

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland March 15, 2016

President Obama. All right, well, top of the morning to you. It is good to welcome back Taoiseach Kenny and the delegation from the Emerald Isle and from Ireland. It is not quite St. Patrick's Day yet, but nevertheless, we always like an excuse to celebrate our Irish heritage and, more importantly, to once again affirm the incredible friendship and partnership that we have with Ireland.

Taoiseach Kenny, when he first came into office, Ireland was in dire straits economically. And we've seen significant progress in the rebound of the Irish economy. Much as here in the United States, we've seen a strong recovery, but we also are aware that a lot more work needs to be done.

There was just an election in Ireland, and we live at a time when there's a lot of volatility in the electoral process. But the one thing that is constant is the importance of us continuing to trade, continuing to encourage investment, and to boost jobs and opportunity in our respective countries.

We also have had an opportunity to discuss some of the larger issues that are impacting the region and the world. Ireland historically has punched above its weight when it comes to humanitarian assistance, dealing with migrants who are displaced because of war, peacekeeping activities around the world. And so we've been very grateful to hear the kinds of work that Ireland is already doing and want to continue to partner with them on that front.

We had a chance to discuss the progress that's been made in Northern Ireland with the Fresh Start Agreement, building on the previous agreements that have been made so that we can solidify the peace that is going to be so important for the people of Northern Ireland. And I'm very proud of the work that the United States—most recently through our Envoy, Gary Hart—has done to help partner in that process. And I'll have an opportunity to stop in and discuss some of these issues with the Northern Ireland leaders later today.

And we had a chance to discuss immigration, an issue that is near and dear to the hearts of the Irish people because they understand how important it's been for Irish Americans, and it has given them a sense of compassion and sympathy and understanding about these issues generally. And I indicated to the Taoiseach that we are going to continue to work as hard as we can to find opportunities to make sure that the United States of America continues to be a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. And we very much appreciate his insights in this.

So overall, it's been an outstanding discussion as always. We're going to have an opportunity to go over to the luncheon hosted by Speaker Ryan and, I'm sure, enjoy some good music as well as some good food. And then, this afternoon we'll have a wonderful St. Patrick's Day reception. I'm pretty sure that the fountain is green out there. And Michelle and the girls all appreciate so much the travels they've had in Ireland. We're always glad to reciprocate to the Taoiseach, the delegation, and all our friends from across the Atlantic.

Thank you.

Prime Minister Kenny. Could I thank the President and First Lady and the American Government for the privilege again to be here in the Oval Office to continue the very long tradition of connection with the United States and particularly in relation to St. Patrick's Day?

The President has given you a rundown on the issues that we've discussed here. We had a conversation about the referendum in respect of Britain and its position with the European Union. We favor very strongly Britain remaining a central member. And I think the President was interested in the challenges that Prime Minister Cameron faces both internally and externally, and I've given him an account of the workings of the European Council in bringing about the proposition that Prime Minister Cameron could actually put a referendum to his people.

I also gave the President a briefing on the background to the European Council meeting dealing with migration and the unprecedented challenge that this presents for the—for members of the European Union with particular reference to some countries. And obviously, the next meeting continues on Thursday and Friday of this week, and I'll go back to attend that.

I've thanked President Obama for appointing Gary Hart, who had quite an influence on the workings and proceedings in the lead-in to the Fresh Start Agreement, which is now in operation. We thank the United States again for their continued effort and interest in that. And I referred to the ongoing interest of the Vice President and his work on that as well, and in reference to the—to Ambassador O'Malley, whom President Obama appointed to Ireland.

We also spoke on a number of the other issues that affect us, and I've raised the question of the potential Norwegian Air deal with the President. And we hope that that can be

brought to a conclusion sometime in the not-too-distant future.

Other than that, it's been a great privilege to be here again. And I wish you and Michelle and Malia and Sasha the very best for the future. We've had a delightful breakfast hosted by the Vice President this morning. And we're very happy to be back here in America and to continue the connections that go back for several centuries now between our two countries. And we will work with you, and we express the hope that the United States will continue to look at Ireland in a way that cements those foundations that are there for very many years.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:17 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Sen. Gary W. Hart, in his capacity as the Secretary of State's Personal Representative for Northern Ireland; and First Minister Arlene Foster and Deputy First Minister J. Martin P. McGuinness of Northern Ireland.

Remarks at the Congressional Friends of Ireland Luncheon March 15, 2016

President Obama. Speaker Ryan, Members of Congress, thank you so much for having me here today. Taoiseach and Mrs. Kenny, leaders of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, honored guests: It is always a privilege to join you for this wonderful St. Patrick's Day celebration.

And with names like Obama, Biden, Ryan, and McConnell, you can rest assured that the old sod's stranglehold on power in Washington is as strong as ever. [*Laughter*]

Now, it's true that it's not technically St. Patrick's Day, but that's okay. Most folks who celebrate it aren't Irish either. [*Laughter*] I can talk about them because I am Irish, as I have been prone to mention on this occasion. [*Laughter*]

Back in 2008, the Corrigan Brothers even penned a song called "There is No One as Irish as Barack Obama." [*Laughter*] This is true. As the lyrics go: "From Kerry to Cork, let's hear it

for Barack from old Moneygall." And somehow, that line did not result in cries for my birth certificate on the campaign trail. [*Laughter*]

Now, to paraphrase something President Reagan once said at this lunch, on St. Patrick's Day, you should spend time with saints and scholars. So the Taoiseach and I have two more stops to make after this. [*Laughter*]

But we do enjoy this tradition. And I want to thank Speaker Ryan for continuing it. It's a welcome break from politics as usual, a moment when we all trade in our red and power blue ties for our green ones. I always imagine every Taoiseach leaving this lunch marveling at how cheerful and bipartisan Washington is. [*Laughter*]

And while I may not possess the persuasive power of St. Patrick, I do hope the hospitality extended here today is similarly extended to my nominee to the Supreme Court when he or she arrives. [*Laughter*]