

White House to Hold Glitzy State Dinner for Italy

Kayla Pantano (October 17, 2016)



President Obama and the First Lady will honor Matteo Renzi and his wife at Obama's last state dinner.

On Tuesday evening, [President](#) [2] [Obama](#) [3] [a](#) [2] and the [First Lady](#) [4] will roll out the red carpet for [Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi](#) [5] and his wife, [Agnese Landini](#) [6], at the White House for what is likely to be the final state dinner of the Obama administration. The 13th of Obama's Presidency, it is guaranteed to be a flashy soiree for the books.

White House Offers Support to a Reliable Ally

Assuming the position in February 2014, Renzi is the youngest prime minister in modern Italian history at 41 years old. Known for his ambitious and charismatic persona, Obama, for one, is a fan.



After a White House meeting with Renzi in 2015, the President said that his "willingness to challenge the status quo and to look to the future [had] made him a leading voice in Europe," according to [The Washington Post](#) [7]. [7]

Following the UK's vote to withdraw from the EU and tensions between [Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel](#) [8] and Obama over US spying allegations and trade, Renzi has become increasingly crucial for US-European relations. The Prime Minister, who is also the leader of Italy's Democratic Party, is presently working closely with the US on supporting the UN-backed unity government in Libya, and has allowed the US to conduct drone strikes out of an American base in Sicily against the Islamic State in Libya and other countries in northern Africa.

A statement by [Press Secretary John Earnest](#) [9] reads, "Renzi's visit will be an opportunity to celebrate the depth and breadth of our relationship with Italy and to exchange views on the future of Europe." He continues, "Italy is one of our closest and strongest allies, and we cooperate across a range of shared interests, from addressing climate change and the global refugee crisis to promoting global security and inclusive economic growth."

Michelle Obama to Host Italian First Lady

Renzi and his wife have reached Washington, D.C, on the night of Monday, October 17, for a visit lasting through Wednesday, October 19. As part of a spousal program, Mrs. Obama will give Mrs. Landini a tour of the [Kitchen Garden](#) [10], which she planted in the spring of 2009 with the help of local elementary schoolchildren. During her time at the capital, students from a school in the [Turnaround Arts](#) [11] program will also treat Landini to a special performance.

Meanwhile, Renzi and Obama will participate in a joint press conference on Tuesday before making their way to a lavishly decorated tent on the South Lawn for the dinner. The trip will also include a visit to [Arlington National Cemetery](#) [12] and a lunch arranged by the [Center for American Progress](#) [13], a Democratic think tank. On his last day in the States, Renzi will make a speech at [John Hopkins University](#) [14].

State Dinner Arranges for all the Bells and Whistles

The highlight of their visit will undoubtedly be the dinner, and what an affair it will be. Only fitting for the First Family to welcome the best celebrity guests for a last hurrah, high-end chef and host of [The Chew](#) [15], [Mario Batali](#) [16] will help prepare the food and singer [Gwen Stefani](#) [17] will provide the entertainment. Though other key details are still under wraps, the occasion is keenly anticipated to be replete with glitz and glam. Odds are Michelle will shy away from wearing a lesser-known designer and don an Italian classic, like [Giorgio Armani](#) [18], who will be in attendance as part of Renzi's Italian entourage.

Mrs. Obama met with Batali back in September at his Greenwich Village restaurant, [Babbo](#) [19], for two hours to sample a variety of appetizers, entrees, and desserts. Along with her team of White House staffers, they voted on their favorites in private and sent him the menu three days later. But an excited Batali only revealed that he will be using ingredients of the season, such as sweet potatoes, winter squash, and hearty cruciferous vegetables. Officials also disclosed that the 500 guests could expect "traditional Italian dishes that have been ingrained in American cuisine."

In addition to Armani, Renzi's group of notable Italians includes Academy Award winners [Roberto Benigni](#) [20] of [Life is Beautiful](#) [21] and director [Paolo Sorrentino](#) [22] of [The Great Beauty](#) [23]. He also invited: [Fabiola Gianotti](#) [24], director-general of [CERN](#) [25], the European Organization for Nuclear Research; [Raffaele Cantone](#) [26], president of Italy's anti-corruption authority; [Paola Antonelli](#) [27], senior curator of the [MoMa's](#) [28] department of architecture and design; and [Beatrice Vio](#) [29], Paralympic wheelchair fencer champion. "It's wonderful that the Italian delegation isn't just institutional," Renzi said.



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