

Press release

Minister Fleming meets West Virginia Governor to discuss West Virginia-Ireland Trade Commission

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Minister for Diaspora Sean Fleming has met with members of the West Virginia Legislature to explore the potential of its newly established Ireland Trade Commission, designed to strengthen economic, cultural and educational links between Ireland and the eastern US state.

Minister Fleming last week became the first ever Irish Government Minister to visit West Virginia, which boasts a sizeable Irish community.

He also visited New York to see construction work being carried out on the Gaelic Park stadium. In March, Tánaiste Micheál Martin announced a grant of €500,000 to the project through Emigrant Support Programme operated by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Minister Fleming met with Governor of West Virginia Jim Justice, as well as the Speaker of the House, Roger Henshaw, and Senate President Craig Blair.

Speaking about his visit to West Virginia, Minister Fleming said:

"A significant number of people in West Virginia claim Irish ancestry. There is huge potential to build on our diaspora links to create investment and educational opportunities that benefit both Ireland and West Virginia. The establishment of the new Trade Commission is a sign of the desire to strengthen those links. The Irish Government is very supportive of the new Trade Commission and I look forward to working with its members to explore trade opportunities and academic exchanges between our young people.

"I also had the pleasure of meeting with the West Virginia Irish Road Bowling Association. It was fascinating to see this ancient Irish game thriving on the roads of West Virginia. Adopting this very Irish pastime as their own shows the warmth of feeling towards Ireland across the state of West Virginia."

Minister Fleming also visited New York, where he witnessed construction work beginning on the Gaelic Grounds, as well as meeting with Irish community centres and Irish students currently on summer exchanges.

Minister Fleming said:

"Gaelic Park has been at the centre of Irish culture and community in New York for generations. The redevelopment of the site will ensure that will continue to be the case for years to come. The funding through the Emigrant Support Programme will help to deliver a truly modern home for Irish culture in New York.

"The Irish community continues to play a crucial role across so many sectors in New York. The work of the Aisling Centre and New York Irish Centre play such a vital role for Irish people in the city. I was delighted to get the opportunity to visit those centres, which are supported by the Emigrant Support Programme. I also met with students from Mary Immaculate in Thurles who are on summer exchanges in New York."

Notes

Minister Fleming was in West Virginia on June 5 and 6, before travelling to New York for June 7 and 8.

The West Virginia – Ireland Trade Commission was formally established in March 2023. It is tasked with advancing bilateral trade and investment between WV and Ireland; initiating joint action on policy issues of mutual interest; promoting business and academic exchange between the two; and encouraging mutual economic support and investment in infrastructure. Members of the Commission are due to be appointed. The Commission shall include nine members: two senators, two delegates, and five members appointed by the Governor.

The Emigrant Support Programme grant of €500,000 for the renovation of Gaelic Park was announced by Tánaiste Micheál Martin in March 2023. Gaelic Games have been played at the venue since 1926. The work is due to be completed by March 2024. Upon completion, the redevelopment in Gaelic Park will include dressing rooms, a fully furnished function room, catering facilities, a medical office and two development offices.

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