet heroes who never gave up hope.

Today in Ireland, people of all ages will tell you stories about the contributions of Presidents Clinton, Reagan and Bush, of Senators Kennedy, Kerry, Dodd, Mitchell, McCain and so many other great leaders from this body. American diplomacy is the best chance for peace in the world and Ireland is its shining example.

My family is originally from Newry, on the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and in visits to that town and others, I witnessed some of the worst violence and destruction I have ever seen. Moved by this human suffering, in 1976, Sir Anthony O'Reilly and I founded the American Ireland Fund, a charitable effort dedicated to peace, culture and charity in all of Ireland. We embraced Protestants and Catholics, Irish Republicans and British Loyalists. The Fund quickly harnessed the generosity of thousands of Irish Americans, and we spoke at cities all over America, raising awareness about peace and reconciliation, rejecting the politics of violence, and raising funds for causes like integrated schools between Catholics and Protestants. Since that time, the kindness and generosity of so many Irish Americans has led the Fund to become the largest Irish philanthropic organization -- raising over \$300 million dollars, supporting peace, culture, and charity in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Today, Ireland, with the peace process largely intact despite recent atrocities, faces new challenges as a small island buffeted by the winds of recession and financial turmoil. While America and Ireland remain great friends, we should not take our special relationship for granted. There is a tendency to look for scapegoats when faced with hardship and we must remind the world that business innovation, with a social safety net, has served the world very well. Successive Irish governments have been pro-business and this, combined with high education standards and a low corporate tax rate, has

been the foundation of the rapid Irish economic growth. The Irish government is now faced with some tough budget choices, but I am hopeful that the shared American and Irish spirit of resilience, hard work and innovation will help them through these hard times.

I have also had years of experience as a manager of one of the world's most successful sporting franchises, the Pittsburgh Steelers, and as an active member of the NFL. I have managed a diverse and talented group of executives, coaches and players and learned how to recruit talented people. I set stretching goals and hold people accountable for results. I believe in drawing clear boundaries involving teamwork, commitment and trust, and then letting folks get to work with their job. This has been a winning formula for me throughout my life. One of my most gratifying accomplishments has been working to insure diversity hiring goes beyond the playing field into coaches and front office personnel. I am humbled that they have named the NFL's diversity hiring by-law the Rooney Rule.

In conclusion, I believe most Irish people feel a strong attachment to America. I believe we can build on the mutual interests and values to continue to build the rich tapestry of exchanges between America and Ireland. In this respect, I want to pay tribute to all the American leaders who have been so successful in widening and deepening relations between our two countries across politics, business, music, literature, the arts, charity and academia. These men and women, together with their dedicated teams, have served our country with great distinction, professionalism and grace, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. It is my intention to represent this President and our entire nation with that same spirit and dedication.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

