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Scottish First Minister Presses Trump on Scotch Whisky Tariffs in White House Meeting

Talks focus on potential tariff reductions as both sides seek to boost transatlantic spirits trade and support domestic industries

Wednesday, September 10, 2025



Scottish First Minister John Swinney met with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office to discuss the future of tariffs on Scotch whisky. The meeting, which lasted about 50 minutes, took place ahead of President Trump’s upcoming State Visit to the United

Kingdom. Secretary of State Marco Rubio was also present during the talks.

The main focus of the discussion was the possibility of reducing or eliminating tariffs on Scotch whisky exported to the United States. The United States is currently the largest market for Scotch whisky, with exports valued at nearly £1 billion in 2024. Swinney emphasized the importance of this trade to Scotland's economy and highlighted that Scottish distillers also purchase significant quantities of Bourbon casks from Kentucky each year.

Swinney told President Trump that a better tariff deal would benefit both countries' spirits industries. He noted that American producers support lower tariffs as well, and he advocated for a "zero-for-zero" approach, where both sides would agree to remove tariffs on each other's whiskies. Swinney said this would help the industry grow on both sides of the Atlantic.

The First Minister confirmed his attendance at the upcoming State Banquet at Windsor Palace during his conversation with President Trump. He described the days leading up to the State Visit as critical for securing a favorable outcome for Scotland's whisky industry.

In addition to trade issues, Swinney raised international concerns, including ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Qatar. His visit to Washington, DC is part of a broader series of trade and political meetings with representatives from both major US political parties.

Earlier in the day, Swinney met with members of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States and the Scotch Whisky Association at Mount Vernon, George Washington's historic home and site of his own whisky distillery. The location was chosen for its historical ties to both American and Scottish whisky production.

Swinney shared updates from his trip in a video posted to social media, stating that he had presented arguments for removing tariffs directly to President Trump. He reiterated his commitment to promoting Scotland's interests abroad and supporting its iconic whisky industry.

The meeting at the White House was scheduled for 7 p.m. UK time and was expected to last about half an hour but extended beyond that as discussions continued. Swinney arrived in Washington on Tuesday, making clear his intention to advocate strongly for Scotland’s economic interests during his visit.