



# Official Report (Hansard)

Friday 13 May 2022  
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Allen, Andy (East Belfast)  
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)  
Archibald, Dr Caoimhe (East Londonderry)  
Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)  
Baker, Danny (West Belfast)  
Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)  
Blair, John (South Antrim)  
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)  
Bradley, Maurice (East Londonderry)  
Bradshaw, Ms Paula (South Belfast)  
Brett, Phillip (North Belfast)  
Brogan, Miss Nicola (West Tyrone)  
Brooks, David (East Belfast)  
Brown, Patrick (South Down)  
Buchanan, Keith (Mid Ulster)  
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Buckley, Jonathan (Upper Bann)  
Bunting, Ms Joanne (East Belfast)  
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Dunne, Stephen (North Down)  
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Eastwood, Ms Sorcha (Lagan Valley)  
Egan, Ms Connie (North Down)  
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Ennis, Mrs Sinéad (South Down)  
Erskine, Mrs Deborah (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
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Forsythe, Ms Diane (South Down)  
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)  
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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 13 May 2022

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

### Notice of First Meeting

**The Clerk to the Assembly:** 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 Friday 13 May 2022.

Please remain standing for the Speaker.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

### Undertaking and Roll of Membership

**Mr Speaker:** Members, please take your seats. Good afternoon. Tráthnóna maith daoibh. *[Translation: Good afternoon to you.]* Members, before we proceed with today's business, I offer my congratulations to all of you following the election last week. As well as welcoming back former Members, I extend a particular welcome to those who are present in the Chamber for the first time. I also put on record our appreciation to colleagues from all sides of the Chamber who decided either not to return or were not re-elected. We thank them all for their service.

I advise you that, yesterday, I received a letter from the Rt Hon Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP advising of his resignation as a Member of the Assembly for Lagan Valley with immediate effect. I was subsequently informed by the Electoral Office that Emma Little-Pengelly has been returned to serve as a Member for that constituency.

Item 2 in the Order Paper is the giving of the undertaking and signing of the Roll of Membership. Standing Order 3(7) says that a Member shall take his or her seat by giving the undertaking set out in section 40A(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and then signing the Roll of Membership.

As you will not have taken your seats until I have had an opportunity to check the undertaking and the Roll, Members will not be able to participate in Assembly proceedings or be entitled to privileges of office. That means that I cannot take any points of order during this process.

I will now explain the procedures for giving the undertaking and signing the Roll of Membership. I will invite Members to come forward in their party groups, and I will call the parties in alphabetical order. I will then call the independent Members. When each party name is called, Members of that party should proceed up through the Aye Lobby on the right and, when advised to do so, come forward to the first table to give the undertaking. In accordance with Standing Order 3(7), Members must give the undertaking before signing the Assembly's Roll of Membership. Members will 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 the procedure. My decision as to whether a Member has properly given the undertaking 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 may also enter a designation of identity as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other". Members should note that Standing Order 3(12) provides that a Member who does not enter a designation of identity in one of those terms will be deemed to be designated "Other". Standing Orders make provision for Members who are unable, due to exceptional circumstances, to

submit a notice of political designation to the Speaker. I can advise that I have received no such notices.

The process of giving the undertaking and signing the Roll may take some time — hopefully not too long — and I ask Members for their patience during the 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."*

**Mr Speaker:** 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 Other*

*Mr John Blair Other*

*Ms Paula Bradshaw Other*

*Mr Patrick Brown Other*

*Mr Stewart Dickson Other*

*Mr Danny Donnelly Other*

*Ms Sorcha Eastwood Other*

*Ms Connie Egan Other*

*Mr David Honeyford Other*

*Mrs Naomi Long Other*

*Mr Nick Mathison Other*

*Miss Nuala McAllister Other*

*Mr Peter McReynolds Other*

*Mr Andrew Muir Other*

*Ms Kate Nicholl Other*

*Dr Patricia O'Lynn Other*

*Mr Eóin Tennyson Other*

**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 Maurice Bradley Unionist*

*Mr Phillip Brett Unionist*

*Mr David Brooks Unionist*

*Mr Keith Buchanan Unionist*

*Mr Tom Buchanan Unionist*

*Mr Jonathan Buckley Unionist*

*Ms Joanne Bunting Unionist*

*Mrs Pam Cameron Unionist*

*Mr Trevor Clarke Unionist*

*Mrs Diane Dodds Unionist*

*Mr Stephen Dunne Unionist*

*Mrs Deborah Erskine Unionist*

*Ms Diane Forsythe Unionist*

*Mr Paul Frew Unionist*

*Mr Paul Givan Unionist*

*Mr Harry Harvey Unionist*

*Mr David Hilditch Unionist*

*Mr William Irwin Unionist*

*Mr Brian Kingston Unionist*

*Mrs Emma Little-Pengelly Unionist*

*Mr Gordon Lyons Unionist*

*Miss Michelle McIlveen Unionist*

*Mr Gary Middleton Unionist*

*Mr Edwin Poots Unionist*

*Mr Alan Robinson Unionist*

**Mr Speaker:** I call the member of the People Before Profit Alliance 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:*

