

## Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Brian Cowen of Ireland and an Exchange With Reporters

March 17, 2010

*President Obama.* Good morning, everybody. First of all, I just want to congratulate this soundperson right here for having the green earmuffs. [Laughter] Now, I haven't seen that before. Happy St. Patrick's Day, everybody.

Before I talk a little bit about the strong and enduring bond between the American and Irish people, I just want to thank Congress for passing this morning the "HIRE Act." It is the first of what I hope will be a series of jobs packages that help to continue to put people back to work all across America.

This bill will provide tax cuts to small businesses that are willing to begin hiring right now, putting people back to work. It's also going to provide significant tax breaks to businesses for investing in their business, and so, hopefully, at a time when we're starting to see an upswing in economic growth, that will help sustain it. And the bill also will continue to improve our ability to finance infrastructure projects all across the country.

I also want to say to the Republicans who voted for this bill that I appreciate their willingness to work with Democrats in a bipartisan fashion to get America moving again. And as I said, I hope that on a series of future steps that we take to help small businesses get financing, to help improve our infrastructure around the country, to put people back to work, that we're going to see more progress on that front.

I want to thank the Taoiseach for coming here today. Last year, we had the opportunity to get to know each other and had a wonderful time during St. Patrick's Day. Thirty-six million Americans claim Irish ancestry—I'm sure more do on St. Patrick's Day. And it's a testament, I think, to how close our two countries are that America has been shaped culturally, politically, economically by the incredible contributions of Irish Americans. Those bonds endure. And in our meeting we reaffirmed how important it is for us to continue a strong partnership across a whole host of issues.

I thanked Taoiseach for the assistance that they've provided on critical international issues.

We use the facilities in Ireland for transit for our military troops to Afghanistan. The Irish police are providing training in Afghanistan. As Taoiseach indicated, the Irish Government punches above its weight on a whole host of critical issues. We're going to be working together to enhance food security around the world. Even in these difficult times, it's important for us to make sure that we're tackling big issues like world hunger.

I congratulated the Taoiseach and his Government for the extraordinary work that they engaged in, working with Gordon Brown and the British Government, as well as Secretary Hillary Clinton, in reaffirming the progress that's been made in Northern Ireland and to get a ratification of continued devolution. It's a sign of his leadership, and we want to be as supportive as possible in advancing the Northern Ireland peace process.

We also discussed the economy. And on both sides of the Atlantic we are seeing stabilization of the economy, but obviously we want more than just stabilization. There are a lot of people out there that are still hurting, still out of work. And so we will continue to coordinate in international fora as well as bilaterally to see how we can spur investment and private sector growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

So I just wanted to say how grateful we are for the friendship and the partnership between the United States Government and the Irish Government. We wish you and everybody who's here a happy St. Patrick's Day and are looking forward to the reception that we'll have in the White House later this evening.

*Prime Minister Cowen.* Thank you very much, Mr. President. And we are—I and my delegation—delighted to be able to join you here in the White House this morning on this wonderful St. Patrick's Day morning. And I think the Sun shining outside and the light coming in, I think, typifies the excellent relationship that Ireland enjoys with the United States, not only now but, as you say, over many generations. And that contribution to America by Ire-

land is a continuing one, one that we have to find and give modern expression to all the time.

And certainly, the level of cooperation and common cause we enjoy together, in terms of the issues of today in the economy and how we can ensure that our economies recover as quickly as possible, is something that's very important to both our countries. And certainly in Ireland's context, the resurgent U.S. economy will be a strong indicator of our return to prosperity. And we very much commend the very decisive steps that you have taken in terms of the economic issues and the banking issues, which have been so successful, and which we are seeking to replicate ourselves in our own context, in terms of recapitalization of our banking system and making sure that we have a banking system fit for purpose that will assist recovery and grow jobs again in the future and provide investment and credit—working credit for businesses that are hard pressed in a very difficult trading environment.

In that context, I've been delighted to head a delegation here to the United States and having visited Chicago, the West Coast, Silicon Valley, and now Washington, DC, over the last couple of days; 70 small and medium-sized enterprises have been over with us, doing trade with American companies. I'm glad to say that the two-way relationship in terms of investment is continuing. Over 34 billion euros has been invested by Ireland—Irish companies in the United States, employing 85,000 people directly.

And that, if you like, mirrors the very significant U.S. investment that has taken place in Ireland, employing directly of the order of 90,000 people. So that important two-way mutual benefit to this trade is very, very important, one I know that you're equally cognizant of, in terms of finding jobs for your people as we seek to provide jobs for ours.

