

18 July 1998,

Congressman James T Walsh,
US House of Representatives,
Washington DC,
U.S.A.

You kindly wrote to me some weeks ago with good wishes on the achievement of the Good Friday Agreement. I must apologise for being so slow to reply but the days following have been very crowded, with the campaign for the Referendum, the elections to the new Assembly, and now the implementation of the Agreement in legislation and in practice.

Despite the many difficulties, and recent days have sometimes been very worrying, I have continued to be encouraged and buoyed up by people like you, who have taken the trouble to be in touch, and give support.

I remain optimistic for our beloved land, and determined to continue to do all I can to build a peaceful future for our long-suffering people.

I understand that you are involved in arrangements for Speaker Gingrich's proposed visit. As the initial Presiding Officer of the new Northern Ireland Assembly, I very much regret that I will be in South Africa at that time, but I would strongly encourage the Speaker to visit Belfast. The President had a marvellous welcome when he came, and I am sure that the Speaker would be received most heartily. It would certainly be seen as another very positive and encouraging US initiative.

Again my thanks for your encouragement.