



Official Report (Hansard)

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Contents

Assembly Business

Election of Speaker and Deputy Speakers..... 1

Assembly Members

Aiken, Steve (South Antrim)
Allen, Andy (East Belfast)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Archibald, Dr Caoimhe (East Londonderry)
Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)
Baker, Danny (West Belfast)
Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)
Blair, John (South Antrim)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Maurice (East Londonderry)
Bradshaw, Ms Paula (South Belfast)
Brett, Phillip (North Belfast)
Brogan, Miss Nicola (West Tyrone)
Brooks, David (East Belfast)
Brown, Patrick (South Down)
Buchanan, Keith (Mid Ulster)
Buchanan, Tom (West Tyrone)
Buckley, Jonathan (Upper Bann)
Bunting, Ms Joanne (East Belfast)
Butler, Robbie (Lagan Valley)
Cameron, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)
Carroll, Gerry (West Belfast)
Chambers, Alan (North Down)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Delargy, Pádraig (Foyle)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dillon, Mrs Linda (Mid Ulster)
Dodds, Mrs Diane (Upper Bann)
Dolan, Miss Jemma (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Donnelly, Danny (East Antrim)
Dunne, Stephen (North Down)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Eastwood, Ms Sorcha (Lagan Valley)
Egan, Ms Connie (North Down)
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Ennis, Mrs Sinéad (South Down)
Erskine, Mrs Deborah (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Ferguson, Mrs Ciara (Foyle)
Flynn, Miss Órlaithí (West Belfast)
Forsythe, Ms Diane (South Down)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)
Gildernew, Colm (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Hargey, Miss Deirdre (South Belfast)
Harvey, Harry (Strangford)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Honeyford, David (Lagan Valley)
Hunter, Ms Cara (East Londonderry)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kearney, Declan (South Antrim)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kimmins, Ms Liz (Newry and Armagh)
Kingston, Brian (North Belfast)
Little-Pengelly, Mrs Emma (Lagan Valley)
Long, Mrs Naomi (East Belfast)
Lyons, Gordon (East Antrim)
McAleer, Declan (West Tyrone)
McAllister, Miss Nuala (North Belfast)
McCrossan, Daniel (West Tyrone)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGrath, Colin (South Down)
McGuigan, Philip (North Antrim)
McHugh, Maolíosa (West Tyrone)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McLaughlin, Ms Sinead (Foyle)
McNulty, Justin (Newry and Armagh)
McReynolds, Peter (East Belfast)
Mason, Mrs Cathy (South Down)
Mathison, Nick (Strangford)
Middleton, Gary (Foyle)
Muir, Andrew (North Down)
Murphy, Miss Áine (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
Nicholl, Ms Kate (South Belfast)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Lynn, Dr Patricia (North Antrim)
O'Neill, Ms Michelle (Mid Ulster)
O'Toole, Matthew (South Belfast)
Poots, Edwin (South Belfast)
Reilly, Ms Aisling (West Belfast)
Robinson, Alan (East Londonderry)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Sheerin, Ms Emma (Mid Ulster)
Stewart, John (East Antrim)
Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Tennyson, Eóin (Upper Bann)

Northern Ireland Assembly

Wednesday 7 December 2022

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Acting Speaker in the Chair).

Assembly Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Good afternoon, Members. Having been given notice by not fewer than 30 Members under Standing Order 11, the Speaker has summoned the Assembly to meet today for the purpose of conducting the items of business that appear in the Order Paper.

Election of Speaker and Deputy Speakers

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Section 39(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides:

"Each Assembly shall as its first business elect from among its members a Presiding Officer and deputies."

Therefore, the Assembly cannot conduct any further business until a Speaker and at least two Deputy Speakers have been elected. Members should be clear: without the election of a Speaker and two Deputy Speakers, no further business can proceed. I advise Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted under the procedures set out in Standing Order 4. Further to Standing Order 4(2), I am the Acting Speaker today for the purpose of electing a Speaker.

I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise to propose that another Member be elected as Speaker. I will then ask for the proposal to be seconded by another Member, as required by Standing Order 14. I will then verify that the Member seconded is willing to accept the nomination. I will then ask for further proposals and follow the same procedure for each. When it appears that there are no further proposals, I will make it clear that the time for proposals has passed. If Members indicate that they wish to speak, a debate relevant to the election may then take place, during which Members will have up to five minutes to speak.

At the conclusion of the debate or, if there are no requests to speak, the conclusion of the

nominations, I shall put the Question that the Member first proposed shall be Speaker of the Assembly. The vote will be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I shall put the Question on the next nominee, and so on, until all nominations are exhausted. Once a Speaker is elected, all other nominations will fall automatically.

Do I have any proposals for the office of Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr Beattie: I nominate Mike Nesbitt MLA.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Is there a Member to second the nomination of Mr Nesbitt?

Mr Stewart: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member verify that he accepts the nomination?

Mr Nesbitt: I accept.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Mr O'Toole?

Mr O'Toole: I nominate Patsy McGlone MLA.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Is there a Member to second the nomination of Mr McGlone?

Ms McLaughlin: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Mr McGlone is unable to be in the Chamber today. Standing Order 4(3) provides that a Member may be nominated, "whether or not present", and:

"the candidate proposed ... may accept nomination by making ... written statement to that effect."

I confirm that the Speaker has received written notification from Mr McGlone that he is willing to accept the nomination for the office of Speaker.

Are there any further proposals? *[Pause.]* Sorry, Members. Since there are no further proposals, I rule that the time for proposals has expired.

A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. Members have up to five minutes in which to speak.

Mrs O'Neill: Today we meet for the fifth time since May to try to elect a Speaker, to reinstate the Assembly and to allow MLAs, mandated by the electorate to represent them and to work here on their behalf, to get on with the job.

As we meet in the comfort of this well-heated and well-lit Building, I am acutely aware that tens of thousands of families are living in cold homes, unable to afford to turn on their heating, and are worrying about the next bill coming through the door, as we face into the most difficult winter in a generation. Outside those family homes, our health service is in crisis. Healthcare workers are being forced to take strike action for safe working conditions and decent pay in order to defend themselves and the wider health service. It is an absolute disgrace that they are being forced into that position. Yesterday, we were in London and met the leadership of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) to hear the plight of our nurses. I want to send solidarity and support from the Assembly to the nurses and the other health and public-sector workers. They have our full support. I think that I speak for most Members in the Assembly in calling on the British Government and the people who hold the purse strings to immediately get around the negotiating table and get on with finding a resolution.

The Secretary of State has brought the Executive Formation Act through Westminster to extend the deadline to form a Government or to hold an election. He has given decision-making to civil servants and has cut MLA pay. He has set out a Budget statement and will bring forward an unadulterated Tory Budget Bill. Whilst they are spending all this time trying to find workarounds, the real question is this: how are they using the space that they have created to get a negotiated settlement with the EU in order to restore the Executive and put to the test the DUP's boycott?

I was in the Dáil last Thursday when European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, addressed parliamentarians the length and breadth of this island. She said:

"Brexit will not become an obstacle ... [to] reconciliation in Ireland."

She said that the single market must continue to function and:

"If both sides are sensitive to this careful balance"

a deal can be done and that there will be:

"no hard border on the island of Ireland."

She also said that her:

"contacts with Prime Minister Sunak are encouraging".

I once more welcome that contact, but I go further than that and appeal for negotiations to be intensified. We do not have months to ponder; rather, we have weeks to take action that creates stability and certainty for society, businesses and politics. We cannot be left to the mercy of the Tories in London — people who are dictating the priorities here, when they have no votes and no mandate here. Already we are starting to see the consequences of having no Executive. Education services are being cut, with new services being targeted, and job losses and reduced provision are now being imposed against the wishes of elected MLAs. It is clear for us all to see that the DUP's political tactic is to abandon our people to a Tory Government intent on inflicting cuts and austerity on the most vulnerable in our society. That strategy, if it can even be called a strategy, makes no sense and has no purpose. Incredibly, it is apparently a strategy dictated by a handful of loyalist bloggers.

Jeffrey Donaldson, of course, is not here. He is not here with us despite the fact that he was elected to sit here. I appeal again to him and to the DUP MLAs who have come to this sitting: rethink your approach; reconsider your position; and, most of all, recognise the dire and deteriorating circumstances that people — your voters; all our voters — are facing on a day-to-day basis, with the crisis in our emergency departments, the cuts to youth services and the very real prospect of the cold that is faced by many of our people, particularly the old, the very young and those with disabilities. People need our help. They need us to do our jobs, and they are, rightly, angry.

Each one of those challenges that we face demands new thinking from us, as elected representatives, and a responsible and mature political response to help people who right now are desperate to see the end of the DUP boycott of politics.

Everyone knows that, by any objective measure, the protocol is working and is protecting our economy from some of the worst effects of Brexit. We need to focus on the opportunities that it presents through dual-market access and how that can create benefits and more jobs in building our economy. Of course, the Members opposite disagree with that, and that is OK. You are entitled to disagree, but, whatever about our different opinions on the protocol, we all know that any of the issues that have been identified with the protocol will not be resolved in the Chamber. As I said, last week, I welcomed the comments by the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen. She restated the Commission's willingness to resolve the issues with how the protocol is applied. We all want those issues to be resolved, but, in the meantime, we have been elected to be here in the Chamber, to have people's backs and to get the £600 into their pockets. They are crying out for help. They need us to do our job. They elected us to do our job. I will say this to you again: you should be ashamed of yourselves in the Chamber today. The public need our support. Do your job. Turn up.

Mr Lyons: The recall of the Assembly is nothing more than a farce. We know that it is a stunt. The public know that it is a stunt. The other parties know that it is a stunt as well; many of their members have told us so privately. So it should come as no surprise to the House to hear that the DUP will not support either of the nominees for Speaker.

