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## America and Ireland: Re-imagining Priorities and Our Community

Report by Ted Smyth

Chair of UCD Clinton Institute Advisory Board

The UCD Clinton Institute and the Washington Ireland Program hosted a timely forum in Washington, DC on November 16 on the changing dynamics of Irish American culture post-Good Friday Agreement, and priorities for the Trump Administration regarding US-Ireland relations. In an introduction to the conference, Professor Liam Kennedy of UCD and Bryan Patten of the Washington Ireland Program said that the intent was to spotlight key issues, including “areas of economic challenge and opportunity, the impact of Brexit, Irish networks in the US, the legacy of the 1916/100 commemorations, the changing dynamics of Irish American culture, and how diaspora linkages between Ireland and the US are evolving.”

The first of two panels focused on “The Challenges and Promise of Irish America’s Future.” In her opening remarks, the Chair of the panel, H.E. Anne Anderson, Ireland’s Ambassador to the US, said she was optimistic about the promise of Irish America, “For over three years, I’ve been to all corners of America and I am so proud when I meet the Irish American community; I am struck by their love, loyalty and sense of engagement with Ireland, their desire to give back to their homeland.” The Ambassador listed the many Irish American organizations such as the AOH, Irish Network USA, GAA, United Irish Counties and numerous educational institutions which had hosted over 300



Pictured at the recent forum in Washington hosted by the UCD Clinton Institute and the Washington Ireland Program are Celine Kennelly, Steve Lenox, Amb. Anne Anderson, Prof. Liam Kennedy, Prof. Maureen Murphy, Niall O’Dowd.

1916 Centenary events, including the Ireland One Hundred three week festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington. She said that the connection between contemporary Ireland and Irish America is improving, especially with the leadership of the Minister for the Diaspora. The Ambassador said the future challenge is that the Irish American community is shrinking because the legal channels for immigration have narrowed and we need immigration reform to address the large numbers of undocumented who are living in the shadows.

Picking up on this theme, Niall O’Dowd, Founder of *Irish America*, *Irish Voice* and *Irish Central.com*, agreed that the second and third generation Irish American community is assimilating rapidly, but that the Internet now enhances communications like never before. Over 3 million Irish Americans are now viewing *Irish Central* online every month, with stories on heritage and roots most popular. “Ireland

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as a brand is unbeatable, we have a huge emotional and mental advantage with over 30 million Americans of Irish descent,” he continued, “and if you can get people to visit Ireland, they’ll fall in love.” As examples, Mr. O’Dowd referenced Vice President-elect Pence and Speaker Paul Ryan who are very proud of their Irish roots.

Maureen Murphy, Professor of Curriculum and Teaching at Hofstra University, agreed that a need to connect to something bigger and more

## America and Ireland: Re-imagining Priorities and Our Community (Continued from page 1)

meaningful is paramount and referred to the thousands of Irish Americans who said in an Irish Central poll that they had voted for Donald Trump due to a feeling of lost identity in a rapidly changing world. Professor Murphy said that Irish Americans played a key role in the 1916 Rising and the Northern Ireland Peace Process and will hopefully bring the “same energy and imagination to the Brexit challenge.” She noted that the profile of Irish Americans is far more diverse since 1965, with engagement in trade, investment, tourism, sports, arts and academia, and with a potential distinction emerging between “sojourners” and “settlers.” Using the example of the creation of the Great Irish Famine curriculum by the Irish American Teachers Association, she said, “We want the celebration of Ireland to be more than a St Patrick’s Day event.” Professor Murphy also mentioned the importance of the Study Abroad programs and hoped they could be better coordinated for optimum benefit.

Celine Kennelly, Executive Director of the San Francisco Irish Immigration Pastoral Center, felt that the 1965 Immigration Act marked the closing of the door to Irish immigrants, notwithstanding outstanding efforts to address it, including the Morrison and Donnelly visa programs. “The new generation of undocumented Irish immigrants continue in the Irish American tradition of being entrepreneurial, hard-working and successful, but they also suffer from a feeling of isolation and loss in times of crisis.” Ms. Kennelly agreed that the future of Irish America is bright, “It’s about people, relationships and communications.”

Steve Lennox, President of Irish Network USA, noted that the Network started 15 years ago in Chicago and it now has 22 chapters designed to bolster relationships through business, arts, culture, education and sports. “We want to help all Irish associations grow and help them to connect to each other where there is often limited interaction, even in the same city.”

Professor Liam Kennedy said that the US election and Brexit were in some part a referendum on globalization, “In the last 25 years, globalization has been key to Ireland’s success, but it has also been a major contributor to our economic collapse in 2008.” He observed that “Ireland is a leader in the strategic engagement of diaspora populations,” but we need more data on the needs and affinities of these communities. Professor Kennedy rejected the argument that the Irish American community is in decline, giving examples of new associations that

**“The new generation of undocumented Irish immigrants continue in the Irish American tradition of being entrepreneurial, hard-working and successful, but they also suffer from a feeling of isolation and loss in times of crisis.”**

replace those that are not growing as interests change. He discussed the research project underway, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to examine Irish linkages in the US.

