

## Remarks of Governor Maura T. Healey

Seanad Éireann

June 27, 2023

*As prepared for delivery*

*Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cathaoirleach.* To all the members of *Seanad Éireann*, Ambassador **[Claire] Cronin**, distinguished guests, and dedicated staff: Thank you all for your warm welcome today. It is a profound honor to be here in this historic chamber with you just over 100 years since this body was created to help lead a free Ireland; 60 years tomorrow, since President **John F. Kennedy** spoke in this building and launched a new era of Irish-American relations; and 30 years since the decriminalization of gay life in Ireland – thanks to this body, all those who fought for that cause, and especially the courageous leadership of Senator **David Norris**. Thank you, Senator.

It's been 19 years since we secured marriage equality in Massachusetts; eight years since both the citizens of Ireland and the Supreme Court of the United States, just one month apart, declared that “love is love” once and for all; six years since Ireland elected its first openly gay *Taoiseach*; and nearly six months since I took office as the first openly lesbian woman elected governor of a U.S. state, by Massachusetts, the most Irish state in the union. Our nations are once again “united by history,” as President **Kennedy** said; and in our journey together, the doors of freedom have opened wider.

I want to thank you for the statements of congratulations that were made in this chamber upon my election. It means the world to me that leaders in the land of my grandparents and great-grandparents were watching and cheering me on. The first messages to reach me from Ireland came from family – my cousins **Kitty** and **John Duke** in Ballinasloe, County Galway. Along with millions of Americans, including President **Biden** and Ambassador **Cronin**, I cherish my Irish roots, and I'm grateful to the brave Irish women and men who made my life possible.

Today I'm thinking of my late father **Jerry Healey**, and his parents, **Jeremiah Healey** and **Margaret Riordan**, who emigrated from Kerry and Cork.

I'm also thinking of my maternal great-grandmother, **Katherine Tracey**. Katherine left Ballinasloe in 1912, at age 16, after her mother died and her father was left to care for five children on their small farm. She arrived in New York by herself, with no one to meet her, and somehow made her way up to Boston to find family members. After working hard in other people's houses for years, she met my great-grandfather, settled down in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and won over her Yankee in-laws with her warmth and kindness.

She was a gentle and well-read woman, proud but in a humble way, and quick with a story about life back in Ireland. She lived to be 96 years old. My mother **Catherine Tracy Beattie** is with us today; she was given Katherine's name and passed it on to me as my middle name. We hold our memories of my great-grandmother deep in our hearts. She taught us to love Ireland and inspired us to keep close contact with our family – to the point where a dozen of us came over for the wedding of **Tommy** and **Clare Boyle** in Newry.

In 1999, I visited Ballinasloe with my mother and grandmother. My uncle **Joe Tracey** showed us around the old farmstead, where only the foundation was left standing. I picked up a loose stone, and held onto it; and I've kept it with me wherever I've lived since, to remind of my foundations.

Our Irish ancestors left behind everything they knew and worked hard to give us all we would need. I was raised with the values they passed on – taking care of your family; taking responsibility for the welfare of your community; and looking out for those who need a helping hand or a friend to speak up for them. I'm grateful for this gift, and I'm awed by the fact that ours is just one of millions of emigrant stories that helped build

Massachusetts and America. Together they are threads, woven together by time, that form a powerful fabric binding our nations together across an ocean and through history.

Especially in Massachusetts, where by ancestry, culture, and proximity we claim the closest ties. Maybe that's also the reason we love politics, as some have said. The important thing is, our relationship with Ireland is not one of distant memory or hazy nostalgia. It is rooted in shared values that are deeply relevant to the moment we live in and the challenges we all face. It evolves through the continual exchange of people, ideas, and resources. It's a living, breathing connection and one that we have a duty to nurture, grow, and use for the good of all our people and indeed for the good of the world. There is so much for us to learn from one another, as we work to protect the rights and freedoms we've fought so hard for.

That's what we are doing this week, in my first trip abroad as Governor.

My Administration's vision is of a Massachusetts that provides opportunity and wellbeing to all our people, drives the innovations that heal and help humanity, and shines as a beacon of human rights, equality, and freedom. Our relationship with Ireland is a powerful and necessary resource for advancing each of these goals.

Already, our economic partnership is reflected in hundreds of companies employing thousands of people on both sides of the Atlantic, billions of dollars and euros in trade and investment, and nearly 200 research and development partnerships that are driving real change in our world today.

We were pleased to welcome Minister **Simon Coveney** to the State House in Boston last month, as he and his team highlighted Irish innovation. In Dublin this week, we are meeting with leaders in business, technology, science, and education to learn and share with them all that Massachusetts has to offer. I'm joined by Secretary for Economic Development **Yvonne Hao**, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs **Rebecca Tepper**, as well as leaders from industry and academia. We're here as Team Massachusetts to build on our relationships, forge new connections, and fuel the ideas and partnerships that can move us forward to a better and more prosperous future for all.

If family is something we *are*, then friendship is something we *do*, as the great trans-Atlantic writer **Nuala O'Faolain** put it.

And what we do matters.

Our partnerships in technology make life better and make the world more connected – especially if we are intentional about equity in both impacts and access.

Our partnerships in healthcare and medical innovation save lives – like the COVID vaccines developed by Massachusetts scientists and Irish scientists that have saved millions of lives around the world.

Our partnerships in clean energy can lead the world to a just transition that protects our planet and brings health and opportunity to every community. In Massachusetts, we are leaning into offshore wind energy where Ireland is also a leader; and we are embracing our maritime heritage, to advance innovations in blue technology. The Atlantic Ocean no longer divides us, but unites us in our understanding of the planetary systems we all depend on, and the potential of our oceans, seas, and skies to bring sustainable benefits to our communities.

