

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017

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

March 16, 2017

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Well, good evening to you all. Fellow Americans, Irish friends, distinguished guests: I'm Mike Pence, and I'm the 48th Vice President of the United States of America. And it is my honor—[*applause*]—it's my honor, along with my wife, Karen Pence, to welcome you on behalf of the First Family to the White House on this very special occasion.

It is such an honor for the two of us to be able to welcome you here and welcome a special guest to the White House and, of course, our host to this podium for this 55-year-old tradition. Since Irish Ambassador John Joseph Hearne left a box of Ireland's most famous symbol at the White House in 1952, the shamrock exchange has grown to become a festive sign of enduring friendship during this memorable week and an eternal bond between the American people and the people of Ireland.

Now, the Irish are one of the strongest and most beautiful threads in our national fabric here in the United States. For centuries, the sons and daughters of Ireland have come here from across the Atlantic. More than 32 million Americans now trace their heritage back to the Emerald Isle. And I say with a grateful heart and deep humility, I'm one of them.

My grandfather, Richard Michael Cowley, stepped off a boat onto Ellis Island in 1923. And that's how Michael Richard Pence got to serve in the White House. My grandfather, as the legend of our family says, was told by my great-grandmother that he needed to go to America. She said, there's a future there for you. He wouldn't see his mother for 25 years, and he often spoke of their separation with a heavy heart.

My grandfather came here, like so many generations of Irish Americans did, with a dream, but with character and with work ethic and a determination to build a family, a good name. And so he did. My mother, who is 83 years young, bright red hair and blue eyes, is still with us today, and his memory and her influence continues to define my life,

The truth is my grandfather was very typical of the millions that would come to these shores. He embodied all that's best about the Irish: sturdy work ethic, faith in God, love of family, patriotism. And that—those are the enduring contributions of people of Irish descent in the history of this country. It's extraordinary to think of the contributions that the Irish have made. In every single American conflict since our Revolutionary War, the Irish people have enriched America in incalculable ways, and they always will.

And when I speak of those character qualities I know that they apply to the two people that we have the privilege of introducing tonight. First is our special guest. It's my high honor to invite him to the podium, along with our host. So, ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, Enda Kenny; his wife Fionnuala; and my friend, the 45th President of the United States of America, Donald Trump.

The President. Thank you very much. It's a great honor.

Taoiseach, Mrs. Kenny, Ambassador Anderson, Dr. Lowe, Vice President Pence, and distinguished guests: We gather here today in the White House to take part in the traditional

shamrock ceremony and to celebrate the strong ties between the United States and a truly great country, Ireland.

I also want to extend a special welcome to a group of distinguished local political and society leaders—and they are real leaders—who are with us from Northern Ireland—great people—including the Mayor of Belfast and the Head of Northern Ireland Civil Service—that's a lot of power there. *[Laughter]* Lord Mayor Kingston and Sir Malcolm McKibbin, and it's wonderful to have you. Where are you folks? Where are you? Where are you? Thank you. And they're going to be having a great open championship very soon. I know that, right? *[Laughter]* At a great course. At a great, great course.

St. Patrick's Day has become a truly important occasion in the United States, one embraced by Americans of all faiths and of all backgrounds. I've been to many of them, and we love it. The shamrock ceremony is a tradition that symbolizes the bond between our two countries. It dates back to 1952 when the Irish Ambassador to the United States, John Joseph Hearne, sent a box of shamrocks to a President who did a very good job, Harry S. Truman.

Our strong ties go back throughout American history. Irish-Americans played a vital role in preserving our Union during its hour of greatest need. So true. They played a very, very big role. Many distinguished themselves in the American Civil War with their grit and their bravery and their courage, earning the nickname, the "Fighting Irish." And I know a lot about the Irish. They fight. They are tough. *[Laughter]* I know a lot. I know more than I'm ever going to tell you. *[Laughter]* And when American Armed Forces joined the fight in Europe during World War II, 75 years ago, our heroic troops first stepped off ships in Belfast Harbor in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the centuries, hard-working Irish Americans contributed mightily to America's innovation and to America's prosperity. They often overcame great hardship—and it's really, I mean, it's like, the hardship they overcame for us, for our people, is inspiring and really helped a relatively young nation beyond what anyone really understands or knows. So we want to thank you. Just an amazing, an amazing history.

President John F. Kennedy, in an address to the Irish Parliament, said that "It is that quality of the Irish—that remarkable combination of hope, confidence, and imagination—that is needed more than ever today." Now, he said that a long time ago, but it's perhaps even more true today. The words of America's first Irish Catholic President ring just as true.

