



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Official Report (Hansard)

Saturday 11 January 2020
Volume 125, No 1

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Saturday 11 January 2020

The Assembly met at 1.00 pm

Assembly Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): On the last occasion the Assembly met, it was unable to elect a Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 4(8), I have taken the Chair as an acting Speaker until a Speaker is elected.

Before we commence, I wish to advise you that, since the Assembly's last sitting, on 21 October 2019, several Members have resigned or ceased to be Members of the Assembly under the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975.

In accordance with the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act, Mr Colum Eastwood, Dr Stephen Farry, Ms Claire Hanna and Ms Carla Lockhart ceased to be Members of the Assembly on 13 December 2019, and I notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

I have been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Sinead McLaughlin has been returned as a Member for Foyle, Andrew Muir as a Member for North Down, Matthew O'Toole as a Member for South Belfast and Mrs Diane Dodds as a Member for Upper Bann.

Mr Andrew Muir gave the undertaking, signed the Roll of Membership and entered his designation in the presence of the Speaker and Clerk on 23 December 2019. Mrs Diane Dodds gave the undertaking, signed the Roll of Membership and entered her designation in the presence of the Speaker and Clerk on 9 January 2020. Ms Sinead McLaughlin gave the undertaking, signed the Roll of Membership and entered her designation in the presence of the Speaker and Clerk on 10 January 2020. The Members have now taken their seats.

I also advise Members that I have received letters from Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleor and Ms Megan Fearon advising of their resignation as Members for the South Belfast and Newry and Armagh constituencies respectively, with effect from close of business on Monday 6 January 2020. I notified the Chief Electoral Officer in

accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

I was informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Ms Deirdre Hargey has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for South Belfast and Ms Liz Kimmins has been returned as a Member for Newry and Armagh. Ms Deirdre Hargey and Ms Liz Kimmins signed the undertaking and Roll of Membership and entered their designations in the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk/Chief Executive on 9 January 2020.

I have also received a letter of resignation from Máire Hendron advising of her resignation as a Member for East Belfast with effect from 12 midnight on 8 January. I notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

I was informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mrs Naomi Long has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for East Belfast, and she signed the undertaking and Roll of Membership and entered her designation in the presence of the Speaker and the Chief Executive on 9 January 2020.

On behalf of the Assembly, I welcome the new Members and wish them every success.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Before we can proceed, I want to make clear the procedural constraints on this sitting. Section 39(1) of the Northern Ireland Act provides that:

"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 Deputy Speakers have been elected. Members should be clear: if a Speaker and Deputy Speakers are not elected, no further business can proceed.

Election of the Speaker

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): The first item of business is the election of the Speaker, and I will remain in the Chair for this process. I advise Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted under the procedures set out in Standing Order 4.

I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise to propose that another Member is elected as Speaker. I will then ask for the proposal to be seconded by another Member, as required by Standing Order 14. Members who have been proposed will be asked whether they are willing to accept the nomination. If they are not, that proposal will fall. 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.

Members will be allowed up to three minutes.

At the conclusion of the debate or the conclusion of the nominations, if there are no requests to speak, 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 in relation to 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?

Mrs O'Neill: A Cheann Comhairle, I nominate Alex Maskey for the position of Ceann Comhairle, Speaker of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Have we a seconder?

Mr Murphy: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Are there any other proposals?

Dr Aiken: I propose Roy Beggs MLA as Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Swann: I second that.

Ms Mallon: I nominate Mr Patsy McGlone for the office of Speaker.

Mrs D Kelly: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Are there any other proposals?

I ask the people who have been nominated whether they accept the proposal.

Mr Maskey: Yes, I accept.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Roy Beggs, do you accept the proposal?

Mr Beggs: I accept the proposal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Patsy McGlone, do you accept the proposal?

Mr McGlone: I accept the proposal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): Are there any other proposals? No.

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 course of the debate. Having consulted with the Whips, I will allow Members up to three minutes in which to speak and approximately 30 minutes for contributions. Members should note that, while it is entirely a matter for them if they wish to take interventions, on this occasion I will not give extra time to those who do so.

Mr Weir: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. First, I congratulate you on the conduct of today's sitting. It is great to see you in your rightful place, George.

The eyes of the world are on us today, but the citizens of Northern Ireland are particularly looking to us to deliver for them. They look on with hope and expectation and probably — some of them — with a certain level of cynicism, so there is a major challenge for all of us.

We begin today with this first item of business, the election of a Speaker, which is the first step in a long journey — one might say, "a never-ending journey" — to try to make life better for all our citizens. In electing a new Speaker, we should first acknowledge and pay tribute to the outgoing Speaker, Robin Newton. When someone leaves a senior post such as this, it is, perhaps, the nearest equivalent that he will have to hearing the eulogies at his own funeral, without having the inconvenience of dying in the meantime. However, I have no hesitation in praising Robin Newton. I have known Robin

and his family for more than 20 years. Above all, Robin is a family man. He is a man of quiet conviction and, unlike, perhaps, some outgoing Speakers in other places, did not seek to make himself the centre of attention in a showy role but tried to maintain discipline in a fair, even-handed and dignified manner. In doing so, I suppose, every Speaker, at times, will incur the wrath of one side or the other. They will have disagreed with different decisions, and, at times, I am sure, all of us have disagreed with something that the Speaker has done, but that highlights his impartiality. We wish him well in the future.

1.15 pm

As I said, we have a long journey ahead of us, on which it will be a challenge to all 90 of us in the Chamber to work together. Whether parties are in government or not in government, the betterment of the people of Northern Ireland should be the unifying factor. The Speaker's role has often varied between the different traditions. There is an outgoing DUP Speaker, so today, on behalf of the DUP, I say that we will support Alex Maskey as the new Speaker. In doing so, we will put forward our own candidate for Deputy Speaker and will support that person to be the Principal Deputy Speaker, when the time comes.

I urge all Members to take this new opportunity to work together and to take this first step. People want to see delivery that will better their lives.

Mrs O'Neill: Tá áthas mór orm Alex Maskey a mholadh mar Cheann Comhairle. It is my real pleasure to nominate my friend and colleague Alex Maskey for the position of Speaker of the Assembly. Alex is someone whose professionalism, dedication and commitment have embodied his involvement in politics for many decades. Alex served as the first Sinn Féin councillor on Belfast City Council and later as the first republican mayor in the history of Belfast. In both roles, he always demonstrated a willingness to represent all citizens equally. He is a tireless and fearless advocate for those most in need in our community. Alex has always reached out right across our society and proved that he can be a voice for everyone.

