

Cleveland, where I'll be visiting tomorrow [Wednesday].^o These are school districts that, despite enormous challenges, have made real progress.

And the idea that we'd go backwards on that progress, in some cases for ideological reasons, as opposed to because of what the evidence says, that's something that—that's not the kind of legacy we want to leave for the next genera-

tion. And I'm going to continue to fight to make sure that this progress continues.

So I want to thank everybody who's around this table and know that they're going to have a strong partner in my administration.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:51 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland March 17, 2015

President Obama. Well, it is a great pleasure to once again welcome my good friend and colleague, the Taoiseach, Prime Minister Kenny, back to the White House and the Oval Office along with his outstanding delegation.

This is an annual affair and always one of my favorites. It allows me to trot out my Irish heritage—[laughter]—and brings back incredibly fond memories of my visits to Ireland, and it allows us to reaffirm the incredible friendship and family ties between our two countries. The Taoiseach visits at a time when Ireland is on the move after a very challenging financial crisis and economic recession. Under the Taoiseach's leadership, finances have stabilized, the economy is now growing again, unemployment's beginning to come down, and there are terrific opportunities for us to further collaborate in creating jobs both in the United States and in Ireland.

One of those areas is the potential for a Transatlantic Trade Partnership between the United States and the European Union. And we had discussions about how we can continue the negotiations on those fronts. And I was able to hear from the Taoiseach about Europe's progress in trying to strengthen its economy as a whole, because obviously, what happens in Europe, as one of our largest trading partners, has a great impact on what happens here in the United States as well.

We had the opportunity to talk about Northern Ireland, and although the recent frame-

work agreement that has been put in place offers great hope for a resolution of some longstanding challenges there, there is still more work to do. But we very much appreciate the leadership that the Taoiseach has shown in this process and the collaboration with the United States in encouraging both parties to arrive at peaceful resolutions that can lead to more prosperity and growth in Northern Ireland.

We had an opportunity to talk about some of the domestic issues here. Of great interest to the Taoiseach is immigration reform. I indicated to him the executive actions that I've taken, some of which are currently tied up in the courts. And we share the view that one of the great strengths of the United States has always been its willingness to welcome new immigrants to our shores. That's what's made us unique and special. And nobody has contributed more to the growth and dynamism of the U.S. economy than our Irish immigrants, and that continues to be the case. So we appreciate the interest there.

And we had a chance to discuss some of the broader security issues that we face in common: the importance of having a firm and resolute position with respect to Ukraine and Russian aggression there, and the need to maintain strong sanctions and ensure that the Minsk agreement is fully implemented and that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine is respected. We had a chance to discuss the challenges in the Middle East and the impor-

^o White House correction.

tance of stemming the flow of foreign fighters, both to Ireland and to the United States and the rest of Europe, and increasing the deepening cooperation in counterterrorism and countering foreign fighter flows. And we very much appreciate the cooperation that's been provided there.

So as usual, the biggest challenge that I have when I meet with the Taoiseach is finding something we disagree on. It's very hard because we're great partners and he is a great friend. We look forward to welcoming everybody to the White House for some St. Patrick's Day cheer later this evening, and we're going to be going over to Congress for some friendship and fellowship on a bipartisan basis.

I should mention that I was hoping for a little luck of the Irish as the Republicans put forward their budget today. Unfortunately, what we're seeing right now is a failure to invest in education and infrastructure and research and national defense, all the things that we need to grow, to create jobs, to stay at the forefront of innovation, and to keep our country safe. It's not a budget that reflects the future. It's not a budget that reflects growth. It's not a budget that is going to help ensure that middle class families are able to maintain security and stability and that people who are trying to get into the middle class will have the rungs on the ladder to get into the middle class.

So I'm going to be talking more about this tomorrow. We're going to have a robust debate. And my hope is, is that ultimately we can find some compromises where together we are financing the education, the research, the training, the building of roads and bridges and ports and railways and all the things that we need to grow and put people back to work and make sure that the incredible momentum that our economy has built over the last several years continues well into the future and for next—future generations.

So we'll—I'll keep my four-leaf clover in my pocket and see if the Speaker and Mitch McConnell and others are interested in having that conversation.

All right? Taoiseach.

