

If the relationship between Ireland and the United States is special, that between Ireland's Mid-West and America is extra-special. Shannon has helped make Shannonside perhaps the most "American" of regions. Certainly with our trans-Atlantic airport and our American-enriched economy, we are unusually susceptible to the effects of shifts in US policy. So where do we stand now in relationship to America? Limerick Leader editor BRENDAN HALLIGAN asked Ambassador James C Kenny. Here are their exchanges, word-for-word ...

Ambassador of America faces major issues over Limerick and airport

Ambassador, Open Skies will obviously benefit the US. How will it help Ireland in general and Shannon Airport and region in particular?

The US-Irish Open Skies provisions of the US-EU aviation agreement would be a boon to both our countries' airlines, airports, travellers, businesspersons, local communities and overall economies. The most immediate benefit would be to enable Irish carriers to fly from any point in the

peace, corporate tax incentives, and an educated, English-speaking, mobile, young workforce. In the face of increased competition, however, Ireland must also become a higher-value, knowledge-based economy in which the advantages for investors continue to outweigh the costs of doing business. Such an economy depends critically on education since future jobs here are not likely to be in manufacturing as that can be done more cheaply farther east. Low-skilled jobs are rapidly disappearing in Ireland, so

Personal file: James C Kenny

UNITED States Ambassador to Ireland James C Kenny, a grandson of County Mayo, is a friend of President Bush. He is also a friend of Limerick. An influential advocate of the development of the

team.

In addition to his involvement in the construction industry, Mr Kenny has found time to devote to public and community service. Illinois Governor Jim Edgar appointed

his appointment as Ambassador, among them the Hispanic American Construction Association's Contractor of the Year and a Salvation Army award for the Tree of Lights campaign in

detainees through Irish airports or Irish airspace in violation of Ireland's sovereignty. There is simply no evidence that we have done otherwise and the Irish government has spoken very clearly on this subject, that it has not granted permission for such flights. This is a non-issue promoted by activists with a political agenda and there is simply no real evidence to support their claims.

Shannon's Iraq connection has generated controversy. How do you

arms, munitions of war, or, in general, of anything which can be of use to an army or a fleet." Even during the Vietnam War, when the United States clearly was at war with another country, Ireland was able to allow US troops to transit Shannon Airport without violating its neutrality if we follow the terms of the 1907 Hague Convention.

Is anti-Americanism a problem?
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At home in Limerick: Ambassador James C. Kenny (LL)

The US-Irish Open Skies provisions of the US-EU aviation agreement would be a boon to both our countries' airlines, airports, travellers, businesspersons, local communities and overall economies. The most immediate benefit would be to enable Irish carriers to fly from any point in the European Union to any point in the United States, not just the handful of US cities now permitted under bilateral arrangements. The phase-out of the dual gateway policy would also allow both Irish and US carriers to provide a level of service that is determined by market demand.

We believe demand in the Shannon region for trans-Atlantic travel will persist, especially given the presence of US multinational firms in the region and the region's attractiveness for tourism. Shannon's managers appear to understand the evolving situation and are already positioning the airport to take advantage of the new commercial opportunities that Open Skies will make possible. Our Embassy is working with the Irish Government on upgrading US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) screening operations at Shannon and Dublin, which will give both airports an advantage in competing with other European airports for trans-Atlantic traffic. Currently, Ireland is the only country in Europe to offer pre-clearances for passengers going to the US.

The economy of Ireland's Mid-West is, as you well know, largely dependent on multinational investment, especially American investment. How do you see this situation evolving in an increasingly globalised world?

As many independent and Irish Government-commissioned studies have pointed out, Ireland faces both challenges and opportunities in its bid to remain an attractive destination for foreign direct investment, including from US firms. A good portion of global manufacturing has already passed to fast-growing developing countries like China and India, where labour costs are generally lower than in the developed world. These countries boast increasingly sophisticated industrial and services sectors that are hungry for foreign investment.

