



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Thursday 12 May 2016

Assembly Business

Notice of First Meeting

The Clerk to the Assembly: It falls to me at the beginning of the sitting, as Clerk to the Assembly, to read the notice for the meeting.

In accordance with Standing Order 2(1), I hereby give notice that the Assembly will meet, as required by section 31(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in Parliament Buildings at noon on Thursday 12 May 2016. Please stand for the Speaker.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Undertaking and Roll of Membership

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated. Before we proceed with today's business, I offer my congratulations to all of you following the election. As well as welcoming back former Members, I extend a particular welcome to those who are present in the Chamber for the first time.

Before I move on to business, I wish to make Members aware that the Clerk to the Assembly, Mr Trevor Reaney, has announced his intention to retire next month. I am sure that I speak for all of you in wishing him well in his retirement.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: He will be replaced by Mrs Lesley Hogg, and I am delighted that Mrs Hogg is able to be with us today. On your behalf, I wish her success in her new role. Let us move on.

The next item in the Order Paper is the signing of the undertaking and the Roll of Membership. Standing Order 3(3) states that a Member shall be regarded as having taken his or her seat only when they have signed the Roll of Membership. In addition, the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016 has amended the Northern Ireland Act, making provision for a new undertaking that Members must sign before signing the Roll. I will therefore not take any points of order until after the undertaking and the Roll have been

signed by all Members present and I have confirmed that Members have taken their seats.

I will now explain the procedures for the signing of the undertaking and the Roll of Membership. I will invite Members to come forward in their party group, and I will call the parties in alphabetical order. I will then call independent Members in alphabetical order. When each party name is called, I will ask Members of that party to proceed through the Aye lobby on my right. Members will then come forward to the first table to give the undertaking.

Paragraph 2(2) of schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016 provides that I, as the person who, under the Assembly's Standing Orders, takes the Chair at the first meeting of the new Assembly, shall determine the transitional procedure for giving the undertaking for Members of the Assembly who are elected at the 2016 election.

I therefore determine the following procedure. All Members shall have the opportunity to give the undertaking before he or she signs the Assembly's Roll of Membership. Members shall give the undertaking by printing their name, entering the date and signing the page provided on which the undertaking has been printed. The giving of the undertaking shall be supervised by Assembly officials. Any Member who does not give the undertaking during this item of business may do so at a later date by appointment through the Speaker's office. A Member may not sign the Assembly's Roll of Membership unless he or she has given the undertaking in accordance with this procedure. My decision on whether a Member has properly given the undertaking shall be final, except where a Member gives the undertaking at such time after my successor has been elected, in which case the decision of my successor shall be final. The signed undertaking page will be kept as the official record of Members having given the undertaking.

Members should then move to the second table and sign one of the Roll pages. Again, Members should enter today's date and print and sign their name, but, for the Roll, they must also enter a designation of identity, as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other". Members

should note that Standing Order 3(7) provides that a Member who does not enter a designation of identity will be deemed to be designated "Other".

The process of giving the undertaking and signing the Roll may take some time. I ask Members for their patience during this procedure.

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

To undertake:

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

to work collectively with the other members of the Assembly to achieve a society free of paramilitarism;

to challenge all paramilitary activity and associated criminality;

to call for, and to work together with the other members of the Assembly to achieve, the disbandment of all paramilitary organisations and their structures;

to challenge paramilitary attempts to control communities;

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

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

We shall now proceed. I invite members of the Alliance Party to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Ms Kellie Armstrong United Community

Ms Paula Bradshaw United Community

Mr Stewart Dickson United Community

Dr Stephen Farry United Community

Mr David Ford United Community

Mrs Naomi Long United Community

Mr Trevor Lunn United Community

Mr Chris Lyttle United Community

Mr Speaker: I invite members of the Democratic Unionist Party to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Mr Sydney Anderson Unionist

Mr Jonathan Bell Unionist

Mr Maurice Bradley Unionist

Ms Paula Bradley Unionist

Mr Keith Buchanan Unionist

Mr Thomas Buchanan Unionist

Ms Joanne Bunting Unionist

Mrs Pam Cameron Unionist

Mr Trevor Clarke Unionist

Mr Sammy Douglas Unionist

Mr Gordon Dunne Unionist

Mr Alex Easton Unionist

Mrs Arlene Foster Unionist

Mr Paul Frew Unionist

Mr Paul Girvan Unionist

Mr Paul Givan Unionist

Mrs Brenda Hale Unionist

Mr Simon Hamilton Unionist

Mr David Hilditch Unionist

Mr William Humphrey Unionist

Mr William Irwin Unionist

Mrs Emma Little Pengelly Unionist

Ms Carla Lockhart Unionist

Mr Philip Logan Unionist

Mr Gordon Lyons Unionist

Mr Nelson McCausland Unionist

Miss Michelle McIlveen Unionist

Mr Adrian McQuillan Unionist

Mr Gary Middleton Unionist

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley Unionist

Mr Robin Newton Unionist

Mr Edwin Poots Unionist

Mr George Robinson Unionist

Mr Alastair Ross Unionist

Mr Christopher Stalford Unionist

Mr Mervyn Storey Unionist

Mr Peter Weir Unionist

Mr Jim Wells Unionist

Mr Speaker: I invite members of the Green Party to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Mr Steven Agnew

Ms Clare Bailey

Mr Speaker: I invite members of the People Before Profit Alliance to come forward.