As a key figure in the negotiations leading up to the Good Friday Agreement and in all subsequent negotiations, Alex has always demonstrated at all times his determination and commitment to encouraging discussion and dialogue. Serving as a Committee Chair, he provided a platform for debate. He gets

business done, all the time making sure that he shows no fear or favour to anyone, and I am sure that that is exactly what he will bring to the role. He will bring all his enormous experience and years of dedication to political life to the position of Speaker. I also have no doubt that he will act at all times with determined professionalism and impartiality. I urge Members to support Alex Maskey for the position of Speaker of the Assembly, the Ceann Comhairle.

Ms Mallon: Three years we have waited to gather in the Chamber. People will rightly wonder why it has taken us so long. The fundamental test of whether all this will work is if there is a genuine change in the mindset, attitude and behaviour of all of us, all political parties. The election of Patsy McGlone would very much send the message that this is a new way of operating and working with one another. Patsy McGlone, whom it is my privilege to nominate, is a man of great integrity and fairness. I do not need to list his qualities — qualities that make him perfect for the role — because Members all know them. This, however, will be a very difficult time in the Assembly. The position of Speaker is a very important one, so I urge Members to consider carefully the role and to vote to elect my party colleague Patsy McGlone.

Dr Aiken: I echo some of the comments that have been made here. It has been far too long since the Assembly has been up and running. Whoever takes on the role of Speaker has to be somebody who brings a considerable degree of tact, diplomacy, knowledge and experience to the role. I cannot think of anybody in the Assembly who would be better suited to that role than Roy Beggs. He is one of the longest-standing Members of the Assembly, going back to 1998. Anybody who has known Roy through his work on Committees or as an MLA or, indeed, from some of the times that he has sat in the Chair in which you are sitting now, Mr Acting Speaker, knows that he is of the utmost integrity. What the Assembly needs, going forward, is somebody who makes sure that it is seen to do what the people of Northern Ireland want it to do. I say clearly that I fully recommend and support Roys Beggs, and I would like you all to do the same.

Mrs Long: First of all, I would like to add to what Peter Weir said in respect of paying tribute to Robin Newton. I have worked with Robin over many years, both in the city council and in the Assembly, and he is also a constituency colleague. I thank him for what was, I have to say, a historic time as the Presiding Officer of

the House, if not necessarily in the way he would have wished. I thank him for his patience at times and for his judgement when it was required.

I think all of us meet here today with the same ambition: that the Assembly will function well for all the people of Northern Ireland. For that to be a reality, it will not depend on words on paper produced by two Governments; it will depend on changed attitudes and approaches from those of us who are called to show leadership.

My expectation was and our belief as a party is that the post of Speaker should rotate among all the parties; therefore, we will support Patsy McGlone for the post of Speaker on this occasion. We believe that it is appropriate that the smaller parties in the Chamber be given the opportunity to show leadership in key roles in the House and that there is fairness and equity in how those are distributed across the parties. I put on record that that is no reflection either on the calibre or the ability of the other candidates whose names have been proposed on the Floor. I have no doubt that, in whatever role they find themselves at the end of this process, we will be able to work with them constructively and for the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: "New Decade, New Approach" is the supposed catchphrase of the day, and, yet, here we are, on the very first item of business, and it is "New Decade, Old Approach", old carve-up between the DUP and Sinn Féin. If that is how things will continue — I suspect it is — nothing has changed, nothing is new and nothing good will come of it. The spectacle of seeing the DUP obediently troop through the Lobbies to support a Sinn Féin Speaker will not be lost on many.

Of the three candidates, I would much prefer either of the other two, both of whom have been Deputy Speakers in the House. Both have acquitted themselves in that regard. Both have the personality and the capacity to do the job. Neither of them has baggage that should prevent them from doing the job, and neither of them has baggage that would proclaim loud and clear that this is not a new approach but the same old, same old. *Question put, That Mr Alex Maskey be Speaker of this Assembly.*

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 51; Noes 32.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Ms C Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Mr Maskey, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Miss Sheerin.

UNIONIST:

Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr McCartney.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Ms S Bradley, Mr Catney, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr O'Toole.

UNIONIST:

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Stewart, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Wells.

OTHER:

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Ms Bradshaw, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr Muir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Butler and Mr Chambers.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>[61.4%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>[69.2%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>[64.9%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0.0%]</i>

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Ms Bailey, Miss Woods.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Alex Maskey be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Robinson): I formally declare that Alex Maskey has been elected Speaker. I invite him to take the Chair. *[Applause.]*

(Mr Speaker [Mr Maskey] in the Chair)

Mr Speaker: OK, Members. First of all, I offer a hearty thank you to all those who gave me their support today. It is a very important statement that it came from such a significant cross-community basis. It is, indeed, an honour to be elected as the Speaker of this new Assembly. As the Assembly meets today, we do so with the sole intention of delivering for all the people of the North and in this jurisdiction. It is my hope that this work is done in a spirit of generosity, cooperation and delivery of good government based fundamentally on integrity and respect.

We enter the new Assembly today on the basis of a deal that can create credible and sustainable politics here in the North, where basic rights are guaranteed and public services are delivered for all. People are hopeful, in my view — it has been widely said over the last number of days — that this new Assembly can deliver for them. It is all of our responsibility to make these ambitions a reality. Today, that hope converges with opportunity. It is time to renew and rekindle a political environment of reconciliation and respect, and to deliver on the promise of a new approach to politics in this decade. Go raibh mile, mile maith agaibh.

Election of the Deputy Speakers

Mr Speaker: In accordance with section 39 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we will now commence the election of the Deputy Speakers. The procedure for electing Deputy Speakers will be the same as that for the election of the Speaker. I will ask for proposals, which must be seconded. I will then confirm that the Member accepts the nomination and will continue in this way until there are no further proposals.

I remind Members that a debate may take place after I announce that the time for proposals has passed, and Members will have three minutes to make their contribution.

Do we have any proposals for the office of Deputy Speaker?

Mrs Foster: Mr Speaker, it is my great pleasure to put forward the name of Christopher Stalford MLA.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder for that proposal?

Mr Lyons: Mr Speaker, I second Mrs Foster's nomination.

Mr Speaker: Does the Member nominated, Christopher Stalford, accept the nomination?

Mr Stalford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Is there a further proposal?

Mr Aiken: Mr Speaker, I propose Mr Roy Beggs MLA.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a seconder for Mr Roy Beggs?

Mr Butler: I second that proposal, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Does Mr Beggs accept the nomination?

Mr Beggs: Yes, I am willing to accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Is there a further proposal?

Ms Mallon: Yes, Mr Speaker. I nominate Mr Patsy McGlone for the office of Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a seconder for that nomination?

Ms S Bradley: Mr Speaker, I second that proposal.