Against this backdrop, the challenge for Ireland, particularly in the Mid-West, is to remain competitive in a global context. Ireland already has numerous strengths that have made the country an ideal base for multinational firms looking to expand their global operations. These strengths include pro-business government policies, strong rule of law, industrial

increased competition, however, Ireland must also become a higher-value, knowledge-based economy in which the advantages for investors continue to outweigh the costs of doing business. Such an economy depends critically on education since future jobs here are not likely to be in manufacturing as that can be done more cheaply farther east. Low-skilled jobs are rapidly disappearing in Ireland, so you need to minimise the number of low-skilled people by cutting the dropout rate and raising the skill levels of secondary school graduates.

More and more US military flights are passing through Shannon. What's your take on that?

Shannon Airport is a commercial arrangement that has been in place for decades. Our soldiers enjoy passing over Ireland and stopping into Shannon as the food is good, the pub is nice, the souvenirs are great to take home to their kids, and everyone speaks English. Service to our planes is also excellent and the fuel is clean. It's a business arrangement that suits everyone.

But it is not by any means a political deal. There are dozens of airports in Europe that could do the job just as well, and we could easily use them if we have to do so. If we were denied access to Shannon, it would have absolutely no impact on our military activities in Iraq in support of the democratically-elected government there or any other military activities anywhere in the world. What it would impact is hundreds of jobs in the Limerick area, but it will have zero impact on military operations in Iraq.

Instead, Ireland should be proud to support the people of Iraq under UN Security Council Resolution 1546, which calls on member states to support the multinational forces in Iraq, of which the United States is a very proud and visible part. The international community is helping the sovereign government of Iraq to establish security and bring peace and stability—and ultimately prosperity—to people who have been suffering for decades under the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

Any time I am at Shannon, and I see the men and women of the multinational forces resting during their layover, I feel a great sense of pride in the work they are doing to make life better, safer, and more secure for the people of Iraq. I would hope that the people of Ireland would feel that same just sense of pride in playing a role in supporting the people of Iraq as called for by the United Nations.

And alleged "rendition" landings?

UNITED States Ambassador to Ireland James C Kenny, a grandson of County Mayo, is a friend of President Bush. He is also a friend of Limerick. An influential advocate of the development of the economy in Ireland's Middle-West, he is a staunch supporter of the University of Limerick.

He presented his credentials to the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, at Aras an Uachtaráin on October 31, 2003.

Before his appointment, he was executive vice-president of Kenny Construction Company and president of Kenny Management Services. Kenny Construction Company, founded in 1927, is involved in building projects across the US. Kenny Management Services is a new division that has overseen large, complex construction projects such as the Chicago Midway Airport expansion and the new stadium for the Chicago Bears football

team. In addition to his involvement in the construction industry, Mr Kenny has found time to devote to public and community service. Illinois Governor Jim Edgar appointed him to the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority Board in 1991. Former President George H W Bush appointed him to the National Corporation for Housing Partnerships. He also served on the transition team for President George W. Bush (2000-2001). Ambassador Kenny was a member of President Bush's first overseas delegation in February 2002, travelling to Nicaragua for the inauguration of President Bolanos. He has served on the boards of directors for the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, Bradley University, Children's Memorial Hospital and the Illinois Business Roundtable. Ambassador Kenny received several business and community service awards before

his appointment as Ambassador, among them the Hispanic American Construction Association's Contractor of the Year and a Salvation Army award for the Tree of Lights campaign in 2001. He was also selected as one of Crain's Chicago Business "40 Under 40" Outstanding Executives.

After his appointment as Ambassador to Ireland, he received the Flax Trust Award in 2004. The Flax Trust was formed in Belfast in 1977 and is the largest community regeneration project in the whole of Ireland. Lynn University and the American College Dublin also awarded Ambassador Kenny an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in 2005.

Ambassador Kenny received his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. He and his wife, Margaret, have four children.



Family man: Ambassador Kenny, wife Margaret and children (LL)

This is simply not an issue. First, let me say that renditions are legal and they are sometimes necessary in the pursuit of terrorists and war criminals. We have done them—we do not deny that—but they are rare. Many countries have done renditions, too, including EU members, and war

crimes tribunals have as well. For example, when Slobodan Milosevic was captured in Serbia and returned to The Hague to face trial for war crimes in Kosovo, that was a rendition as Serbian law did not have an extradition procedure in place.

