

FREE
SUPPLEMENT

A SEASON REVIEW

FREE
SUPPLEMENT

Subscribe

Irish Examiner

Tuesday, May 24, 2011

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 58,736

Stg £1.50

€1.90



SLÁINTE, MR PRESIDENT

Obama woos crowd with cúpla focal

by Paul O'Brien
Political Editor

BARACK OBAMA has proclaimed himself Irish and told the country it can and will recover from the current crisis, declaring: "Is féidir linn."

In a stirring 24-minute speech delivered to tens of thousands of people on Dublin's College Green, the US president said to huge applause: "Your best days are still ahead."

"Our greatest triumphs, in America and Ireland alike, are still to come. And Ireland, if anyone ever says otherwise, if anybody ever tells you that your problems are too big, that your challenges are too great, and we can't do something, that we shouldn't even try, think about all that we've done together."

"Remember that, whatever hardships the winter may bring, springtime's always just around the corner. And if they keep on arguing with you, just respond with a simple creed: Is féidir linn. Yes we can."

The speech was the final event in the whirlwind visit by the US President and his wife, First Lady Michelle Obama.

After touching down in Dublin in Air Force One at 9.30am, the Obamas met President Mary McAleese and her husband, Martin, at Áras an Uachtaráin before meeting Taoiseach Enda Kenny and his wife, Fionnuala, at Farnleigh.

Mr Obama and Mr Kenny then held a political meeting for 30 minutes, in which they discussed the EU/IMF bailout, the recent elections in the North, the immigration debate in the US, and other issues. After the meeting, Mr Obama spoke of the "blood link" between Ireland and America and promised to do everything he could "to be helpful on the path to recovery".

A Government spokesman said Mr Kenny had not asked the US President to do anything specific in this regard.

But a separate Government source suggested that Mr Kenny would have taken the opportunity ahead of Thursday's G8 summit in France to spell out the need for a comprehensive solution to the eurozone debt crisis.

The hope is that Mr Obama will push France and Germany on the issue at the Paris summit. Such a solution would include a cheaper bailout deal for Ireland.

In the afternoon, the Obamas travelled by helicopter to the president's ancestral home in Moneygall, Co Offaly, from where his great-great-grandfather, Falmouth Kearney, hailed.

Despite heavy rain, the Obamas spent a lengthy time greeting residents before visiting his ancestor's former home and enjoying a Guinness in Hayes' pub.

It was then back to Dublin for the speech, with Mr Obama grinning as a fired-up Mr Kenny introduced him shortly before 6pm by saying: "Today the 44th American president comes home."

Mr Obama spoke from behind bullet-proof glass amid tight security, but neither that nor the weather dampened the spirits of those present.

Speaking briefly in Irish, Mr Obama said he was happy to be in Ireland, before proceeding to the substance of his speech, which hinged on the theme of rebuilding a nation.

He spoke of the huge contribution Ireland had made to America, stating: "You could say there's always been a little green behind the red, white and blue."

Invoking the legacy of the most famous Irish-American political dynasty, he said JFK "had made us dream again".

Both Ireland and America had overcome huge challenges in the past and would do so again, he said.

The Obamas departed Ireland for Britain last night ahead of schedule because of fears that the latest volcanic ash cloud would affect air travel today.



Yes we can: Taoiseach Enda Kenny greets Barack Obama in Farnleigh yesterday. Picture: Maxwell

The president's pint: worth waiting for

by Caroline O'Doherty
Moneygall

BARACK OBAMA told the people of Moneygall he'd be back.

There's just one problem — he'd had a pint when he said it. A fast pint at that. He downed it like a man rescued from a sandstorm and finished every last drop, declaring it "wonderful".

So can we believe him? Is féidir linn, as the T-shirts the enterprising Moneygall residents have been selling say.

You'd be inclined to believe anything out of Obama after yesterday's performance in his ancestral home where he spent an hour-and-a-half — twice the official allocated time — shaking hands, kissing fans, hugging babies, signing autographs and making a village of 298 people feel like the biggest place on earth.

He made Ollie Hayes feel like the biggest man on earth. The publican — one of the village's two, although the other is his uncle so there's little rivalry — welcomed the president and his wife into his premises, where they instantly turned protocol on its head by making everyone there feel at home.

Lots of folksy banter filled the air, Michelle delighting in the warmth after the gale outside, her husband dishing out more kisses, hugs and handshakes.

And in what will forever more be known as his "speech by the fireplace", he thanked profusely the people of Moneygall for preserving his past in parish records so carefully and organising his welcome so warmly. "And with that," he declared, "I call for a pint."

Ollie duly did his duty as the president watched intently, putting himself in the publican's hands with their four generations of pint-pulling expertise behind him.

"You tell me when it's properly settled," Mr Obama told Ollie. "I don't want to mess this up."

He bantered on: "I have been told it makes a difference who the person behind the bar is, and that people are very particular who pulls their pint. Can people vouch for this guy?"

"What do you do while you're waiting?" Michelle wanted to know. "And how much time did our staff spend in here?"

This wasn't Mr Obama's first taste of the black stuff. "The first time I had Guinness was when I came into Shannon," he revealed. "We were going to Afghanistan and it was the middle of the night. I realised it tasted so much better here than it did in the States. I realised that you guys are keeping all the best stuff here."

"It's quite an art. You think it's ready? I want to get it perfect," he said, eyeing the settling pint.

And then it was ready. Sláinte, said Mr Obama, and he went for it — a slug not a sip. "I am very impressed," was the verdict. "It's wonderful."

Michelle joined him, drinking a glass, before asking to have a go at pulling a pint herself. She pulled two, perfectly, one for US Ambassador Dan Rooney and another for parish priest Fr Joe Kennedy.

The president had to cover his wife's largesse and slapped a fifty on the counter. "I just want you to know that the president always pays his bar tab."

And that's how we can believe he'll return. He's coming back for his change.

Irish Examiner

The visits of US presidents emphasise the importance of what is one of this country's major resources — Irish descendants in the United States and, indeed, Irish descendants scattered throughout the world. We need to cultivate those resources wherever possible.

Editorial: 16

INSIDE



■ THEY call him No Drama Obama but that was before he arrived in Ireland and the theatrics at Moneygall. Page: 8



■ AMERICA is "rooting" for Ireland to overcome its economic problems and will do all it can to help out. Page: 9



■ HE didn't part the Red Sea, but Barack Obama did transform Dublin's Dame Street into a human river of hope. Page: 10



■ BARACK OBAMA said Ireland had inspired so many others and he predicted that our best days were yet to come. Page: 10



■ TWO state visits in seven days have administered a much-needed shot in the arm to national confidence. Page: 12



■ WHATEVER hardships the winter may bring, springtime is always just around the corner... Is féidir linn. Obama's speech, Page: 17

