

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Leo Varadkar of Ireland and an Exchange With Reporters

March 15, 2024

President Biden. Well, Taoiseach, welcome back to the Oval Office. It's good to have you back. And I want to thank you again for the reception I had last—when I was last in Ireland. As a matter of fact, my family wasn't sure we wanted to come home. It was so nice.

Look, it's great to see you again, a great chance to return some of the hospitality that you provided me when I was in Ireland last. And I know there are all kinds of Irish—old Irish sayings, but my Grandfather Finnegan used to say, "May the hinge of our friendship never go rusty." He had all these sayings, you know. The Irish in America sometimes think they're more Irish than the Irish.

But—and I don't think we're going to let it go rusty. We're vital to each other's economies. We're good friends. And we're—and today celebrates 100 years——

Prime Minister Varadkar. That's right.

President Biden. ——100 years of diplomatic relations between Ireland and America. And as far as that friendship goes, it keeps increasing and not diminishing, and I would argue it's stronger than ever.

Together, we're deepening our economic partnership. There are 300,000—helped create 300,000 jobs across both our nations.

And we're working together to increase humanitarian assistance in Gaza. And we both know that a whole lot more has to be done.

And we're standing together to support Ukraine in the face of Putin's onslaught, the savagery with which he's attacking Ukrainians. And I want to thank you, Leo, for Ireland's unwavering assistance to Ukraine, including millions of vital humanitarian aid that you provide—millions of dollars.

And I'm urging our Congress to do its part to get back in the game of—we were able to find another \$300 million, but we have a \$6 billion package—a \$60 billion package. And we're really working—so, when we're up in the Hill, I'd ask you to lobby them for me.

Prime Minister Varadkar. I will.

President Biden. That was a joke, guys. *[Laughter]* That was a joke.

But I'm urging them to—Congress to pass the bipartisan legislation now that includes a significant amount of humanitarian aid, including to Ukraine and Gaza.

And as I said in Belfast last year, we remain committed to protecting the peace and progress in Northern Ireland since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. And like you, I'm glad to see Northern Ireland's Executive and Assembly are up and running. And I think that's, from my perspective, a very positive step forward.

So, Leo, thank you, again, for being here. And as we begin the next century of our partnership and friendship, I've never been more optimistic because, you know, united by history, heritage, and hope, I think there's not a damn thing we can't do together. So, welcome.

Prime Minister Varadkar. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. And thanks for giving us so much time over these next few days. And very keen to talk about four main things while we're together.

Since we last met, back in New York, briefly in September at the U.N., and since your visit to Ireland last year, it's really good to see the institutions in Northern Ireland up and running. It just makes such a difference to have the Good Friday Agreement properly functioning.

So, the—as you know, the Deputy First Minister and First Minister are here. The Executive and Assembly are operating. We'll have our North South Ministerial Council meeting next month and the British-Irish Council in June. So, really good to see the promise of that agreement—that Good Friday Agreement being fulfilled again, which is such a positive change since the last time we met.

As you mentioned, we've—celebrating a hundred years of diplomatic relations. The U.S is one of the first countries to recognize Irish independence. And it's become such a strong relationship since then.

I'm very keen to talk about that a bit more, and also the strength of our economic relationship now, which increasingly goes both ways. There's now 100,000 Americans working in firms that are Irish-owned here in the U.S., and we're one of the top 10 investors in the U.S. now. So, great to be able to repay some of that interest.

Obviously, keen to talk about the situation in Gaza as well. You know, my view that we need to have a cease-fire as soon as possible to get food and medicine in——

President Biden. And I agree.

Prime Minister Varadkar. ——to get the hostages out. And we need to talk about how we can make that happen and move towards a two-state solution, which I think is the only—the only way we'll have lasting peace and security.

President Biden. I agree.

Prime Minister Varadkar. And then, on Ukraine—just really want to thank you and America for your leadership on Ukraine. We're very worried about the situation there. And we don't think that if Putin is successful in Ukraine he'll stop there. And we really need your continued support and leadership on Ukraine and look forward to speaking to the congressional leaders about that as well later on.

And we'll have a European Council meeting next week of the—of the 27 EU Prime Ministers, so they're going to be very keen to know what—what I learned here in Washington.

And that's a—that's a fight we've got to win.

President Biden. Well, you can tell them that the President of the United States is strongly committed to making sure we provide that aid.

Well, thank you very much. We'll get a chance to bring in our delegations.

And thank you all for being here, folks.

Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer's Remarks on Israeli Military Operations in Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Q. Do you have any comment, sir, on Senator Schumer's speech on Israel yesterday?

President Biden. Senator Schumer contacted my staff—my senior staff—he was going to make that speech. And he—I'm not going to elaborate on the speech. He made a good speech, and I think he expressed a serious concern shared not only by him, but by many Americans.

[At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.]

Q. Mr. President, can there be a cease-fire before the end of Ramadan? Mr. President, can there be a cease-fire before the end of Ramadan?

President Biden. *[Inaudible]*

[Several reporters asked questions at once.]

The President's Travel Schedule

Q. Will you go back to Ireland?

The President. I always want to—I always want to go back to Ireland.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:52 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. Prime Minister Varadkar referred to Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and First Minister Michelle O'Neill of Northern Ireland.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Ireland, Prime Minister Varadkar.

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