*Mr Gerry Carroll Other*

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

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

*Dr Caoimhe Archibald Nationalist*

*Mr Danny Baker Nationalist*

*Mr Cathal Boylan Nationalist*

*Miss Nicola Brogan Nationalist*

*Mr Pádraig Delargy Nationalist*

*Mrs Linda Dillon Nationalist*

*Miss Jemma Dolan Nationalist*

*Mrs Sinéad Ennis Nationalist*

*Mrs Ciara Ferguson Nationalist*

*Miss Órlaithí Flynn Nationalist*

*Mr Colm Gildernew Nationalist*

*Miss Deirdre Hargey Nationalist*

*Mr Declan Kearney Nationalist*

*Mr Gerry Kelly Nationalist*

*Ms Liz Kimmins Nationalist*

*Mrs Cathy Mason Nationalist*

*Mr Declan McAleer Nationalist*

*Mr Philip McGuigan Nationalist*

*Mr Maolíosa McHugh Nationalist*

*Miss Áine Murphy Nationalist*

*Mr Conor Murphy Nationalist*

*Ms Carál Ní Chuilín Nationalist*

*Mr John O'Dowd Nationalist*

*Mrs Michelle O'Neill Nationalist*

*Miss Aisling Reilly Nationalist*

*Mr Pat Sheehan Nationalist*

*Ms Emma Sheerin Nationalist*

**12.30 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** I invite 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 Mark Durkan Nationalist*

*Ms Cara Hunter Nationalist*

*Mr Daniel McCrossan Nationalist*

*Mr Patsy McGlone Nationalist*

*Mr Colin McGrath Nationalist*

*Ms Sinead McLaughlin Nationalist*

*Mr Justin McNulty Nationalist*

*Mr Matthew O'Toole 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:*

*Dr Steve Aiken Unionist*

*Mr Andy Allen Unionist*

*Mr Doug Beattie Unionist*

*Mr Robbie Butler Unionist*

*Mr Alan Chambers Unionist*

*Mr Tom Elliott Unionist*

*Mr Mike Nesbitt Unionist*

*Mr John Stewart Unionist*

*Mr Robin Swann Unionist*

**Mr Speaker:** I invite Alex Easton and Claire Sugden, as independent Members, 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 Easton Unionist*

*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 Orders have been updated and reprinted, and copies are available for all new Members in the Rotunda. A copy of the updated Standing Orders will be delivered to the offices of returning Members as soon as rooms have been allocated.

Standing Order 3(6) states that my decision on whether a Member has taken his or her seat is final. I can make that decision only after examining all the entries on the Roll. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.44 pm.*

*On resuming* —

2.30 pm

### **Simultaneous Interpretation: Irish and Ulster Scots**

**Mr Speaker:** Before moving on with the rest of today's business, I want to take this opportunity to make some brief remarks at the beginning of the new Assembly term.

The Assembly Commission has made the necessary arrangements for the operation of a simultaneous and passive system for the interpretation of Irish and Ulster Scots spoken in Assembly proceedings. Details on how to use the system have been issued to all Members via an all-party notice. In light of those new arrangements, I am updating the previous Speaker's ruling on contributions made in languages other than English. Subject to the continuing availability of interpreters and without prejudice to the outcome of any future review, it is no longer necessary for Members who make their contributions in Irish or Ulster Scots to provide a translation. However, Members who choose to speak in a language other than English, Irish or Ulster Scots must provide a full and accurate translation. It is in keeping with the requirement to show respect and courtesy to all Members to ensure that all Members are able to understand the contributions made in the Assembly.

Members relying on simultaneous interpretation will need a moment or two, at least until we get the system up and running, to put on their headphones. I therefore encourage Members speaking in Irish or Ulster Scots to be mindful of that and to allow an opportunity for others, including the Deputy Speaker or the Speaker in the Chair, to put on their headphones before proceeding to the body of their substantive contribution.

It also remains the case that, as much as possible, it is an expected courtesy that Members will give the Speaker advance notice if they intend to raise any points of order, regardless of which language they wish to use.

## **Speaker's Business**

### **Concluding Remarks**

**Mr Speaker:** With the Assembly's indulgence, I will make a few personal remarks. If we do not elect a Speaker today, I will remain in office until a successor is appointed. If need be, I will return to that point shortly. In line with Standing Orders, however, regardless of today's outcome, today will be my last time in the Chamber. Therefore, before I proceed to the election of a new Speaker, I ask for your indulgence to make some final personal remarks.

I consider myself very privileged to have played a role in the important work of the Assembly over the past two and a half years as Speaker/Ceann Comhairle. I was honoured that Michelle O'Neill nominated me for the role and that the Assembly elected me to it with cross-community support. At this stage, it is not for me to comment from the Chair on the wider political issues facing us today. I ask, however, that we do not lose sight of the times when we have shown what we can achieve together in the Assembly.

