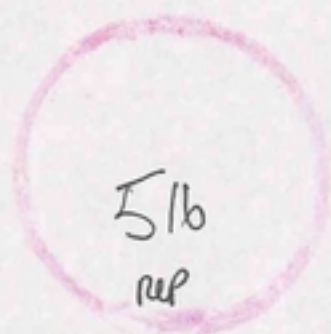


SECRET AND PERSONAL

FROM: D J R HILL  
Constitutional & Political Division  
25 March 1998

COPY NO [14] OF 17.

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) [2&3]  
PS/Mr Murphy (L&B) [4&5]  
PS/PUS (L&B) [6&7]  
Mr Jeffrey [8]  
Mr Stephens [9]  
Mr Brooker [10]  
Mr Ferguson [11]  
Mr Howard [12]  
Mr Whysall [13]  
Mr Holmes, No 10 [14]  
Mr G Fergusson, RID [15]  
Ms Bharucha [16]  
File [17]



C: ~~PB~~  
JAB  
AC

MR THOMAS [1]

## SENATOR MITCHELL: OVERALL AGREEMENT

### Summary

Senator Mitchell asked the two Governments to let him have

- their separate current texts of an overall agreement, by 6pm tonight, so that he can familiarise himself with the various issues over the next few days
- an agreed text (so far as possible) by 3pm on Monday 30 March, or earlier if at all possible

2. He believes that the only conceivable way of reaching an agreement by Easter is for him to table a draft of an overall agreement for the parties to consider. His present view is that such a draft - possibly incorporating a number of options square brackets etc - would need to be tabled by the afternoon of Wednesday 1 April.

3. Following your conversations with the Secretary of State and No 10 I have now complied with the first request.

### Detail

4. Senator Mitchell, as he has often done, asked David Cooney and me to meet him earlier this afternoon.

5. He said he had met most of the parties during the day and had progressively formed the view that the only conceivable way of producing an agreement by Easter was to table in his name a draft of an overall agreement during next week. That is what the parties were urging him to

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do; and they had made clear that they would not be prepared to come to terms on any draft tabled as late as the week beginning 6 April.

6. I asked whether this view was shared by the UUP. The Senator said that he had not consulted the UUP but believed that they would be sympathetic. He had had a good meeting with David Trimble the night before who had impressed him with his sincerity about wanting to strike a deal, and to do so before Easter (although he acknowledged that there was precious little evidence of the UUP being ready to strike a deal on anything other than their own terms). He also said that both the UUP and SDLP (Cooney confirmed this) had reported that they had had ~~a~~ another very good meeting today; although he was a little worried that they had not yet got down to drafting or to the point of inviting him to join their discussions.

7. Senator Mitchell said that he hoped that the two Governments could provide an agreed text by 3pm on Monday 30 March so that he had time to review it, put it in his own style and table it possibly on the afternoon of Wednesday 1 April. Meanwhile he needed to see whatever the two Governments individually had in mind by way of an overall settlement so that he could familiarise himself with the issues. He gave categorical assurances that these would be for his eyes only. He wanted to review them overnight as he flies back to the United States so asked if they could be with him by 6pm today.

8. I said I would report these requests but could give no commitment. I also said that although the two Governments were hoping to work towards an agreed text by the weekend (did the Senator already know that?) there was no guarantee we could reach full agreement. Indeed, given their respective starting points, anything which could be agreed between the two Governments was intrinsically more likely to be acceptable to nationalists than Unionists. The Senator acknowledged the point and said he would be happy to take responsibility for putting a final draft together. He also said that he thought it would be helpful if whatever he tabled did have a number of options, square brackets and so on, to indicate that it was indeed only a draft for negotiation.

9. David Cooney indicated that he saw no difficulty about meeting the Senator's request for a copy of the Irish Government's current thinking on the shape of an overall settlement; and said that he believed an agreed document could be produced by next Monday. (I may be getting paranoid, but he seemed a little too confident for someone who had only just been presented with this request.)

10. Additionally, Senator Mitchell

a) invited our views on the relatively upbeat statement he subsequently issued this evening; and

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- b) told us that intends to convene a cross strand meeting next Monday afternoon to "shift the focus" away from the ground likely to be covered in the resumed review plenary and back on to the political negotiations. He also emphasised that "all the parties" had explained their difficulty with addressing the various issues in isolation.

Later

11. As instructed, I gave Senator Mitchell the text which Martin Howard sent me, on the following basis:

- a) it was for his eyes only;
- b) it represented work in progress and was not a fully polished draft. In particular we were in the process of refining Annex D;
- c) the Government would have an opportunity to comment on any synthesis which the Senator produced before it was tabled (although the point would not really arise until after the two Governments had given him an agreed text).

12. He gave the necessary assurances.

13. He went on to say that he would like the maximum possible opportunity to consider any agreed text, explore its implications with the two Governments, consider what presentational or other changes he would like to make and clear those with us; and given the likely demands of the talks on Monday he would like to have any agreed text - even if it was ad referendum to Ministers - on Sunday afternoon/evening. To this end he has, at some considerable personal inconvenience, re-jigged his schedule to enable him to arrive in Belfast at around 1pm on Sunday. I said the target was ambitious, but I would ring him at home in Florida on Friday evening to discuss the practicalities.

14. Meanwhile I have it on good authority that the Senator's request has put the Irish side into a spin. David Cooney has found it difficult to contact senior colleagues and those he has spoken to have been cautious about revealing the Irish side's full thinking to Senator Mitchell. Paddy Teahon has apparently suggested that they produce a quick summary for the Senator! The upshot is that the Irish are currently arranging to send a text to the Senator in Florida tomorrow. (Perhaps I was getting paranoid earlier)

Signed: David Hill

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