Mr Speaker: Does Mr McGlone accept the nomination?

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Glacaim leis an mholadh sin, agus gabhaim buíochas le mo chara Nichola Mallon as sin a dhéanamh. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I accept the nomination, and I thank Nichola Mallon for the proposal.

1.45 pm

Mr Speaker: Go raibh maith agat. Any further proposals? There are no further proposals. The

time for proposals has now expired, and we move on.

A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. Having consulted with the Whips, I will allow Members up to three minutes in which to speak. I will allow around half an hour for contributions.

Mr Weir: One of the virtues and vices of being involved in politics for a long time, and, indeed, of growing older, is that I have known many of the people involved for a long time. I mentioned earlier knowing the outgoing Speaker, Robin Newton, for two decades. I have known Christopher Stalford for probably more than 20 years. I have known him so long that one could say that I have known him since before he was young. *[Laughter.]* Down the years, he has mellowed and become more informal. *[Laughter.]* It is undoubtedly the case that, had this plenary sitting been held several years ago, he would have been wearing two waistcoats rather than one.

For my sins, I was Christopher's first employer, so any subsequent blame will be laid very much at my door. Christopher is somebody who has an intense interest in politics, right to his fingertips. He has a great knowledge and great skills. Like the outgoing Speaker, he is also a family man, and, over the years, we have seen an expanding family. He is someone who brings a wealth of experience to the post. Prior to being a Member of the Assembly, he served as a councillor on Belfast City Council for a number of years. During that period, he had representative roles as High Sheriff of Belfast and Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast. Therefore, the duties of hosting events and ensuring good order in the Chamber that fall to any Deputy Speaker are ones that Christopher is well blessed in.

We have seen the contribution that he has made to this Chamber. For all of us on these Benches, the quick wit, the snappy comments, the interventions and the great speeches will be greatly missed when he is in the Chair. In South Belfast, he serves probably the most diverse constituency in Northern Ireland. He is someone who brings a wealth of experience to the role, and I have no hesitation in supporting Christopher Stalford for Deputy Speaker and, subsequently, for Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: No further Members have indicated that they wish to speak, so we will move on to the vote.

Question, That Mr Christopher Stalford be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Christopher Stalford be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

[Applause.]

Question, That Mr Roy Beggs be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Roy Beggs be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

[Applause.]

Question, That Mr Patsy McGlone be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Patsy McGlone be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

[Applause.]

Mr Speaker: Members, as three Deputy Speakers have been elected, that concludes this item of business. I offer my congratulations to the successful candidates and look forward to working in partnership with all of the Deputy Speakers.

Committee Business

Business Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion to appoint the Business Committee will be treated as a business motion, so there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That the following shall be appointed to be Members of the Business Committee:

The Speaker (ex officio);

Ms Kellie Armstrong;

Ms Clare Bailey;

Mr Robbie Butler;

Mrs Dolores Kelly;

Mr Gordon Lyons;

Mr Declan McAleer;

Mr Colin McGrath;

Mr Andrew Muir;

Ms Caral Ní Chuilín;

Mr George Robinson; and

Mr John Stewart — [Mr Speaker]

Assembly Business

Appointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the appointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I will conduct the process of filling the offices in accordance with the procedures set out in section 16 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44(1).

I will begin by asking the nominating officer of the largest political party to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the First Minister. I will then ask the nominating officer of the largest political party of the largest political designation to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be deputy First Minister.

As the persons nominated to fill the vacancies shall not take up office until each of them has affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office contained in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, when I have received both nominations, I will ask each of the persons nominated to accept the nomination and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

Before we proceed, Members may find it helpful if the Pledge of Office is read into the record:

To pledge:

(a) to discharge in good faith all the duties of office;

(b) commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means;

(c) to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality and prevent discrimination;

(ca) to promote the interests of the whole community represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly towards the goal of a shared future;

(cb) to participate fully in the Executive Committee, the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council;

(cc) to observe the joint nature of the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister;

(cd) to uphold the rule of law based as it is on the fundamental principles of fairness,

impartiality and democratic accountability, including support for policing and the courts as set out in paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement;

(ce) to support the rule of law unequivocally in word and deed and to support all efforts to uphold it;

(cf) to work collectively with the other members of the Executive Committee to achieve a society free of paramilitarism;

(cg) to challenge all paramilitary activity and associated criminality;

(ch) to call for, and to work together with the other members of the Executive Committee to achieve, the disbandment of all paramilitary organisations and their structures;

(ci) to challenge paramilitary attempts to control communities;

(cj) to support those who are determined to make the transition away from paramilitarism;

(ck) to accept no authority, direction or control on my political activities other than my democratic mandate alongside my own personal and party judgment;

(d) to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government;

(e) to operate within the framework of that programme when agreed within the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly;

(f) to support, and act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly;

(g) to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement states:

"We believe that the essential elements of support for law and order include endorsing fully the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the criminal justice system, actively encouraging everyone in the community to co-operate fully with the PSNI in tackling crime in all areas and actively supporting all the policing and criminal justice institutions, including the Policing Board."

Members, the Pledge of Office has now been read into the record of proceedings, and I will proceed with the nomination process.

I have received notification from the nominating officer of the DUP advising me that Mr Gordon Lyons will serve as nominating officer for the party for this item of business. I call Gordon Lyons to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the First Minister and allow him up to three minutes to say a few words in support of the nomination.

Mr Lyons: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It is a delight for me to be able to stand here today and, on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, nominate Mrs Arlene Foster MLA for the position of First Minister of Northern Ireland.

We have come a long way in the last number of years, and I know, having spoken to many people right across Northern Ireland, that people want us to get on with the job here. They want us to work and to deliver on the issues that matter to them. We all know what they are. We all know the very difficult job we have in front of us, but that job starts today. It starts with the nomination of First Minister and deputy First Minister and other Ministers so that we can form that Executive so that this Assembly can sit and do the job we were elected to do.

I absolutely agree with those outside who say we should have been here before now. We all would like to have been here doing our jobs sooner than we were able to today. Nevertheless, we are here. It is the time now to get on with this work. Again, I say on behalf of my party that we are delighted to be able to nominate Arlene Foster to the position of First Minister of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Mrs Arlene Foster, are you willing to take up the Office of First Minister and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mrs Foster: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of First Minister, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: I have received a letter from the nominating officer of Sinn Féin advising me that Conor Murphy will serve as its nominating office for this item of business. I call Mr Murphy to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, agus comhghairdeas. It gives me great pleasure to nominate Michelle O'Neill for the position of deputy First Minister. She follows on in that post from our late, great friend Martin McGuinness, who served with such distinction as deputy First Minister in the Assembly for many years. I know that Michelle will bring the same commitment to genuine power-sharing, to equality for all our citizens, to reaching out across the divide and to ensuring that we try to make this institution and the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement function according to their purpose as set out in that agreement, which was on the basis of equality, respect and parity of esteem for all who serve here and all those we represent right across the community.