In the past two years, we were able to meet the challenges of re-establishing the Assembly and keeping it functioning in order to take important decisions during the pandemic. We were also able to progress a record amount of legislation for a relatively short mandate. None of that would have happened without strong cooperation between the parties. I very much appreciate the positive cooperation and engagement from all the Whips, Commission members and Members across the House. I am grateful for that, and I express my thanks to all the parties. I have said before that I wish that the public had a greater opportunity to see the positive relationships that can and do exist right across the Chamber.

I want to say a few brief thank-yous. First, many of you who are here today for the first time will soon come to realise that it takes a huge amount of work behind the scenes for the Assembly to operate. I have often described that as the "engine room". We benefit from the huge skill and commitment of staff across a huge range of areas, and I thank all of them for that. I want to recognise the support that I have been given at different times by the staff in the Speaker's Office, including Emma, Paul and Frances. In particular, I want to acknowledge Robin Ramsey, who is my adviser and who has been the linchpin behind everything that I have done in my role as Speaker. I have appreciated

that support even when it meant Robin ringing me at all hours of the day and night.

Secondly, while today does not end my interest in politics — far from it — it does mark the end of around 40 years in elected politics, 24 of which were in the Assembly and 30-odd of which were in Belfast City Council with some of the people who have been in the Chamber in past years as well. In particular, I thank all the constituents who voted for and supported me, often through very difficult times.

We all know that political roles have an impact on our families, and I recognise the great support that I have had. I thank my wife, Liz, my two boys and the wider family circle, who have always been prepared to give me support and advice. They have often commended me and given off to me in equal measure.

Finally, I have been very fortunate in this role to be able to engage with a wide section of the population in the community that we represent. I was incredibly proud to be involved in finally seeing a Youth Assembly established, after a long period, as a strong voice for our young people. I have also been able to host a Pensioners' Parliament and Parliaments in this Chamber for women and people with disabilities, amongst others. We have also recently introduced sign language into our proceedings. I have also had the opportunity to meet visiting dignitaries and delegations from across the globe. All those engagements have demonstrated to me the huge desire and goodwill at home and abroad to see this place work.

I recognise that we are in a difficult political situation. Since 1998, we have all seen our fair share of those. Those of us who were here in 1998, and those of us who have been here since, have had big issues to deal with. However, we came through them. There is a heavy responsibility into the future upon all of you who are here today and who have taken your seats in the Assembly. You have my very best wishes for the challenges ahead.

I will move on to the Order Paper. *[Applause.]* Thank you, Members. I see that you are glad to get rid of me. *[Laughter.]* I should have mentioned my mother and father. Sometimes, parents can be your cheerleaders; my parents were my guardian angels. When I was on the council and in the Assembly, doing the work that I have been doing for the last number of years, my parents, doing what good parents do, were never just my cheerleaders. They were also there to help me, guide me, give off to me and try to steer me in the right direction, as they

saw it. I want to especially mention my father, Taskey — Alex senior — and my mother, Teresa.

## Designations

**Mr Speaker:** I have had an opportunity to scrutinise the entries in the undertaking and Roll of Membership, and I am satisfied that all Members have taken their seats in accordance with Standing Orders. Regarding designations of identity, 18 Members entered designations that I have deemed to be "Other" for the purposes of Standing Orders. Details of all designations have been emailed to all Members, and copies are available in the Rotunda.

## Election of Speaker and Deputy Speakers

**Mr Speaker:** The next item of business is the election of the Speaker. Members will be aware that I am not seeking re-election as Speaker. Therefore, I will remain in the Chair for this process. I wish to advise Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted under the procedure set out in 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, during which Members will have up to five minutes in which to speak. At the conclusion of that debate or, if there are no requests to speak, at the conclusion of nominations, I shall put the Question that the Member first proposed be Speaker of the Assembly. The vote, of course, will be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I shall put the Question on the next nominee, and so on, until all nominations are exhausted. Once a Speaker is elected, all other nominations will automatically fall.

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

**Mr Beattie:** I propose Mike Nesbitt MLA.

**Mr Speaker:** Do we have a seconder for that proposal?

**Mr Stewart:** I second the proposal.

**Mr Speaker:** Mike Nesbitt has been proposed and seconded. Under Standing Order 14, does the Member accept the proposal to be Speaker?

**Mr Nesbitt:** I accept, and I am honoured, Mr Speaker.

**Mr O'Toole:** I propose Patsy McGlone MLA to be Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Do we have a seconder for Patsy McGlone?

**Ms McLaughlin:** I second the proposal.

**Mr Speaker:** Does the Member, Patsy McGlone, wish to accept the nomination?

**Mr McGlone:** Glacaim leis. Go raibh maith agat. *[Translation: I accept. Thank you.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Go raibh maith agat. *[Translation: Thank you.]* There are no further proposals, so two Members have been nominated, Mike Nesbitt and Patsy McGlone. We will now open the debate. Do any Members wish to speak to the House?

**Mrs O'Neill:** First, I congratulate all colleagues across the Chamber on their successful election results, and I welcome everybody to this Assembly. We look forward to working together in the time ahead. It is truly a special honour for any of us who holds elected office to represent the communities from which we come. We carry the hopes and expectations of workers, families and businesses. They are relying on us to work together in a spirit of cooperation and to deliver real change.