Some Members: Shame.

Mr Lyons: We believe that devolution needs a firm foundation to succeed. That foundation will never be in place as long as the issues around the protocol are unresolved.

I recognise that the sitting has a special benefit for Sinn Féin as it provides a useful distraction from proceedings at the Special Criminal Court in Dublin, where it has been alleged that Sinn Féin has used a criminal gang for money and votes. I am sure that many others will, like me, be surprised to hear that there could be connections between Sinn Féin and criminals, but, of course, there needs to be proper investigation to ensure that no gangland money is being used to influence politics here.

I recognise the dire situation that many people find themselves in. Many people are struggling with the cost of living. On that, I agree with the former Finance Minister:

"the levers which can make the biggest difference sit with the UK Government."

Those are not my words but the words of the former Finance Minister in a letter from him and his Scottish and Welsh colleagues to the former Chancellor in July.

Mr Brett: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that one organisation that is certainly not suffering from the cost-of-living crisis is that which is based at Connolly House, an organisation that continues to be one of the largest landlords on this island, continues to host champagne receptions across the globe and continues to inherit the millions of pounds that were apparently found down the back of a sofa in a caravan?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lyons: Absolutely. I agree that there will not be any shortage of funds or heat in Connolly House this winter. Of course, the Member neglects to mention the £10 million of public money that that party has received for its MPs not taking their seats at Westminster or many of the pension pots that Sinn Féin members will have built up during their time working for MI5 as well.

On the cost of living, the UK Government have been able to deliver additional payments for those who are low incomes, additional support for pensioners through the increased winter fuel payments, and the energy price guarantee, which, in some cases, has cut electricity bills by up to 50%. However, it is up to them to finally deliver the energy bills support scheme. That scheme was devised and promised by Westminster and now needs to be delivered by Westminster as well. In the summertime, there was a way forward and a mechanism identified for delivery. Energy suppliers and the Utility Regulator worked hard to put that in place. At the last minute, the Government have started to consider alternative options. That is what is causing delay. That is a shame. They need to get on with delivering the scheme that they brought forward.

The time for dithering is over. They have the money, they have the systems, they have the capacity to deliver it, and they need to get on with it. I hope that the other parties will join us in calling for payments to be delivered as soon as possible, because the Government are the ones with the tools. That is key to the conversation that we are having today.

12.15 pm

Mr Tennyson: Will the Member acknowledge that he gave assurances to the public that the payments would come in November? No other party in the Chamber fell for Conservative dishonesty but the party to my right. My constituents are now in a worse position, because they had budgeted on the assumption that they would receive that money pre-Christmas. They are now in a dire situation. That is thanks to DUP dishonesty, and it is not the first time. There has been dishonesty about the protocol, about cardiac equipment, about Christmas trees and now about support payments. When will the DUP accept responsibility for its hand in placing us in this position, in which we are subject to Tory chaos and in which our constituents are suffering?

Mr Lyons: That has been well discussed. The Government said that they were going to deliver it. It is up to them to deliver it. We will continue to push the Government on that at Westminster, but what we will not do is say that we can deliver things that are not in our gift to deliver. We are not going to be like the SDLP, which has made people think that it is within its gift to deliver 1,000 litres of home heating oil to every home in Northern Ireland. I am not going to be like Sinn Féin and Michelle O'Neill, who repeatedly told us that there were hundreds of millions of pounds in a Stormont bank account just ready to go into people's pockets. Sinn Féin today still has not been able to accept that there are difficult choices ahead and that, if we were in an Executive right now, we too would have to make difficult decisions. There is therefore a need for people to be straightforward and honest.

This sitting is a farce. Everybody knows it, but it provides us with one useful benefit: it provides us once more with the opportunity to say clearly to the Government and the European Union that the issue must be resolved. Threatening an election does not change anything and cutting salaries does not change anything. What will unlock devolution is getting the protocol sorted, restoring Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market and removing the democratic deficit. When that happens, we will not be found wanting. We will elect a Speaker and nominate Ministers. We say to the UK and the EU, "The ball is in your court. The clock is ticking. Get on with it".

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Before I call the next Member to speak, I remind all Members that interventions are not an

opportunity to make speeches. I ask you all to bear that in mind this afternoon.

Ms Armstrong: If we manage to elect a Speaker today and go on to elect an Executive, the subject of today's recall motion will be answered. We can all get back to work, put our collective force together and create a solution to enable the £600 energy support payment to go out to all households. Sadly, however, from what I have heard today and as a result of the use of cross-community voting in this place, I do not expect the DUP to end its boycott, and I expect every household in Northern Ireland to face a cold winter without the same level of help that is being provided to others across the UK.

The DUP's 2022 manifesto states:

"Now is not the time for more division and uncertainty",

yet, here we are, a House divided and constituents facing uncertainty over how they will pay for oil to heat their home. I say to each DUP Member — MLA colleagues in the House today — that now is not the time for division and uncertainty. End your boycott. Using fellow citizens as leverage is not working. Our health service is crumbling, and many health staff will be heading out on strike. Tackling the cost of living is being hampered, not helped, by the DUP's boycott.

In the 'News Letter', Niall Deeney reported on a statement made by the homeless sector this week as part of Homelessness Awareness Week. He wrote:

"in a joint statement, the Chartered Institute of Housing (NI), Homeless Connect, NIFHA and Housing Rights have expressed concern regarding the delays of the £600 energy bill payment, which will now not reach consumers in Northern Ireland until after Christmas."

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. Will she agree with me that we have just heard a speech from the former caretaker Minister in which he was effectively defending the indefensible? The reality is that he made promises not to this House, which he should have done, but to the citizens of Northern Ireland about payments for fuel that he and his party are blocking. The DUP has completely and utterly failed to deliver the urgently needed money for fuel costs to citizens across Northern Ireland.

People will be freezing in Northern Ireland because of the former Minister's actions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you.

I shall continue with the piece in the 'News Letter':

"Households here are being failed by the ongoing lack of financial support to help with increased energy costs; continuing delays to the scheme being rolled out are unconscionable, particularly given that households in England, Scotland, and Wales have rightly been in receipt of support since October this year ... Our members and the tenants and communities we work with are already being impacted by significant pressures on their households' budgets and the delay in this payment further compounds this. Our members report increased instances where people are sitting in cold homes this winter."

Mr Acting Speaker, neither your constituents nor mine, nor any constituents in Northern Ireland, have received any part of the £600 energy support payment, because the DUP continues to use them as leverage in its political game with Westminster. It is clear that Westminster is in no rush to sort out the payment. Northern Ireland was never going to be able to opt into a GB energy payment scheme. It was always going to require a bespoke approach, because Northern Ireland has a different regulator, system and companies. Northern Ireland is more dependent on oil for home heating. Originally, the payment was supposed to come through the Barnett consequential. I have no doubt that, if a local scheme had been progressed earlier this year, we would not be in this dreadful situation. Mr Graham Stuart MP made it clear in the Commons that the energy issue is a devolved issue. He said:

"We are acutely aware of the situation facing households in Northern Ireland. Of course, what they most need is good government in Northern Ireland for and by the people of Northern Ireland. It is the failure to have that Executive in this devolved area of responsibility that is at the heart of the issue ... Looking forward, the people of Northern Ireland need a period of good government and future prosperity."

Westminster did not intentionally delay the scheme. I put it to the House that the DUP dropped the ball.

I would love to see some payment in some format before Christmas. It is unacceptable for people in poverty here to have to wait until January while the rest of the UK is insulated from the worst effects of the crisis. Alliance wants to see Westminster proceed with electricity credits before Christmas and continue to work on a cashback option in parallel. That could look like providing the original £400 credit on bills pre Christmas, with a £200 cash-out option to follow as soon as possible.

I go out regularly across my constituency, surveying people and asking what their key issues are. The first thing that they tell us is, "Get the £600 out to households", and the second is, "Get the Executive back to work". Today I will vote for the proposed Speakers, because I want this place to get back to work. Today the DUP has a choice: elect a Speaker and let us all get on with helping constituents in Northern Ireland, or continue your boycott and leave constituents in the cold this winter.

Mr Beattie: Merry Christmas to you all. It is warm in here, is it not? It is a bit of a shame that many of our people sitting in their homes right now are cold. Many businesses are looking at their energy bills and saying that they will just not survive this winter. Many service providers are wondering what they can cut just to provide the basic level of service. It is warm in here, is it not? That £600 energy support scheme would have helped other people to be warm also.

I know that the recall petition is gesture politics and is born of frustration. I just do not see what we gain from hurling insults across the Assembly while others suffer with the cost-of-living crisis. The reality is that, as was the case for three years with Sinn Féin, the DUP simply does not care. It does not care about people being hungry. It does not care about people being cold. It does not care about waiting lists. It does not care that services are being undermined. It does not care that nurses are going on strike. It does not care that some of our most vulnerable older people will die cold and hungry. The DUP cares about the DUP and about taking votes back off the TUV. That is all that it cares about. The DUP and Sinn Féin are two sides of the same damn coin.

They have shared champagne breakfasts together and taken overseas trips together for the past 16 years, and they have pushed

Northern Ireland into the dirt for their own political gain.

Mandate. Mandate. I am sick to death of hearing the word "mandate". If your mandate is not the 1·9 million people in Northern Ireland who we work for, you are an absolute busted flush. We have to work for all our people. I am sick of it. I am sick of the word "mandate". The protocol was a bad deal, and it was a bad deal that was facilitated by the DUP. It undermined the UK territorial integrity in 2019, and it undermines the UK's territorial integrity now. However, handing all the power to those who brought in the protocol is absolutely crazy. The Northern Ireland protocol will be dealt with through negotiation between the UK and the EU, or it will be dealt with by legislation. Whether or not we have an Executive up and running will not change that fact. Anyone who tells you that the collapse of the Executive brought anybody to the negotiating table is telling you lies. Global forces brought them back to the negotiating table. The cost of the protocol brought them back to the negotiating table, not this.

