




CNI


COMMENT - Being snubbed in US is all this place deserves

**There is something toe-curling about this
rush to America, writes Liam Clarke**


First of all, the welcome wasn't exactly overwhelming. Martin McGuinness and Theresa Villiers met Drew O'Brien, an important [State Department](#) official, but he is in Ireland often enough. There was also talk of someone from the Vice-President's office going along, too. What there wasn't was the "money shot" of Obama shaking hands with our heroes. Not him, not Joe Biden, no pictures at all so far.

Most small regions wouldn't be met in the first place, so we are lucky. Still, there are words for the sort of reception meted out, and the most polite are 'low' and 'key'. Can anyone be surprised? Barack Obama is in his second and final term as President. He has just concluded a nuclear deal with Iran, he is bombing Syria, he

wants to sort out the Middle East. He is defending Obamacare as his major domestic achievement, along with saving [General Motors](#) . He is speaking out on the massive issues of race and gun control, and he is the man who brought about the death of Osama bin Laden.

In that situation, how much priority would you give when tapped on the arm and told that the Northern Ireland [Executive](#)  couldn't sort out welfare and you owe them one?

In Washington they might recall that this place has gone pear-shaped before. Special envoy Gary Hart was treated to ribald abuse and asked what he knew about anything.

After that, an investment conference to celebrate our latest "breakthrough" in the Stormont House Agreement had to be cancelled. US officials had helped Norman Houston, of the Northern Ireland Bureau to promote our coming fall in [corporation tax](#) . As soon as they got the message across, they were told that the "game-changer" economic measure might not happen.

It could well strike [President Obama](#) that there are better, more appreciative and more rewarding places in the world to try to influence than this place. This is his final period as President and he can't afford to waste time. Neither can Joe Biden nor John Kerry.

The most depressing thing about Mr McGuinness's trip, in particular, is that it represents a search for leverage over his opponents rather than a search for agreement. Rather than reaching a deal with the DUP and the British Government, which is what is required, Sinn Fein dispatched him at party expense to try and drum up support in America.

Even if something is patched up, it is a bad precedent. It shows the world we are unable to govern ourselves. Not only that, but we are unable to wean ourselves off the childish notion that, in a world with so many problems, we stand out as the special case everyone must focus on.

First published in the Belfast Telegraph in which Liam Clarke is a regular columnist on matters political.