The public will, rightly, be watching on today as they juggle their work and family responsibilities. They are struggling to manage their household budgets, and they are watching on in the hope that the parties in the Chamber have the maturity and the courage to shoulder our responsibilities, get down to business and act in the common good. There is absolutely no reason that we should be in a rolling crisis, even for one second. Over the past two years, the Assembly and the Executive have delivered, and we have proved that politics and power-sharing here can work when we give leadership, deliver good public services,

champion difference and inclusion and oppose division. Those are my values also.

The democratic outcome of the election must now be respected. Today, we stand ready to elect a Speaker and form an Executive, and I stand ready to take on the leadership of the Northern Ireland Executive as a First Minister for all in a Government who work for all the people. It is the job of our heroic doctors, nurses and NHS staff to treat and care for patients, but it is our job as politicians to fund that service properly. It is time to agree a three-year Budget and to invest an extra £1 billion in our health service immediately. Workers and families are facing really hard times because of the cost-of-living crisis, and that demands our immediate action, not protest.

Mr Speaker, this is our hour of decision. Not tomorrow and not for a moment longer can the DUP deny democracy, punish the public, boycott this Assembly and the Executive and prevent us from putting money into people's pockets. Every party in the Chamber told the electorate that they would turn up on day 1. The DUP has failed on day 1. The people and businesses here want to have confidence and hope for the future, so it is now time to look forwards, not backwards. We in Sinn Féin will continue to turn up and work in partnership with willing partners to deliver for people today and every day.

**2.45 pm**

Finally, I will say a few words to you, Mr Speaker, as this is your last sitting of the Assembly. Thank you for encouraging us all to exercise civility and restraint throughout your tenure as Speaker. It has helped to achieve better community relations inside the Chamber and, also importantly, outside in our wider community. Your four decades of dedicated public service leave a legacy of which many politicians would, rightly, be proud. We thank you for that. I also acknowledge your good wife, Liz, who is in the Gallery. As we all know, elected life can be very challenging. We all very much recognise that we need our family's support. Thank you for everything that you have done.

**Mr Givan:** I, too, thank you, Mr Speaker, for your work as Speaker of the Assembly, not only in guiding 90 Members but in advising on private Members' Bills, one of which I had. I wish you well. The class of '98 has been reduced, with, I think, only three Members in the Chamber today who were here all those years ago.

In October 2019, at a time when Sinn Féin held Northern Ireland to ransom for three years by refusing to form a Government, the Assembly sought to elect a Speaker. The leader of the SDLP, Colum Eastwood, said then:

*"we will not be able to have an Executive, Northern Ireland Assembly or North/South Ministerial Council. It is our clear view — it is the Good Friday Agreement's clear view — that the best way to effect any change to any legislation is to do it within the confines of those structures and that it will not happen as part of a shadow Assembly ... that ... will lead only to the fundamental destruction of the Good Friday Agreement."*  
— [Official Report (Hansard), 21 October 2019, p5, col 2].

The Irish Sea border has fundamentally undermined the Belfast Agreement. It has changed our relationship with the United Kingdom. Not one unionist elected to this Assembly supports the Northern Ireland protocol. We do not consent. The principle of consent is a fundamental cornerstone of the Belfast Agreement, but that is gone as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol.

Last September, we outlined the problems and put forward our solutions. We were patient. We have been reasonable. We allowed space for the United Kingdom and the European Union to engage in negotiations and talks, and so the talks went on and on as we continued to be patient. Others in this place acted in a divisive manner and called for the protocol's "rigorous implementation". At a time when we have a cost-of-living crisis, some Members want to drive up the cost of transportation. They want to harm people as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol. We do not, and we put forward pragmatic solutions.

The Democratic Unionist Party received a mandate in the Assembly election to remove the Irish Sea border. Our mandate will be given respect. We have engaged this week with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State. Our message is now clear: it is time for action. Words will no longer suffice. It is because we believe in devolution and we want the stability of these institutions to endure that we are taking the action that we are taking today.

**Mr Buckley:** I thank the Member for giving way. The House will know that the DUP, and unionism, has a very clear mandate to deal with the Irish Sea border. In that respect, does the Member find it quite bizarre that the word

"power-sharing" was missing from the lips of the leader of Sinn Féin, Michelle O'Neill, and that many in the House now call for majority rule? Does the Member agree that these institutions can exist only if there is consent from all corners of the House?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an additional minute.

**Mr Givan:** The Member is right in that Northern Ireland works best whenever we work together. Those who now call for majority rule need to recommit themselves, and I challenge Sinn Féin in particular. It needs to recommit itself to the principles of the Belfast Agreement and to power-sharing, because we will not be dictated to; we will be treated with respect and equality.