While some sitting in this Chamber today will feel good about themselves because they are able to raise this issue, the reality is that people out there will still suffer. There are good people out there, there are good people in here and there are good people in the DUP. I know that you do not want to do that, and I know that you think you can scream and whinge and whine like a girl from the sidelines. That is up to you — *[Interruption.]* That is up to you, but I will not be bullied. *[Interruption.]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Order.

Mr Brett: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. The House will be aware of Mr Beattie's history when it comes to misogyny. Is it in order, Mr Acting Speaker, to use such language in relation to women in this Chamber?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member is perfectly entitled to say whatever he wishes. *[Interruption.]* Carry on.

Mr Beattie: Thank you, and do you know what, Mr Acting Speaker? I am a big enough man to say, when I get something wrong, that I got it wrong. I will apologise — *[Interruption.]* I got it wrong because I used that terminology. It is exactly the same: they sit and they think that they can barrack and bully you into doing something when we are simply not going to. We are not going to. We will have this Executive up and running, and we will provide for the people

of Northern Ireland regardless. It is as simple as that. It will happen because we will get to the same place on the protocol whether we have an Executive or not. The difference is that the people will suffer because of it.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for once again taking the Chair as we seek — it looks like, once again, in vain — to elect a Speaker. I nominated Patsy McGlone. He has accepted that nomination although he is not here in person because of a prior commitment.

I have a five-year-old child, who I helped get packed up for school today. Like lots of other parents, we are using the fact that Christmas is approaching as a tool to help teach our children responsibility. When you are trying to teach responsibility, one of the key things is trying to get your child to take accountability and responsibility for their actions. Surely, people who should be willing to take responsibility and accountability for their actions more than anyone else are those of us who walk to people's doors and ask for power. With power has to come responsibility. When you seek power and when you seek election, you do so, hopefully, to make people's lives better. You take responsibility for leading them, for ensuring that they have proper governance, for ensuring that they have public services that work and for ensuring that, at a time of a cost-of-living emergency in which inflation is at double-digit levels and in which people — my constituents and everyone else's constituents, including the DUP's — are sitting in cold homes, those people can have a modicum of support.

12.30 pm

The tragedy is that the DUP is addicted to power but hates responsibility. The DUP wants the power to assert a tribal veto over progress in this place and of being able to say, "Unless this happens on our terms, it will not happen at all." They seek that power and assert that power, as they have done in the Chamber today. Multiple DUP Members have asked, "What about our mandate? What about the power that we got from the electorate?" However, they refuse to take responsibility for leading people and helping people in a cost-of-living emergency. It is absolutely disgraceful. They are always shirking and deflecting. It is always someone else's fault. I am sure that, later today, multiple DUP Members will say, "Well, for three years, Sinn Féin brought the Executive down". There will be debates about the precise chronology between 2017 and 2020, but that was wrong then. It was wrong for exactly the same reasons as what you are

doing is wrong now, even though the circumstances are slightly different.

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Toole: I will happily give way, for the sake of debate, to Mr Buckley.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. If he is consistent on the point that it was wrong to hold the institutions down for three years when the Bengoa report, for example, had been produced — it was not published; it sat on a shelf, and the Health Minister in post then was Michelle O'Neill — why did the SDLP not call for the restoration of a devolved Assembly then? On that point, why did the SDLP help to facilitate that boycott by Sinn Féin by walking out the door with it? Can the Member explain or, at least, be consistent in his position? *[Interruption.]*

Mr O'Toole: I gave way for precisely this reason, Mr Acting Speaker: so that the DUP representative could assert exactly that. It is tribal one-upmanship. It is always about that. It is always like the old saying from the movies, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." *[Interruption.]* Well, when life gives you them-uns, chuck it back across the Chamber. People's cold homes and public services do not matter because them-uns did it — them-uns did it. *[Interruption.]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Sorry, Mr O'Toole. I will take a point of order.

Mr Butler: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. In the last Assembly debate, there was an incredible amount of chuntering and bickering going on in the Chamber, and I could not hear what the Member speaking was saying. The chuntering then was coming from one side of the Chamber. Today, it is coming from the other side of the Chamber. It is not appropriate, especially given what the debate is about today and the pressures on the general public in Northern Ireland. Will you make a ruling that the chuntering be kept to a minimum, regardless of where it comes from, to allow Members to make their points?

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. A previous point of order was made about the general tenor of the debate in the Chamber, but I want to make a specific point of order request. One of the Speaker's very clear rulings is that Members should not engage from a sedentary position. A Member on this side of the House has done that consistently in an argument with the Member who had the Floor

and the right to speak. I expect a Speaker's ruling about Members involving themselves in a debate from a sedentary position.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I ask all Members to behave with dignity and respect. The public are watching this. We do not get many opportunities, and have not had many opportunities, to come into the Chamber to debate. If the level of the debate descends to what it could, it will not set a very good example for the public. Please, I want to hear the Members who speak, the public want to hear them and Hansard wants to hear them. Please, I ask for respect. When a Member is on their feet, let them speak, and let us not have any yelling from the sidelines.

Mr O'Toole: This institution was created and founded on the basis of common endeavour: putting aside differences to work together for the common good. That is what I want to do. When bills arrive in the post or meters tick towards zero, they do not say unionist, nationalist or other on them. People are in cold homes. Those homes are not unionist, nationalist or other. Operating a tribal veto or trying to achieve a tribal victory is not a way to help people through this crisis. I appeal to the DUP, sincerely — even as I do that, I am getting sceptical looks and chuntering from DUP Members — genuinely and sincerely, this is not a game. This really is not a game, I am afraid, Mr Lyons. As a Minister, he promised people some months ago that they would have money. They do not have it, and they are in cold homes. This is not a game.

This institution is about common endeavour, working together and serving the people who we asked for a vote from in May. I am afraid that, if we keep going down this road and bringing this place down in order to assert a tribal veto, all we do is fundamentally damage people's trust in the status quo, not just the constitutional status quo but the ability of democracy to deliver for people. That is an extraordinarily damaging and dangerous thing to do. Therefore, sincerely, genuinely and honestly, I say this to DUP colleagues across the Chamber, who I genuinely think, in their heart of hearts, do care about their constituents: you want power, you have got it; now, please, take responsibility.

Mr Allister: On 7 December 1922, exactly 100 years ago, the elected unionist representatives to the predecessor of this House, the Northern Ireland Parliament, unanimously declined to leave the Union of the United Kingdom and join the Irish Free State. One hundred years later, it

remains the unanimous view of every unionist elected representative that the protocol is unacceptable because of the manner and extent to which it dissipates and disrespects that very same Union. That fundamental has not changed and will not change for those of us who are, by conviction, unionists.

What is the Union? As David Trimble quite rightly said, it is the Acts of Union. What do they do? Whether it was the 1707 Union with Scotland Act or the 1800 Act of Union, those created a Union of the United Kingdom based on two premises: a political, parliamentary union where a single sovereign Parliament was created; and an economic union that created a single market and a single trading area, which was the United Kingdom. That, of course, was premised on article 6 of the Acts of Union.

Last week, I sat in the Supreme Court listening to an His Majesty's Government barrister — barristers only speak upon instructions — argue that the protocol disapplies article 6 of the Acts of Union and, in so arguing, confirm everything that we have ever said about it. What does disapply mean? It is pretty obvious what it means. It means that it sets it aside, overrides it, subjugates it — we can all understand that — but what does it do? It takes that key component of the Act of Union, the economic union, sets it aside and says that it no longer applies. There no longer is a single market in the United Kingdom. There no longer is the freedom to trade unfettered between and within all of the United Kingdom. Indeed, it goes further than that because it says that GB is now a foreign country whose goods must be checked when coming to Northern Ireland. That, of course, is the fundamental reason why no unionist can ever operate institutions that, by law, would be required to implement such a protocol, to accept that GB is a foreign country, to accept that there must be checks on its goods and to accept that we must be subject to foreign laws that we do not make and cannot change. That is the fundamental essence of the reason why the protocol can never be accepted.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. To add insult to injury on the protocol, we hear language such as that used by Ursula Von Der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, who, last week, compared Britain's actions in Ireland to the situation in Ukraine. The irony is not lost that Britain has led the way in supporting Ukraine in its actions against the dictators in Russia.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allister: The Member is absolutely right, but those are now the ground rules of the operation of devolution in Northern Ireland. That is the fundamental premise upon which devolution now has to operate, and it can never be bearable or acceptable to any unionist. The sad truth is that the protocol achieved what the IRA in all its murderous campaign could never achieve: a border in the Irish Sea, and the suspension of a significant part of the Act of Union. Whether it was its murder 39 years ago of the very talented Edgar Graham — 39 years ago today — or the callous kidnapping 50 years ago today of Jean McConville, for all that murderous attack, the IRA never achieved what the protocol achieved.

Then there are those in the House who think that unionists should just suck it up. It is not going to happen, because we are defending the very fundamentals of the Union when we resist and reject the protocol. Let us be clear: a protocol that requires unionists to operate an Assembly and to conduct themselves as Ministers on the basis that GB is a foreign country is not going to operate with the consent of unionists. If there are others — be they the Government, the EU, the American president or other MLAs — who want an Assembly to operate, they need to recognise and accept that reality. It is not going to operate on the basis that GB is a foreign country, that article 6 of the Act of Union has been disapplied and that we are being disenfranchised from within the Union that we believe in. Unless and until those who fail to face up to that reality do face up to it —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion?