I am very confident that Michelle, alongside the First Minister, will fulfil that role, and we look forward to the Assembly beginning a new journey, one that is about genuine power-sharing and the delivery of services for the people we represent. I am pleased to nominate Michelle O'Neill.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Mrs Michelle O'Neill, are you willing to take up the office of deputy First Minister and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Deimhním go bhfuil mé toilteanach glacadh leis an ról seo. I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of deputy First Minister, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in the 1998 Act.

Mrs Arlene Foster appointed First Minister and Mrs Michelle O'Neill appointed deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. There will now be an opportunity for speeches. I will begin by calling the First Minister and then the deputy First Minister to address the Assembly.

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. May I first of all congratulate you as you are elected to serve as Speaker of the House? It is a role with much responsibility to ensure that Members on all Benches are heard. I look forward to working with you and, indeed, the broader Speaker team that has just been elected.

To serve as the First Minister of Northern Ireland is deeply humbling and brings with it enormous responsibility to the people whom we represent. This is the fourth anniversary of when I first took up this role. A lot of water has

passed under the bridge since then, but today the real work starts.

2.00 pm

The past three years have focused too much on division and recrimination. There is plenty of blame to go around, but the time has come to move forward with resolution. The lessons have been learnt, and it is time to get Northern Ireland moving forward again. However, the restoration of the Assembly and the Executive alone will not solve our waiting lists or reduce the staff pressures in our hospitals. Simply filling posts will not resolve the mental health challenges that our society is facing. There needs to be action, and decisions need to be made. The Bengoa report needs to be implemented. It already has cross-party agreement. It has a 10-year plan, but that was in 2016, and we have lost three years. To deliver this transformation will not be easy. It will require courageous decisions by Members on all sides of the House. I pledge to work in a collegiate manner with all the parties across the Chamber to ensure that our public services are improved, that every citizen feels valued and that we lay a solid foundation for the next generation.

In 2021, Northern Ireland will celebrate its centenary, and we want to do so with safer streets, better schools and a first-class health service, free at the point of need. The National Health Service is unique to the United Kingdom, and we must work together to protect and strengthen it.

In the Chamber, there are people who are British, Irish, Northern Irish and European. There are many identities. Those of us here today should have each of our identities respected. That is why we reached the fair and balanced deal, which caters for British and Irish, as well as for new and emerging identities. We want everyone to feel at home in Northern Ireland. In particular, I draw attention to the commitments to implement fully the armed forces covenant and establish a veterans' commissioner. Those are very significant for young men and women from these shores who have defended, or continue to defend, democracy all over the world.

Mr Speaker, you and other Members in the Chamber are Irish republicans. I am a unionist with a strong British identity. Regardless of our differences, we must seek out common ground. When I visited Our Lady's Grammar School in Newry, the pupils gave me a lovely picture as a gift. It has hung in my office upstairs ever since, just above my shoulder, and, in Irish, it states,

"Together we are strong". We have many differences. Michelle's narrative of the past 40 years could not be any more different from mine, and I am not sure that we will ever agree on much about the past, but we can agree that there was too much suffering and that we cannot allow society to drift back and allow division to grow.

Northern Ireland is succeeding in many ways. It is time for Stormont to move forward and show that together we are stronger, for the benefit of everyone. Fixing problems in schools and reforming our health service so that people receive timely treatment should be a priority for all parties. Therefore, let us get down to work and, most importantly, let us get Northern Ireland moving again.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): I also say comhghairdeas on your new position, a Cheann Comhairle. I look forward to your leadership in the Assembly.

This is a defining moment for our politics here. From today, the parties represented in the Chamber undertake to cooperate in every way that we can in order to rebuild public trust and confidence in, and engagement with, the Assembly and its Executive. Our mission must be to deliver good politics. Our mission must be to deliver on health, education and jobs for everyone, right across our communities.

I see no contradiction whatsoever in declaring our firm commitment to power-sharing with unionism in the Stormont Assembly whilst also initiating a mature and inclusive debate about new political arrangements that examine Ireland's future beyond Brexit. Similarly, I see no contradiction in unionism working the existing constitutional arrangements whilst rightly taking its place in the conversation about what a new Ireland would look like.

We can do this while maintaining our independent, distinct political identities and working in the best interests of all the people. That is my firm commitment. After three years without functioning institutions, the five parties are here to form a new Executive. It is my hope that we do so united in our determination to deliver a stable power-sharing coalition that works on the basis of openness and transparency, accountability and good faith and with no surprises.

I am really honoured to follow in the footsteps of my dear friend and comrade Martin

McGuinness. Taking up the position of deputy First Minister as joint head of Government, I, too, pledge to follow the example that he set by actively promoting reconciliation and building bridges that we all can cross to end sectarianism and bigotry. Resistance to equality caused the Executive to fall. A refusal to embrace citizens' identities and rights left people frustrated, angry and divided. That cannot be repeated. Today, each of us is called to lead; to build common cause for a society that makes room for and gives respect to every citizen; to deliver a power-sharing Government that is truly grounded in fairness and inclusion and has the courage to lead from the front in these times of change. Our politics must embrace civic society. Trade unions, the voluntary and community sector, businesses, academia, farmers, church leaders and students all must have a permanent place and a space to advise, input and hold the Assembly and Executive to account. We must work together to solve the problems that face this society. We will apply the full powers and resources available to us to address the major issues of the day faced by all those whom we represent.

I welcome the historic official recognition of the Irish language in this state. The guarantees for the language in law represent meaningful parity of esteem for the community from which I proudly come. It also means that the equality, mutual respect and all-Ireland approaches enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement are being embraced and that we deliver on the promises of 1998 to a new generation of young people. Today, we have a basis on which to move forward in building a fairer society and to build good government. We will institute necessary reforms across the board in order not only to get things done but to get things right. In this new Administration, we must have shared values and policy objectives set out in a new Programme for Government. Yesterday, our nurses and healthcare workers had to take industrial action. Let us make that the last day they have to do that. This Executive will move immediately to settle the ongoing healthcare workers' pay parity dispute. Our health service is in crisis and demands our urgent attention. Waiting lists are unacceptable, and the health service needs reformed: we have a big, big job of work to do. As we face into the great uncertainties of Brexit, it is imperative that we redouble our efforts to develop and rebuild a modern, competitive and sustainable economy in which we open doors to trade, investment, jobs and tourism. We need decent jobs that value workers and protect their rights. We need to improve our competitiveness through

investing in our public structures, our public services and our infrastructure.