We are committed to devolution. We want these institutions to work, but the Northern Ireland protocol and the Belfast Agreement are incompatible; you cannot have both. Now is the time for action, not for further delay or procrastination. The Democratic Unionist Party's position is resolute. We are determined to succeed in the approach that we are taking, because we want the Executive to be built on solid foundations that will endure and deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Long:** First of all, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for presiding over the operations of the Chamber for the last number of years. Your fairness and inclusivity as Speaker were reflected both in the changes that were made to our procedures in order to ensure that independent Members and smaller groupings had a full opportunity to participate and in the fact that, as you said yourself, you held parliaments for the youth, for pensioners, for disabled persons and for women. It is important that the Chamber reflects the entirety of our society and is inclusive, and you played an important role in that.

You also steered us through COVID and hybrid working and, in spite of that, through one of the most challenging legislative timetables that any Speaker has presided over, not least in terms of the number of pieces of legislation and private Members' Bills that came through at the end of the session. I want to pay particular tribute, if I may, to your handling of the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) apology, which was a hugely sensitive matter for all involved and with regard to which you discharged your duties with real dignity. Thanks, also, to your staff, and especially to Frances Leneghan, who has now retired.

With respect to the election of the future Speaker, I wish both Mike Nesbitt and Patsy McGlone well. I think that both are able and capable of taking up that role. We are happy to support either and will probably end up supporting both, given the way that things are likely to break down in the Chamber later. In truth, either could do the job, but our priority is that someone does the job. We are here to elect a Speaker so that the Assembly can go about its business, so that those who have been elected can serve the people who elected them and so that those items that we can proceed with in the next few weeks can be moved forward.

We come here with a can-do attitude and a commitment to serve the people who elected us, and I hope that others do likewise. The DUP has said in the press that it will not support the election of a Speaker today. There is still time, however, to reflect on that position, notwithstanding what the former First Minister has just said. It is worth remembering, when we talk about consent and equality, that many of us in the Chamber represent people who did not consent to Brexit in the first place, and yet we turned up for work. We turned up for work.

We also do not all have equality. Some in the Chamber are more equal than others. My 16 colleagues' and my votes will count for less in this next election than those of everyone else in the Chamber. If we are really committed to equality, we will also be committed to the reform of these institutions so that that anomaly is brought to an end.

If you believe in devolution, as Mr Givan claims that he does, you do not gamble with it at such an important juncture; you make it work for the people who elected you. We accept that there are issues with the protocol and that those issues should be resolved, but nothing that the protocol does to harm Northern Ireland will be helped at all by the lack of a functioning Government. In conclusion, to turn up here, sign in, take salaries and refuse to take seats is a slap in the face for every family that is struggling to make ends meet and every person who is sitting on a waiting list. I appeal to the DUP to think long and hard before it insults the electorate by doing that today.

**Mr Beattie:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Long pause.]* Silence. That is the silence that we were subjected to for three years when Sinn Féin walked out and the silence that we will now be subjected to if the DUP does not support a Speaker. People will go cold and hungry in their home, and, from this place, there will be silence. People will die on waiting lists,

and, from this House, there will be silence. People will be desperately calling for an ambulance, and, from this place, there will be silence. Our children will go to school hungry and will not be able to afford uniforms, and, from this House, there will be silence. The only thing that will be a constant after today will be silence from us. The rest of the people will be screaming for help, and we will be silent.

Today, we can at least do something: we can elect a Speaker. That would allow us to do part of the business that we can and to move within the budgets that we have. If we elect a Speaker, we can do something to end the silence without compromising the DUP's position on the protocol, which is an issue. If we do not, there will be silence. That uncomfortable silence that you all felt when I first stood up is what you will feel from this moment on as the people of this country stare at us and we give them nothing.

We can elect a Speaker, and I have nominated a Speaker. He is a man of integrity, a man of compassion and a man who can reach every corner of the Assembly. You know him, and he is somebody whom you can speak to with honesty and somebody who can reach out beyond the Assembly: Mike Nesbitt. He also acted as a victims' commissioner, so he knows the heartache that is out there. Today, we can not only make the point that we need to make about the protocol but elect a Speaker in order to do some business so that we do not have silence. Otherwise, we will walk out of here, and the moment will be lost. We cannot allow that. Nobody here can allow that. Individually, you cannot allow that. Moral courage will tell you not to allow that. In nominating Mike Nesbitt, I understand the limitations of what we can do, but I also understand that it is the right thing to do so that we can at least help, in part, the people who need our help.

**Mr O'Toole:** First of all, on behalf of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, I welcome all newly elected MLAs to the Chamber. I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for your work over the past two and a half years. I hope that you are able to finish it soon, because you worked hard for all of us over the past two and a half years and deserve your retirement. The choice for us today is whether we allow you to retire and elect a successor.

There is nothing more profound in public life than being entrusted with the responsibility of service by the electorate. My first act in the new Assembly is to proudly nominate our colleague and friend Patsy McGlone for the role of Speaker. The role of Speaker is one of

enormous importance to the functioning of the Assembly. As well as overseeing the Chamber, including the Executive and private Members' business, the Speaker acts as a representative for the whole institution in all our diversity. We believe that Patsy is uniquely qualified to act as our Speaker at this moment. I have lots in my speech about why Patsy is qualified, and everyone in the Chamber and everyone who has served with Patsy knows how qualified he is.