Mr Allister: — the Assembly, quite rightly, is going nowhere.

Mr Carroll: I have to admit that today's political circus might be amusing if the cost-of-living crisis were not so deep or the outcome of the proceedings today were not so predictable. Although the sitting might carry some intrigue for the press, workers on the picket lines, patients lying in hospital corridors and everyone who is struggling may ask, "What's the point?". This morning, I met Kids Together and Sólás. They, who are being denied access to Youth Service funding, effectively because they work with and support children with disabilities, may also ask, "What's the point?". The DUP's impervious attitude to people's plight is obvious, so there is some justification in asking what the point is of pleading with a party that has allowed people to go hungry, whole households to

freeze and whole communities to suffer for its own ends.

Just as everyone knows that the DUP will not vote for a Speaker, they know that the DUP's outrage about the protocol is manufactured. Edwin Poots's embarrassing attempt to change the protocol Bill proves that point. The DUP's political credibility and vote are plummeting, so it has reverted to the familiar tactic of stoking inter-communal tensions to shore up its base. While the DUP refuses to govern, its one-time allies in the Tory party have decided to inflict more misery on people in the North. That same party indulged the DUP's boycott of the Assembly from the outset, first with the protocol Bill and then by re-entering negotiations with the European Union. After failing with the carrot, the Secretary of State is now trying the stick. We have had election threats, budget cuts and, finally, a threat to introduce water charges and to punish ordinary people for the intransigence of the DUP.

Make no mistake: the Tories also want us to pick up the bill for their September Budget that promised handouts for the wealthy and misery for the rest. They are a Government of the rich and for the rich who have always been about making ordinary people pay for their mistakes, but those threats against working-class communities could be the last resort of an Administration that have no plan whatsoever to deal with the crisis that exists here. Stormont is fundamentally broken, and neither the Tories nor the political establishment here has the desire to fix it. Besides exacerbating the cost-of-living crisis, the DUP is simply exercising the sectarian veto on power-sharing that is enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. These political institutions, built and run on the basis of communal divisions and designations, have failed Catholic, Protestant and neither. After 25 years of failure, serious questions loom about whether this place could, or should, be resurrected at all.

People are all too aware of how these sectarian structures were used to deny same-sex marriage, reproductive rights, Irish language rights and the broad democratic desires of the public, and, unfortunately, the communal carve-up has been no barrier to things like welfare reforms, public-sector pay cuts and corrupt schemes like RHI and Red Sky.

12.45 pm

Mr O'Toole: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: Maybe later.

People Before Profit will support the election of a Speaker today as a stopgap measure. However, we recognise that resurrecting Stormont will not itself solve the cost-of-living crisis or deliver on the long-term hopes and aspirations of the majority here. As in the past, it will be for the public to pressure any new Executive to act in their interests. If the Assembly is not restored, that denial of democracy should be met with democracy and a border poll should be called within two years. People should be given a say in reshaping this island for the benefit of the many, not for the benefit of the DUP or the economic elites on this island.

Illusions of Stormont are waning, and, whether the Assembly is restored or not, working-class people who have been crushed by this crisis will not wait for politicians to get their house in order. We have only to look at the example of our health workers, who are striking in the coming days to defend our NHS. They will remember that the previous Executive were content to offer them a pay cut in real terms. Our postal workers, Housing Executive workers, BT workers, university workers and countless others are also forging ahead without Stormont. They are fighting to ensure that their demands for a better future are heard, wherever they need to be heard.

To be clear, I believe that, if Stormont is restored in its current guise, further crises will come. The sectarianism at the heart of the state guarantees it. We are fast approaching the point where, given the choice, people may call time on this farce, because you cannot paper over the cracks of an Assembly that is crumbling at its foundations.

All things considered, people may still ask what the point is in taking a seat in this broken Assembly or speaking here today. For me, the point is simple: as long as I and other socialists have a voice in the Chamber, we will use it to amplify the voices of workers and social movements, and we will hold parties like the DUP and the Tories to account. Whether the DUP votes for a Speaker today or not, it is important that it hears the disastrous consequences of its actions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion?

Mr Carroll: Finally, in solidarity with every worker who is out on strike in the coming weeks, we say this: today may be about the DUP, but tomorrow is about you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member's time is up.

Mr Easton: I despair at the political maturity and debate in this place and the hypocrisy that comes from some parties, which, in my opinion, are interested only in point-scoring and playing games and, no matter what section of the community they claim to represent, are not really interested in the lives of the people of Northern Ireland.

When we look at the facts, we see that Sinn Féin brought down the Assembly for three years. It did that for several reasons. It did it because of the RHI scandal and, indeed, because it wanted an Irish language Act, although only 5% of the population can speak Irish to some degree. During those three years, Sinn Féin could not have cared less about our education system, our health system, our wildlife, our policing system, our infrastructure and roads, and our security. During those three years, Sinn Féin could not have cared less about our housing or about jobs, and it certainly could not have cared less about the welfare of our people.

Ironically, Sinn Féin supports the Northern Ireland protocol, yet what does the protocol do for Northern Ireland? It costs businesses extra money and leads to extra paperwork. It denies the citizens of Northern Ireland the right to the same goods, in many places, that they get in the rest of the United Kingdom; in fact, the protocol has actually driven up prices. Although Sinn Féin says that it cares about the cost-of-living and energy crises, it certainly could not care less about the crisis and the amount of money —.

Ms Bradshaw: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: Sorry, no.

Sinn Féin could not care less about the increasing costs that the Northern Ireland protocol is putting on the people of Northern Ireland. It could not care less, so you are hypocrites. You are total hypocrites.

When we look at our Government in Westminster, we see that they are also playing with the lives of the people of Northern Ireland through costs, because they know that, if they want to, they can get the cost-of-living payments and the energy payments out to the people of Northern Ireland just like that. They have a responsibility to resolve that.

Before the Assembly collapsed, we could have done little to help people, because the Assembly was in debt to the tune of £600 million. The Finance Minister allowed that to happen before he left office. Where were we going to get any money to help people with their energy costs or their heating or to help them afford food? We could not have found the money. We did not have it, because we were that far in debt, yet you all sit around here pretending that we were going to do fantastic things. We were not, because we could not afford it.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No.

People need to realise that the Northern Ireland protocol, whether we like it or not, is a serious issue for the unionist population. I see some of my colleagues on the Ulster Unionist Benches shaking their heads, but some are not. Some agree that it is an issue. Until we get it sorted out, this place will not be coming back. There is a responsibility on all the political parties in here to talk to one another, but you do not: all that you do is shout at one another. It does not matter from which side of the divide you claim to come, whom you support or whether you claim that you are in the middle —.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No, I will not. You do not meet or support one another. You are not willing to listen to other people's points of view.

Mr Muir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No, I will not, because I listen to you all the time, and you achieve nothing.
[Interruption.]

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Order, please. The Member has indicated that he will not give way.

Mr Easton: It is even more depressing when we see the lack of negotiation between Westminster and the EU. The Northern Ireland Protocol Bill is going through Westminster. Westminster could have had it fast-tracked, but it did not. It is causing part of the problem that we have here today. Much as I want to help the people of Northern Ireland —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion, please?

Mr Easton: — the reality is that, until there is political maturity from the rest of us in here and until Westminster and the EU stop playing games, we will get nowhere.

Mr C Murphy: I had thought that the DUP was out of dead cats at this stage, but it seems that we might need to alert the RSPCA in the time ahead.

Let us get away from distraction politics and get real. In challenging circumstances during COVID, the parties here worked together in the Executive to help people through that crisis. We should be working together now to help our people and businesses through the cost-of-living crisis. The DUP boycott of the Executive is preventing that, and for what? We did not choose Brexit. The majority of the people of the North rejected Brexit, but it was imposed on us by the Tories and the DUP. As with any new trading relationship, there are issues that can and should be sorted out, but the boycott of our Assembly and the Executive by the DUP is having absolutely no impact on the negotiations, which are between the EU and the British Government. Instead, the boycott is doing huge damage to our people, our businesses and our public services.

When the DUP collapsed the Executive in February, the draft Budget was out for consultation. I have no doubt that a final Budget would have been agreed and would have provided the health service with an extra £1 billion. Just as importantly, it would have provided the certainty of a three-year Budget, which would have allowed the Health Department to plan services properly, recruit more doctors and nurses and give staff a pay increase. In the absence of an Executive, health and other public services went from day to day not knowing what their spending limit was. That financial chaos led Departments to overspend.

During the year, the Executive received millions of pounds of additional money. That could have been used to help with departmental pressures, give public-sector workers a pay rise and help people and businesses with the cost-of-living crisis. Crucially, it would have been for the Executive to decide how to use that money. Instead, the Tories are imposing a Budget that will mean a £330 million reduction in our finances next year, and there is no Executive to set a public pay policy that could have offered a fair pay rise to nurses, teachers and other public-sector workers who stepped up during the pandemic. Because the DUP went on strike — on full pay — public-sector workers now

have to resort to industrial action to get the pay rise that they deserve.

As well as walking out of the Executive in the middle of a Budget consultation, the DUP downed tools in the middle of a deepening financial crisis, when we all knew that families would need our help to heat their homes and put food on their tables and that businesses would need help to keep their shutters up and their workers in a job. We had the means to help people. The first tranche of money for the energy support payment — around £160 million — came to the Executive in February. The funding was given to the Executive to deliver the scheme because it was the responsibility of the Economy Minister and his Department to do that. Energy is a devolved matter. Given the urgency —

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for giving way. He has spent quite a bit of money so far in what he has said, if only the Executive were back.