To conclude, as we approach the centenary of partition, let us not refight the battles of the past. It is time to bring people together. We can open doors, let the future in, give people hope and give our young people opportunity. It is my sincere hope that 2020 is a time of real change that reinvents the optimism and the hope that we have experienced before but our young people have not. It is time now for parties to have courage as we all choose hope over fear and enter a new era of politics in this society. I wish all Members the very best, particularly all the new MLAs, and I welcome and congratulate all the Ministers who will be appointed into government today. We have two years left of the mandate: let us go out and make a difference.

Mr Speaker: There will now be an opportunity for a representative from each party to speak. Members should limit their remarks to not more than three minutes. I have the names of some Members who have already indicated that they wish to speak, but I ask all Members who want to contribute on behalf of their party to approach the Table and add their name to the speaking list. It is not compulsory to do so.

Ms P Bradley: Today is a good day for Northern Ireland. It is a good day for Northern Ireland because, after three years of political vacuum, there will be a First Minister and a deputy First Minister heading up a cross-party Executive, taking decisions and working for the benefit of every one of the people whom we all represent. I am delighted to have the opportunity to pay tribute to and to congratulate my party leader, Arlene Foster, who returns as our First Minister today. She, like all of us, wants to get Northern Ireland moving forward again. That, as we all know, will be a task that requires hard work and dedication. Those are qualities that, I know, Arlene does not lack.

Much has changed since the Assembly last met. The challenges facing our health service are most evident, and, more than ever, stable government is needed. As we look ahead, there is a need for leadership, and, within the Democratic Unionist Party, Arlene is someone who leads from the front and is not afraid to do so. Again, I know that she is ready, willing and able to take her place in the Executive and Assembly alongside the deputy First Minister.

I congratulate the deputy First Minister, and I know that she too recognises the challenges we face in Northern Ireland. I worked with her previously when I chaired the Committee, and

we had a good working relationship. I wish her well. I also take the opportunity to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, and all those from all the parties around the Chamber who will take their seat at the Executive table today.

As I said, this is a good day for Northern Ireland, but it is a day that represents the beginning of much hard work. Success will be measured by delivery for all the people of Northern Ireland, and, as First Minister and as my party leader, Arlene will have the full support of everyone on these Benches as we seek to get Northern Ireland moving forward again.

Ms Mallon: In addition to paying tribute to the outgoing Speaker, we wish you the best in your new post. As I have said previously, we have waited three years, and people will rightly wonder why it has taken so long. Our view is that the deal could have been much better and contains missed opportunities, but, for us, there are two key tests. The first is how our Executive and Assembly operate, and the second is what it actually does to transform our citizens' lives. We have all committed to a greater openness and transparency in the Executive; we have all committed to seeing the end of the abuse of power and the reign of SpAds; and we have all committed to opening up this place and our Government to better involve our citizens. That is why we pushed hard for the citizens' assembly.

There are also commitments on policies that we have all committed to. We are all committed to tackling the crises in our health and education systems and delivering pay justice. We pushed hard with other parties to secure welfare mitigations so that we can protect our low-income families and our disabled citizens. We pushed as well for an anti-poverty strategy — a meaningful anti-poverty strategy — and a commitment to build new and more social and affordable homes. We have also committed to tackling regional imbalance in terms of investment in our economy, and we have committed to the expansion of Magee. We have committed to climate action, among many, many things. They are big commitments, and we have been pushing both Governments because we need to see clear financial support, but all of us must honour those commitments.

We will go into the Executive and will be in the Chamber because we genuinely want to see power-sharing. We genuinely and sincerely want to work with all parties so that we can improve the lives of everybody living in Northern Ireland. We have entered in good faith, and we take it at face value that everyone

else is acting in the same spirit. We will play our part, and I look forward, as a party, to working with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, with Ministers in the Executive and with all our MLAs across all political parties.

We will always be reviewing and monitoring our position and how we operate — the people of Northern Ireland deserve that — and we will always be honest throughout this mandate with the people of Northern Ireland.

2.15 pm

Mr Aiken: It would be churlish of me not to welcome the appointment of the new First Minister and deputy First Minister.

For us, the key to this is being able to transform Northern Ireland and to make it work again. I say to all the new MLAs who are in the Chamber: we have a real task ahead of us, because if we have seen anything over the past couple of years, it is that Northern Ireland desperately needs open, transparent, accountable and responsible government that is open to everybody in Northern Ireland, to see how we will make changes.

I look at the Gallery and I see members of the Civil Service and others. A considerable amount of work needs to be done on reform. The Northern Ireland political and government machine is broken. It needs to be fixed. The fact that we will be in receipt of considerable — albeit, we do not yet know how much — largesse from our Government to sort out some of our problems gives a burden to us to make sure we appropriately manage those resources and deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. Be in no doubt whatsoever: over the next two years, or however long the Assembly is going to run, we must be able to make our government work. So, the Ulster Unionist Party pledges to work closely with our other partners in government, but we want to see a genuine transformation. We must change the culture of government in Northern Ireland. If we do not, Mr Speaker, First Minister and deputy First Minister, we are doomed to fail. We cannot allow that to happen.

Mrs Long: Mr Speaker, first of all, I congratulate you and your team of Deputy Speakers on your appointments.

There is significant pressure facing the Assembly, and all of us, given the backlog of Assembly business that needs to be undertaken in swift time, and we will work with you, constructively, in order to ensure that that

can be done in as expeditious a manner as possible.

A lot of water, much of it turbulent, has passed under the bridge in the past three years. However, I do not believe that today is a day for recriminations. It is a day for focusing forward and for looking forward to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Our commitment throughout the past three years has been to deliver the restoration and reform of the institutions to deliver fit-for-purpose, accountable and sustainable government that can deliver for all the people of Northern Ireland.

The deal that the Governments have put forward is imperfect. I think all of us recognise that it is a compromise on the positions that each of the parties took in the negotiations, but we cannot ask others to do what we are not willing to do ourselves, and, on balance, I believe that it is an honourable compromise and that, if implemented with goodwill and in a spirit of cooperation and inclusion, it can form the basis on which we can deliver improved government for the people here in Northern Ireland.

I congratulate the First Minister and deputy First Minister on their appointment to their roles. Much of the heavy lifting will have to be done by the two main parties, as is always the case, but I reassure both of you — through the Speaker — that we will not be found wanting in playing our role in supporting you in the job that you have to do, in encouraging you and in being an effective support where you are acting in the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland, and, on occasion, being a robust challenge where we fear that that is not the case, but we hope that we will do that too in a spirit of constructive engagement and one where we work together to deliver.