The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Mr Gerry Carroll Socialist

Mr Eamonn McCann Socialist

Mr Speaker: I invite members of Sinn Féin to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Ms Caoimhe Archibald Nationalist

Mr Cathal Boylan Nationalist

Ms Michaela Boyle Nationalist

Ms Linda Dillon Nationalist

Ms Megan Fearon Nationalist

Ms Michelle Gildernew Nationalist

Mr Chris Hazzard Nationalist

Mr Declan Kearney Nationalist

Mr Gerry Kelly Nationalist

Mr Seán Lynch Nationalist

Mr Declan McAleer Nationalist

Mr Fra McCann Nationalist

Ms Jennifer McCann Nationalist

Mr Raymond McCartney Nationalist

Mr Barry McElduff Nationalist

Mr Martin McGuinness Nationalist

Mr Daithí McKay Nationalist

Mr Oliver McMullan Nationalist

Mr Alex Maskey Nationalist

Mr Ian Milne Nationalist

Mr Conor Murphy Nationalist

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín Nationalist

Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir Nationalist

Mr John O'Dowd Nationalist

Mrs Michelle O'Neill Nationalist

Ms Caitríona Ruane Nationalist

Ms Catherine Seeley Nationalist

Mr Pat Sheehan Nationalist

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: I call the members of the Social Democratic and Labour Party to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership. *The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:*

Mr Alex Attwood Nationalist

Mrs Sinead Bradley Nationalist

Mr Mark Durkan Nationalist

Mr Colum Eastwood Nationalist

Ms Claire Hanna Nationalist

Mr Daniel McCrossan Nationalist

Mr Patsy McGlone Nationalist

Mr Colin McGrath Nationalist

Mr Justin McNulty Nationalist

Mr Richie McPhillips Nationalist

Ms Nichola Mallon Nationalist

Mr Gerry Mullan Nationalist

Mr Speaker: I invite the member of the Traditional Unionist Voice to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Mr Jim Allister Unionist

Mr Speaker: I invite members of the Ulster Unionist Party to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Mr Steve Aiken Unionist

Mr Andy Allen Unionist

Mrs Rosemary Barton Unionist

Mr Doug Beattie Unionist

Mr Roy Beggs Unionist

Mr Robbie Butler Unionist

Mr Alan Chambers Unionist

Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson Unionist

Mr Ross Hussey Unionist

Mr Danny Kennedy Unionist

Mr Harold McKee Unionist

Mr Mike Nesbitt Unionist

Mrs Sandra Overend Unionist

Mrs Jenny Palmer Unionist

Mr Philip Smith Unionist

Mr Robin Swann Unionist

12.45 pm

Mr Speaker: I invite Ms Claire Sugden, as an Independent Member, to come forward and give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member gave the undertaking and signed the Roll of Membership:

Ms Claire Sugden Unionist

Mr Speaker: Finally, I invite any Member present who has not already done so to come forward to give the undertaking and sign the Roll of Membership.

I thank Members for their cooperation and patience during the giving of the undertaking and the signing of the Roll of Membership. Any Member who has not been able to give the undertaking today may do so at a later date by appointment through the Speaker's Office.

Standing Order 3(3) states that my decision as to whether a Member has taken his or her seat is final. I can only make that decision after examining all the entries in the Roll. To that end I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. Thank you.

The sitting was suspended at 12.47 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Speaker's Business

Concluding Remarks

Mr Speaker: Order. I will enjoy saying that for the last time. Before moving on to the rest of today's business, I would like to take this opportunity to make some brief remarks at the beginning of this new Assembly term.

Once I have presided over the election of my successor, I will leave office. Therefore, before we move on to that business, I would like to give you my remarks about the working relationships here and my appreciation of how well and effectively the Assembly can work on those issues that our electorate expect. I also want to put down my understanding of how the Assembly has become vital to our wider community and how that is reflected at times when it appears that we have encountered impasses and difficulties. What you begin to hear, sometimes just through the chattering classes, is speculation about the collapse of the Assembly, and then you start to hear the more concerned, focused and informed opinions about how vital it is that a community that has our history of conflict and division really needs the Assembly to be part of the cement in the process of reconciliation and healing.

In my view, the election has demonstrated that despite the negative commentaries that all of us pick up and the reactions at times on the doors — they are legitimate comments one way or the other — you also get a very clear affirmation of how vital the Assembly is to our day-to-day existence and the people's expectation of a future more peaceful than our past.

Many Members will know that, throughout my time in office, I have focused on the Assembly's need to show respect towards all its people. It has been a tremendous opportunity to host so many events and meet so many different elements of our diverse community. In that context, I am delighted to look out today on a Chamber that has 50% more women than there were following the outcome of the previous election. We have much more to do on that front, but it is a very good beginning. I know that I am leaving behind many who will continue to focus on the composition of the Assembly going forward, reflecting the actual composition to ensure that, in mathematical as well as

electoral terms, we represent the entire community.

I want to give my thanks to the three former Deputy Speakers, Roy Beggs, John Dallat and Principal Deputy Speaker, Robin Newton, for their support and cooperation. It is important for the occupants of the Chair to be able to depend and rely on each other to enforce and deliver the Speaker's rulings. I could not have wished for a better working relationship amidst some very challenging and difficult issues, and I sincerely thank them for that.

I also want to thank the Assembly Commission members. It is a vital corporate function but very much, in most circumstances, out of the public eye. I want to acknowledge the role and contribution of Pat Ramsey, Peter Weir, Judith Cochrane, Caitríona Ruane, Sam Gardiner, Paula Bradley and Karen McKeivitt. It is easy for those on the outside to underestimate the difficulties and challenges that the Assembly Commission often faces in delivering its statutory obligations and achieving agreement amongst diverse views. However, it can best be done through constructive discussions, developing strong working relationships and leaving the politics for the Chamber. I thank the Assembly Commission members for their cooperation on so many issues.

It is appropriate also that I thank the staff of the Assembly. I have been a Member here since 1998, but it was really only during my time as Speaker that I gained the fullest appreciation of just how much work is required behind the scenes to support the operation of the Assembly and to deal with the challenges and pressures that Assembly staff face daily in what is often a very confrontational and difficult environment.

I have a renewed admiration for them. I thank them — I think that I do so on behalf of all in the Chamber — for their support and also the occasional banter.

I also give my thanks to the Clerk/Chief Executive, Trevor Reaney. At the end of next month, Trevor will be following me into retirement — not oblivion, I am certain. I thank him for his work and support. In even the most difficult exchanges, Trevor maintains calmness, courtesy and respect, and he offers solutions. He is most characterised by his absolute commitment to serving the best interests of the Assembly, its Members and staff. I thank him for his leadership.

