

Thank you very much for the honor you have paid me this afternoon. I deeply appreciate it. I congratulate each of my co-honorees.

I salute each of you who have joined the Ancient Order of Hibernians. In the era in which we now live, it is difficult to give time for membership in any organization. You and your families deserve much credit for the time you give. Your membership and time serves a valuable purpose.

I extend warm congratulations to your new officers who devote even more time. Your President, Martin Galvin has had a long and distinguished career both as a prosecuting attorney and a defense attorney. I can attest to his abilities as a lawyer. Beyond that, he has rendered yeoman services to the Irish community here and in Ireland. Over the years some may have disagreed with positions he took----- but let it be said loud and clear that if it were not for Martin Galvin and others, the nationalist community in the north of Ireland would not have the political and social advancements, achieved to date. Martin Galvin did his work sometimes at great personal cost to him. I know for a fact that the British Government attempted to interfere with his employment as a Bronx District Attorney and we all know that because of one speech he made in the north of Ireland, Martin has the proud distinction of having being detained, deported and transported by Her Majesty's military jet to Washington, DC.

I also must acknowledge your recording secretary, Joe Doherty, also an able attorney, who once worked for me, before he went on to greater things.

You know, certainly, as well as I the history of the founding of the AOH and its essential purpose as a Catholic American fraternal order. Its motto sums it up, Friendship, Unity and Christian Charity. It should mean more than a dinner, or a dance, a Communion Breakfast or a softball game, though each of these is important.

Of equal importance is the fact that the AOH is the only nationwide Irish American organization in existence. It is in connection with that aspect that I speak very briefly this afternoon. The AOH has the political power to exert great force on behalf of 30 million American Irish. It can be as powerful as the Sons of Italy organization or the German Steuben organization. I say it can because regrettably, often-----it is not.

There are many issues that should be of concern to the AOH and to us.

Shortly, indeed very shortly the Congress and the President will take up the issue of immigration and undocumented individuals.

That issue now is far different that it was forty years ago when I spoke before Congressional Committees and it is important that the AOH be concerned with it. The national AOH leaders need to be in contact with the legislators and determine what is possible and what is not and what the Irish should be looking for.

You as individual members can keep the pressure on those national AOH leaders. Only 311 Irishmen and women were able to receive documented immigrant visas in 2011.

We are no better than any other nationality but we do have some bragging rights and we deserve a fair shake.

So what must the AOH say to Congress and Why? 40 years ago, the former National Chaplain of the AOH, a Carmelite priest from St. Simon Stock Parish, Fr. Donal O'Callaghan spoke to Congress about the Irish contribution to labor, politics, and the Church, but the first part of his remarks set the tone. He said in part-

We ask you to look at the record. We are not Johnny come latelies. We have been here from the beginning. We were with Washington at Lexington and Concord and suffered through Valley Forge. When Benjamin Franklin addressed the Irish Parliament, he said that the Irish people were with us to a man. General Washington Parke Curtis said, -Up to the coming of the French, Ireland had furnished in the ratio of 100 to one of every nation whatever.

In the war of 1812, the only great victory was won by a son of Irish immigrants, Andrew Jackson.

Two thousand native born Irish fought under General Winfield Scott in the war against Mexico. One half of General Taylor's Army were Irishmen.

In the War between the states whole Divisions of the Ancient Order of Hibernians went off to fight for the Union. 300,000 Irish born men wore the uniform of Blue and 150,000 died for the Union cause.

In the First World War, when General Pershing crossed the Rhine, he came upon a regimental flag that couldn't stand straight because it had so many campaign ribbons on it. He asked an aide for the name of the regiment. Told it was the 69th of New York, he said, I should have known.

WWII gave us the names of Colin Kelly, Admiral Callaghan and Father Joseph O'Callaghan, the first minister of religion ever to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Under our present laws, many of these individuals and their ancestors would never have been admitted here. How can we sum up the record. We can do it no better, than by quoting John Boyle O'Reilly, Editor of the Boston Pilot

No treason do we bring from Erin  
Nor bring we shame nor guilt  
The sword we hold may be broken  
But we haven't dropped the hilt

The wreath we offer to Columbia is  
fastened of thorns not bought  
And the hearts we bring are saddened  
by the thoughts of sorrowful days  
But the hearts we bring for freedom  
are washed in a people's faith out-living  
a thousand years.

That is what the AOH must now say to our Church, our labor unions and to the United States Congress.