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An Coiste um Thurasóireacht, Cultúr, Ealaíona, Spórt agus Meáin

Tuarascaíl Taistil, California, Meitheamh 2023

Deireadh Fómhair 2023

Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media

Travel Report, California, June 2023

October 2023

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Introduction

The Committee agreed for a Committee delegation to travel to California to engage with state legislators and key stakeholders in media regulation and content creation. The visit was directly and explicitly linked to areas of work in which the Committee had decided to become involved pursuant to its orders of reference.

The Work Programme of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media identified the following as very important areas of work;

- The development of Ireland as a global centre for film and content creation.
- The role of streaming services, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney Plus, in the growth of the Irish content creation industry
- The State's response to online disinformation and media/digital literacy, including social media and fake news.

The five-day programme of meetings and engagements under the areas of Committee remit included meetings with key members of the Irish community, senior business and cultural contacts, representatives of political offices, and Team Ireland (the Consulate and the State agencies in the Bay Area), and also provided an opportunity for the Committee to engage with the important economic, political and cultural links between Ireland and California.

Participants:

- Deputy Niamh Smyth T.D., Fianna Fáil, *Cathaoirleach*
- Senator Malcolm Byrne, Fianna Fáil

The delegation was accompanied by the Clerk of the Joint Committee of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media, Laura Pathe.

Summary of Key Engagements

Tuesday 13 June

Meeting with Tourism Ireland

- A breakfast meeting with representatives from Tourism Ireland was held at Ireland House, San Francisco where Tourism Ireland are collocated with the Irish Consulate. This meeting was an opportunity for the delegation to receive an overview of the tourism industry coming from the Western United States to Ireland. The delegation were grateful to meet key representatives from Tourism Ireland, Western USA, and Aer Lingus, West Coast USA



- Further topics of discussion included the importance of the Western US market for the Irish tourism industry, availability of tourist accommodation, the expansion of the air access network, development of new business

opportunities and strategies e.g, screen tourism and the Riverdance 25th Anniversary Tour, and digital publicity.

Meeting with European Union Delegation to San Francisco

The delegation met the European Union Delegation to San Francisco, also temporarily co-located in Ireland House. This meeting was an excellent opportunity for a briefing from Gerard de Graaf, EU Envoy to the US for Digital, whose portfolio largely focuses on technology, social media, and regulation.

Topics discussed included the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive, disinformation, media regulation, the impact of artificial intelligence (A.I.) on media pluralism and the need for common strategies and approaches to regulate A.I.

Meeting with Google

The delegation met with Google representatives responsible for Information Quality Government Affairs and Public Policy and Policy Council at Google's Spear Street offices in San Francisco.



This meeting provided a useful opportunity to discuss the challenges facing industry and regulators alike in relation to mis- and dis-information, and media literacy and also the impact of A.I..

Topics also discussed included the need for increased engagement between governments, industry and civil society in safeguarding the integrity of media content as valuable tools of democracy, content verification and the establishment of codes of practice.

Meeting with Tech Caucus, Sacramento

The delegation were honoured to meet with Assemblymember Evan Low, Co-Chair of the California Legislative Technology and Innovation Caucus.



The Caucus is a bipartisan group of state lawmakers that seek to promote economic

activity. This meeting provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations at the legislative level and to discuss the many common challenges facing regulators worldwide in combatting mis-, and dis-information, and safeguarding media as a democratic good. The need for greater cooperation between industry and governments was once more a point of discussion in this engagement, as was also the impact of A.I. across all sectors of society.

Visit to Dublin, California to location of Continental Youth Championships (CYC) 2023 and reception with key officials

The delegation visited the city of Dublin, California which recently had the distinction of hosting 2023 GAA Continental Youth Championship (CYC), annual weekend tournament of Gaelic football, hurling, and camogie organized by the Gaelic Athletic Association, and a sports event of key importance for the Irish diaspora across North America. The delegation was brought on a tour of the proposed location for the games, and met with the Vice Mayor of Dublin, CA and City State Officials, alongside CYC Board Members and regional GAA leaders, who later hosted the delegation for an informal reception that evening.



Wednesday 14 June

Meeting with Hearst Media Group, San Francisco

Hearst Media Group is a powerful media conglomerate that owns and operates television networks, magazines, newspapers, and other media properties and the delegation were glad of the opportunity to meet some of its senior management team. The meeting provided an overview of, and insights into, the media landscape in California and in the US as a whole.