I also thank my colleagues and friends in the Speaker's Office. I know that previous

Speakers have acknowledged the calibre of support, expertise and experience that exists there, but I will name Robin Ramsey, a vital source of knowledge, experience and vision. He has an absolute commitment to ensuring that the Speaker gets the best possible support. I want to thank Frances Leneghan. Behind all the previous incumbents of the Speaker's Chair, she is the woman who ensures that it will all happen and be done according to the script. Paul and Christopher complete the picture in a remarkable team that we should all be proud of.

I will comment on the role of the Speaker before I step down from it. From the outset, I made it clear that I recognised the importance of the role of the Speaker in representing every single Member of this establishment. I was the representative of 107 other MLAs; it was not a party political position. In a few minutes, the Assembly will elect a new Speaker to do that and to uphold the independence and impartiality of the office. However, it is equally important for Members to remember that after the Speaker is elected. When Members come to see the Speaker in relation to issues that they are concerned about, they should not come with just their party or personal perspective. They should not come without at least acknowledging that the Speaker has a responsibility to be impartial and to take account of all the diverse views in the Assembly. The Speaker is not there to become involved in a ping-pong between party political interests; there are plenty of other structures and opportunities for those issues to be addressed. The Speaker — this is important for everybody, and it is to everybody's advantage — should be protected in the independence and impartiality of the role.

The Assembly is moving on. I welcome a new generation and wider perspectives. There are a few left who like me were here in 1998, but those remaining Members represent a very significant corporate memory of how far we have come and the work that was required to achieve it. That is important because, sometimes, we hear complacent voices about focusing on the imperfections of this institution rather than appreciating where we might otherwise be without the Assembly. There are many difficulties ahead, but I am entirely optimistic about the future and the Assembly. However, I lay down a challenge: it is for every single Member in the Chamber to try to make the most of the Assembly. We have seen that we can move forward only when we find agreement. I welcome very much the approach that has developed in recent terms, where people simply stay at the table in the midst of all the disagreements until a solution emerges.

Much more will be achieved through positive energy focused on finding that agreement and respecting other opinions, even though there is much negative energy to feed on if we were to take account of it. My colleague in Westminster, Speaker John Bercow, speaks of the need for the Speaker to be impartial between the parties but never impartial about the institution. Similarly, here, the Speaker should be fair and impartial between all shades of opinion but should never be impartial about recognising the importance of the Assembly and wanting the best for it.

It has been a privilege to end my time in this place as Speaker. I sincerely wish you all the very best for the future, and I sincerely wish my successor all the success and support that I enjoyed. Thank you all very much indeed. *[Applause.]* I will say it one more time: order. *[Laughter.]* I have had the opportunity to scrutinise the entries in the undertaking and Roll of Membership. I am satisfied that all Members have taken their seat in accordance with Standing Orders.

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was slightly surprised when I read the notes indicating procedure for this morning, which referred to Members giving a designation of "Nationalist, Unionist or Other", with initial capitals and quotation marks, but paragraph 6 of strand one of the Good Friday Agreement specifically puts "nationalist, unionist or other" in lower case with no quotation marks. For the avoidance of doubt, my colleagues and I have given our designation as united community. You may regard it as something different.

Mr Speaker: I accept the point of order and the point that you make, but you will be aware that our procedures are based on the original legislation, and Standing Orders have to reflect that accurately. I take your point about the grammatical issue, and I indicate that, regarding designations of identity, other Members of other political groupings here took similar objection to the available options. However, I made it clear before we started that process that it would be for me to decide the basis on which they would be designated for the purposes of voting and procedures. Twelve Members entered designations that I deemed to be "Other" for the purposes of Standing Orders. Details of all the designations have been placed in Members' pigeonholes, and copies are available in the Rotunda.

Assembly Business

Election of the Speaker

Mr Speaker: Members will be aware that I am not seeking re-election as Speaker. Therefore, I will remain in the Chair only for the process of electing the Speaker and, once my successor has been elected, will step down immediately.

I advise Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted under the procedures that have been set out under Standing Order 4. 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. At the conclusion of the debate or 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 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 Foster: With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, before I make my proposal, I will say that this is the first day of the new mandate, and it is a new era. Every election brings change, and I thank you, as outgoing Speaker, for your service to the House. I also thank the outgoing Clerk for his service to the House.

I nominate Mr Robin Newton for Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Is there a Member to second that proposal?

Mr Douglas: I second the nomination of my good friend and colleague Robin Newton.

Mr Speaker: Are there any other nominations?

Is the nominated person prepared to accept the proposal?

Mr Newton: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further proposals?

The time for proposals has expired. A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak — at least one has. I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. Members have up to three minutes in which to speak.

Mrs Foster: I am delighted to propose my party colleague Robin Newton for the office of Speaker. If elected today, I am sure that Robin will bring great dignity and sure-footedness to the position. He has a long and distinguished career in public service, first with Belfast City Council and then here in the Northern Ireland Assembly. During his time in the Assembly, he has served as a junior Minister and led the DUP team on the Policing Board.

2.15 pm

Robin has been honoured by Her Majesty The Queen and is a Member of the Order of the British Empire. He was first elected in 2003 and is thereby a veteran of the House. That makes me a veteran of the House as well, which I am rather alarmed at, but anyway —

Mr Weir: Some of us are even older.

Mrs Foster: Yes.

He had many years' experience of the procedures of the Assembly even before he was elevated to Principal Deputy Speaker last year. Over the last 15 months in post, Robin has proven himself in the role, and he is superbly well qualified to hold the post. Indeed, over the last 15 months in particular and across his whole career, Robin has demonstrated that he is an ideal candidate for the post.

If such a thing exists in the House, Robin Newton is a conciliator. I suspect that, at times, it will take all his natural skills to manage this new term. I have no doubt that he will carry out his duties in a fashion that will be recognised by Members as impartial and fair, and I urge all Members to support Robin Newton as our next Speaker.