There is optimism outside this place. It would be, perhaps, overstating our position as one that is optimistic. We are realistic about the prospects of this agreement — there is a lot of work to be done — but we are also determined that it will succeed, and we will play whatever role we can in ensuring that it does.

You have my best wishes for the remainder of this term and for the future of the Assembly.

Ms Bailey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I also congratulate you and your team on your new role and our First Minister and deputy First Minister on their reappointment. This is a positive development for Northern Ireland today and one in which we can hopefully begin to

move forward. After three years of stagnation, I think we can all agree that people have suffered enough. While there is much in the draft agreement, there is so much there that has been promised before but failed to be delivered. If we are seriously intent in the Chamber on doing things differently, it is delivery we need to do. Let delivery be the new approach for this new decade.

Climate breakdown is the biggest threat we face, yet we have done so little to address it. People are so far ahead of our politics and policy, and they are demanding that we step up. The Green Party is very encouraged to note the very high level of environmental commitments given in the draft deal. Promises, such as a strategy to reduce our carbon emissions in the light of the Paris accord, an energy strategy to transition to a carbon-neutral society, an independent environmental protection agency, long overdue and long campaigned for, the elimination of plastic pollution, an economic strategy that will include a green new deal, and the close-down of the RHI, are all very welcome, but we are the only place across these islands yet to see and endorse a climate Act.

Let this new decade and this new approach be one where Northern Ireland is no longer left behind as a place apart, because, regardless of anyone's identity, a new Ireland is coming. It is here, it is called the climate emergency, and it knows no borders, so we will all be affected. We truly believe that today a platform exists to create a sustainable, accountable devolved Executive, Assembly and society. The Green Party really hopes the will is there for that as well.

Mr Allister: I get it that people are desperate to have their health service fixed, but I will not join in the pretence that an Executive here that can exist only by the grace and favour of a party that does not want Northern Ireland to exist will bring them the stability they crave.

I also remind the public that the present health crisis was made in Stormont. It was the Executive that broke with pay parity for nurses. It was the Executive that, through successive Ministers, radically reduced the number of beds in our hospitals. Of course, we are here today only because of a double blackmail: blackmail of a Secretary of State who says, "I have the money to fix the health service, but I will not give it unless there is an Executive", a Secretary of State who shamelessly put the life of an Executive above the life of the sick; and, of course, the blackmail of Sinn Féin that you

can have a Government only if you pay the ransom that they demand.

Indeed, it is a commentary in itself on the perversity of these governmental arrangements that, although it was Sinn Féin that tore down the institutions, for what they were worth, it was the DUP that had to pay the price to get them back, and what a price it was: to eat a mountain of their own words, laced with yoghurt and curry, a special brand of Campbell's soup.

What a digestive system the DUP has.

I remember in 2017 the call of the First Minister on Irish language legislation was, "Not on my watch", yet, here today, she is the handmaiden of that very legislation. Here today, she is the sponsor of an Irish language enforcer who will put Irish upon every public authority, including this House, where we will have the ludicrous spectacle of needless interpretation. In every council chamber, we will put our ratepayers to the needless cost of translation.

There may well be a honeymoon period for the Executive, at least until the Irish language legislation is safely on the statute book and at least until the innocent victims have been betrayed —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to wind up his remarks.

Mr Allister: — by the passing of the Stormont House Agreement's unbalanced legacy proposals. At the end of it, however, this is only a staging post for Sinn Féin. The First Minister knows that. She has known that since her infamous —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to wind up.

Mr Allister: — reptilian turn of phrase, when she knew what she would be doing if she gave in to the Irish language demand, but power — any power — is the supreme draw. Even now, we are not even going —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to wind up his remarks.

Mr Allister: — to have an Opposition. I will do my best to give you as much opposition as I can.

Mr Speaker: OK. The honeymoon might not last that long, so thank you very much for your remarks, Mr Allister.

Mr Carroll: It is plainly obvious that the Assembly will have some major issues to deal with urgently in the days and weeks ahead. We live in a society where increasing numbers of people are utilising food banks largely because of the welfare reform policies that were implemented by previous Administrations in this Chamber. We have a crisis in the health system as waiting lists grow. We have a deep and profound crisis in the education system as school budgets are stretched to the limit. It is by those measures that we will judge the conduct of the new Executive and, indeed, anyone who holds office in it.

People Before Profit was not part of constructing the recent deal that was agreed by the five main parties. It is not our deal; it is your deal. We were not part of the talks. We were excluded from them despite our call for them to be open, all-party talks. We were not permitted to contribute to the content of the deal. We think that that the wrong decision and one that disenfranchised the voice of smaller parties and those who voted for us. For that reason, the job of People Before Profit, as we see it, is to collaborate and work with people where we can and see that issues of a positive nature in the deal are carried through. It is also our role to highlight where we see flaws in the deal, not only because they may have bad consequences but because they may act not as a solution to the underlying tensions in the Assembly but as a bridge to the next crisis, whenever that may be.

I pay tribute to the nurses, health workers and trade unions, who so evidently transformed the political debate here. They put on the agenda in the most direct way the question of pay parity and safe staffing levels, and confronted everyone in the Chamber with the real crisis in the health service and refused to back down. Those workers are the primary drivers of any progress that we might see. It is worth remembering that any change that we might see on pay parity or investment in the health service was not something that was gifted to us by the British or Irish Governments or even the five parties here. It is something that came from the action and struggle of those workers and unions, so I congratulate them on what they have been able to achieve thus far.

Finally, I welcome the fact that there is an aspiration in the deal to resolve pay parity. Thus far, however, unions have still not been made an offer, and there is no cast-iron commitment as to how precisely the pay dispute will be resolved and whether pay parity will indeed be restored. That must be a top priority for the Executive formed here today.

2.30 pm

Ms Sugden: I congratulate you and your deputies on your appointments. I am, however, somewhat disappointed that there are no women in the Speaker's Office, but we make up for that in the Executive Office, and I offer my sincere congratulations to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. I worked with both women in government — gosh, over three years ago now — and I can put on record that they are incredibly capable and can do wonderful things for Northern Ireland if there is will. I hope today is a demonstration of that will, because we need to take Northern Ireland forward. It has got to the point now at which we cannot continue in this vein.

I also congratulate the Ministers who will be appointed this afternoon. I believe that it is a wasted opportunity that none has decided to go into opposition. Do not fear opposition: opposition improves legislation. If policy cannot uphold the challenge that other Members provide, it is not good policy, and no one benefits from that. I do, however, appreciate that the stability of Northern Ireland requires that we have a five-party Executive, and I, as an independent Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, will support that Executive in the work that we do because, critically, moving forward, that work needs to happen.