Topics discussed included;

- The need to tackle the spread of online disinformation and misinformation to ensure the protection of trustworthy media and democratic systems more generally.
- The need to support local and regional reporting.
- The impact of A.I. on the media sector.

Lunch with local Arts and Cultural Stakeholders

The delegation had the opportunity to meet some local arts and cultural stakeholders in San Francisco and were thankful to the group for its insights into music, arts and film.



Visit to United Irish Cultural Centre (UICC)

The delegation met with the UICC board to discuss Irish Centre Project 2025, an ambitious renovation project with an estimated cost of \$70m and were briefed by the UICC team on the current activities of the centre. The ambitious project aims to tear down the current building housing the UICC and reconstruct a more modern

structure that better represents the needs of the local Irish community. The \$70m Capital Project is undoubtedly the primary issue at hand for the UICC and for many within the Irish community. The Centre, established in 1975, is now aiming to pivot and be more inclusive of all members of the diaspora community, with a great variety of spaces to be devoted to cultural programming uses that are currently not available. The delegation was impressed by the dedication and commitment of the group and wish them well with this ambitious project, which will serve the Irish diaspora in the Bay area for many years to come.



Meeting with TikTok Global Head of Risk and Response Operations, Trust and Safety

This meeting was a useful engagement to understand some of TikTok's processes and approaches in relation to data privacy and processes to combat the amplification of polarising materials online.

Issues also discussed included;

- The challenges facing legislators in regulating in an ever-changing landscape where technology grows and develops at speed.
- Online Safety, particularly in relation to children.
- Efforts to combat mis- and disinformation.
- The impact of A.I.

Thursday 15 June

Breakfast meeting with Consul General of Ireland - South Western United States and Screen Ireland Head of US Productions and Partnerships

Programme briefing ahead of day's engagements.

Tour of Culver City Studios

The delegation enjoyed a short tour of the iconic Culver Studios owned and run by MBS Group/ Hackman Capital Partners located in Culver City, California. The Culver Studios is one of the entertainment industry's most treasured independent film and television studios. Originally built in 1918 by silent movie pioneer Thomas Ince, the Culver Studios has been home to some of the most famous productions in Hollywood history, including *Gone with the Wind*, *Citizen Kane* and *E.T.*

The Culver Studios totals 720,850 square feet—including the Mansion and bungalows, five brand new buildings, totalling 500,000 square feet, and two parking structures with 1930 spaces. In total, the campus offers 619,850 square feet of creative office and state-of-the-art production support space, 91,263 square feet of stages, and 4,736 square feet of stage support space. Amazon Studios will occupy over 530,000 and are based on campus.

Visit to MBS office, Culver City

MBS/HCP owns the world's largest independent studio and media portfolio, which now includes approximately \$4.3 Billion in media real estate assets and exclusively

services over 360 sound stages within its MBS Group network of 65+ locations across 46 cities and four countries.

The MBS Group operates some of the entertainment industry's most iconic, independent studio lots. Each is loaded with modern features and amenities, and all offer turn-key services to deliver a signature, one-stop production experience. Its customer base includes major media and digital content producers as well as best-in-class studio real estate owners with locations in the world's top production markets.

MBS acquired Ardmore Studios, Bray Co Wicklow, and Troy Studios, Castletroy, Co Limerick in August 2021. Both iconic Irish studios continue to operate with their existing branding, with CEO Elaine Geraghty and the staff at both facilities remaining unchanged. In April 2022, MBS were announced as the joint partner of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund to lead the development of the Greystones Media Campus. Set to be completed in 2024, this will be the largest state of the art film and television studios in Ireland. It is expected to double the number of high-end TV and film stages in Ireland and lead to approximately 1500 jobs.

Topics discussed during the meeting with MBS officials included;

- Ways to encourage more film industry production in Ireland
- Encouragement of US Ireland co-productions
- Call for restoration of the 5% regional uplift.
- Limitations of the cap imposed by Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1975.
- Training and upskilling incentives
- Need for Ireland to compete in what is now a global market.

Round table discussion with the Motion Picture Association and representation from its members from Disney, Netflix, Universal, Sony, Paramount and Warner Bros.

The Motion Picture Association is the trade association representing some of the entertainment industry's biggest studios. It advocates for film, television and streaming industry globally across a range of issues from copyright to skills development to economic supports. Its membership includes Disney, Sony, Netflix, Warner Bros and the Committee members will have the opportunity to meet with senior executives from these and other studios who form part of the organization.