Mr McGuinness: First of all, like the First Minister, I pay tribute to you, Mitchel, as Speaker. I think that, in your stewardship of

that office, you clearly followed on from the Trojan work that was done prior to your appointment by a fellow Derry man — William Hay, now Lord Hay. In the last two terms of the Assembly, the work done by William and yourself sent, I think, a very powerful message to everyone about the ability of unionists and republicans to inhabit the Chair in a way that showed them to be totally fair and impartial. I also think the work that you did to raise up women within the Assembly was very important. I join you in congratulating all those women who have been elected to the Assembly and look forward to the day in the not-too-distant future when even more are elected.

I have no difficulty whatsoever in supporting Robin Newton as the new Speaker of the Assembly. I think he will follow the practice of William Hay and yourself and will recognise his duties and responsibilities to everybody in the House to ensure that there is fairness and that no one can leave the House and say that the office was demeaned in any way by a partisan approach. That certainly did not happen with William Hay, it did not happen with you and I have every confidence that it will not happen with Robin either. I wish him well.

Question, That Mr Robin Newton be Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Robin Newton be Speaker of this Assembly.

Mr Speaker: As there are Ayes from all sides of the House and no dissenting voices, I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated.

I formally declare that Robin Newton has been elected Speaker. I congratulate him and invite him to take the Chair. *[Applause.]*

(Mr Speaker [Mr Newton] in the Chair)

Mr Speaker: I thank Members for entrusting me with the very important office of Speaker of the Assembly. I particularly appreciate, and the deputy First Minister referred to this, the very radical move of selecting someone from outside the Maiden City to hold the post. *[Laughter.]* I thank my predecessor Mitchel McLaughlin for his dedication to the Assembly and his even-handed treatment of Members. I appreciated that as a Member on the Benches and in the role of Principal Deputy Speaker. Despite his short time in office, he leaves the Assembly held in very high esteem and is recognised not

only in here but further afield. We wish him well, as the First Minister said, for the future.

The Assembly returns after the election with a diverse range of opinions on all the issues and, indeed, facing many challenges over this mandate.

I fully accept the requirement of the office to preside in an independent and impartial manner and to uphold the standards that my predecessors have set. I recognise that it is the role of the Speaker to be firm, to protect the interests, integrity and procedures of the House and to be fair in the way in which business is conducted. Therefore, Members can be assured that I will be doing my best to uphold the rights of all parts of the Chamber to express their views and the concerns of their constituents.

The people of Northern Ireland are looking to us. They want this Assembly, and I want this Assembly, to prove to them that we are moving forward, agreeing as much as we can and expressing our differences with courtesy and respect when we cannot. In this new term, we should be setting out with high ambitions for the next five years, and I look forward to working with every Member on meeting those ambitions. Let us work for the days ahead.

Election of the Deputy Speakers

Mr Speaker: Standing Order 5(1) requires there to be three Deputy Speakers elected. The procedure for electing Deputy Speakers is 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 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. Do we have any proposals for the office of Deputy Speaker?

Mr McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I nominate the Member for South Down Cairíona Ruane.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a seconder?

Ms J McCann: I second that.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member prepared to accept the nomination?

Ms Ruane: Aontaím leis. I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Is there a further proposal?

Mr Eastwood: I nominate Mr Patsy McGlone.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder for Mr Patsy McGlone?

Mr Attwood: I second the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Does Mr McGlone accept the nomination?

Mr McGlone: Glacaim leis. Go raibh maith agat. Thank you very much. I accept.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further nominations?

Mr Nesbitt: I nominate Mr Danny Kennedy.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder for Mr Danny Kennedy?

Mrs Dobson: I second the proposal.

Mr Speaker: Does Mr Kennedy accept the proposal?

Mr Kennedy: I accept.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further proposals?

The time for proposals has expired. A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak, so I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. Members will have up to three minutes in which to speak.

Mr McGuinness: I have no hesitation whatsoever in nominating my friend and colleague, Caitríona Ruane the Member for South Down. She is one of our most experienced MLAs, a former Minister and a Chief Whip, who clearly demonstrated the ability to work with Members from other parties in a very positive and constructive way. It was heart-warming to see, during her stewardship of that position, the way in which she and others interacted, and genuine friendships, I think, were forged.

Gender is a very important issue for my party, Sinn Féin.

It is also a very important issue for all the parties here given that we have seen increased

numbers coming into the Assembly as a result of the election. I pay tribute to the work that Caitríona has done and to the women from other parties who worked with her to ensure that we continue to forge positive working relationships and, indeed, friendships, which I believe are very important. I have no hesitation whatsoever in nominating Caitríona for this important post.

Mr Nesbitt: I begin by congratulating you, Mr Speaker, on your elevation and wish you well during the course of the mandate. I am delighted to nominate the MLA from Newry and Armagh Mr Danny Kennedy. Before I do so, I pay tribute to Roy Beggs who performed the role in the previous mandate. Roy brought professionalism and attention to detail to the role from which I think we all benefited. He was quite fearless in the face of some heated debates; he demonstrated that fearlessness in a quite impartial manner — indeed, I think I was on the losing side of some of his rulings during the course of the mandate.

Those returning from the last mandate will recall that Mr Kennedy, I think, shouted "order" from a sedentary position more often than the Speaker did from the Speaker's Chair, so it will perhaps be a relief if we move him up to the far end of the Chamber and make him legal. As we are talking about veterans, Danny is a veteran of the Northern Ireland Assembly. He is a very popular man, a committed politician, and I believe that he will bring a unique and refreshing style to the role. Order.

Mr Eastwood: I begin by congratulating you, Mr Speaker, on your elevation. I know that you will carry out your role with fairness and impartiality as you have done in your previous roles. I also thank and congratulate Mr Mitchel McLaughlin for all the effort he put in. He was a fair, impartial and, at times, tough-when-needed Speaker and he deserves our thanks for that. I give praise to all the previous Deputy Speakers, and Mr John Dallat in particular who is no longer in the Assembly. He is somebody that we in the party will miss very much, and I think that the people of East Derry will miss him as a public representative too.

I am very happy to propose somebody today who was first elected to the House in 2003; someone who is a previous general secretary of the SDLP; a Gaeilgeoir; a champion of rural issues, and somebody who, in his position as Chair of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, showed a great wisdom and fairness and an ability to get to the point. We are very glad to propose Mr Patsy McGlone for

the position of Deputy Chair — sorry, Deputy Speaker.

