

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks During a Meeting With Prime Minister Brian Cowen of Ireland and an Exchange with Reporters

March 17, 2009

President Obama. Hello, everybody. Happy St. Patrick's Day.

I just want to say that we are incredibly honored to have the *Taoiseach* here and his entire team. This is an affirmation of one of the strongest bonds between peoples that exist in the world. You know, when you think about the history of Ireland and the enormous impact it has had on our own history, and the fact that you've had people from Ireland who have shed blood on behalf of this country's independence and its freedom, that it has had probably as much impact on our culture and our traditions as any country on earth.

The bond and the friendship that is felt between the United States and Ireland is something that I think everybody understands, but as *Taoiseach* just mentioned, we can't take for granted and we have to continually build upon.

And so this visit gives us an opportunity to talk about some of the very important bilateral issues that we face, also to talk about some of the global issues that both the United States and Ireland want to take leadership in. We are grateful for the lasting friendship that exists between us.

I, personally, take great interest on St. Patrick's Day because, as some of you know, my mother's family can be traced back to Ireland, and it turns out that I think our first Irish ancestor came from the same county that *Taoiseach* once represented. So we may be cousins. [*Laughter*] We haven't sorted that through yet. But even if by blood we're not related, by culture and affinity, by friendship and mutual interest, we are certainly related. And this gives us an opportunity to just continue to strengthen the incredible bonds that we have between the two countries.

So thank you so much for visiting us.

President's Visit to Ireland

Q. Will you visit—President, will you visit Offaly?

President Obama. I hope so.

Prime Minister Cowen. Well, can I first of all thank President Obama and Secretary of State and all his team for the wonderful welcome here to the White House. As President Obama has said, it's a great tradition here in the United States for a warm welcome for Ireland, and we deeply appreciate that welcome. And as I said, in area of contribution, since I came to America over this weekend, this relationship is based on substance, it's based on a very engaged America working with a contemporary, modern Ireland, helping to shape our history at home and helping us to contribute so much more by reason of our unity of purpose and our common values. And it is a great day for the Irish in America today, and I'm very conscious of that.

More than 44 million of our 70 million diasporas of the world are residing in the United States of America. And all of us, my own family, have reason to be very grateful to this country, and for what it's done down the generations further as we've progressed and, thankfully, go home and marry childhood sweethearts and end up with *Taoiseach* coming over here to meet a

man whose forebears, as he said, was in my electoral district on one occasion. He said we're not related, and he looks forward coming to Offaly, the only thing I can say to him is he's not going to share a slate with me over there, because I can't compete with this man even in Offaly. [Laughter] But he would be very, very welcome.

And we look forward to an excellent discussion, as I said, on issues of mutual interest. And we are deeply grateful and appreciative of the wonderful access that our country is accorded on this great day for Ireland. And he reminds us, of course, that we are not simply an island nation, but a dispersed global family, and nowhere is that more celebrated than in this great country.

President Obama. Just one last point that I would like to make, and that is although I think it's wonderful that you visited the Oval Office and Washington, what you're really missing out on is the South Side Irish Parade in Chicago—[laughter]—

Prime Minister Cowen. I've been there.

President Obama. —which I believe is one of the great events in America. And it is a lot of fun. Although as President I don't think I could have as much fun as I could before I was President at that parade, because I have press following me all the time.

But, anyway, welcome; thank you so much for being here. Thank you, guys; appreciate it. We got to get down to business.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:56 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Prime Minister Cowen referred to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Ireland, Prime Minister Cowen.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Cowen, Brian.

Subjects: Ireland : Prime Minister; Ireland : Prime Minister; Ireland : Relations with U.S.; Ireland : Relations with U.S.; Saint Patrick's Day; Saint Patrick's Day; Saint Patrick's Day.

DCPD Number: DCPD200900160.