Items discussed included;

- The development of the industry in Ireland, including technology and innovation needs.
- Incentives to encourage US production in Ireland
- Section 481, including the 5% regional uplift and the associated 45Km training radius —re-instating the former and relieving from the latter.
- The lifting of the per-project cap.
- The need for budgetary stability over a sufficient planning horizon.

Dinner with studio and content creation executives

The delegation was grateful to be hosted by the Consul General in Los Angeles for an evening engagement with key studio and content creation executives from companies such as Disney, Netflix, NBC and Cinespace Studios.

Friday 16 June

Visit to RAND

RAND is a world-renowned global think tank and policy research institute, which focuses in the main on security, to learn more of their Countering Truth Decay initiative. RAND has been studying what it terms “Truth Decay” since 2018. It defines truth decay as a blurring of fact and fiction in American public life and has undertaken extensive research to uncover its causes, consequences and means

to counter it, across a range of public spheres. This visit afforded the delegation the opportunity to discuss with relevant researchers their work on media (including social media) disinformation, in particular their “Truth Decay” initiative.

Universal Studio Tour

The delegation enjoyed the tour of Universal Studios which provided a wonderful opportunity to grasp the scale of investment and production undertaken by such studios.

Visit to Los Angeles Public Library

The LA Central Library is the headquarters of a network of 72 branches that make up the Los Angeles Public Library, and the third largest central library in the US, housing more than ten million items, from popular fiction titles to rare genealogical publications, historic photographs and U.S. patents. The LA Public Library is a cultural partner of the Consulate, having worked with the LA Public Library on the presentation of Fishamble’s “Transatlantic Commissions”. The delegation enjoyed a tour of the facility.

Conclusion

The delegation concluded that the visit to California had provided an ideal opportunity to get a sense of the regulatory landscape and common challenges facing legislators in California. The delegation was agreed that its meetings with industry stakeholders in both media and content creation provided vital insights into how Ireland might grow even stronger in these fields and were grateful for the opportunity to have political and cultural engagements in California. In adopting this report, the Committee notes it has raised salient points with Minister Martin in relation to challenges facing the content creation industries and also commits to continuing its examination of matters relating to online safety, online disinformation and media literacy.

The delegation, and in turn, the Committee is grateful for the opportunity to explore the important economic, political and cultural links between Ireland and California. The delegation thanks most sincerely the Consul General of Ireland, Western United

States, Micheál Smith, and Consul General of Ireland, South Western United States, Marcella Smyth and all the staff at the Consulates of Ireland in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and also Screen Ireland Head of US Production and Partnerships, Steven Davenport for their invaluable assistance and guidance.


MEMBERSHIP

- Deputy Niamh Smyth T.D., Fianna Fáil, *Cathaoirleach*
- Deputy Alan Dillon T.D., Fine Gael, *Leas-Chathaoirleach*
- Deputy Ciarán Cannon T.D., Fine Gael
- Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick T.D., Independent
- Deputy Brendan Griffin T.D., Fine Gael
- Deputy Mattie McGrath T.D., Independent
- Deputy Imelda Munster T.D., Sinn Féin
- Deputy Chris Andrews T.D., Sinn Féin
- Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan T.D., Fianna Fáil
- Senator Malcolm Byrne, Fianna Fáil
- Senator Micheál Carrigy, Fine Gael
- Senator Shane Cassells, Fianna Fáil
- Senator Annie Hoey, Labour Party
- Senator Fintan Warfield, Sinn Féin

Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media

The following Deputies and Senators are members of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media of the 33rd Dáil and the 26th Seanad.

Deputies


CATHAOIRLEACH	LEAS-CHATHAOIRLEACH			
				
Niamh Smyth	Alan Dillon	Chris Andrews	Ciarán Cannon	Peter Fitzpatrick
Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Sinn Féin	Fine Gael	Independent

				
Brendan Griffin	Mattie McGrath	Imelda Munster	Christopher O'Sullivan	
Fine Gael	Independent	Sinn Féin	Fianna Fáil	

Senators

				
Malcolm Byrne	Micheál Carrigy	Shane Cassells	Annie Hoey	Fintan Warfield
Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Fianna Fáil	Labour Party	Sinn Féin

Membership history


 Johnny Mythen
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