

ple in the White House, and to meet President Obama and later his wife Michelle as well.

My message to the American people is that the new Government, which I lead, which has the strongest mandate in the history of the state, will continue to build on the very strong traditional links that we've had with the United States, in business and in politics and in culture and the arts and so on.

And Ireland is open for business and we continue to be open for business to the United States. We appreciate the investment of so much foreign direct investment from the U.S. to our country. But unlike previous centuries, we come bearing gifts as well. There are many Irish companies now operating in the U.S., with at least 80,000 American jobs created out of Irish firms here.

So from that point of view, Ireland will continue to be a very strong and loyal friend of the United States, and we will work with the authorities and the political process to the benefit of both countries.

I've explained to the President what our program is for our new government, how that's been accepted in terms of its fiscal element by the IMF, who have been in Dublin recently. We also reiterated that I will work with our European colleagues for the benefit of the European Union, a union of 500 million people, which is so important in the interests of this connection with the United States and the bigger world outside.

I'm absolutely thrilled, I have to say, that President Obama has confirmed that he is to

come to Ireland. He follows a long line of Presidents of the United States who visited Ireland. And I can assure you, Mr. President, that his visit will be rapturously received by the people of Ireland.

And from that perspective, I thank you and hope that you will enjoy the fulfilling experience during your visit of visiting Moneygall, where some of your ancestors contributed to the welfare and the well-being of that little village right in the center of Ireland. You will be made very welcome, President, and we appreciate for a person with so many difficulties on his plate as you have, in the global sense, that you'd take time to visit Ireland.

So from that point of view, I can testify as the Irish Taoiseach, this is another great day in our country's journey, and it's a very significant statement of confidence by the most powerful political office in the world that the President of the United States decides to come to Ireland in May. We appreciate that very much, indeed, Mr. President. And we'll make sure that your visit is warmly received and generously treated. And if you want the odd round of golf, I'll be very happy to participate with you.

President Obama. I hear Taoiseach is pretty good, so I've got to be careful. I may have to practice before I play with him.

So thank you so much.

Prime Minister Kenny. Thank you very much, indeed, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Luncheon *March 17, 2011*

Thank you, everybody. Thank you so much. Everyone, please have a seat.

To Taoiseach Kenny; to his lovely wife, who has made a wonderful luncheon companion; to the Vice President, who is here; to our host, Speaker Boehner, for gathering us together; Ambassador Collins and Mrs. Collins; distinguished Members of the House and Senate; distinguished guests from Irish, Northern Irish, and British governments: It is wonder-

ful to be here and a great privilege. It's my privilege to join all of you today for this wonderful St. Patrick's Day celebration, a day when red, white, and blue has a strong hint of green.

Taoiseach Kenny, welcome. We thank you for joining us. Your presence at this lunch virtually guarantees that any partisan clashes will be limited to who is more Irish than whom. [Laughter]

Now, speaking of ancestry, there has been some controversy about my own background. [Laughter] Two years into my Presidency, some are still bent on peddling rumors about my origins. So today I want to put all those rumors to rest. It is true, my great-great-great-grandfather really was from Ireland. It's true—Moneygall, to be precise. I can't believe I have to keep pointing this out. [Laughter]

As John mentioned, this tradition began with Tip O'Neill and President Reagan, two men of Irish stock, quick wit, and no small amount of fighting spirit. Tip's and Gip's differences were real; their beliefs and their battles were sincere. But so too were the bonds of affection and respect for one another. In fact, on the Speaker's 70th birthday, President Reagan threw him a small party at the White House, where he offered up a toast. "Tip," he said, "if I had a ticket to heaven and you didn't have one, I would give mine away and go to hell with you." [Laughter] The two later left the room arm in arm.

Before 6 o'clock, it was politics; after 6 o'clock, they could be friends. They extended that safe zone to St. Patrick's Day, setting aside this lunch each year so that folks in both parties could enjoy the good cheer and the good company. Our dear friend Ted Kennedy and others persuaded Taoiseach to join them. And the only hint of fighting in the air was the contest to outdo one another's stories.

President Reagan insisted that this lunch not be a place for policy battles, but rather for good cheer and fellowship that so often is missing in Washington. "Our friendship," President Reagan said of Tip O'Neill, "is testimony to the political system that we're part of and the country that we live in, a country which permits two not so shy and not so retiring Irishmen to have it out on the issues, rather than on each other or their countrymen." I think that's a sentiment that we should all strive to keep in mind, whether Irish or not.

Over the past week, we've witnessed one of our finest allies, Japan, endure a terrible tragedy. As Americans, our first instinct naturally has been to help in any way that we can, and we will help the Japanese people as they recover and rebuild. But what these events should also remind us is that, in the scheme of things, our differences are small. In the face of all that we have in common, our differences are insignificant. None of us are alone in this world. We need one another, especially in times of turmoil and trial.

And as servants of the people who sent us here, we can all do better to live up to the example that Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan and others often set: to put the differences of the day aside, to seek common ground, to forge progress for the sake of this country that we love—even before 6 o'clock.

So in the months and years ahead, I hope we can summon some of the spirit of this day and work together with renewed commitment to bring about better days for all of our people. But today is a day for tens of millions of Americans of Irish descent to celebrate the tremendous influence that one small island with a big-hearted people has had on our country.

Prime Minister Kenny, I thank you and your lovely wife for coming today. We are proud to call Ireland a friend on this St. Patrick's Day and on all the days of the calendar, and we thank the Irish people for all that they've done to enrich the United States of America.

So let me grab a glass. To our guest, the Taoiseach of Ireland: Happy St. Patrick's Day to all of you, and may the friendship between our two countries grow ever greener. Cheers.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:04 p.m. at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland and his wife Fionnuala; and Ireland's Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Collins and his wife Marie. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.