

**Remarks 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 welcomes" 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.

I also want to take a moment to recognize those who do the hard work of waging peace. Theresa Villiers, the U.K.'s Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, is here. Please give Theresa a big round of applause. As is America's Consul General in Belfast, Greg Burton—yay, Greg—and Richard Haass, two men who helped bring the Stormont House Agreement to fruition, and we are very grateful to them. Two people who were going to be here—First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness—are home hammering out the details to implement the agreement. So we wish them good luck and Godspeed so the people of Northern Ireland can finally enjoy the full fruits of a lasting peace. Now——

*Audience members.* Hear, hear.

*President Obama.* Hear, hear.

There's always a brood of Irish American Members of Congress running around here. [*Laughter*] Or folks who wish they were Irish. [*Laughter*] But let me just mention one. When Brendan Boyle ran for Congress last year, his campaign was followed closely by folks back in Ireland, not so much because of him, although he's an impressive young man, but because of his dad. Frank Boyle grew up in Donegal. He moved to America as a young man, married an Irish lass, had two sons. He supported his family by working as a janitor for the Philadelphia public transit authority. Today, one son, Kevin, serves in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Brendan serves in the U.S. Congress. The Boyle boys are all here today. They've made people across two nations very proud. Give them a big round of applause. [*Applause*] Hey!

So when Irish and Americans get together, there's more than a diplomatic exchange. It is a family reunion. Literally. My eighth cousin, Henry, who has become a regular at this party, I mean—[*laughter*]—where is "Henry the Eighth"—he's, he's—there he is, he's back there. Good to see you, Henry. So is his good buddy, Ollie Hayes, who owns my favorite pub in Moneygall. [*Laughter*] And while many of you are far from home today, I'm sure you've found plenty of green in the red, white, and blue because we've got 30 or 40 million family members here in the United States and millions more who wish they were.

Now, Shaw said that an Irishman's heart is nothing but his imagination. And if there's any place that can set the imagination on fire, it is Ireland. I remember my own visit to Dublin and Moneygall and Belfast. The unrushed landscape. The unrushed pint of black. [*Laughter*] Waiting for that perfect pint is 90 seconds well spent. [*Laughter*] A people noted for bouts of

great joy and the belt of a late-night song. People known for the good things: slow days, hard lessons, high notes.

But Irish Americans are also rightly proud of what we've done here in America: the cities our ancestors helped build, the canals they dug, the tracks they laid, the shipyards and factories they labored in, enduring all manner of intolerance and insult to carve out a place for themselves and their children in this new world.

They put their full hearts into their work, even as their hearts were far from home. In 1897, at an Irish Fair held in New York, dirt was shipped over from each of Ireland's counties and laid out on a map. At least one immigrant knelt in prayer, grateful to be back in Fermanagh again, even if only for an instant. Meanwhile, thousands of young Irish women moved to America to find work as domestic servants. "Not a day goes by," one said, "that I don't look at the Moon and say it's the same in Ireland."

So they persevered. For the story of the Irish in America is a story of overcoming hardship through strength and sacrifice and faith and family. It's an idea central to Saint Patrick's himself: faith in the unseen, a belief in something better around the bend. And that's why the Irish did more than help build America—I'm very impressed, by the way, whoever just shushed. [*Laughter*]. Joe Crowley. [*Applause*] I was going to wait until the Taoiseach spoke to shush everybody, but Joe handled his business. I like that, Joe. But the Irish did more than just build America, they helped to sharpen the idea of America: the notion that no matter who you are, where you come from, what your last name is, in this country, you can make it.

And today we revel in that idea. We remember the great Irish Americans of the past: those who struggled in obscurity, those who rose to the highest levels of politics and business and the arts. We celebrate the ideals at the heart of the Irish American story, ones that people everywhere can embrace: friendship and family and hard work and humility, fairness and dignity, and the persistent belief that tomorrow will be better than today.

Yeats is one of my favorite poets, and the Taoiseach honored me by giving me a slim volume of his favorite works. So in this 150th anniversary year of his birth, I'll just close with words from one of his plays: "I have believed the best of every man. And find that to believe it is enough to make a bad man show him at his best—or even a good man swing his lantern higher."

And with that, I will turn it over to our guest, a man who always swings his lantern higher—[*laughter*—the Taoiseach of Ireland: Prime Minister Kenny.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland spoke briefly in Irish, but no translation was provided. He then spoke in English as follows.*]

*Prime Minister Kenny.* [*Inaudible*]—means "White House."

*President Obama.* White House.

*Prime Minister Kenny.* *Is féidir linn.* [*Laughter*] Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, Fionnuala and I appreciate the honor that you bestow on the Irish people today, and we're very honored to be here in the White House on this St. Patrick's Day.

Let me extend and thank you for your hospitality to the Irish people and those of Irish descent here in the United States who are represented here this evening. I want to thank you, President Obama and Vice President Biden, for your friendship and for your support for Ireland, North and South.

