

Statement on Signing the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Conservation and Recreation Act March 13, 2014

Today I signed the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Conservation and Recreation Act into law. This legislation protects a stunning, 35-mile stretch of Lake Michigan's coastline as a wilderness area and guarantees public access for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor pursuits. It also marks the first time Congress has passed a public lands designation in 5 years, ending the longest period of congressional inaction on wilderness protection in nearly 50 years. And it passed with bipartisan support, proving that protecting America's natural beauty is something leaders from both parties can get behind.

Now it's up to Congress to do even more. There are currently dozens of conservation proposals before Congress—many supported by Democrats and Republicans—that would protect important lands across the country and help grow our economy. Congress should act on these proposals, and in the meantime, I will continue to do my part to protect our Federal lands for future generations to enjoy.

NOTE: S. 23, approved March 13, was assigned Public Law No. 113-87.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland and an Exchange With Reporters March 14, 2014

President Obama. Well, it is wonderful to have Taoiseach Kenny back here in the Oval Office. This is one of my favorite times of year because I'm able to join with our friends from Ireland to celebrate the incredible bond that exists between our two countries. I think it is fair to say that there are very few countries around the world where the people-to-people ties are so strong.

And in addition to sharing values and sharing a commitment to democracy, we also share these family ties that go back generations. And I want to once again thank the people of Ireland for the incredible hospitality that they showed me and Michelle and the girls each time that we've had an opportunity to visit Ireland.

I started the meeting today congratulating Taoiseach Kenny on the economic progress that's been made over the last several years in Ireland. Obviously, Ireland was hit hard by the financial crisis and problems with its banking system. It required some very tough decisions that Taoiseach Kenny was willing to take. But what we've now seen is Ireland emerge from its assistance program in a much stronger posi-

tion on the global stage and in global markets. And as a consequence, I think it's really well positioned to start building for the future and attracting businesses with a highly skilled and well-educated workforce.

And there is tremendous investment by U.S. companies in Ireland. There's tremendous investment here in the United States by Irish companies. We're an example of the mutually beneficial trade that can take place across the Atlantic. And that's why we appreciate Taoiseach Kenny being a strong leader as we move forward on the transatlantic trade agreement that is currently being negotiated between the United States and the EU.

We had an opportunity to discuss a range of global affairs. Obviously, on our minds right now is the situation in Ukraine. Ireland has been a strong voice in the European Council for the need to send a clear message of support for Ukrainian democracy and self-determination and a strong message to Russia that it should not violate the integrity and the sovereignty of its neighbor. We continue to hope that there's a diplomatic solution to be found, but the United States and Europe stand united

not only in its message about Ukrainian sovereignty, but also that there will be consequences if in fact that sovereignty continues to be violated.

We had an opportunity to discuss the fact that Ireland does tremendous work around the world on a whole range of issues. It punches above its weight when it comes to humanitarian efforts. We very much appreciate that.

Closer to home, we both share an interest in seeing Northern Ireland continue to take the next steps that are necessary to finally bring an end to what so often has been a tragic history. I was disappointed—the U.S. Government was disappointed—that the all-party talks did not arrive at a final conclusion and agreement. But we're urging the parties to continue to work and negotiate. And I know that the good influence coming from Dublin will help to encourage them to move out of the past and get the kind of history that—or the kind of future that Northern Ireland so richly deserves.

So I greatly appreciate, Taoiseach, your visit. We look forward to a good lunch and, I suspect, some good Irish music. And we will have a wonderful St. Patrick's Day reception this afternoon. The Taoiseach, I understand, has brought his children here this time, so they'll be able to celebrate alongside us. And to you and your delegation, thank you again for your friendship and support.

Prime Minister Kenny. Let me just say it's a privilege to be here in the Oval Office with the President to continue these traditions and discussions that we've had between our two countries. I might say that on this occasion, we did not have to have a detailed discussion about Ireland's economy. I was able to report to the President the progress our country has made in the last couple years.

The President spoke about the issues that we did discuss. In addition to that, we also discussed the question of immigration reform, which is an issue for Ireland and for many other countries, and we hope to pursue those dis-

cussions down at the Capitol building later on with a number of other representatives.

So it's a privilege to be here. It's a great occasion for us. And I've given the President a review of the attitude and the happenings at the European Council meeting, particularly in relation to the situation in Ukraine. And we hope that clarity of message and strength of feeling can prevent very difficult circumstances arising there.

I explained to him the European Council meeting presentation by the Ukrainian President, the discussion we've had at the EPP Congress with Prime Minister Cameron in Downing Street earlier this week, and our hopes that this matter can be resolved.

So again, my privilege to be here on behalf of the Irish people to wish the President, the First Lady, and his family every success in their onerous responsibilities with so many places around the world requiring the assistance of the United States.

President Obama. Thank you.

Thank you, everybody.

Vice President Joe Biden

Q. Will Vice President Biden come to Ireland?

President Obama. You know, Biden wants to come to Ireland. He lobbies me every week to go to Ireland. So I guarantee you, he'll get there. He'll get there.

Thank you, everybody.

Q. Will you come back to join us again?

President Obama. Oh, I'd love—tell everybody in Moneygall I said hi.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Naoise, Ferdia, and Aoi-bhinn Kenny, children of Prime Minister Kenny. Prime Minister Kenny referred to Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk of Ukraine; and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom. He also referred to the European People's Party (EPP).