Question put, That Ms Caitríona Ruane be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Some Members: Aye.

Mr Allister: No.

Mr Speaker: Clear the Lobbies. The Question will be put in three minutes.

Order. Members will resume their seats.

Question put, That Ms Caitríona Ruane be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Some Members: Aye.

Mr Allister: No.

Mr Speaker: Do we have Tellers?

Order. As only one Teller has been nominated for the Noes, the Ayes have it. *[Laughter.]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Ms Caitríona Ruane be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

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.

Question, That Mr Danny Kennedy be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Danny Kennedy be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Mr Speaker: As three Deputy Speakers have been elected, the item of business is concluded. I offer my congratulations to the successful candidates, and I look forward to working with all the Deputy Speakers. As the requirements under Standing Order 5(1) have been fulfilled, it is now appropriate to move on to the election of a Principal Deputy Speaker.

Election of the Principal Deputy Speaker

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the nomination of a Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. The process will be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 5A. I will begin by asking for a nomination. Any Member may rise to nominate one of the Deputy Speakers to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. I will then confirm that the person nominated is willing to act as Principal Deputy Speaker, and then a debate relevant to that nomination will take place. The Business Committee has agreed that only one Member should speak on behalf of each party in the debate. At the end of the debate, I will put the Question on the nomination. The vote will be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I shall ask for a further nomination, and the process will be repeated.

Do I have a proposal for a Deputy Speaker to be nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker? Members should rise to make the proposal.

Mr McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to nominate the Deputy Speaker Caitríona Ruane, Member for South Down, as Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a seconder?

Ms J McCann: Mr Speaker, I second that nomination.

Mr Speaker: Deputy Speaker Ruane, do you agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane): Glacaim leis. I do accept.

Mr Speaker: Standing Orders provide for a debate to take place on the nomination. Members may speak only once in the debate. Standing Order 5A(7) requires the debate to be relevant to the nomination. I will not allow Members to stray into any other area. Members will have up to three minutes in which to speak.

Mr McGuinness: I have no hesitation whatsoever. I am absolutely delighted to propose Caitríona Ruane, my friend and Member for South Down, as the new Principal Deputy Speaker. Further to my comments earlier regarding her vast experience in the House, her experience as a Minister, her work as a Chief Whip and her work with colleagues

in the Assembly across the board, she is eminently suited for this position. She is a very strong advocate for women. I think that we all look forward to you having a great term as Speaker — we wish you every success in the future — but we look forward, in the next term of the Assembly, for the first time in the House since Eileen Bell, to having a woman Speaker.

Mr Nesbitt: Mr Speaker, thank you very much. Just to make it clear, we will not be supporting this nomination as the Ulster Unionist Party intends to propose Mr Danny Kennedy as Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Do you have a seconder?

Mrs Dobson: Yes, I am happy to second that.

Mr Eastwood: Just to make it clear, we were very happy to vote for and support Ms Ruane's nomination to be Deputy Speaker. Unfortunately, though, we cannot support her nomination as Principal Deputy Speaker, nor can we propose anyone for that position. We do not believe the position has any point. It is a pointless position that is more about carving out positions than actually making this place work more efficiently and effectively. Therefore, we cannot support the proposal.

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to put on record our compliments to the outgoing Speaker, Mitchel McLaughlin, and wish you well in the role that you have taken on this afternoon. I certainly agree with Colum Eastwood: there has proven to be little value in having, formally, a Principal Deputy Speaker. I think that it would be a sign of maturity in the Assembly if we were to move away from the presumption that the two largest parties occupy the posts of Speaker and Principal Deputy Speaker all of the time. That said, I welcome you to your role. While we have established that we no longer have to have a Speaker from Foyle, we have at least returned to having a Speaker from East Belfast. I recall that that set us off in good terms in 1998.

Mr Allister: Mr Speaker, first of all, I congratulate you on your election. I trust that it means that the national anthem will be restored to its proper place within the remembrance event and that my staff member can cancel his singing lessons.

The position of Principal Deputy Speaker is a fictional post. It has no powers above that of Deputy Speaker. It was created, of course in 2011, as a sop to those with a penchant for titles. Those who, in a previous life, enjoyed

various commanding titles felt the need to be appointed as Principal Deputy Speaker even though it is a post without substance. Of course, we had the deputy First Minister once rejoicing in the title of Steward and Bailiff of the Manor of Northstead and more infamous and commanding titles besides. This is an office created as part of the demonstration of the trappings of office and control freakery of Sinn Féin and the DUP. The person proposed for it has to be the most unsuitable person; a totally divisive figure in this House, a disaster when she was Education Minister and someone who continues to bring division to everyone and everything she touches. She is someone whose own claim to fame is probably most infamously that of matron of the Colombia three. To suggest that such a person should be elevated to the post of Principal Deputy Speaker is an insult to the many victims of the IRA, an organisation whose volunteers she still defends to this day.

It will be interesting to see in the House whether those who spent the last six weeks telling us that they were in the business of stopping Sinn Féin will in fact, today, be the facilitators of Sinn Féin to this high office of Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I remind the House that cross-community support is required.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 66; Noes 27.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms Dillon, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.

UNIONIST:

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr

McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

OTHER:

Mr Lunn.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Mr Kelly.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Long, Mr Lyttle.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Hussey.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>[71.0%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>[67.3%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>[10.0%]</i>

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Ms Caitríona Ruane be Principal Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Mr Speaker: I offer my congratulations to the Principal Deputy Speaker, Caitríona Ruane. That concludes this item of 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 the deputy First Minister. I will conduct the process of filling the offices in accordance with the procedures set out in section 16A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44(1).

I will begin by asking the nominating officer of the largest political party of the largest political designation 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 second largest political designation to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the 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;

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 Democratic Unionist Party advising me that Lord Morrow will serve as nominating officer for the party today. I call Lord Morrow to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the First Minister.