That said, we would never bring

dence that we have done otherwise and the Irish government has spoken very clearly on this subject, that it has not granted permission for such flights. This is a non-issue promoted by activists with a political agenda and there is simply no real evidence to support their claims.

Shannon's Iraq connection has generated controversy. How do you view the Irish media's treatment of this issue?

Most media in the world, including American media, simply do not tell the full story of what is going on in Iraq today. Almost all the violence is taking place in the so-called "Sunni Triangle," an area that composes four of Iraq's 18 provinces. Most of Iraq is at peace, is rebuilding, is relatively safe and secure, schools and businesses are open and functioning, and even real estate prices are going up every day.

Media tend to focus on conflict. A car bomb or kidnapping is a more interesting story than a school opening and educating hundreds of children safely without any incidents. Rebuilding a vital bridge or repairing a crucial oil pipeline is not nearly as visual or "newsworthy" as a suicide bomber's devastating wake.

Ireland recognizes the government of Iraq. Full sovereignty was restored to Iraq on June 30, 2004, in UNSC Resolution 1546. Iraqis voted THREE times with huge turnouts to elect a government and approve the most progressive constitution in the Arab world. They did so at considerable risk to life and limb. In fact, a higher percentage of Iraqis voted in their first and most dangerous election than voted in recent elections in either Ireland or the United States! There can be no question of the government's legitimacy.

American and other multinational forces are in Iraq with the agreement and approval of both the legitimate government of Iraq and the United Nations. What more can anyone ask?

Finally, there is no issue here of neutrality, either. We are not at war with Iraq or with Afghanistan. We are helping those governments to fight terrorism and insurgency. There are no state-to-state conflicts in either theatre. Thus, there is no legal issue around the concept of neutrality.

I would like to point out one other thing. Our notions of neutrality in international law come mainly from the 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land. In Chapter 1, Article 7 of that Convention, it states that "a neutral power is NOT called upon to prevent the export or transport, on behalf of one or other of the belligerents, of

Vietnam War, when the United States clearly was at war with another country, Ireland was able to allow US troops to transit Shannon Airport without violating its neutrality if we follow the terms of the 1907 Hague Convention.

Is anti-Americanism a problem?

For some people, I am sure this is a factor, but I think it is mainly just the ideology of being opposed to war. Although the anti-war activists often show little consistency in their opposition to war, we can generally count on them to be opposed all the time to every US military action, even when approved by the United Nations, as is the case with Iraq today. Given that we often see the same small group of protestors marching against the Bin Tax, gas pipelines in County Mayo, phone masts, anything that has to do with Israel, and other assorted issues, it is hard not to see that anti-globalisation and opposition to capitalism colour their thinking.

As is so often the case with such activists, a small unelected group of ideologues claims to speak for the people, with the result that a group of five or ten protestors or a couple of guys unrolling a sign purports to "speak for the people of Ireland." I do not find their attitudes and beliefs to be supported by most Irish so I do not think the Irish overall are by any means anti-American.

Being ethnic Irish, you are naturally at home in Ireland and obviously enjoying your job. But what about your wife and family—how long will they allow you stay here?

My wife, Margaret, and our three kids who live here love it! They have made it clear they will gladly stay here as long as I want. Our fourth child is in university studies in the States, so she does not have to face this issue.

However, all US ambassadors serve at the pleasure of the President, so I will continue to serve here as long as President Bush wishes me to do so. As a general rule, our appointments are for three years, but it is entirely up to the President.

If President Bush wishes me to serve our country elsewhere or in another capacity, I will gladly do so and my family will support that decision. If he wishes me to stay in Ireland and continue the important work we are doing, I will gladly do so and my family will support that decision. Or, I may return to private life. In any case, our first priority is to serve our nation and support the good work that President Bush is doing in advancing freedom and democracy around the world and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland.

What is the justification for military flights through Shannon? And what of our local economy?



Operating under UN mandate: an American military aircraft at Shannon (LL)



American investment: Dell employ thousands of people in Limerick and indirectly benefit tens of thousands (LL)