We have had nearly 20 years of what I would describe as political party nonsense. Now, moving forward, the focus of the Assembly needs to be on good governance that looks at the needs of the people outside the Chamber. Maybe, for once, we will put those people first instead of the political parties that sit in this Chamber.

Today is a fantastic day for Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland are ecstatic that we are here on their behalf. It is important to note that each one of us, in the mandates that we all have, represent the people of Northern Ireland, whom we disrespect when we disrespect one another in the Chamber. I cannot imagine that the problems that have existed over the past three years will be fixed overnight, and it is important that, in the Chamber, we set an expectation that we will not fix them overnight. If anything, we need a root-and-branch review of every Department in Northern Ireland, but it is good that the wheels are now moving, and I look forward to working with each and every one of you.

Mr Speaker: No more Members are indicating that they wish to speak. In order to enable me to chair the remaining business, I propose, with your leave, Members, a short suspension to allow me to be properly briefed. The Assembly is, by leave, suspended until 3.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.33 pm and resumed at 3.05 pm.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Now, Mr Speaker, that you are Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, would you like to take the opportunity to apologise for and withdraw your statement of 2018, when you referred to Northern Ireland as a "putrid little statelet"?

Mr Speaker: Not a point of order, Mr Allister, thank you.

Appointment of Junior Ministers

Mr Speaker: I want to advise the House that I have received correspondence from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in relation to the appointment of junior Ministers.

"Dear Speaker,

We write to inform you of our intention to appoint both junior Ministers in the Executive Office today. Those Assembly Members being nominated are:

Gordon Lyons

Declan Kearney

Yours sincerely,

*Arlene Foster MLA Michelle O'Neill MLA
First Minister Deputy First Minister"*

Mr Speaker: Will Gordon Lyons affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Lyons: I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of junior Minister, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office, as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Gordon Lyons appointed a junior Minister.

Mr Speaker: Congratulations.

Will Declan Kearney affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Kearney: Thig liom a rá go bhfuil mé breá toilteanach glacadh le hoifig an Aire, agus dearbhaím téarmaí an ghealltanais oifige, mar atá siad leagtha amach sa sceideal do Acht NI 1998.

I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office, as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Declan Kearney appointed a junior Minister.

Mr Speaker: Comhghairdeas, Declan.

That concludes the business of appointing the junior Ministers.

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Sorry, just let me make this final point. I congratulate both junior Ministers on taking up office.

Mrs Long: I am not sure if other Members in the Chamber are having the difficulty that I am having in hearing you, Mr Speaker. There seems to be a problem with your mic, and it is incredibly difficult for us to hear what you are saying. In order to be helpful, we would like to be able to hear you better.

Mr Speaker: I will certainly endeavour to make sure that that does not go amiss in future. I am told that the mics are not working very well. I have been asked to give a bit of volume, so I will do my best. Apologies for that. As long as we do not have to go back to the start again, we are OK. *[Laughter.]* That concludes the business of appointing the junior Ministers. As I have said, congratulations to both.

Appointment of Minister of Justice

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the filling of the office of the Minister of Justice. I will conduct a process for filling the office in accordance with the procedures set out in part 1A of schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44A. I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise and nominate another Member of the Assembly to hold the office of Minister of Justice. If Members rise from more than one party, I will call first the Member from the largest of those parties to make a nomination in accordance with convention.

I advise Members that the Act requires that one nomination must be processed before a further nomination can be made. I will, therefore, take only one nomination at a time and put the Question on that nomination. If the Assembly resolves by parallel consent that the Member nominated shall be Minister of Justice and that person takes up office as required by the Act and Standing Orders, no further nominations may be made. I will call for further nominations only if those conditions are not fulfilled.

Having consulted the party Whips, I will allow a Member making a nomination to speak for up to three minutes. Following that, there will be an opportunity for debate on the nomination, with Members also having an opportunity to speak for three minutes.

Standing Orders place a time constraint on the nomination process, and I will curtail the debate if necessary, unless, under Standing Order 44A(2), the Assembly approves a request for the time limit to be extended. In any event, if it appears that, before I put the Question, the time limit will be exceeded, I will ask the nominator to repeat the nomination after the debate.

As the person nominated to fill the vacancy shall not take up office until he or she has affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office contained in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 after the Question has been determined, I will ask the person nominated to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office, which was read into the record during the previous item of business.

Do I have any nominations for the office of Minister of Justice?

Ms Armstrong: I nominate my party leader, Naomi Long, for the position of Justice Minister.

Mr Speaker: If the Member wishes to speak, she has up to three minutes. It is not compulsory. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Armstrong: Thank you. I will try not to speak for too long, Mr Speaker.

I have been privileged to work with Naomi Long for a considerable time in the Alliance Party. Over the years, I have got to know Naomi as the person and the politician. Therefore, I am confident in nominating her for this role. She will make an effective Justice Minister and bring a considerable wealth of experience and strength to the Executive.

As part of the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement, there are many opportunities to be delivered and challenges to be resolved. Having an inclusive, five-party Executive will provide a collective commitment to delivering much-needed leadership and productive government. Naomi is committed to serving everyone without fear or favour and irrespective of religion, class, colour, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or disability. Naomi is committed to making politics work in Northern Ireland for all our people and will work constructively, as she said earlier, with all our partners in government and across the Assembly to ensure that a fair and transparent service is delivered for everyone. For those and many other reasons, I and all my wider Alliance Party colleagues — my colleagues here in the Chamber and one who is not, Stewart Dickson, who, unfortunately, is recovering from major surgery in his fight against cancer and cannot be here today — believe that Naomi Long is the right person to take on the responsibility for such a sensitive and trusted issue as policing and justice and can be trusted to act in the best interests of the whole community.

I ask the Assembly to support an inclusive Executive and give their support to Naomi Long by voting for her to be our Justice Minister. I am pleased to nominate Naomi Long for the post.

Mr Speaker: Naomi Long has been nominated. Naomi Long, do you accept the nomination?

Mrs Long: Yes, Mr Speaker, I accept the nomination, and I thank Kellie for her words.

Mr Speaker: The nomination is now open for debate. I remind Members that they may speak for up to three minutes.

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I wish you well in your role as Speaker. You are one of a select few, having served from 1998, and I have no doubt that that institutional memory and the relationships that you have built will stand you in good stead as you seek to navigate the Assembly through what, I am sure, will be, at times, passionate debates, as they should be in any debating Chamber. I wish you well in your role. I also wish the Deputy Speakers well.