The Member said that energy is a devolved issue: it absolutely is. If that is the case, however, why has the energy price guarantee been delivered in Northern Ireland? Does he accept that the money that was originally given for the energy payments in February was given as a result of that money originally being a loan?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr C Murphy: The fact is that the Government had agreed and decided that we were the ones to deliver an energy scheme. Just as we did on many occasions during COVID, the Executive received billions of pounds of additional payment and distributed that money quickly and directly to those most in need. Had an Executive been in place, they would have instructed you, as the Economy Minister, to get a scheme in place quickly to distribute that money. Despite the false promises, there is no ducking that issue. The fact that the DUP collapsed the Executive meant that the funding could not be allocated. To cover up its culpability for blocking the payment, the DUP made the false claim that the payment should have been delivered by the British Government, regardless of whether an Executive were in place. It kept up that fiction for months, while the money sat idle.

Eventually, at a meeting in August that the Economy Minister and I attended, the British Government finally agreed to take responsibility for delivering the scheme. They did so

reluctantly and only because the DUP had made it clear that it would continue to block an Executive from delivering the scheme. The British Government made it clear that the payment might not be made until after Christmas, despite the fact that people in Britain were starting to receive that money in October. I was honest with the public about that, but the DUP falsely promised people that they could expect that payment in November. Now, the British Government have confirmed only that payments will be made over the winter, whenever that may be deemed to end. That delay is unacceptable.

We have been told that the IT systems needed to make the payment of the £600 discount are ready to go. If that is the case, the Executive could meet today, agree to the discount and transfer that money to the energy companies. I therefore ask the DUP to stop looking over its shoulder at those who want to live in the past and to start looking after our people, who face a really tough Christmas. While you go back to the comfort of your warm homes tonight, many of your constituents will be freezing. Let us work together to help them.

Mr Blair: I will try to keep my remarks relatively short, given what we have heard already, especially in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. There is little to be added on the core issues of the debate. We have already thoroughly rehearsed the frankly devastating impacts that again failing to elect a Speaker will have on our public services, on the public purse and on the lives of each of our constituents in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, as well as on their confidence in how this institution supports and delivers for them.

To be clear, Acting Speaker, the vote that will take place at the end of the debate is not a vote on who will sit in the Chair that you currently occupy. Bluntly, my party colleagues and I do not care who that will be, although we know that two well-qualified candidates have been put forward; we care only that someone occupies the Chair so that we can reconvene Assembly business, conduct the jobs that we were elected to do and serve our constituents to our fullest ability. Instead, the vote at the end of the debate will be on whether Members care about the issues affecting our constituents and whether they care enough to prioritise those issues over party political interest and protest.

I was going to say that it would be shameful to prioritise party political interest over a health service that is collapsing around us and a climate crisis that is no longer a looming threat but is here and happening now, but I am

starting to believe that the party to my right — the DUP — is incapable of shame. The rest of us are aware of the global and local implications and repercussions of the issues that I have mentioned, and we want to get on with it.

1.00 pm

As with every other recall, we know what the outcome is likely to be, and it is utterly depressing. To put it in context, I have been a Member of the Assembly for over four years. I have been afforded the opportunity to debate in the Chamber and scrutinise in Committee for a little over two years, and therein lies the problem. We should be looking urgently at the reform of these institutions. I am not going to go into the detail of that today except to reiterate my and my party colleagues' strong commitment to allow all parties in the Chamber to govern if they wish to do so. That is by far the best alternative to the current arrangements of recurring collapse and chaos.

I would prefer that to be done on an inclusive basis, of course, but the point is that some parties that have had the opportunity to take their seats in Government have failed to do so. In the new arrangements, they could self-exclude if they so wish, but they should never ever be able to prevent those of us who are willing to govern and deliver from doing so. It is called choice, and it is fair.

I close by asking my South Antrim political colleagues — those in the DUP in particular — to reflect on their position, and I appeal to them to do so. That is what I would advise, and I issue that advice on the basis of very recent conversations — as recently as this morning, in some cases — with food banks, businesses, schools, youth service providers, which were mentioned earlier, NHS patients on waiting lists and other constituents. Their need is greater than any need to use them as leverage for political point-scoring or protest.

Ms McLaughlin: As we meet here for the fifth time to try to elect a Speaker, this is not the meeting of the Assembly that I or any of my party colleagues want. I want to be standing here today to hold the Education Minister accountable for helping childcare providers that are struggling to stay open and the parents who are struggling to pay. I want to be questioning the Health Minister about how we can address the spread of strep A throughout our communities and about the tragic circumstances around the emergency department in relation to little Stella-Lily. I want

to be asking the Communities Minister how they might be able to intervene to prevent the potential closure of Radio Foyle. I want to be questioning the Economy Minister to explain why over 1,600 jobs were created in Belfast last year and only 67 in Derry. However, none of that is possible. Therefore I am unable to fully represent and serve the people of Foyle. Each time that we have to meet to nominate a Speaker, the DUP refuse to act.

There is very little Christmas cheer around Stormont today and certainly no Christmas miracle. Today, the DUP will leave this Building having refused once again to do their job and expecting once again their constituencies to foot the bill. I have no doubt that, in the days ahead, we will hear DUP politicians on the airwaves to defend their decision — defending how they stopped government here because they were not getting their own way. I do not know how they have the nerve, but, then again, I do not know they have the nerve to do a lot of things. The nerve to call for a £600 payment scheme to be delivered from outside this Chamber while they refuse to take their seats inside this Chamber. The nerve to hold up government because they do not like the consequences of the political decision in 2016 that they campaigned for. The nerve to stand for election, sign up for their wages but not take their seats.

Let us really cut to the chase, however, and get to the truth for once. I accept that the DUP has not been well-accustomed to the truth in recent times, but some of us still believe that it is important. To anyone with eyes, the plain truth is that the DUP has whipped up its people into a frenzy because it cannot stomach finishing in second place. The truth is that the DUP holding to ransom those of us who actually want to get on with our jobs.

This is not about us; this is about the leverage of ordinary people who the DUP is now exploiting.

It is about how you are willing to stand idly by while people lose their jobs, or struggle to pay their mortgage or meet their childcare bills. People are rightly furious about that, but what angers them more than anything is that they can see that one party is able to hold up the rest of us. The most basic test of our politicians is just to show up, yet one party is preventing us from doing that.

Mr McGrath: Will the Member give way?

Ms McLaughlin: Yes.

Mr McGrath: Will the Member agree with me and many in the healthcare sector that it is undeniable that the lack of any real reform being instituted is costing people their lives? The fact that some will not allow us to have an Executive and a Health Minister means that, out there, people are dying. They should reflect on their actions in this place and on the impact that those have on people in real terms in their homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member will have an extra minute.

Ms McLaughlin: I absolutely agree with the Member. It should be the impetus for all of us, if we even needed any, that we need to reform this place to take away the veto over progress that the DUP is so cruelly wielding against our people.

In the twenty-fifth year of the Good Friday Agreement, our party stands ready to do that hard work. With each day that passes, we preside over failed politics. Our young people lose hope for their future and for this place. I still believe that investing in the mechanisms of inclusive democracy, where we share power rather than carve it up, is the only way to deliver for the people and the only way to give hope and honesty to the Good Friday Agreement.

More and more people are looking at the dysfunction that you are creating, and they are turning towards something different. The DUP might be content, for now, with whipping up fear over a new Ireland that would, supposedly, be hastened by a nationalist First Minister or by a protocol. The truth is, however, that the real impetus for constitutional change is the arrogant boycott that you will no doubt continue today. Happy Christmas.

Miss Reilly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Bhéarfaidh mé seans do Chomhaltáí na cluasáin ateangaireachta a chur orthu féin.

Ba mhaith liom tús a chur ar m'óráid trínár gcombhrón, ar son Bhinsí Shinn Féin agus ar son gach duine sa Tionól, a dhéanamh le clann agus le cairde Matthew McCallan, agus le gach duine a raibh aithne acu air. Tá ár smaointe lena mháthair, lena athair agus libh uilig ag an am seo.

Ba mhaith liom a lua fosta, mar ghaeilgeoir, gurb é inniu an chéad lá de stádas oifigiúil an Achta Gaeilge ina dhlí. Is rud stairiúil go bhfuil an tAcht rite agus go bhfuil cosaint do gach duine a sheas an fód agus a raibh baint acu leis

an fheachtas go dtí seo. Agus is mar gheall ar ráitis shuaracha amhail na ráitis ó dhaoine áirithe inniu atá gá agus tábhacht leis an Acht agus leis an dlí seo. Táimid ag caint ar chearta bunúsacha anseo, agus beidh mise, agus pobal iomlán na Gaeilge, ag coinneáil súil ghéar ar chur i bhfeidhm an dlí agus beimid ag dúil leis sin a fheiceáil a luaithe is féidir.

Seo arís muid i mbéal an gheimhridh agus cóngarach don Nollaig. Arís ag teacht le chéile lenár ndícheall a dhéanamh le Ceann Comhairle a thoghadh don chúigiú huair le seacht mí i ndiaidh do dhaoine teacht amach i mí na Bealtaine le vóta a chaitheamh dúinn.

D'aithin muid uilig — seachas an DUP, ar ndóigh — gur léir go mbeadh teaghlaigh agus oibrithe ag streachailt ó lá go lá le hardú an chostais maireachtála, agus is é sin go díreach an rud atá ag titim amach os ár gcomhair inniu.

Tá teaghlaigh ag streachailt le billí arda fuinnimh, ag streachailt le bia a chur ar an tábla, agus ag streachailt leo san fhuacht. Tá an ghéarchéim sa chostas maireachtála ag éirí níos measa, agus níl Coiste Feidhmiúcháin ná Airí áitiúla in áit againn le tacú agus le cuidiú leis an phobal. Níl aon ábhar dóchais ann do dhaoine. Ach tá daoine sna Binsí díreach os mo chomhair amach breá sásta ligean do dhaoine — dár gcairde, dár dteaghlaigh, dár gcomharsana, dár bpobail — streachailt leo. Mo náire sibh.