Lord Morrow: It is with profound pleasure that I nominate my party leader and constituency colleague, Arlene Foster, for this position.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

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

Mrs Foster: 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 Jennifer McCann will serve as nominating officer for the party for this item of business. I

call Ms McCann to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege for me to be asked to make our party's nomination, and I am very honoured to nominate my long-time friend and colleague Mr Martin McGuinness to be deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Mr McGuinness, are you willing to take up the office of deputy First Minister and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr McGuinness: 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 schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: There will be an opportunity for speeches. I will begin by calling the First Minister and then the deputy First Minister to address the House.

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): I am deeply humbled to have affirmed the Pledge of Office and to return to Stormont as Northern Ireland's First Minister. When I became First Minister back in January, I said that I could think of no greater honour than to serve my country and the people of Northern Ireland, and, today, that sense of honour is magnified as I look back at the huge vote of confidence placed in me and my party by the electorate.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): The media made much of the election campaign being a personal campaign. I do not often say it, but, in some respects, they were right. It was personal. I take the role of First Minister extremely personally. I feel an enormous sense of responsibility, not just to the people who voted for me and my party colleagues but to everyone who lives here. I am determined to keep Northern Ireland moving forward and to make it a safer, peaceful and more prosperous place.

I want everyone who lives here to be proud of this vibrant, beautiful part of the world. That positive ethos will be at the cornerstone of everything I do over the next five years.

3.00 pm

The election was fought and won on the basis of my five-point plan and I believe it forms the

foundation for a Northern Ireland that can continue to take centre stage for all the right reasons. We have come so far, but, with determination and a can-do approach, we have the potential to achieve so much more.

When I sat down with my 37 newly elected party colleagues on Monday, I told them that I wanted this to be a mandate of delivery. I want to get things done for the people of Northern Ireland. We all have a job of work to do and the voters have entrusted us to build on our vision for the future. I will work with other parties to get the best results for Northern Ireland. I believe that we can agree a Programme for Government over the coming days that will keep us on a winning footing.

The past five months have been the most demanding and the most rewarding of my life. When I was asked by the media if I was relieved that the electorate had once again voted to make the DUP Northern Ireland's largest party, I said I was elated. I was elated, and I still am. I feel incredibly proud to be Northern Ireland's First Minister. I have said it many times since January but it is worth repeating: growing up as a young girl in rural Fermanagh who wanted to make a difference, who wanted to make Northern Ireland a better place, I could never have dared imagine that one day I would be chosen by the people of Northern Ireland to be their First Minister. So, I want to thank everyone who has helped me on this wonderful journey, personally, professionally and politically. I am immensely grateful to each and every one of you.

Public duty is not always easy, but the worthwhile things in life never are. There may be hurdles and difficulties along the way, but we stand, I believe, on the cusp of a new and exciting era for Northern Ireland. We have a Fresh Start, we have a new mandate, and we must — and I am determined that we will — capitalise on every opportunity to build on the strong economic foundations to underpin the future stability of Northern Ireland.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): First of all, heartiest congratulations to every one of the Members of the House who have been returned as a result of the recent election. I want to congratulate you on your appointment as the new Speaker. The widespread support in the Assembly for your appointment is, I think, testimony to the belief in the House that you will follow in the footsteps of William Hay and Mitchel McLaughlin and be a Speaker that we can be proud of.

I want to thank Jennifer, my friend and colleague, for the nomination. I want to thank my party. I pay tribute to the 27 other members of my party who were elected in the election and thank, wholeheartedly, everyone in the constituencies who voted for Sinn Féin.

I want to congratulate Arlene on her appointment as First Minister. She and I, and our ministerial colleagues when they are appointed, will have a huge responsibility to move forward to continue to deliver on the Fresh Start Agreement, which is now over six months old. It has been a good start, but there is more work to be done, not least putting the final piece of the jigsaw in place in relation to victims and how we deal with the past. I earnestly hope, in the aftermath of putting together the Programme for Government and appointing Ministers, that a way forward can be found to meet the needs of victims — all victims — in our discussions with the Secretary of State.

There was a lot of talk during the course of the election about colours, and who was what colour and who was not — orange and green, and red, white and blue. I am a very proud, unapologetic Irish republican and my politics are green, white and orange because I do believe in bringing the green and the orange together, with the white of peace in the middle. I do think that that is absolutely achievable at some stage in the future. I absolutely respect those people on the other side of the House who are red, white and blue. The challenge for us, and the challenge for Arlene and me and for other Ministers, is for us to continue with the good start and to recognise the importance of working together, building new relationships, putting the past three years into the dustbin of history and moving on to deliver for the people whom we represent.

I want to live in a society that is diverse — our society is diverse — and I want that to be an inclusive society. I want us to stand up for those who are discriminated against. I want us to stand up for the marginalised, for the poor and for those who feel that they are not being treated fairly. I want to stand up alongside ministerial colleagues to deliver on tackling social deprivation and providing much-needed employment for the people whom we represent.

All of that represents a huge challenge to us, because one of the great difficulties that we faced, particularly during the last term of the Assembly, was the austerity agenda being imposed on us by a Conservative Government in London — a Government that cut billions out of our block grant. Of course, during the last

term of the Assembly, opportunities were taken by opportunistic politicians to blame the Executive and the Assembly for that. It was a very dishonest approach, in my opinion, because nowhere did I hear in the criticisms of the Executive any criticism of the economic policies being pursued by a Conservative Administration in London which were detrimentally affecting our ability as elected politicians here to deliver for all of our people, whether they live in east Belfast, west Belfast, the Bogside or Portadown.

This is an opportunity for all of us to move forward. Ideologically, we are different from the unionists. There is nothing wrong with that; everybody is entitled to their position. Allegiance-wise, we are completely different, but I come from that school of thought that fervently believes that we have the ability to work together. Not only can we build working relationships, but we can build friendships that will last until the day we die. I did it with Ian Paisley, and Ian Paisley did it with me. Queen Elizabeth and I had all sorts of reasons not to meet each other, but we rose above it in the interests of trying to show people that reconciliation was achievable. We need reconciliation in our society, so let us all go forward together. We are all human beings, and we all represent people. People out there depend on us, and we have a duty and a responsibility to live up to their expectations.

