

## Columbus Hosts International Discussion on Irish Unity

An international panel discussion was recently held in Columbus, Ohio, before an enthusiastic audience addressing both the opportunities and the practical difficulties involved in pursuing Irish unification.

The event was sponsored by The Ohio State University Mershon Center for International Security Studies and the Greater Columbus Irish Cultural Foundation.

The event featured a panel including Ms. Andrée Murphy, Deputy Director of Relatives for Justice Belfast, Board Member of Ireland's Future, and columnist for Belfast Media Group; Dr. Teri Murphy, Associate Director for Peacebuilding Research at Ohio State University's Mershon Center for International Security Studies; Martin Galvin, National Freedom for all Ireland Chair of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and myself.

The evening was moderated by Jeff Hogan, television anchor for CBS affiliate WBNS TV. The panelists engaged in robust discussions on the opportunities and practical difficulties surrounding unification of Ireland.

The recent approval of a resolution in the Dáil Éireann urging the Irish government to plan and prepare for a future border poll, along with the election of a new Uachtarán na hÉireann, has contributed to ongoing discussions.

The resolution, adopted on 21 October 2025, urges the Irish government to initiate planning and preparations for a potential border poll on the question of a united Ireland. On November 11, 2025, the Republic of Ireland elected Catherine Connolly as Uachtarán na hÉireann. Connolly is a proponent of a new united Ireland, emphasizing an inclusive and transparent process that acknowledges and respects the traditions of all communities residing on the island.

The evenings discussions were led off by Dr. Murphy, who offered her experience with reconciliation among the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. Dr. Murphy, who has actively contributed to local peace and reconciliation



The panelists at the Mershon Center.



**OPINION**  
Michael C. Mentel  
office  
@irishecho.com

initiatives in Northern Ireland, highlighted several notable challenges to reconciliation in the North, notably the limited engagement of youth in the process.

As an example, Dr. Murphy offered several photographs taken on July 11, 2025, marking the beginning of the celebrations of Prince William of Orange's victory in 1690 over King James II at the Battle of the Boyne. These photographs showed large pyres burning with effigies of nationalists and migrants attached to the pyres as they burned and a youth watching a burning pyre with the back of his head shaved into the outline of a British flag. Other photos showed members of the Orange Order marching along nationalist neighborhoods.

Dr. Murphy was noting with these photographs that reconciliation is a challenge within the traditions in the North. The overall observation is that more dialogue needs to occur, particularly with the youth. It is with the youth that a new united Ireland will occur. Polling conducted in Ireland has revealed that support for unification is on the rise on both sides of the border, with young adults in Northern Ireland, 18-29 years old, favorable to unification.

The opportunity for constitutional change is felt in Ireland. "For the first time since partition, it is not fanciful or rhetorical to say that this generation is likely to see

constitutional change in Ireland," said Andrée Murphy.

The proposed constitutional change is not simply about choosing one tradition over another. Rather, it is the opportunity to construct a new united Ireland.

"Constitutional change is not simply about borders or structures. It is about the kind of society we choose to build — how we treat difference, how we address harm, and how we embed rights and equality at the core of the state. Those [who advocate] for constitutional change in Ireland are not offering a single blueprint. They are insisting on principles. Any future Ireland must be rights-based, grounded in equality, honest about the past, and built with consent," said Murphy.

To arrive at this societal change, it will require all residents on the island from all traditions and religions, to discuss, to dialogue, and reach consent on how a new united Ireland will be formed.

"This generation carries a responsibility unlike any before it. We may be the generation that does not merely imagine change but delivers it," said Murphy.

As preparations and strategic planning for unification progress, the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement are pivotal to the discussion. "Peace and the provisions for a vote on Irish reunification through a border poll would not have been attained without Irish Americans across the [United States], including Ohio, making

Ireland an issue on the American Presidential Agenda", said Martin Galvin.

He added that, "[in] April 1992 in a crucial New York Democratic Primary both Bill Clinton and his main opponent promised visas for Sinn Fein and [for] an American Special Envoy [to be sent to Northern Ireland]. [President] Clinton kept that [promise] and appointed [an envoy to northern Ireland]. It would not have happened without Irish America and now there is a genuine concern that we will not see a referendum on reunification unless Irish America and American pressure insures that the GFA's ["Good Friday Agreement"] promise of a vote for national self-determination does not become one more broken British promise to the Irish."

Mr. Galvin and Ms. Murphy told the audience that Irish America's role is vital in advocating for a border poll on unification. Ms. Murphy noted the importance of Irish America's voice in calling for the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement and how it relates to the present situation.

"During the conflict in the North of Ireland, Irish America again used its leverage — political, financial, and diplomatic. You lobbied Congress. You challenged U.S. administrations. You helped internationalize a conflict others wanted to keep hidden. That pressure mattered. It helped create the conditions for the peace process."

The call for Irish America's advocacy for setting a border

poll was taken to heart by the audience. During the question and answer segment, the audience asked the panelists "how do we get involved?" and "who do we write to?" Following the discussion, several members of the audience began to organize efforts to pressurize Irish America's call for a border poll.

Legal rights and due process have shown to be an issue that all political parties and traditions appear to agree upon. To illustrate the point, the political opposition towards the 2023 Legacy Bill - when the Legacy Bill was introduced, and approved as an Act, in 2023 - saw every major political party in the North objected to its implementation. Given that the political parties can agree on the unlawfulness of the Legacy Act, it should serve today as a foundation stone to discuss how a new justice system and constitutional framework should be structured in a new united Ireland.

Ms. Murphy echoed this observation saying that during the peace process, "Irish America also understood something crucial: peace without justice is unstable."

The Good Friday Agreement was not agreed to and ratified by the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic in order to share the island. It was agreed to and ratified by the people to provide a peaceful path to a united Ireland, a united Ireland that encompasses all traditions and religions under the guarantee of equal justice for all. It is time again for Irish America to make its voice heard and advocate for calling a border poll on unification.

**Judge Michael C. Mentel is an appellate court judge on the Ohio Court of Appeals for the Tenth District. He has participated in round table discussions Legacy Bill at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and participated in panel discussions on Irish Unity sponsored by the Ohio State University, Mershon Center for International Security Studies. Judge Mentel is an author and a columnist with Irish newsmagazine. He also contributes to other publications on contemporary legal and political issues facing Ireland.**

Download FREE IrishEcho App on Apple Store



www.irishecho.com