The conclusions of this panel could be summarized as follows:

- 1. Irish Americans are less active in American elections with the success of the Irish Peace process.**
- 2. Immigration reform remains a key issue for Irish Americans.**
- 3. The power of the Internet needs to be tapped to mobilize and connect Irish America.**
- 4. We need the Irish Government to co-ordinate Irish agencies in the US to take a holistic approach to Irish America, to determine what are their interests, needs and how can we better engage to our mutual advantage across a range of cultural, business, sports, tourist and charitable areas.**

The second panel, “Ireland and America: Priorities for a Trump Administration”, was chaired by Jim Walsh, former Republican Member of Congress from New York. Mr. Walsh said that he and his family had always had a deep pride in being Irish, including his father “Big Jim” Walsh who had been a Congressman and Mayor of Syracuse. The Irish in Syracuse even had a traffic light on Tipperary Hill where the green light was above the red! He commented on his role in the Friends of Ireland and said that support for the Irish Peace process was always bipartisan and that was how the Friends operate.

Catriona Perry, Washington Correspondent for RTÉ, said she was struck during the election campaign by “the number of small towns that had lost their young people and sense of community”. She added that huge crowds saw Trump as a strong man on

jobs and the economy. “Who voted for Donald Trump? All sorts of people.”

Donal Donovan, retired Deputy Director of the IMF, said that a lower corporate tax in America would affect Ireland’s competitiveness, even though the tax rate is only part of our offering. “The world will be more challenging for Ireland if there’s a halt to globalization, a more competitive USA and disruption by Brexit.”

Jack Horgan Jones, Business Correspondent with the Sunday Business Post, said that after Brexit, Ireland will have the advantage of being the only English-speaking country in the EU. He added that the relationship between Ireland and America is at core an economic one, impacting jobs, trade and growth.

Tom Wright, Fellow at the Brookings Institute discussed some of Donald Trump’s earlier stated positions, including newspaper ads 30 years ago critical of US alliances with South Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia and a consistent opposition to multilateral trade deals and a preference for bilateral agreements. Mr. Wright wondered whether a Trump Administration would be supportive of the EU or not.

Mr. Bob Carey, a member of the Republican National Committee but speaking in a personal capacity, said that the cohesiveness of the Irish American political identity is not as strong as it was before the Good Friday Agreement. He added that imagination would be needed to adapt to changing conditions and interests, including, for example, the continued growth in support for both the GAA and rugby amongst the Irish in America. This latter was well illustrated by the thousands who had come to Chicago to watch the Irish rugby team beat the All Blacks.

In my concluding remarks at the conference, I speculated that if the Trump Administration and Congress made progress in 2017 on the three issues of infrastructure investment, immigration reform and tax reform, it could increase annual GDP growth to 4-5%, providing millions of new jobs in America and a much-needed engine of growth for the rest of the world, including Ireland. In addition, the US now represents less than 20% of global trade and a prosperous future depends on increasing free and fair trade, not decreasing it. In this connection, Ireland and America are united.

# US Presidential Election 2016

## Professor Liam Kennedy

UCD Clinton Institute  
for American Studies

**Donald Trump has been elected the 45th president of the United States. This came as a surprise if not a shock to many and the ramifications still seem uncertain these few weeks after the election.**

The election that elevated him to this office was at times brutal and bizarre. Many of those unsettled by Trump's victory believe he has poisoned the well of American democracy by leading a mass abandonment of civility and reason, and normalising prejudice and brazen dishonesty. Bemused Democrats see his victory as a result of fake news or manipulations by Wikileaks or Vladimir Putin or James Comey, or as a racist backlash against President Obama or against immigrants, or as a misogynistic bias against a female president. These elements were almost certainly present in the election but they do not explain the result.

The media may not be the best place to look for that explanation. Trump's election has perturbed the mainstream news media and political pollsters in the US, none of whom foresaw the outcome. Many, mostly on the liberal wing, are warning we are in a "post-truth" age.

The truth is that Trump was elected because he spoke to and for the concerns of a large portion of the electorate who feel left behind by a stuttering recovery, dislocated by social changes, and ignored or disrespected by establishment elites. To be sure, they are mostly white males, but not exclusively – over 50% of white women voted Republican, and over 30% of Latino men – and while Trump did not win the popular vote this was a crushing defeat for the Democrats.



It is the Democrats who will now need an extensive autopsy and serious reconsideration of their strategy; the assumption that demographics would deliver the election now appears staggeringly naïve, while the failure to engage rural voters appears a stunning own goal. They will have to reach out to a new generation of Democrat leaders as well as voters.

Hillary Clinton's defeat was not only a huge personal loss by a major national one. She was able a presidential candidate as the US has produced in recent years, and showed her intellectual and diplomatic strengths in winning the debates with Trump. The glass ceiling may not have been shattered but it has a large crack in it and Clinton's legacy will surely be felt by the young women she has influenced not only in the US but across the world.