Over the past three decades, he has embodied social democratic politics and constitutional Irish nationalism but also, critically, cross-community politics. He is a fluent Gaeilgeoir, he has been a Member of the Assembly for nearly 20 years and he is a former Chair of Cookstown council.

### 3.00 pm

In a sense, however, all of my words today are largely in vain because the DUP, a party that has the word "Democratic" in its name, has decided to thwart democracy today. Not only is it thwarting democracy; it is demeaning democracy. It is demeaning the entire process that all of us have spent the past six weeks engaging in — all of us who knocked on a door, went to a hustings and made our case to our constituents.

During the six weeks of campaigning, I had countless people from all backgrounds telling me that they were considering not voting. They had become so alienated from politics here and were so tired of gridlock and dysfunction that they simply did not want to hear about politics or the democratic process. A woman in Carryduff who described herself to me as a small "u" unionist told me that she would not vote because the DUP in particular had destroyed her trust. She also told me the story of her 90-year-old mother who had waited for hours in an ambulance. I urged her, if she wanted something done about it, to please take the time to vote for people who wanted to do something about the state of the health service. Like others in the Chamber, I am sure, when people tell me that they are not going to vote, I always take the time to convince them to cast that vote. That woman is now not just a voter but my constituent. What do I tell her about the shameful spectacle that the DUP is inflicting on her and all of us today? I would like to ask the leader of the DUP — a man who sought election to this place but now has not taken his seat — but I cannot.

In stifling not just the creation of an Executive but even the appointment of a Speaker to allow us to have basic debates and hold caretaker Ministers to account, the DUP has demeaned the entire democratic process. Shame on them. I say this to the DUP: "Do not blame the protocol. Do not blame the EU, the Irish Government or Remain-supporting parties. This is your doing and your responsibility".

I designated today as a social democrat and a nationalist, because my party has always been more than just a constitutional party. There are many people whose view on the constitution has evolved. Many of them simply want to live in a society that is at peace with itself and with a functioning Government delivering on their needs. If the DUP seeks the constitutional status quo, as, it says, it does, I say to it, "Why are you so determined to make the status quo so unappealing?".

When we finally have a functioning Assembly, I hope to nominate again the outstanding candidate for the job, Mr Patsy McGlone MLA, when the DUP decides to finally stop holding the people of Northern Ireland to ransom.

**Mr Allister:** There is no reason in the characteristics or personalities of Mike Nesbitt or Patsy McGlone why either of them would not make a perfectly adequate and good Speaker. However, the circumstances are such that it is not appropriate to proceed to the election of a Speaker, for one simple reason. In politics, when a community is downtrodden and ignored and its legitimate protests are trampled underfoot, that community is entitled to — nay, must — use whatever legitimate leverage it has to extricate itself from that situation. We are in a situation, as unionists in Northern Ireland, where we are being expected to live under the unbearable: a protocol that decrees and operates on the basis that Great Britain is a foreign country. That is something that no unionist can ever come to terms with. Therefore, all unionists should be on the side of exercising the leverage that is available to seek to force change to that situation. That is why, since the leverage is in respect of the Assembly —

**Mrs Long:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allister:** In a moment. That is why the mendacious Prime Minister whom we have has to be brought to the point of choice. Does he want to save the protocol, or does he want to save these institutions? It is as simple as that.

If there is — I trust that there is — unrelenting unionist resolve that that choice must be made, we are in a situation where, until the protocol becomes moribund, the Assembly must be moribund. That is abundantly clear.

I appreciate that the protocol fanatics cannot come to terms with the fact that they have embraced a system that is supposed to have consent at its heart but do not wish to live by that system. They seem to think that unionist concerns are there to be trampled on and that everyone else's concerns are there to be adhered to. Well, I am sorry: with the 65,000 unionist votes that I have, I will not allow anyone to trample unionist concerns, and I will make sure that unionist concerns are heard and listened to in the House.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Member for giving way. Would he agree that the real leverage is not these institutions? The real leverage that is being exercised here is the pain of the public of Northern Ireland. It is not that the institutions will be harmed — by the way, unionism should think long and hard about upsetting the institutions because of the damage that it could do to its cause — but the pain that is being inflicted on the public that should cause the Member concern. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, Members.

**Mr Allister:** The Member speaks in an irrational way. The protocol itself is causing pain. It adds excessive costs to the cost of living through transport costs. It is causing businesses that hitherto supplied trade to our supermarket shelves and elsewhere to cease to trade. The Member is very selective in her approach.

The fundamental point is this: we have a Prime Minister and parties in the House who will have to choose whether they want these institutions or the protocol. It is a choice for you all. As far as I am concerned — I trust that it is the continuing resolve of everyone else — you cannot and will not have both. Make up your mind. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, Members. Order. Let us continue as we began: respectfully and in order.

**Mr Carroll:** Mr Speaker, I wish you well. I was going to say "in your retirement", but, somehow, I think that you may not be able to retire from this place or politics. I wish you well and thank you for your service. I also thank the good people of West Belfast for returning me to the Assembly. I am proud to take up the baton as the socialist opposition in

the House and to hold any incoming Executive to account. Boy, will that be needed if an Executive are formed.

