

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland attends St Patrick's Day events in Washington

Rt Hon Brandon Lewis, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, will travel to Washington later today where he will represent the United Kingdom Government at a number of events to mark St Patrick's Day. Mr Lewis will use his first visit to the US as Secretary of State to build key relationships with US stakeholders who share a keen interest and influence in Northern Ireland and to reinforce the UK Government's intention to implement the commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach deal which saw devolved institutions restored in Northern Ireland after three years without government.

During his three day visit, the Secretary of State will attend key events hosted by the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the Northern Ireland Bureau and the UK Ambassador. He will promote Northern Ireland as open for business and showcase its great investment potential, highlighting the thriving creative industries which have been instrumental in putting Northern Ireland on the world stage for creating global television productions including Game of Thrones.

Government analysis published earlier this month shows Northern Ireland's economy could grow by up to £94 million as a result of a future UK-US free trade agreement.

The US is one of Northern Ireland's largest export markets, accounting for 12.1% of all Northern Ireland's exports. 447 businesses in Northern Ireland collectively export £2,053 worth of goods to the US every minute.

Before departing for Washington, Mr Lewis said:

I am absolutely delighted to be joining the St Patrick's Day events in Washington this week. The last few years have, undoubtedly, represented a period of real challenge for Northern Ireland. The three-year absence of a devolved government represented a step in the wrong direction, but I am delighted that the Executive is back and the Good Friday Agreement institutions are up and running once again.

The Good Friday Agreement, and the power-sharing Executive and other institutions set out within it, are as important today as they were 20 years ago. As Secretary of State, my commitment to the letter and the spirit of the Agreement is absolute, and I will never apologise for saying that the only sustainable way forward for Northern Ireland is through those institutions. The New Decade, New Approach Deal sets out an ambitious vision for Northern Ireland

and I am focussed on delivering on our commitments. Of course, we cannot forget the vital contribution the US had in helping to secure that historic deal in 1998 that led to lasting peace in Northern Ireland and for its continued support for the Northern Ireland political process.

The US is already one of Northern Ireland's largest export markets and a future UK-US free trade agreement could see the economy grow by up to £94 million. That's why we have committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland's businesses and producers enjoy unfettered access to the rest of the UK and that Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the UK internal market.

And during my visit this week I will be encouraging the many businesses I meet to continue to invest in Northern Ireland and help support local businesses to grow, create jobs and promote Northern Ireland as a great place to do business.

The Secretary of State will also hold a number of meetings with key State Department and White House officials as well as senior US Representatives and Congressmen. He will also attend the White House reception, hosted by President Donald Trump, in honour of the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and the annual 'Friends of Ireland' lunch at Capitol Hill hosted by Speaker Nancy Pelosi.