When we met in the Oval Office this morning, says he—[*laughter*—sure—we had the opportunity to discuss the progress that we are making in our economic recovery through the perseverance and the determination of the Irish people. The United States remains our most important economic partner, and the support of the U.S. has been critical to the progress that we are making. The improvement that the U.S. economy is making under your leadership, President, is essential not only to jobs and growth in the United States, but also to Ireland's recovery and growth throughout the global economy.

Let me thank you, in particular, Mr. President, for the work that you are doing to achieve immigration reform and, in particular, for the executive actions, which you announced last November. The undocumented Irish represent a small proportion of the 11 million people affected by this issue across the United States, but I can also tell you that almost every family in our country is related to or knows somebody who is caught up in this deeply distressing situation. Any progress that would allow our undocumented to come out of the shadows and be free to travel home for family events would be very welcome, and your very welcome Ambassador, Kevin O'Malley, understands this deeply from his own—on his own personal family side.

We also want to see a legal pathway for the future for Irish people to make their full contribution here if they so choose. I can assure you this evening, Mr. President, that we will continue to add our voice to the many voices calling on this Congress to pass immigration reform legislation as soon as possible.

Mr. President, I also want to acknowledge and to thank you for your ongoing support and your commitment and your engagement in the peace process. Northern Ireland has been transformed through the implementation of the Good Friday agreement. Huge steps have been taken with the work of building a shared future, bringing an end to sectarian division, and to ensure that future generations will grow in mutual respect and tolerance is still a work in progress. The Stormont House Agreement reached last December is a welcome step—a welcome further step forward, and let me publicly acknowledge the role of Senator Gary Hart, appointed by you and Vice President Biden, as your representative in reaching and helping parties to reach that agreement.

As you will have seen in recent days, implementation can always be the hardest part of any agreement, and I urge the Northern Ireland parties—as you have done, Mr. President—to do all that they can to ensure that the current roadblock is overcome, as I'm sure it will be, and that the agreement can be implemented in full. We therefore appreciate your ongoing engagement and your support, and that of all our friends in the United States, as we continue to build permanent peace and reconciliation in Ireland.

Mr. President, as you said on the conclusion of the Stormont House Agreement, where there is courage and a will, these changes can happen. In your brilliant Selma speech a few weeks ago, you said that the march is not yet over. I agree with that sentiment. Nor can it be, until democratically elected politicians decide to make decisions that are of benefit to all.

In Ireland, we're now in a decade of commemorations marking the hundredth anniversary of the tumultuous events that resulted in our country achieving its independence. Next year, we commemorate the anniversary of the 1916 Rising in Ireland and around the globe, including a major festival here in Washington in the Kennedy Center.

This year, as you know, is also the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great poet W.B. Yeats, to whom you have referred, Mr. President. We will mark that event with many occasions

in Ireland, here in the U.S., and around the world. And to mark that particular anniversary, Mr. President, this year, the Shamrock Bowl is engraved with one of his most famous and beautiful poems: "He Wishes for the Cloth of Heaven." The last line reads in that, Mr. President, if I recall it correctly, to paraphrase it, tread softly, for you tread upon our dreams.

*[Prime Minister Kenny spoke briefly in Irish, but no translation was provided. He then spoke in English as follows.]*

*Prime Minister Kenny.* Happy St. Patrick's Day to you all. Have a wonderful occasion here in the present—[*applause*].

*President Obama.* Everybody, enjoy yourselves. Have fun, don't break anything, and you can take the paper napkins, but not the cloth ones. [*Laughter*] They don't belong to be, and I want my security deposit back. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:34 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Richard N. Haass, president, Council on Foreign Relations. He also referred to his cousin Henry Healy. Prime Minister Kenny referred to former Sen. Gary W. Hart, in his capacity as the U.S. Secretary of State's Personal Representative for Northern Ireland.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : St. Patrick's Day Reception.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Anderson, Anne; Boyle, Brendan F.; Boyle, Frank; Boyle, Kevin; Burton, Gregory S.; Crowley, Joseph; Haass, Richard N.; Healy, Henry; Kenny, Enda; Kenny, Fionnuala; McGuinness, J. Martin P.; Ollie, Hayes; O'Malley, Kevin F.; Robinson, Peter D.; Villiers, Theresa.

*Subjects:* Holidays and special observances : St. Patrick's Day; Ireland : Ambassador to U.S.; Ireland : Prime Minister; Ireland : Relations with Northern Ireland; Ireland : U.S. Ambassador; United Kingdom : Northern Ireland :: Deputy First Minister ; United Kingdom : Northern Ireland :: First Minister; United Kingdom : Northern Ireland :: Relations with Ireland; United Kingdom : Northern Ireland :: Secretary of State; United Kingdom : Northern Ireland :: Stormont House Agreement.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD201500179.