Our communities are struggling with soaring energy and fuel bills. Truth be told, when the Executive were sitting, they ignored the plight of workers and those who were struggling. That is why Translink workers will take strike action next week and why we are likely to see Assembly staff go out on strike in the near future. Our message is simple: if bills are rapidly rising, so should workers' wages. No more below-inflation pay offers. They are unfair and unacceptable.

Today, we have to call out the actions of the DUP and its obstruction. For all its talk about the protocol, poll after poll has shown that it is not a priority nor the number-one issue that people are vexed about, whether they class themselves as unionist, nationalist or other. In many ways, it is a manufactured crisis. Where was the DUP crisis about the decades of divergence on women's rights in this place from those in Britain? The DUP tried to cause panic and fear and to whip people up on the basis of fear and division in order to save its seats. The vast majority of people did not vote for this and should not be held to ransom by the DUP's self-serving actions.

The DUP has been a continual barrier to progress in this place, and there is no democratic rationale or reason for it to boycott the position of deputy First Minister. Sinn Féin should not be blocked from the position of First Minister because it is a nationalist party or because of the games being played over the protocol. However, let us be honest: real change in our society will not come from within this Building. It will happen out in the streets and on the picket lines with workers who are Catholics, Protestants, migrants and people who are classed as "other" in this part of the world. That is where I will be next week regardless of whether this place is reconvened.

**Miss Reilly:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tabharfaidh mé faill do na Comhaltaí cluasáin a úsáid más maith leo.

Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt inniu agus muid ag cur ainmneacha chun cinn le Ceann Comhairle agus, le cuidiú Dé, Leas-Chinn Comhairle a roghnú sa Teach inniu.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas ó chroí a ghabháil ar bhonn pearsanta agus thar ceann gach Comhalta de chuid Shinn Féin ar na Binsí seo lenár gcara agus ár gcomhghleacaí Alex Maskey. Le linn tréimhse dhoiligh de dhá

bhliain, bhí Alex cothrom agus díograiseach le gach duine. Thug Alex —

*[Translation: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will give Members an opportunity to don headphones if they wish.]*

*I welcome the opportunity to speak today as we make nominations for the election of a Speaker and, with the help of God, Deputy Speakers.*

*I would like to extend the warmest thanks, personally and on behalf of every Sinn Féin Member on these Benches, to our friend and colleague, Alex Maskey. During two difficult years, Alex was fair and generous to everyone. Alex has given —]*

**Mrs Little-Pengelly:** On a point of order, can we clarify whether there will be a translation or if is this a time to use the headsets? That would be helpful for all Members.

**Mr Speaker:** With respect, Members were given notice of how this would be conducted, and I repeated that at the beginning of the session. This person is indicating that she is speaking in Irish on this occasion, so it is an opportunity for people who so wish to hear a direct translation and put the headphones on.

**Ms Bunting:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It would be helpful if Members would indicate that their remarks will be in a different language so that we have time to put our headphones on, if that is OK.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope that, as time goes on and such contributions are made, there will be no caveats on this. I suggested that people who wanted to use the Irish language or Ulster Scots might indicate that on this occasion. It cannot be built in as a precondition: Members will speak freely with the use of passive translation or interpretation. There has to be respect both ways.

The Member spoke quite quickly. That is fine, and she is entitled to do that. From here on in, people should expect Miss Reilly in particular to speak often in the Irish language. It will be her choice, of course, when she does that. That requires respect from others who do not have an understanding of the Irish language or, indeed, Ulster Scots, and they should use the headphones if they want instantaneous interpretation.

Gabh ar aghaidh, a chara. *[Translation: Continue, friend.]*

**Miss Reilly:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. *[Translation: Thank you, Mr Speaker.]* Just to clarify, I did indicate, but I appreciate that it was in Irish, so apologies.

Thug Alex a shaol don tseirbhís phoiblí agus do ghníomhaíochtaí polaitíochta, agus tá a fhios agam go leanfaidh sin ar aghaidh san am atá romhainn. Ádh mór ort, a chara, agus ar Liz. Go raibh céad míle maith agat uainn uilig i Sinn Féin.

Tá sé tábhachtach a aithint gurb é seo an chéad uair riamh a bhí Comhalta ar bith in ann óráid a thabhairt os comhair an Tionóil go huile agus go hiomlán inár dteanga dhúchais. Ba mhaith liom an deis seo a thapú chun cur i gcuimhne nár cheart gur cuireadh cosc ar úsáid na Gaeilge ná ar úsáid na seirbhísí aistriúcháin san Fhoirgneamh seo ariamh. Ach tá cur amach againn ar fad ar stair na héadulaingthe maidir le comhionannas agus cearta teanga san áit seo. Ach is léiriú é sin ar an am atá tharainn. Anois amharcfaimid i dtreo na todhchaí. Is cóir do gach páirtí anseo amharc i dtreo na todhchaí chomh maith.