[Translation: Thank you, Speaker.

I will give Members an opportunity to put on the interpretation headphones.

I would like to start by expressing the condolences of those on the Sinn Féin Benches, as well as everyone in the Assembly, to the family and friends of Matthew McCallan and to all those who knew him. Our thoughts are with his mother, his father and with you all at this time.

As an Irish speaker, I would also like to point out that this is the first day of official status for the Irish language Act as legislation. It is a historic event that the Act has been passed, giving language protection to all those who stood their ground and took part in the campaign so far. This law, this Act, is necessary because of the mean-minded statements of some people. We are talking about basic rights. I, and the whole Irish-speaking community, will be keeping a close eye on how the new law is implemented — we expect that to be done as soon as possible.

Here we are again in the middle of winter and approaching Christmas. Again, we are meeting to do our best to elect a Speaker for the fifth time in seven months after people came out in May to vote for us.

We all recognise — all except the DUP, of course — that it is clear that families and workers are struggling day in, day out with the rising cost of living. That is exactly what is happening before our eyes.

Families are struggling with high energy bills, struggling to put food on the table, and struggling with the cold. The cost-of-living crisis is getting worse, yet we have no Executive or local Ministers to support and help people. People are losing hope.

Yet the people on the Benches opposite are quite happy to let people — our friends, our families, our neighbours, our communities — struggle. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

Mr Butler: Will the Member give way?

Miss Reilly: An mbeidh sé i nGaeilge? Will it be in Irish?

Mr Butler: *[Inaudible.]*

Miss Reilly: Gheall an tAire Eacnamaíochta ón DUP arís agus arís eile go mbeadh £600 d'íochaíocht tacaíochta ag teacht do dhaoine anseo i mí na Samhna. Níl mé cinnte an raibh sé ar an eolas ag an am nach mbeadh sin ag tarlú, nó an bhfuil sé breá sásta daoine a mhíthreorú, ach seo muid ar an 7 Nollaig agus an £600 sin níos faide ó dhaoine ná a bhí riamh.

Táimid ag cluinstit anois ó Rialtas na Breataine nach mbeidh sin ag titim amach go dtí an bhliain úr — b'fhéidir. Tá diúltú an DUP Tionól a bhunú le páirtithe eile ag cur bac ar an airgead sin ag dul amach ar an doras.

[Translation: The DUP Economy Minister promised again and again that the £600 support payment would come to people here in November. I do not know whether he knew that that would not happen or whether he was prepared to misdirect people, but here we are at 7 December and that £600 is as far off as ever.

We now hear from the British Government that the payment will not be delivered until the new year — maybe. The DUP's refusal to come

here and form an Assembly with other parties is preventing that money from going out the door.]

Dr Aiken: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. My friend Mr Butler wished to ask a question. It is my understanding of the joint translation process that he is fully entitled to ask his question in English, the question would be translated into Irish, the Member would be able to respond in Irish and the response would be translated into English. It was more than a little bit disingenuous of the Member who was speaking to ask whether Mr Butler's question was going to be asked in Irish. I do not think that it was the intent of my friend Mr Butler to invite such a response. May I have a ruling on that, please, Mr Acting Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member has made a point, and it has been noted, but it is convention that the Member who is on their feet has the right to refuse to take an intervention. It is down to the Member whether they wish to take an intervention.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. Will the Acting Speaker address Mr Aiken's point? Do Standing Orders not now provide that an intervention can be in the language of choice of the intervener? It is not at the discretion of the Member speaking as to in which language they are addressed: it is at the discretion of the intervener. Is that not the reality? Why do we need to equivocate about it? Why can we not have a ruling that that is the situation?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): My understanding is that anyone who makes an intervention can make it in any language that they wish. At the end of the day, it is up to the Member who is on their feet whether they wish to take that intervention.

Mr Allister: You cannot precondition it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Yes.

Miss Reilly: Is léir gur sin ionsaí eile ar an Ghaeilge.

Níl mé cinnte an raibh sé ar an eolas ag an am nach mbeadh sin ag tarlú, nó an bhfuil sé breá sásta daoine a mhíthreorú, ach seo muid ar an 7 Nollaig agus an £600 sin níos faide ó dhaoine ná a bhí riamh.

Táimid ag cluinstitín anois ó Rialtas na Breataine nach mbeidh sin ag titim amach go dtí an bhliain úr — b'fhéidir. Tá diúltú an DUP Tionól a bhunú le páirtithe eile ag cur bac ar an airgead

sin ag dul amach ar an doras. Tá an DUP ag diúltú tacaíocht, meas agus dínit a thaispeáint do dhaoine; tá siad ag diúltú go fóill glacadh le toradh an toghcháin. Ach inniu is féidir linn dóchas a thabhairt do dhaoine. Is féidir linn Ceann Comhairle a thoghadh agus Coiste Feidhmiúcháin a chur ar bun. Is féidir linn tús a chur ar an obair agus an £600 sin a chur isteach i bpócaí na ndaoine — £600 a bheadh mar líne slándála do theaghlaigh agus do oibrithe.

Caithfimid freastal ar ár bpobal láithreach; caithfimid freastal ar gach duine fud fad an Tuaiscirt. Tá Sinn Féin tiomanta do bheith ag obair ar son gach duine. Táimid tiomanta fosta don cheannaireacht a thaispeáint atá de dhíth. Dúirt muid, agus táimid á rá arís, go bhfuil muid réidh le comhoibriú le páirtithe eile atá ag iarraidh sochaí fhorásach a chruthú.

Tá barraíocht ama curtha amú idir Bealtaine agus an lá inniu. Ní mór don mhoill, don chleasaíocht agus do na leithscéalta stopadh anois díreach. Déanaigí an rud ceart. Toghaigí Ceann Comhairle agus ligigí dúinn dul i gceann oibre ar son an phobail anois.

Go raibh maith agat.

[Translation: It is clear that that is another attack on the Irish language.]

I do not know whether he knew that that would not happen or whether he was prepared to misdirect people, but here we are at 7 December and that £600 is as far off as ever.

We now hear from the British Government that the payment will not be delivered until the new year — maybe.

The DUP's refusal to come here and form an Assembly with other parties is preventing that money from going out the door.

The DUP is refusing to show people support, respect and dignity; it is refusing to accept the results of the election.

Today, however, we can give people hope. We can elect a Speaker and form an Executive. We can start the work of getting that £600 into people's pockets: £600 that will be a lifeline for families and workers.

We have to serve our people now; we have to serve everyone in the North.

Sinn Féin is committed to working for everyone and to showing the necessary leadership. We have said, and we are saying it again, that we are ready to work with other parties that want to create a progressive society.

Too much time has been wasted between May and now. The delay, the dithering, and the excuses must stop right away.

Do the right thing. Elect a Speaker and let us get to work for our people now.

Thank you.]

Mr Poots: Today, a lot of statements have been made but there has not been a lot of fact behind a lot of what has been said. We have Michelle O'Neill, who walked out of her role as Health Minister — not for six months but for three years — and abandoned her position when we had Bengoa and there were all the problems with nursing that led to the strike in 2019, lecturing us about health. We also have Conor Murphy lecturing us about what could be done. Earlier this year, Michelle O'Neill was saying, "We have £420 million that we want to give to the public". That was completely non-factual in that she was claiming that there was £420 million to distribute while Conor Murphy was racking up a huge debt for the Executive — a huge debt that will be passed on to next year's Budget, because the money did not exist.

1.15 pm

Mr C Murphy: I thank the Member for giving way. I will correct him on two points. First, when he talks about the three years, he knows that he and I agreed a deal in February 2018 to put the Executive back in place, and he knows that his party scuppered that over the following weekend and would not announce the deal. He knows that.

Also, as I pointed out in my contribution, it was for the Executive to decide what to do with that £300 million. They could have put it all towards dealing with the overspend of Departments, which was caused by the fact that we had no Budget in place, or they could have used some or all of it to deal with the cost of living and fair pay awards. Crucially, it was for the Executive to decide, and, crucially, the DUP has prevented that from happening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Poots: I welcome Mr Murphy's intervention. First, he tells us that there was £300 million, which indicates that —

Mr C Murphy: That is *[Inaudible.]* That is the £160 million that they gave us for the home heating scheme.

Mr Poots: — Michelle O'Neill's quote of £420 million was a fabricated one and did not have any standing whatsoever.

Mr C Murphy: There was £160 million for the scheme that they gave us in February.

Mr Poots: Secondly —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Order, please. I want to hear only one person. Thank you.

Mr Poots: I was happy to give way to Mr Murphy, and I am happy to respond to his intervention.

Clearly, Mrs O'Neill did not have anything factual when she claimed that there was £420 million to give to the public. *[Interruption.]* We had a circumstance where Sinn Féin repeated, month after month after month, that there were hundreds of millions to give to the public when that did not exist and when, in reality, Minister Murphy was racking up debt that will roll into next year, which will ensure that that will be a difficult financial year. He also referred to the Budget that was produced —

Mr C Murphy: Will the Member give way again?

Mr Poots: I need to deal with the issues first.

He referred to the Budget that he produced. No party supported that Budget. The Alliance Party did not support it, because it did not cover policing and prisons. Infrastructure did not support it, because it would not allow it to do the basics of what had to be done. Education did not support it, because it did not provide what is statutorily necessary for special educational needs. In that Budget, Sinn Féin did not care about young people with special educational needs, because it did not provide for them. We, therefore, had a Budget that was not supported by any other party in the Executive at that point.

Ms Armstrong suggested that, if we just get the Assembly back, that £600 will go out. That is entirely disingenuous.