We hope confidence—and I tell you, what we want now is a lot of things, but we need that great Irish confidence—and they are confident people, aren't they, Mike? And we—and I tell you what, we all want it together to grow in the 21st century. And grow we will, as I say, bigger and better and stronger than ever before.

We must have the hope to believe in a better future, the confidence to pursue it, and the imagination to figure out how to get there. A new optimism is sweeping across our Nation. You see that when you look at the numbers; the optimism is at the highest level in many, many years. And as America gains renewed strength, Ireland will find us to be an ever-faithful partner and an always loyal friend. We will be there for you, and we will be there for you.

So thank you for being here. I wish you a very, very happy St. Patrick's Day. And God bless you and may God bless Ireland and Northern Ireland. *[Applause]* Okay? And may God bless America. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Kenny. Thank you. Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, ladies and gentlemen: It's a great honor to be back again in the most famous house in the world to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, the most special of days for Irish men and Irish women and those of Irish descent the world over.

Since I had the privilege of being elected as Taoiseach in 2011, I've had the pleasure of being here in the White House each March to mark the enduring connections between our country and the United States. Fionnuala and I would like sincerely to thank President Trump for so graciously continuing this great tradition of hospitality which means so much to Irish people everywhere.

I'm proud, sir, to have the opportunity to contribute to maintaining and developing relations between Ireland and the United States, particularly at the beginning of the new era in our country's relationship following your election, Mr. President. Let me congratulate you and wish you and your administration the very best as you begin your term of office.

This job, the job you hold, is exceptionally demanding and exceptionally difficult. The United States remains the most influential, as well as the most powerful, country in the world. You hold the hopes and the future of America—and indeed, the world—in your hands.

But let me thank you for giving so much of your time today to this visit. We had an excellent meeting, a first-class meeting this morning in the Oval Office—not there very often—[laughter]—where we discussed a variety of important issues of mutual concern. And I want to assure you, sir, of our commitment to working closely with you and your administration as you face the many challenges up ahead.

The ties that bind our two countries are deep and historic. And Ireland and the United States have a unique relationship that goes back to the earliest days of the original 13 Colonies. Irish-born military officers assisted George Washington to win that War of Independence. Indeed, they've fought in every war for America since then. And this very house was designed by James Hoban from Kilkenny, modeled in part after the Leinster House in Dublin, where the Irish parliament has met on our own independence since 1922.

It's fitting that we gather here each year to celebrate St. Patrick and his legacy. He, too, of course, was an immigrant. And though he is, of course, the patron saint of Ireland, for many people around the globe, he is also a symbol of—indeed, the patron of—immigrants.

Here in America, in your great country, 35 million people claim Irish heritage, and the Irish have contributed to the economic, social, political, and cultural life of this great country over the last 200 years. Ireland came to America because, deprived of liberty, deprived of opportunity, of safety, of even food itself, the Irish believed. And four decades before Lady Liberty lifted her lamp, we were the "wretched refuse on the teeming shore." We believed in the shelter of America, in the compassion of America, in the opportunity of America. We came, and we became Americans.

We lived the words of John F. Kennedy long before he uttered them: We asked not what America could do for us, but what we could do for America. And we still do. We want to give and not to take. We know the Irish have built the bridges and the roads, protected the public as firefighters and police officers. We've cared for the sick in hospitals, entertained as poets, as singers, and writers, as politicians, as judges and legislators. And as entrepreneurs, they provided hundreds of thousands of jobs for Americans, including most recently, in exciting technology companies.

Two-way trade in goods is approaching \$100 billion a year at the moment. Irish firms employ 100,000 people across 50 States in the U.S. And we want to build on this for the future.

Mr. President, Ireland is a small island on the edge of Europe, a natural bridge between the United States and Europe, and as a committed member of the European Union and a close friend of the United States, we will work hard with you, Mr. President, and with your administration in pursuit of strong and open relations between the United States and the European Union, including the strong trade relationships for the mutual benefit of millions of people either side of the Atlantic.

I believe that the strong people-to-people links that Ireland and the United States have developed over the generations will help us in this endeavor. And I wish you and the American people every success and happiness in the future.

To Irish Americans, coast to coast, I say—in these days especially—we hold you in our hearts. And tonight I thank you again for your warm hospitality.

Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, may I wish you and your lovely families every good wish and blessing on this very special day. Indeed, I'm reminded in many ways of the dream of another American President—which Ireland will walk with you with—when he spoke the words and said, "My dream is of a place and a time where America will once again be seen as the last, best hope of Earth." Spoken by Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. President, Ireland will help you build on that foundation to achieve the ultimate dream. Thank you, sir. And God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:03 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ireland's Ambassador to the United States Anne C. Anderson. Vice President Pence referred to his mother Nancy Pence Fritsch.

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