I commend Claire Sugden for the role that she carried out during her time as Justice Minister. She operated in the Executive in a very dignified manner. I had the privilege of serving with her during that period. A very tenacious Justice Minister, she achieved significant things during that tenure and carried herself very well during that period. I want to put on record our

appreciation of the service that she gave at that time.

We will support the nomination of Naomi Long to be Minister of Justice. This society faces a wide-ranging number of issues when it comes to these matters, but there is a way forward, by working together to address a lot of these areas. The document that has been agreed recognises the need for additional resources for police officers, and, when we look at the wide spectrum of issues in the criminal justice sector, we see that the Minister will have a lot of challenges. However, she will go into an Executive that will seek to operate with collective responsibility, and I trust that the Minister of Justice will have the support of the wider Executive as she takes up her role in providing support to her colleagues in the spirit of that collective responsibility.

Mr Murphy: We will also support Naomi Long for the position. The procedure that we are adopting today was devised as part of an agreement back in, I think, 2008, when we agreed to transfer powers of policing and justice from London to here. At that time, it was considered necessary because it was such a sensitive and, perhaps, potentially controversial post and Department. It is long past time for us to move beyond that and not require a special procedure to elect the post. The performance of various Ministers of Justice has helped with that over the years, and I also pay tribute to Claire Sugden, the outgoing Minister of Justice. They have proved, over time, that the post no longer needs this type of procedure and that the allocation of the Department of Justice should be done alongside the normal running of d'Hondt for all the other Departments.

That will require legislation. My understanding is that it will require legislation in Westminster, so it is not possible to do it at this time, but it is my firm belief — I am certain, and we are certain — that this will be the last time we allocate the position under such a procedure and that we will move in the next mandate to allocate the Minister of Justice — the Department of Justice — under the normal run of d'Hondt. Nonetheless, we are pleased to support Naomi Long, and we wish her well in her endeavours over the next couple of years.

3.15 pm

Ms Mallon: I stand on behalf of the SDLP to commend Claire Sugden and to warmly congratulate Naomi Long. Throughout the talks process, we and our parties, alongside the Ulster Unionists, have worked hard and worked

well together, and I look forward to continuing that cooperation, as with all parties, in the interests of everyone living in Northern Ireland. I must make the point, as we have on previous occasions, that the Justice Ministry should be run under d'Hondt and this must be the last time it is not.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim Allister.

Mr Allister: No, I will spare you that. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Mr Allister, for that magnanimous gesture to the other Members. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Allister: It is the last one.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the debate. Before we proceed to the Question, I remind the Assembly that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 — that is for Jim; that is my magnanimity towards you — requires that the resolution must be passed by parallel consent.

Question, That Mrs Naomi Long be the Minister of Justice, put and agreed to.

Resolved (by parallel consent):

That Mrs Naomi Long be the Minister of Justice.

Mr Speaker: As there are Ayes from all sides of the Assembly and no dissenting voices, I am satisfied that parallel consent has been demonstrated. I now ask Naomi Long to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mrs Long: Thank you, Mr Speaker. You have chaired meetings at which I have been present, and I know that you will not indulge me much, but I would like to place on record that I am honoured to have the support of all sides of the House for the role I am about to take up. I am also honoured to be following to build on the considerable legacy of David Ford and the legacy of Claire Sugden, and I pay tribute to her. Whilst it was a short time in office, it was, nevertheless, a significant time. I am happy to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mrs Naomi Long appointed Minister of Justice.

Mr Speaker: I can now confirm that Naomi Long, having affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office, has taken up office as Minister of

Justice in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I offer Naomi my congratulations.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the appointment of Ministers. I will conduct the process for filling these offices in accordance with the procedure set out in section 18 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44. I will ask the nominating officer of each political party, in the order required by the formula in section 18(5), to select an available ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it who is a member of his or her party and a Member of the Assembly. If a nominating officer declines to nominate, I will invite the nominating officer of the next political party determined by the formula to nominate a Member to hold ministerial office.

I therefore call on Arlene Foster, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it who is a member of her party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mrs Foster: I choose the Department for the Economy, and I nominate Diane Dodds MLA.

Mr Speaker: Will Diane Dodds confirm that she is willing to take up office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mrs Dodds: I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister for the Economy, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mrs Diane Dodds appointed Minister for the Economy.

Mr Speaker: I call on Michelle O'Neill.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I nominate Conor Murphy to the post of Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker: Will Conor Murphy confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Murphy: A Cheann Comhairle, tá mé toilteanach glacadh leis an ról seo. I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Finance, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Conor Murphy appointed Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker: I call on Arlene Foster, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it who is a member of her party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mrs Foster: Mr Speaker, I choose the Department of Education, and I nominate Peter Weir MLA.

Mr Speaker: Will Peter Weir confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Weir: Mr Speaker, I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Education, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Peter Weir appointed Minister of Education.

Mr Speaker: I call on Michelle O'Neill, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it who is a member of her party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I confirm that we wish to take the Department for Communities, and I nominate Deirdre Hargey MLA as the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Will Deirdre Hargey confirm that she is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Ms Hargey: Deimhním go bhfuil mé toilteanach glacadh leis an ról seo. I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister for Communities, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Ms Deirdre Hargey appointed Minister for Communities.

Mr Speaker: I call on Dolores Kelly, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it who is a member of her party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Speaker, on behalf of the SDLP, it is my particular pleasure to nominate our party's deputy leader, Nichola Mallon, as Minister for Infrastructure.

Mr Speaker: Will Nichola Mallon confirm that she is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Ms Mallon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister for Infrastructure, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I sincerely thank my party for the nomination.

Ms Nichola Mallon appointed Minister for Infrastructure.

Mr Speaker: I call on Steve Aiken, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly.

Dr Aiken: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I nominate Robin Swann MLA as the new Minister of Health for Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Will Robin Swann confirm that he is willing to take up — *[Laughter.]* Less of that.

Mr Swann: Mr Speaker, I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Health, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Robin Swann appointed Minister of Health.

Mr Speaker: I call on Arlene Foster, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it who is a member of her party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mrs Foster: What is left, and what we are very happy to take, is the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. I nominate Edwin Poots MLA.

Mr Speaker: Will Edwin Poots confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Poots: I confirm that I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Edwin Poots appointed Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Assembly for its patience. That concludes the appointment of Ministers under the d'Hondt process. I offer my congratulations to all those who have taken up office.

The next item of business in the Order Paper on this fine Saturday afternoon is the Adjournment. The Business Committee will meet after this sitting to consider an Order Paper for the next sitting. If the Business Committee agrees, an Order Paper will issue and be available electronically from the Business Office.

Adjourned at 3.26 pm.

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