Ms Armstrong: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. Hansard will record that the £600 will not, I said, be given out before Christmas. I offered that it would be possible for us to get £400 out before Christmas as an electric credit and £200 after Christmas. Hansard will be proof and fact of that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I do not really think that that is a point of order, but the remarks have been noted.

Mr Poots: Thank you for clarifying that that is not a point of order. It was entirely disingenuous for Ms Kelly to suggest that the Assembly —

Ms Armstrong: Ms Armstrong.

Mr Poots: Sorry — Ms Armstrong. My apologies.

That the Assembly could, in some way, get that money out when it is a UK Government responsibility. The UK Government have distributed it directly in Scotland and Wales, not through the Welsh Parliament and not through the Scottish Parliament. Let us be very clear: the money is sitting there; the capacity to spend the money exists; and it is for the UK Government to do it.

We have this nonsense, "Well, we'll call an election. That'll push the DUP into doing this. We'll cut the pay. That'll push the DUP into doing this. We'll hold the money back. We know that we have to give it to them, but we'll hold it back from the people. That'll make them have to do it". Let me be very clear: this is a constitutional issue. We will not be going back in for threats, bribes or anything else. We will be making our position absolutely clear.

To Ursula von der Leyen, who was here last week —

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I have not got time; I am sorry.

Ursula von der Leyen, who was in the Republic last week, made some of the most ridiculous claims about the British Government, who have supported Ukraine in a way that no other Government in Europe have and who have never engaged in the activity that was suggested by Ursula von der Leyen. In fact, the only people outside Russia who are doing a power grab are those in the European Union, who want to make laws in this place when there is nobody democratically mandated to respond to those laws on behalf of the people of

Northern Ireland. The European Union needs to get the reality here: we will not be giving in on these issues; we will be standing firm on them.

I want to briefly mention Mr Beattie's comments, because what he said was absolutely scandalous. Apologies do not cut it, Doug. When you are a repeat offender, repeat apologies do not cut it. I will repeat what he said:

"I know that you think you can scream and whinge and whine like a girl from the sidelines. That is up to you".

I know personally what it is like, Mr Beattie, to be on the receiving end of your tweets and messages. I know personally what it is like for a woman to be on the receiving end.

I know personally what it is like —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Would the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion, please?

Mr Poots: — for a women's children to be on the receiving end of that. You are a disgrace to unionism.

Ms Eastwood: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I want to raise a point of order under Standing Order 65 about the language that was used earlier and that the Member who has just spoken referred to. I was going to wait until the end, but I think that now is the appropriate time to raise it. I understand that the Member withdrew the remarks. However, it is incumbent on all Members to be dignified in their use of language and to ensure that it is reflective of the whole community. Obviously, that fell short on this occasion.

I also reference your reluctance to make a ruling, Mr Acting Speaker, when you said, "People can say what they want", or words to that effect. It is incumbent on you in the Chair to make a ruling and to say what language is appropriate. I would like to hear a ruling on that, Mr Acting Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I will just remind the Member that she really does not have the authority to challenge the ruling of the Chair. Earlier, I requested — I made it clear that I was asking for this — that people act with dignity and respect. We should all continue to act on that basis. My function as Acting Speaker is limited. My powers are limited. If any Member feels that there is something that they want to take up further, I advise that they

contact the Speaker and take it up with him directly.

Ms Eastwood: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I would like to clarify that, yes, we will follow up in writing. However, I also wish to log for the record that it is disappointing that a simple statement could not have been made from the Chair about those comments. For the record, that language was unparliamentary. Women belong in the Chamber and, in fact, in every meeting where decisions are made. I would like that to be heard for the whole House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I have no doubt that the Speaker will make a ruling on that if you bring it to his attention.

Ms Bradshaw: Before I begin, I place on record my deepest sympathies to the family of Stella-Lily McCorkindale. I am sure that they are devastated by her loss this week through strep A infection. I also thank the Public Health Agency, GPs, community pharmacists and school leaders for their swift response to this health emergency.

I urge all Members in the Chamber to elect a Speaker. I will be blunt: I do not care which Speaker is elected, but we need a Speaker and an Assembly. Only one party is blocking the election of a Speaker, yet, even by its own logic, it shows that we need to elect one. Recently, the DUP sought an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill at Second Reading in Parliament to give MLAs scrutiny rights over what permanent secretaries do. DUP MLAs can, in fact, deliver that scrutiny right here, right now, by electing a Speaker. They always could. The fact is that the DUP's desperate quest for leverage by refusing to elect a Speaker is not just causing material harm to households, which are not receiving payments during an energy crisis, but is imperilling one of the very institutions cited as a reason for unionism to exist, namely the National Health Service.

The failure to take the time to pass relevant legislation to allow the transformation of our health service to proceed and to communicate to the public why such reforms are necessary have seen a calamity unfold in our health and social care system, not least in recent weeks. We now have a service that is often inaccessible, accompanied by diagnostics or treatment that can take many years or are effectively unavailable in many branches of medicine, while money is spent on public inquiries and severe adverse incident reviews, the recommendations of which go pretty much

unimplemented. As a result, patient safety is compromised, and improvement is rarely truly sought, leading to an endless cycle of more inquiries and reviews, more scandals and more quests for justifiable redress but no significant transformation of the service.

The fact is that many of the failings go back to previous devolved Administrations. The DUP often held the Health and Finance Ministries at the same time, while failing to embrace reform and the need to fund and resource it adequately. As Bengoa, Donaldson, Compton and all the others warned us, healthcare provision is changing around the world. Services are much more specialised; conditions are much more complex; and medicines are much more specific than was the case even a decade ago. What was required was a consistent transformation programme with clearly measurable outcomes and clarity about why any of those outcomes had been missed. Instead, what we have had since 2017 following Bengoa are protracted periods of political stalemate. As a result, we now see some reconfigurations of services being carried out as a panicked response rather than as a planned programme.

The supposed jewel in the crown of the Union — the NHS — is on its knees in Northern Ireland. Our Health and Social Care workers struggle to keep it upright as best they can. I note as well that they are long overdue pay rises that an Executive need to sign off. Perhaps people do not believe that Stormont will sort it out, but it will not be sorted out without Stormont: without ministerial direction, local accountability, democratic scrutiny and legislative intervention.

Those who vote to elect a Speaker are voting to begin the process of turning our Health and Social Care service around and giving the public the care, support and treatment that they need, not least in this time of economic uncertainty. Those who do not vote to elect a Speaker are voting to crash and burn public healthcare provision in Northern Ireland. That is the choice for all of us here today. Let us be in no doubt about that.

Mr McCrossan: It is extremely disappointing that we find ourselves here for the fifth time since each of us was democratically elected in May. What is even more depressing is watching some of the antics across the House, particularly some of the language used by Members of the DUP.

In May, I was democratically elected as an MLA to the Northern Ireland Assembly to represent

the constituents of West Tyrone. My democratic right as an elected Member of the House is being blocked by one party alone: the DUP. It is preventing me and others from representing and standing up for the needs of our constituents across every constituency in Northern Ireland. It would serve some Members well to remember why we stand for election to begin with. We stand for election, I would hope, to better the lives of our constituents in whatever way is possible. How on earth is this situation in any way improving the lives of any of our constituents? The DUP knows, as does anybody in Northern Ireland with ears and eyes, that it has no influence over the negotiations between the EU and the British Government. Zero.

Mr O'Toole: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCrossan: I will give way.

Mr O'Toole: The Member will have noted, like I did, the remarks of Mr Poots across the Chamber on double standards. Will he have seen, like I did, the reports of the correspondence that Mr Poots sent to the British Government while he was still Agriculture Minister saying that he wanted parts of the protocol to be retained for the benefit of farmers? Does the Member think that he should account for that double standard over the protocol that the DUP so bemoans today?

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Member for his intervention. Duplicity —.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. It is important to clarify something when an untruth is being peddled [*Interruption.*] It is absolutely important to say that —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Order.

Mr Poots: — nothing from the protocol was asked to be kept. The maximisation of the United Kingdom Government's ability to support business in Northern Ireland should be availed of in legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I do not think that that was a point of order, but the Member's remarks have been noted.

Mr McCrossan: It is no surprise that the first three letters of the word "duplicity" spell "DUP". It is never found wanting when it comes to that narrative.

1.30 pm

Our colleagues across the Benches have talked about reality: the reality is that people are starving. They cannot heat their homes. They cannot afford to travel to their work. People who are working tirelessly in our hospitals, schools and public domain every day cannot afford to live, and you know it. I would like to think that you are hearing the exact same things as I hear from our constituents; either that or your office doors are locked or your phone lines are disconnected. The people who ring me and other Members are absolutely sick, sore and tired of being failed by this place. I am ashamed to stand in the House, prevented from exercising my democratic right to stand up for every citizen.

I have heard the Member say that the constitution comes first. He would do well to follow me to Altnagelvin hospital, stand in the A&E and look at people suffering with mental health issues who cannot get a bed in the facilities in Derry or anywhere else. The Member would do well to look at the person who is dying on a hospital seat because they cannot get a bed. Perhaps Mr Poots wants to go to the A&E in Altnagelvin and say, "Folks, it's constitution first. You can all die". That is the message that you are sending.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCrossan: I will not give way. You have said enough, Mr Allister. The real leader of the DUP has spoken. That is where your narrative comes from.

This is about real life. I am frustrated; it can be heard in how I speak and what I am saying today. People in our constituencies are suffering incredibly. I appeal to the Members opposite to search within themselves and ask whether they really think that it is appropriate to allow people to suffer or to use them as leverage to get what they want, when the reality is that the Members have no influence whatever. In fact, they truly destroyed that bridge when they propped up Theresa May's Government and polished the red bus.