Prime Minister Kenny. Thanks very much. Well, first of all, it's a privilege to be back again here in the environs of the Oval Office. I've wished the President a Happy St. Patrick's Day and his First Lady a safe journey on her travels to the Far East.

I've thanked the President for the appointment of Ambassador Kevin O'Malley to our country. He's doing an outstanding job, and we welcome him wholeheartedly.

The President has outlined the issues that we discussed here. I've given him a rundown on the progress that Ireland has made in the last number of years in terms of our growth, employment increasing, unemployment dropping. The progress in respect of our economy—our deficit to be eliminated by 2018 and so on. But I reminded him that it's a fragile progress and it's a work that's not yet complete. So our challenge is to manage that carefully for the future, which is what we intend to do.

I've given the President an update in respect of Europe with the situation insofar as the election in Britain is concerned, the issues that might arise there; the potential for a referendum—referendum in respect of staying in or staying out of Europe, and the need for Britain to stay in, and our big support for that and for the comments of Prime Minister Cameron.

I've referred to the situation in Greece, where the Prime Minister was clear that he wanted time and space to produce sustainable programs for the future and did not want to default or leave the euro, and he's been granted that by the European Council. The time is obviously shortening, and the ball is very much in the court of the Greek politicians.

We've referred to the T-TIP transatlantic agreement. We're very big supporters of this, and I commended the President on his forthrightness in making the decision to have the American side of that team engage with the European teams. And we want that to happen, and we want it to happen in the lifetime of this administration. And therefore, the next 6 months are critical for that. I will speak to President Juncker and President Tusk on Thursday in Brussels about this. The President is very strong on moving this along.

We referred obviously to immigration and the issue that affects us here. I commended President Obama on his executive action. Obviously, I'm aware that this is going through the courts. And the question of visa waivers and E-3 visas and all of that are part of the process. So I would hope that at the end of the day, that political leadership here in Washington and the greatest nation, the most powerful nation on Earth can actually deal with this particular problem. And it can only be dealt with by having courage and leadership to actually make it happen.

I referred to one of the recipients of the scientific medal, which I awarded yesterday, to France Córdova, herself the descendant of immigrants to America from Ireland, who became head of NASA and one of the best known astrophysicists in the world. And that kind of contribution is part of what immigration has brought for the U.S.

So we hope that that can move through the system and that the work of the—decisiveness of President Obama on this can bear fruit, and particularly the element of that—[inaudible]—on the road to legitimacy is the opportunity to travel over and back to see loved ones, as the case might be. That's an essential part of this. President Obama tried to deal with this by executive action. Obviously, there's a court process in place now.

We discussed the issue of the talks in respect of nonproliferation and the ISIS situation and the Middle East in general, and the challenges that face many countries and indeed humanity in that part of the world at the moment.

We also discussed the Ukraine, the necessity to have clarity about strength in respect of sanctions. And I've reminded the President that Europe has been very clear on this and wants to be very clear in coordinating activity with the United States in respect of sanctions being imposed on Russia.

So all in all, it's been a very constructive, I think a very inclusive conversation. I'm very privileged to be here on behalf of the Irish people and to say that it is quite unique for a country as small as Ireland to have this reach right to the center of influence here in the White House. And I thank you, President Obama, and your good wife and family and your administration for allowing our country to have this access. And I wish you the very best for the future.

President Obama. Well, thank you. And I just want to point out, Taoiseach got me a book of poetry by Yeats, one of my favorite poets. So in addition to all its wonderful exports, at the top of the list has to be poetry from the Irish.

Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, Prime Minister Kenny referred to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece; President Jean-Claude Juncker of the European Commission; President Donald Franciszek Tusk of the European Council; and France A. Córdova, Director, National Science Foundation, in her former capacity as Chief Scientist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Remarks With Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland at a St. Patrick's Day Reception March 17, 2015

President Obama. Hello, everybody! This is a good-looking crowd. Everybody all right back there? Have you been enjoying yourselves too much? [Laughter] Happy St. Patrick's Day, everybody. There are too many distinguished Irish and Irish Americans here tonight to mention, so I'll just offer "a hundred thousand wel-

comes" to the White House. But I want to offer a warm welcome to our special guests: Taoiseach Kenny and his lovely wife Fionnuala. Give them a big round of applause. Ireland's Ambassador to the United States, Anne Anderson; and her counterpart, our man in Dublin, Kevin O'Malley.