As my final comment, I pledge today to work with our unionist colleagues in a positive, responsible and constructive spirit to build a better future for everyone.

Mr Speaker: There will now be an opportunity for others 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. I ask all Members who would like to contribute to the debate to rise in their places, and I will endeavour to accommodate as many as possible. The briefer you are, the more opportunity there will be for others.

Mr Nesbitt: I begin by congratulating the other 107 successful candidates who are gathered here today as Members of the Legislative Assembly. I also commiserate with the unsuccessful candidates. I know the feeling of not finding favour with the electorate, and it is not a feeling or an experience that I would choose to repeat.

My congratulations go to Mrs Foster and to Mr McGuinness. On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I wish them well in their onerous

leadership positions for these devolved institutions. I think that it is noteworthy, if not a cause for concern, that none of the five big parties grew in numbers in the election. Two shed a couple of seats each, and the other three of us just managed to maintain the status quo, but this is not the time to rerun the election and its themes. Instead, I repeat my good wishes to Mrs Foster and to Mr McGuinness. Like any Executive Minister or any other Member of this legislative Assembly, they will have my support and the support of the Ulster Unionist Party when the time is right.

Where they will not have our support is at the Executive table, because the Ulster Unionist MLA group has decided unanimously to form the first official opposition of the Northern Ireland Assembly. *[Interruption.]* This is a big and bold move to bring a better and more normal democracy to the people of Northern Ireland. Let battle commence.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Colum Eastwood.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker — *[Interruption.]* No announcement is coming, just so you know.

I first of all offer my sincere congratulations to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. The people have spoken, and we are very glad to support your nominations. It is a very difficult job; you both know that. You will have our support when you deserve it. I think we have some work to do before any of us should be making announcements about whether we are going into government. We fought the election on the basis that we would negotiate hard, work hard and put forward proposals for the Programme for Government. We continue to do that, and we will see where that goes. We want to see a Programme for Government that we can sign up to. If we cannot do that, we will be in opposition; if we can, we will be in government. We want that Programme for Government to look after the people and the areas that have been left behind and to begin to make this place about delivery.

This time five years ago Peter Robinson said:

"Four or five years from now, we will not be judged on the size of our first preference votes but on what we have done to make life better for the people whom we represent. We will be judged on delivery." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 64, p11, col 1].

I do not often quote Peter Robinson, Mr Speaker, but I think, on that particular occasion, he was speaking sense. I do not think that anybody out there will say that we have delivered what we could. In this mandate, whether we are in government or opposition, we will work constructively to ensure that we can deliver as much as we possibly can for all those people who so dearly need our help.

Mr Ford: I add my congratulations to Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness. It is clear that their parties have been given a mandate to lead the Government. The challenge now is to turn it into delivery and not just some of the promises which we saw.

I congratulate Mike Nesbitt on the sound bite of the day, but some of us believe that government is a bit more substantial than the sound bite of the day. I congratulate Colum Eastwood on the quote of the day, because the sad reality is that the Executive and the Assembly, over the last five years, did not deliver all that was promised when we stood here five years ago. There is much that remains to be done. That is a challenge for those who have been given office today and for others who will join them, and it is a challenge for the Assembly to hold the Executive to account. Despite the number of votes that were given, there is absolutely no doubt that they were given by only 55% of our people, and there is a very substantial body that does not believe that the Assembly has delivered in the 18 years that we have had.

I say to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister that if they are going to take action on those key issues, they will get the support of the Alliance Party for the work that they are doing in the right direction. If they do not, they will be challenged by us because there is a need to ensure that delivery is achieved in key issues, in particular the need to deal with the threat of violence on our streets that still exists, and of which we have been so sadly reminded in recent days, and the need to move to a united community so that those divisions will be overcome and that violence will be ended. That is what, unfortunately, we have so far failed to do in 18 years. That is the challenge that needs to be addressed, and it is up to those who have just assumed office to lead that challenge and up to the rest of us to ensure that that carries through.

Lord Morrow: Mr Speaker, before I say anything more, I congratulate you on your elevation to the position of Speaker. I certainly have confidence that you will do an excellent job, as you did when you were Principal Deputy

Speaker. I wish you well and hope that I and everyone around the Chamber will give the support that you deserve.

I congratulate my party colleague Arlene Foster on her position as First Minister. This is an historic day for Northern Ireland. I am sure it has not gone unnoticed that during the election campaign, and when the results were announced, Arlene Foster secured the largest personal vote of any MLA in the Chamber today. I do not think that anybody has missed that point; I certainly did not anyway. *[Laughter.]*

3.15 pm

As a constituency colleague of hers and one who fought the election along with her, I know the energy that this woman brings to anything. You can take my word for it: she is full of energy. I want to wish her well in the weeks, months and years that lie ahead. I have no doubt that Arlene Foster will bring much good to Northern Ireland. Whether it is in Northern Ireland or outside Northern Ireland, she will be a great ambassador for this part of the United Kingdom, and I want to wish her every success.

In relation to Mr Nesbitt's announcement, it is obvious that he has lost the battle within his own party and we have had the outfall of it here today. During the election campaign, there was no strategy from him at all. He was neither in nor out, and now, because he has now tested his own party, they have said, "Mike, it is time to get out." I suspect that the next call will be, "Time, Mike, for you to go."

Ms J McCann: I will start off on behalf of myself and our party by congratulating Arlene on her reappointment as First Minister.

It was a great honour and privilege to be asked to nominate Martin for the post of deputy First Minister. Everyone knows that he is a committed and tireless worker, and everyone has seen the great leadership that he has shown, not just in these institutions but to people outside them, right around the world. His style of leadership is highly respected, and he does not ask anyone to do anything that he would not do himself. He has never been afraid to challenge those who have tried to destroy the peace process or disrupt the political institutions and the political process that we have made such progress on.