While Clinton went high, Trump went low. In doing so he tapped into the deep disaffection of many voters with politics as usual and showed a genius for channelling the grievances and insecurities of those disoriented by economic and social changes in the US. Many of them have lost faith in public institutions and his rallies were at their most

excitable when he spoke of "corruption" among elites. To his supporters, enraged by a dishonest, manipulative "Washington," Trump "tells it like it is." With uncanny skill Trump magnified and manipulated a form of identity politics the Republicans have long been using to appease and mobilise their base. In doing so he hijacked the Republican Party and has now hijacked the presidency. On a structural level, Trump's victory is of a piece with the way American politics now works, with cultural differences exacerbating political divisions. The resulting focus on polarised core groups has helped create the crippling polarisation that wracks the US today – and the increasingly intense contempt that Democrats and Republicans hold for each other. Trump did not create this divisive partisanship, but he has eagerly inflamed and manipulated it to his own ends.

The schism is starkly visual on electoral maps of the US that now show blue coasts and a mostly red heartland. The nation is so divided that Democrats and Republicans are unable to agree on what constitutes factual reality and it is unclear where consensus may be found. America's political system and the sensibilities of the populace are desperately out of sync – at some point, there will need to be a realignment of relations between the individual, the state and the market, and a rebalancing of rights and responsibilities. The US's capacity for regeneration should not be underestimated, but as the Trump victory indicates, the American polity's growing tribalisation and the country's toxic political and social climate are suggestive of a deep malaise.



*Right: pictured at the recent forum in Washington hosted by the UCD Clinton Institute and the Washington Ireland Program are Congressman Jim Walsh (Retired), Donal Donovan, Bob Carey, Caitriona Perry, Jack Horgan-Jones, Tom Wright.*

# A Word from one of our Alums

**Christopher Follenus**

**“All changed, changed utterly”; as WB Yeats once wrote. I find myself writing this in Orlando, Florida, in November, it’s 26 degrees’ Celsius outside, the sun is still shining but there is a heavy, ominous feeling in the air as the results of perhaps the most shocking Presidential election result in American history start to sink in. The future of the world or reality we have known is at the very least uncertain.**

I open my remarks with this backdrop because for me America has always been the land I aspired to reaching, as it’s been for countless millions across the world seeking to escape authoritarianism or just looking for a better life. I had come to see America as that ‘indispensable nation’ to paraphrase Madeline Albright, the bulwark against totalitarianism, the mature democracy that avoided the extremes of fascism or communism.

I moved to the United States upon finishing my Masters in American Studies at the Institute with the objective of working in a communications role in politics or government, or at least somewhere in

the ideas universe. However, I was offered a solid role as marketing director for an Irish property developer based in Orlando. So with a family in tow it seemed like the responsible thing to do, and I must say there are worse places to be than Florida.

Despite my working in the private sector I have involved myself in domestic politics. I volunteered for the Hillary Clinton campaign, attended her Florida rallies, and was there at the Javits Center in New York - campaign ground zero - on November 8th watching as my adopted state fell to Donald Trump; a precursor to what was destined to happen in many other places as the night unfolded. I am not a partisan; in the primaries I was supporting Ohio Governor John Kasich, but then as it became clear who final candidates would be I felt an obligation to enthusiastically support Hillary Clinton in any way I could.

It’s not Armageddon. While I’m not terribly hopeful I fully agree with Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*: let’s grit our teeth, give him a chance and hold him strictly to account. Some seeking to enter politics or government in the United States may feel despondent. But those of us who have believed in America cannot give up hope and must seek to serve. The country still needs good people and



believers. So I would advise anyone studying at the Institute with the objective of working in government or for a cause, not to give up hope. The country needs you more than ever!

Finally, I’d like to say a few words about my experience at the Clinton Institute, an experience I found incredibly valuable for so many reasons. Through the Institute I attended fascinating talks and

events, met interesting people and opinion leaders I would not have met otherwise, learned to ask new questions and was able to enrich my understanding of the world’s most consequential country. While I knew that studying history and politics would be interesting, it was really the study of American culture that I found most enlightening, perhaps to my surprise. I found that only through examining culture can you develop an understanding of the mindset of the country at a given time. Studying the history and politics is crucial for sure, but I believe it must be complimented by a study of culture to give a deeper understanding, and can therefore help you better explain a phenomenon like Trump. Aside from this, researching for my final essay on culture turned me into an aficionado of grimy 70s New York films!

## Global Irish Summer Camp

Under a Diaspora initiative created by the Irish Government the first Global Irish Summer Camp ran from the 20 July – 4 August 2016. Organised by the Institute for Study Abroad Ireland and the UCD Clinton Institute, twenty high school students came to Ireland to develop a greater understanding of their Irish heritage. After a series of classes and activities in Donegal and surrounding counties the group visited Dublin and spent a day at the Clinton Institute where we hosted a mini-conference with them and a group of Irish secondary students. A very lively day was had when both groups discussed the perceptions each had of the other country and there were plenty of surprises! On their last day a reception was held for the group in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade where the Minister for Diaspora Joe McHugh TD presented them with a certificate of attendance and each offered up their own thoughts on their first visit to Ireland and all pledged to return.



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