President **Kennedy** said 60 years ago: “The supreme reality of our time is our indivisibility as children of God and the common vulnerability of this planet.” We have a different understanding of our planet's vulnerability today, but this truth remains unchanged. If we embrace our shared destiny, then we will not only meet the climate challenge, we will also demonstrate the unity the world needs to meet all the challenges that confront us.

The truth is, we share more than history. We share intellectual firepower nurtured through a passion for education. We share a culture and an infrastructure of strategic partnership built on generations of exchange and growth.

We share something else as well, and it's never been more clear. We share the belief that we must move forward together – in fact we can *only* succeed – if everyone has the opportunity to exercise their rights, be free from discrimination, reach their full potential, share their talents, and live fully as their true selves.

That value, too, is the reason I am here – and the reason I am *able* to be here.

Massachusetts is a state of firsts: the first public school, park, library, and subway system in the United States. We are a state that led the cause of abolition, the first state to make healthcare universally accessible, and the first to declare that love is love.

Ireland, by the same token, for generations has been famed for its commitment to global human rights. Wherever deep suffering appears in the world, you will find Irish people giving their heart and soul to relieve it and to change the systems that cause it.

This work has deepened our relationship.

We are proud of the role that Massachusetts leaders, like Congressman **Richie Neal**, along with countless private citizens, have played in fostering peace and justice in Northern Ireland. President **Biden**'s commitment to supporting the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is shared widely and deeply in our state. We are proud that one of our own, **Joe Kennedy III**, is in the role of Special Envoy.

At the same time, we have been blessed in Massachusetts by Irish people who, as former President **Mary McAleese** said, “dedicate their lives to building bridges,” as she did herself.

Recently I appointed new leaders in our Office for Refugees and Immigrants. **Ronnie Millar** is the new Director of Strategic Initiatives, a critical role at this moment of global disruption. Ronnie emigrated from Belfast in 1993 to work as a computer engineer, but soon turned to a new career helping fellow immigrants. He returned to Northern Ireland to do cross-community work with the Corrymeela Centre. Then for 12 years he led Boston's Irish Immigrant Center – which for over three decades has received funding from the Irish government through its Emigrant Support Program. Under Ronnie's leadership the Immigrant Center embraced the shared humanity of all migrants, serving over 3,000 families each year coming to Boston from 120 countries around the world. He has built new bridges across old social divides, and now he'll be helping to lead that work for us statewide.

Massachusetts and Ireland both have taken long journeys toward freedom and equality for all our people, but we have come to be known for our commitment to always doing better and showing a way forward for others.

I want to recognize the leadership of this chamber, along with all those who have worked to make Ireland a better place for its citizens by addressing the injustices of the past, securing reproductive rights, and advancing climate action, Travellers' rights, and migrant safety – to name just a few of the issues you have led on.

The cause of human rights is woven through our shared history, and draws us ever closer today.

In Massachusetts, at a time when across America people's rights, freedoms, histories, and identities are being attacked, we are ensuring that women and all who need it have their reproductive rights protected and access to healthcare defended; we are eradicating racial injustice from our legal system, our economy, our schools, our healthcare systems, and every realm of life; and we are defending the rights of every member of the gay, lesbian, and trans community to live their lives freely without discrimination, abuse, or barriers of any kind.

As you know, this work is personal for me. It's also intersectional work. It's why as a Civil Rights attorney and Massachusetts Attorney General, I fought not only for marriage equality but for victims of discrimination and exploitation of all kinds.

This work is inspired by my Irish foundations, the deep kindness and fierce passion for freedom that is familiar from the immigrant homes of Massachusetts to the great rooms of state here in Leinster House.

I am grateful to all those who came before me, and I am grateful for all those who advance our cause today. The movements for gay rights, trans rights, and women's rights in Ireland are strong, visible, and worthy of our attention and gratitude.

Together we have come to the point where I can arrive in Ireland as the out governor of Massachusetts and make my first stop a Pride reception last night. I can speak as a guest in the Seanad, and I can sit for dinner afterward

with an LGBTQ caucus led by the *Cathaoirleach*. I can meet later this week with the *Taoiseach*, elected as a gay man in 2017 with his own immigrant story.

In our business development meetings, I can tell prospective workers, students, employers, or investors looking to make a life in Massachusetts or Ireland: whoever you are and whomever you love, you will be welcome, you will be embraced, your rights will be respected. That's a competitive advantage in today's world.

We know there is more work to be done. I think of the young people today, experiencing a surge of mental health problems – in part due to the pandemic and in part due to hearing the voices of hate rise once again to threaten their futures. We must stand strong for them and never go backwards.

It was not so long ago, when the story of Irish-American unity, and the story of gay liberation would never have been told together. I'm here to say they are stories of the same people, threads in the same fabric that binds us across time and strengthens us to face the future.

We stand together at a critical moment in world history. We face big challenges: a pandemic's long tail, and all the loss and instability it wrought; a climate crisis and its harsh and growing impacts on the most vulnerable communities; humanitarian tragedies and deep inequalities both among and within nations; violent conflict in Europe and the resulting suffering and displacement; and the resurgence across the west of regressive, anti-democratic ideologies being advanced through familiar means of scapegoating and division.

We must stand together now, not only to celebrate our progress, but to meet these challenges, rise to this moment, and show a better way forward.

We are stronger in that work, because more of us are able to contribute our whole selves to the effort. Let us never take this achievement for granted and let us always work to open the doors of freedom wider.

Thank you for your friendship and thank once again for inviting me to address this historic body.

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