I have heard the session today being called "a farce". My democratic right as an elected Member of the House is not a farce. My right to represent my constituents is not a farce. I ask Mr Lyons whether it is a farce to suggest that children are starving. We could resolve that issue in the House. I hear members of the DUP continually say on radio, "But we really couldn't do anything about it if the Assembly were here". Why stand for election? Where is your sense of hope or aspiration? If that is the vision for this place, young emerging unionists will not want to

be a part of it. I represent every citizen in my constituency — every one. I have yet to hear one of them say that the protocol is their biggest issue. It is not.

The DUP does not like the truth. I appeal to the people of Northern Ireland to knock on the doors of the DUP. Ring their phones. Email them. Bombard their social media. Tell them that your children are starving. Tell them that you cannot heat your home. Tell them that you cannot fund your business. The reality is that the DUP knows it. You are in a bad position, you are wrong, and you are failing people. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would do well to remember that MLAs —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Bring your remarks to a conclusion, please.

Mr McCrossan: — have not failed; the DUP has failed. It has failed every citizen in Northern Ireland.

Mr Delargy: Every household in the North will be £600 worse off this Christmas because one party refuses to go into government, do its job and end its boycott of the Assembly and Executive. One party refuses to accept the democratic will of the people of the North. It refuses to come back to work with a nationalist First Minister. It refuses to do its job and help the rest of us here to put money back into people's pockets. I refuse to stop standing up for ordinary people. I will continue to do that, as will my party and the other parties here. We will stand up for ordinary people. We will stand up for workers. We will stand up for families across the North. I say to that party that it should form an Executive today. Come back around the table with the rest of us and work together to give people that £600 payment. Let us deliver for people. That is our job. Weeks ago, the former Economy Minister promised people that they would get the payment in November, but now we find out that that had absolutely no basis.

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr Delargy: No.

We also heard the DUP's five-point plan to invest an extra £1 billion in health, to give 30 hours of free childcare and to keep schools world-class. I would love to know how the DUP intends to do any of that without an Executive.

Last Friday, I sat at the Disabled People's Parliament, and I heard from deaf and disabled people from across the North about how they

are struggling day in, day out. I heard about their harrowing experiences and the plethora of practical solutions that we can help to make. What do they want us to do? They want us to get back in here and to get an Executive formed. I also listened to the Children's Commissioner, who stated:

"This is ... 2022 and we're worried about children dying of hypothermia."

What does she want us to do? She wants us to get back in here and form an Executive. I have listened to people across Derry and across the North, day in, day out, telling us that they are in dire straits, that they are struggling and that they need emergency financial support. Guess what they are telling us: to get back in here and get an Executive formed.

You can choose today not to listen to me, and you can choose not to listen to my party or any of the other parties in here, but do not sit there and ignore the people who elected you — the people who will go cold and hungry this winter. The refusal to go into government is an act of gross political and financial negligence, and it needs to end now.

Mr Butler: It does not look like I will be speaking Irish today, Mr Frew.

I was not going to speak today, but my heart is literally thumping. It is thumping with a myriad of emotions. The first is about the reason that we are here to debate, and that is the state that Northern Ireland is in, the country that I love dearly and deeply and for which I gave up the job that I did to come here to represent as a proud unionist. I put any unionist in the Chamber on warning not to challenge me on the depth of my commitment to unionism, the Union and the United Kingdom. Do not dare do that. Do not chunter and reduce any unionist's desire and passion on the constitutional issue.

Yesterday, I got a message from a lady whom I know. She works, and her husband does not. This lady has quite a number of children. I will not say how many children she has because that would identify her. She has a large family. She approached me for food vouchers, and I was able to direct her to the local food bank. That, in itself, was sad enough. This lady tries to work hard to provide for her family. Shortly after that, the lady got the courage to message me to ask whether I knew anybody who could or would help with fuel because she was down to the fumes in her oil tank and would not get paid until 16 December. I directed her to some agencies that I am aware of that may or may not be able to provide help.

I have listened to much of the debate. The Member for North Down spoke well. Some of the points that he made were reasonably good, but they were not fully accurate if you were to take what he was saying right to the end. He talked about the hypocrisy that has been exposed in the Chamber today. Hypocrisy has been exposed in the Chamber, particularly of the party opposite. Obviously, the Chamber was held out for three years. Some will debate the rationale and the reasons for that. I speak on mental health and suicide prevention all the time, so I know that, when you inflict trauma on anyone, the lasting effects of that trauma go on for years. In fact, some of those things do not emerge until many months or years later. I suspect that, in years to come, we will look back on those three years and will be able to pinpoint the effect that that had on people's lives in Northern Ireland, whether it was the failure to deliver Bengoa or have it running at the speed at which it should have been; whether it was the failure to deliver the transformation of business opportunities; or whether it was the failure to speak about the impact of Brexit. We did not have that. We run the risk of doing the same again. My colleagues to the right of me need to take that into consideration, as does my colleague to the left Mr Allister.

I urge unionists to hold themselves to a higher station and understand that, yes, the constitution is important, but the constitution will be won on seats in the Chamber and political representation. The political representation will come from people believing that you represent them at the moment that they are in and on the things that matter to them. I fear, at the moment, with the pressures on families, like the lady who messaged me yesterday —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Butler: I will not take any interventions, Mr Allister, and I mean that most kindly and appropriately.

There are deep fissures in the Chamber, and one of them emerged today when I asked the Member from West Belfast to take an intervention. The reason given for not taking the intervention was that I was not able to ask in Irish. As someone whom many would describe as a moderate unionist and as someone who tabled an amendment to a Bill with regard to translation, I am deeply disappointed. I will not labour on it too much because it is not the most important thing today, but, on the day that the Irish language Act gets Royal Assent, to be

treated like that in the Chamber makes me genuinely grieve for the future of this place.

I will end with this. The decisions by the DUP and their partner in the TUV will not be made in the Chamber. To my right, there is nobody with the authority to influence the DUP in that regard. The leader is not here, and those who are speaking to him are not here. I urge you not to repeat the sins of the past, because that trauma will be measured in years to come, guys. I want you to re-evaluate for the sake of unionism.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): No other Members have indicated that they wish to speak.

Mr Donnelly: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. Can you confirm today that the votes of MLAs who designate as "Other", rather than as "Unionist" or "Nationalist", will carry less weight than the votes of MLAs who designate as "Unionist" and "Nationalist"?

Mr Chambers: The Northern Ireland Act sets out the mechanism for that. That answers your question.

Question put, That Mr Mike Nesbitt be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 24; Noes 24.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Dr Aiken, Mr Beattie, Mr Butler, Mr Elliott, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Stewart, Ms Sugden.

OTHER:

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Brown, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Mr Donnelly, Ms Eastwood, Ms Egan, Mr Honeyford, Ms McAllister, Mr McReynolds, Mr Mathison, Mr Muir, Ms Nicholl, Dr O'Lynn, Mr Tennyson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Dr Aiken and Mr Butler.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr McCrossan.

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Bradley, Mr Brett, Mr Brooks, Mr K Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Forsythe, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kingston, Mrs Little-Pengelly, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Forsythe and Mr Robinson.

Total Votes	48	Total Ayes	24	[50.0%]
Nationalist Votes	1	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Unionist Votes	30	Unionist Ayes	7	[23.3%]
Other Votes	17	Other Ayes	17	[100.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Durkan, Ms Hunter, Mr McGrath, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Mr O'Toole.

Question accordingly negated (cross-community vote).

Question put, That Mr Patsy McGlone be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 50; Noes 24.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Dr Archibald, Mr Baker, Mr Boylan, Ms Brogan, Mr Delargy, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Ferguson, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Ms Hunter, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mr McAleer, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Mrs Mason, Ms Á Murphy, Mr C Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Miss Reilly, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin.

UNIONIST:

Ms Sugden.

OTHER:

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Brown, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Mr Donnelly, Ms Eastwood, Ms Egan, Mr Honeyford, Ms McAllister, Mr McReynolds, Mr Mathison, Mr Muir, Ms Nicholl, Dr O'Lynn, Mr Tennyson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Hunter and Mr McGrath.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Bradley, Mr Brett, Mr Brooks, Mr K Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Forsythe, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kingston, Mrs Little-Pengelly, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Forsythe and Mr Robinson.

Total Votes	74	Total Ayes	50	[67.6%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	32	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	25	Unionist Ayes	1	[4.0%]
Other Votes	17	Other Ayes	17	[100.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Dr Aiken, Mr Beattie, Mr Butler, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Stewart.

Question accordingly negated (cross-community vote).

Mr O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I hope that this is a genuine point of order. In the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022, which recently received Royal Assent at Westminster and which delays an election and gives the power to cut MLAs' pay, there is specific reference to consultation between elected Members of the Assembly and the British Government about the operation of powers in this interim period. Is it in order for the Speaker's Office to give clarity to Members as to what exactly it understands that provision in the new legislation to mean? Further to that, is it be order for the Speaker's Office to write to the UK Government asking them to provide Members of this duly elected Assembly — it still exists; we are still MLAs — with an urgent update on the progress of discussions between the UK and EU?

I hope that both points of order will find some agreement across the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I thank the Member for his points of order, but, as Acting Speaker, my responsibility is limited to overseeing the election of a Speaker today. Points of order in relation to any other matters should be raised with the Speaker through the Speaker's Office.

The Assembly has been unable to elect a Speaker today and is therefore unable to conduct its first business. Therefore, we can proceed no further. Any further sittings of the Assembly can be held only to first elect a Speaker and Deputy Speakers. Under section 39(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the current Speaker remains in office until a successor is elected. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to adjourn the sitting until a future date, the details of which will be communicated to Members in due course.

Adjourned at 2.09 pm.