



John Bruton,
European Union ambassador

"The location of the companies (in Alabama) is due in no small part to a changing perception."

EU ambassador hails Alabama's evolving image

Calls death penalty an obstacle to progress

By **THOMAS SPENCER**,
News staff writer

MONTGOMERY — Alabama "is a state that has turned the corner in many ways," European Union Ambassador John Bruton told a Montgomery audience Wednesday, but "all of that can be spoiled if one fails to deal with excessive incarceration and the death penalty."

Bruton, on the final day of a three-day swing through the state, was speaking to a group of activists gathered by the Equal Justice Initiative, the Montgomery-based nonprofit that provides legal defense for Death Row inmates.

His visit has mostly been a celebration of the growing economic relationship between Alabama and European countries that have joined together to form a common market.

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In terms of foreign investment in the state and the growth of its exports, Alabama has been one of the most successful U.S. states in recent years, with the bulk of that coming from European companies, Bruton said.

Alabama and the states of the Deep South have overcome deep negative impressions to achieve that, Bruton said. "The location of the companies here is due in no small part to a changing perception."

But the death penalty is one issue that stills shadows the impression of the United States in general and Alabama in particular, he said.

The death penalty is outlawed in the 27 member nations of the EU and abolition of the death penalty is a precondition for joining.

129 nations have bans

Worldwide, 129 countries have either outlawed or do not practice the death penalty; 68 nations still administer it.

Bruton said the EU raises the issue of the death penalty with other major countries where it is still practiced, including China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. When combined with the United States, those countries carried out 94 percent of the 2,148 executions worldwide in 2005.

"It would be inappropriate if we failed to raise this issue with our closest friend in the world," Bruton said.

At a time when many countries and many U.S. states are reconsidering their use of the death penalty and are handing out fewer death sentences, Ala-

bama's number of death sentences climbed from 12 in 2005 to 14 in 2006, according to figures provided by the Equal Justice Initiative.

In the past several years, Alabama has sentenced more people to death per capita than any other state. In 2005, Alabama sentenced more people to death than Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee combined. Alabama has 195 people on Death Row, according to EJI.

Further, Alabama is the only state in the nation that allows judges to override jury verdicts of life without parole and to impose death sentences, and it is the only state that does not provide legal assistance to Death Row inmates challenging their sentences on appeal, according to EJI.

Bruton said Tuesday in a meeting with Gov. Bob Riley that he did mention EU opposition to the death penalty but the discussion ended there.

In advance of Bruton's remarks, EJI screened a video that explored issues surrounding the death penalty in Alabama. Bruton was moved by personal stories it contained of former Death Row inmates and relatives of people who'd been executed, but he questioned whether the film's flashbacks to scenes of lynching and its featuring of Confederate flags would have the unintended consequence of making the broader public more defensive and less open to calls for change.

A hard sale to Alabama

A former Irish prime minister, Bruton said the easiest part of taking on an issue is marshaling your arguments. "The hard part is getting them to listen."

Perhaps, Bruton said, Alabamians who are seeing the benefits of foreign investment

through job growth and low unemployment would be more receptive to an argument that doing away with the death penalty would accelerate the shift to a more positive opinion of the state.

International companies make location decisions based on where they feel their employees would feel comfortable and whether the corporate image is enhanced by its association with that state, he said.

"Anyone who thinks it is a decision made solely on the basis of purely financial data is mistaken," he said.

Arguments against the death penalty should be couched as an extension of the state's positive qualities: hospitality, warmth and lack of formality, and its strong religious tradition. As a politician, he found that appealing to people's positive qualities was a more effective way of winning people over.

Jerome Gray, the recently retired field director for the Alabama Democratic Conference, said Bruton's comments were good advice. He was reminded that they'd been most successful in making the case for expanded black representation in government when they made people see the benefits of having a government that is broadly reflective of the people of the state.

Alabamians like to think of themselves as fair-minded and vigilant in the pursuit of justice, Gray said. Those instincts can be made to work against the death penalty.

"I thought he was very perceptive," Gray said. "We've got to think of better ways to achieve this thing we want to see happen."

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AMBASSADOR JOHN BRUTON

Head of Delegation

Biographical Note

John Bruton is a former [Irish](#) Prime Minister (Taoiseach), who helped transform the Irish economy into the "Celtic Tiger," one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In the year before he took office (1993) the Irish economy grew by 2.7%. During his time as Taoiseach (1994-1997), the Irish economy grew at an annual average rate of 8.7%, peaking at 11.1% in 1997. John Bruton was also deeply involved in the Northern Irish Peace Process leading to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.



While Prime Minister, Ambassador Bruton presided over a successful [Irish EU Presidency](#) in [1996](#) and helped finalize the [Stability and Growth Pact](#), which governs the management of the single European currency, the [Euro](#). Mr. Bruton addressed a joint session of the US Congress on [September 11, 1996](#), as only the 30th head of state or government of an EU country to do so since 1945. He was probably the only President in office of the [European Council](#) to have addressed a joint session of Congress. Further, he represented the EU at [Summit](#) meetings with the President of the United States and with the Prime Ministers of Canada, Japan, China and Korea.

Before being appointed Ambassador to the United States, John Bruton served as a leading member of the Convention that drafted the first-ever [European Constitution](#), which was signed in Rome on October 29, 2004 and is now before the 25 EU Member States for ratification. He strongly supported proposals to give the general public a more direct say in the choice of EU leadership. He was also Vice President of the European People's Party from 1999 to 2005.

Since taking up his position in Washington, John Bruton has met with the President and former Presidents of the United States, and [visited](#) with governors, mayors, business leaders and students in over 20 US states to explain that the expanding European Union is good for the US economy and good for American jobs. In Washington, DC, Ambassador Bruton has met some 200 Members of Congress to explain major EU developments and discuss the importance of the EU-US relationship in matters of trade, counterterrorism, public health, energy, the environment and the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights around the world.

John Bruton was first elected to the Irish Parliament ("Dáil Éireann") in 1969 at the age of 22 as a member of the Fine Gael Party, becoming Party Leader in 1990 and leading it into government in 1994. He previously served as Ireland's Minister for Finance (1981-1982 and 1986-1987); Minister for Industry & Energy (1982-1983); Minister for Trade, Commerce & Tourism (1983-1986) and was Parliamentary Secretary (Junior Minister) from 1973-1977.

As Minister for Finance, he overcame a major budget deficit crisis for Ireland in 1981, and as Minister for Industry he prepared and had enacted into law the comprehensive industrial development legislation which underpins Irish growth to this day. He resigned his seat effective November 1, 2004 to take up his appointment as EU Commission Head of Delegation in the United States.

John Bruton graduated from University College Dublin with a Bachelor of Arts degree before studying to become a barrister. He holds Honorary Degrees from Memorial University of Newfoundland and the National University of Ireland. He is married to Finola Bruton and has 4 children.

[John Bruton's letter, upon assuming his official duties, to US President Bush; News Release.](#)

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