He puts the hand of friendship out to anyone; that is the sense of the person that you have. Having worked with him in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I, as junior

Minister, and my other ministerial colleagues have seen the great personal sacrifice that he has given to the role and the tireless energy that he has all the time. He is always there; he is the one who is always out front, and he is the one who is always doing most of the difficult lifting for the rest of us. He has earned the respect of people right across the political divide, and he has set a really high bar for leadership. I know that we can go into this new mandate with a true leader at our side who will work with anyone and who is genuine about partnership working and power sharing. His style of leadership gives us a lot of determination and commitment ourselves to take the progress that we have made and make further progress.

Mr Allister: Anyone looking at the Order Paper today and seeing the item

"Appointment of First Minister and deputy First Minister"

might be forgiven for thinking there would have to be a vote on such a matter, as there was yesterday in the Welsh Assembly on the appointment of the First Minister. Any new Member of this House who came expecting to be allowed to vote on this issue, well, welcome to Stormont.

Of course, the reason there is not a vote is that the rules were changed to save the blushes of the DUP, which, for the past six weeks, has spent the time with the deceptive message that it was in the business of stopping Sinn Féin. Then, today, when it comes to the appointment to the equal office of First and deputy First Minister, to save its blushes from walking through the Lobbies to put its partner Martin McGuinness in as equal to that office, the situation is contrived where there is no vote.

Of course, that is to save that embarrassment. Although, I do have to say that it is very difficult now to bring embarrassment to the DUP Benches. Last September, the First Minister told us that Sinn Féin was inextricably linked to the IRA. This week, the Chief Constable told us that nothing has changed: the IRA still exists and still has its structures. As far as Sinn Féin is concerned, nothing has changed: it still denies the reality of the IRA. However, for the DUP, it does not matter; office matters more than any of that. The lure of office overcomes any principle and any talk about inextricable linkage. In the words of the First Minister, she is now partnering a party in government that is inextricably linked to the IRA, which the Chief Constable says still exists. That says it all for

me. Lest there is any doubt, my position will continue to be one of opposition to the dysfunctional Government.

Mr E McCann: I rise only to comment on one of the deputy First Minister's remarks. He referred to opportunist politicians or political parties that concentrate their fire on the Executive in relation to austerity and let the British Government off the hook. As he accurately remarked, the British Government are the original source of the austerity measures. The deputy First Minister did not make it absolutely clear to whom he was referring. Lest there be any possibility whatsoever that he included People Before Profit in his strictures on people not attacking the British Government strongly enough, we deny and refute that absolutely. We question whether there is any political party represented in the Assembly that has more vigorously and consistently, in association with our comrades and brothers and sisters across the water, fought so hard and directly against the austerity measures emanating from Westminster. Our criticism of the Executive was not to put all the blame on them but to draw attention to the fact that they were not fighting hard enough against the Tories. That was our criticism.

We are faced with a situation in which the Tory party across the water has more austerity in mind.

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: The Tory party is in disarray —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: The Tory party is in disarray. After the vote, whichever way it goes —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: — on 23 June, it will be toast; it will be completely dysfunctional. *[Interruption.]* This is the time to put pressure on the Tories. This is no time to hide behind constitutionality and the position of the Executive. If you are against austerity, fight against austerity.

Mr Speaker: I simply wanted to point out to you, Mr McCann, that, since you had strayed from the microphone, Hansard was not able to pick up what you were saying. *[Laughter.]*

Mr E McCann: Do you want me to say it all again? Do you want me to say it again?

Some Members: Yes. *[Laughter.]*

Mr E McCann: I am quite happy to.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Steven Agnew.

Some Members: Follow that.

Mr Agnew: I will not even try to follow that, thank you. Mr Speaker, this is my first opportunity to welcome you to your new position and congratulate your new deputies also. I congratulate the incoming First Minister and deputy First Minister. It is clear — we have seen it already today — that we have an emboldened opposition corner. We will provide an effective challenge to those who choose to take up seats in the Executive.

Throughout the election campaign, I said that the Green Party wants to see delivery for the people of Northern Ireland. If that comes from the Executive, we will welcome it, but, if it does not come, we will lead the way in bringing forward the change that Northern Ireland needs. Just today, there was a queue outside the Bill Office door to see who could be the first to bring forward legislation for marriage equality. I brought forward that first motion in the last Assembly at a time when other parties did not want to speak about it. Now parties are literally crawling over each other trying to be first to get to the door to bring forward that legislation. That is the effect that an opposition can have. Regardless of whether it is a formal opposition or an informal opposition, as we have had in this corner, that is the role that my party plans to operate. It is a constructive opposition. It is an opposition seeking change, but it is about delivery for the people of Northern Ireland. It is not opposition for opposition's sake or opposition without positive proposals for change. That is what we have seen from the Green Party and now, with my colleague Clare Bailey, that is what we can expect even more of.

Ms Sugden: It is my pleasure to stand here as the only independent MLA in Northern Ireland. I think my success demonstrates that people are getting sick of the old party system, and I think today might actually demonstrate a sea change in politics in Northern Ireland. We have our first female Principal Deputy Speaker, and, whilst I voted against it on the principle of the institutions and a carve-up between the two main parties, I think it is a good thing for women in politics. We will move forward into the next five years with a female First Minister, and I am pleased to say that.

I want to comment on opposition and say "Fair play" to the Ulster Unionist Party. Things are changing, and I think Northern Ireland is about to move forward. This election, for me, marks Northern Ireland really moving on to the issues that matter to people on the ground, and I look forward to the next five years. Congratulations to all those MLAs elected to the Assembly, and I look forward to working with every single one of you. Thank you.

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership

Resolved:

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

*The Speaker (ex officio);
Mr A Attwood;
Mr T Clarke;
Mr S Dickson;
Mr G Kelly;
Mr C McGrath;
Mrs S Overend;
Ms C Ruane;
Mr R Swann; and
Mr P Weir — [Mr Speaker.]*

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Before we move to the Adjournment, I advise the House that the Northern Ireland Act 1998, recently amended to the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016, requires the offices of the Ministers to be appointed within 14 days from today. When the parties have indicated that they are ready for that to take place, the Business Committee will meet to consider an Order Paper for the next meeting.

Adjourned at 3.28 pm.

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