On Northern Ireland, we are deeply grateful for the continuing and deep commitment shown by the Obama administration, by the President himself, and by Secretary of State Clinton in recent months. We've been very

grateful for that continuing interest, which has influenced an outcome that has been so positive. As I said to the President, for a place that has been known for its disagreements, an 88–17 vote was a very good vote to get. I'm sure he's looking forward to a good outcome in what he's doing during the course of this week.

We decided to come on a quiet week; we knew there wasn't much going on. *[Laughter]* But we—in that context, it reinforces the fact that we are so, so grateful that the President gives so much of his time—both himself, as President, his administration, and indeed, the people on the Hill from both parties are very welcoming of us. And we deeply appreciate that, as both a recognition of the contribution of Ireland thus far to America, but also the continuing important relationship we enjoy.

So on all these fronts, again, it's a great pleasure to meet with the leader of the free world. We are deeply grateful for his sense of mission, not only in terms of how America is progressing, but America's position in the world. And we will always be supportive of the very progressive stands and positions that President Obama has taken, not only in terms of the economic issues, but on development issues. We will have a cochairing by Secretary Clinton and Micheal Martin, our foreign minister, at the U.N. conference on hunger and food security. And these are another indication of the values we share, and our ability to cooperate and provide leadership positions is one that we're very grateful and privileged to enjoy with you.

*President Obama.* Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

*[At this point, the press were dismissed by the White House staff. President Obama and Prime Minister Cowen began to leave, but the President stopped to answer questions from reporters.]*

*Congressional Action on Health Care Reform Legislation*

*Q. [Inaudible]*—that Representative Kucinich will vote for the health care bill.

*President Obama.* That's a good sign.

Q. What did you tell him?

*President Obama.* I told him thank you.

*President's Visit to Ireland*

Q. Will you be going to Ireland, Mr. President?

*President Obama.* I would love to be going to Ireland.

Q. If St. Patrick comes—[inaudible]—got you the health care, the rub of the Irish green, would you then come to Ireland the next day to thank him. Would you?

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Luncheon  
March 17, 2010

Thank you. Please, everybody, be seated. To Speaker Pelosi; distinguished Members of the House and Senate; Republican Leader Boehner; Majority Leader Steny Hoyer; my outstanding Vice President and his newest chief of staff—[laughter]—to Prime Minister Cowen and the entire Irish delegation, as well as the extraordinary leaders from Ireland and Northern Ireland: It is my privilege to welcome all of you for this wonderful St. Patrick's Day tradition.

And, Governor O'Malley, thank you for that outstanding rendition of our two national anthems. I had asked if Martin was going to do a rock 'n' roll version. [Laughter] Some of you know he's got a rock band and is in much demand.

This tradition, as most of you know, was begun by Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan, two men who agreed on their love of all things Irish, including a good scrum. But they also knew how to set aside time just to enjoy one another's company. President Reagan himself said that the two men could be friends after 6 o'clock. And I imagine they also made a midday exception for this luncheon every year.

Today is a day we speak with pride of being Irish American, whether we actually are or not. [Laughter] I am pleased to say that I can actually get away with it, and I've got the Taoiseach here to vouch for me. Prime Minister Cowen was born in County Offaly, and I can trace my ancestry on my mother's side there as well. I believe it was my great-great-great-great-

*The President.* If you have a vote in the House—

Q. Would you? [Laughter]

*The President.* All right, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:26 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom. He also referred to H.R. 2847. A portion of the first reporter's remarks could not be verified because of difficulties with the audio.

grandfather. [Laughter] This is true. [Laughter] He was a bootmaker, if I'm not mistaken.

Someone actually discovered my Irish lineage when I was running for President, and my first thought was, why didn't anybody discover this when I was running for office in Chicago? [Laughter] I would have gotten here sooner. [Laughter] I used to put the apostrophe after the "O" but that did not work. [Laughter]

So it is nice to have a little Irish blood today. It is, after all, a day to celebrate and give thanks for the profound and enduring relationship between Ireland and America. And it's also a day to thank the Irish people for all that they've done for America.

Few nations so small have had such an enormous impact on another. They came to our shores in waves, by choice as well as by necessity, building new lives even as they were building a new nation, enriching our heritage, enriching our culture in their own way. And in so doing, alongside so many others who sought a better life in America, they forged a better future for all of us.

But the truth is, they weren't always welcomed. There were times where the Irish were caricatured and stereotyped and cursed at and blamed for society's ills. So naturally, it was a good fit for them to go into politics—[laughter]—made sense. [Laughter]

When the fictional Mayor Skeffington of Edwin O'Connor's "The Last Hurrah" spoke of his life as an Irish American, he said, "When I be-