Mar sin de, tá tábhacht ar leith ag baint leis an lá atá inniu ann. Tá sé tábhachtach dóibh siúd a bhfuil grá acu don teanga, an pobal céanna a leanas ar aghaidh leis an fheachtas chun aitheantas agus cosaint a bhaint amach don Ghaeilge anseo. Tá sé tábhachtach do gach aon duine sa Tionól a chreideann go bhfuil sé de dhualgas orthu ionadaíocht chuí a dhéanamh ar gach duine a bhfreastalaíonn siad orthu.

Ní bagairt í an Ghaeilge ar dhuine ar bith. A mhalairt atá fíor. Ba cheart dúinn sin a cheiliúradh. Is fíor sin faoin Ghaeilge sa tSeomra seo; is fíor sin faoi Acht na Gaeilge; is fíor sin faoi chomhionannas. Is dul chun cinn suntasach é an lá inniu ar an bhóthar i dtreo comhionannais. Tá mise ag súil, faoi choimirce an Chinn Comhairle úir, gurb ionann seo agus ré nua don pholaitíocht ó Thuaidh.

Tá mé ag dúil go mór le sochaí a thógáil a chaitheann le gach saoránach le comhionannas, cothroime agus meas. Tá súil agam go bhfuil gach duine anseo réidh leis an tsochaí sin a thógáil liom.

*[Translation: Alex has given his life to public service and to political activities, and I know that that will continue in the time ahead. Good luck, my friend, and good luck to Liz. Thank you very much from everyone in Sinn Féin.]*

*It is important to recognise that this is the first time ever that a Member has been able to make a speech entirely in our native language. I would like to take this opportunity to remind us that it was never right to prevent the use of Irish in this Building or to prevent the use of translation services. We are familiar with the history of intolerance with regard to equality and language rights in this place. But that was the past. Now we look to the future. Every party here should look to the future as well.*

*Therefore, there is a special importance attached to today. It is important for those who love the language, that community that continues with the campaign for recognition and protection of the Irish language here. It is important for everyone here who believes that they have a duty to represent all those whom they serve.*

*The Irish language is not a threat to anyone. Quite the opposite. We should celebrate that. That is true of the Irish language in this Chamber; that is true of an Irish language Act; that is true of equality. Today is a significant step forward on the road towards equality. I hope, under the auspices of the new Speaker, that this is the dawn of a new era in politics in the North.*

*I look forward to building a society that treats every citizen with equality, fairness and respect. I hope that everyone here is ready to build that society with me. Thank you all very much.]*

**Mr Lyons:** We have just come through an election, and my party has won a mandate. It is difficult for some other Members to respect, but that mandate is to not go into an Executive until we deal with the instability of the protocol and the long shadow that it casts.

When it comes to the election of a Speaker, there has been a stark change of position by many of the parties in the Chamber. Of course, we tried to have the election of a Speaker in October 2019, and the leader of the Alliance Party, Naomi Long, and her team did not turn up to the Assembly that day. In fact, Naomi Long said, "We do not need a pointless talking shop." Her words.

Michelle O'Neill, in 2019, opposed the election of a Speaker. She came today and talked about the need to have courage to get on with the job and said that we should not deny democracy, but, of course, for three years Sinn Féin stopped the Assembly and the Executive operating.

Mrs O'Neill said that she would not come to the Assembly until an Executive were established.

Mr Eastwood said:

*"there will not be an Executive formed today? If that is the case, we will be in no position to support a Speaker and allow for the undermining of the Good Friday Agreement".*

3.15 pm

**Mr O'Toole:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** What has changed —

**Mr O'Toole:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** I will give way in a minute. What has changed in that time? Maybe we should look at the words that came next from Mr Colum Eastwood. He said:

*"we will be in no position to support a Speaker and allow for the undermining of the Good Friday Agreement through a unionist-dominated shadow Assembly." — [Official Report (Hansard), 21 October 2019, p5, col 2].*

So, that is what has changed. Mr O'Toole has come here today and talked about "thwarting democracy". He has come here and talked about trust in politics. What does it do to trust in politics when parties were not prepared to elect a Speaker in 2019 but want to elect one today? The SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party are completely inconsistent. They are all shaking their heads. They do not like it but it is the truth. *[Interruption.]* They refused —

**Mr Speaker:** Order, Members. Sorry, Mr Lyons. Order. Please proceed, Mr Lyons.

**Mr Lyons:** That is the difficulty for the parties today. They had one position in 2019 and they have changed it. They are all shaking their heads, but it is the truth. *[Interruption.]* You all had the opportunity to come here in October 2019. The SDLP turned up and said that it was not going to do it. *[Interruption.]* Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party did not even turn up.

**Mr Speaker:** Order, Members. We are nearly there. Let us keep order. Let us keep the business respectful.

**Mr Lyons:** This is going to be a very difficult mandate if Members cannot even accept the

truth when what happened is there in black and white in Hansard.

**Mrs Long:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** I will give way to Mrs Long.

**Mrs Long:** Will the Member accept that, if we are going to talk about truth and transparency, it is not just the balance between unionism and nationalism that has changed, but it is a fact that there are Ministers in office at this point who are desirous of scrutiny, who have jobs to do and who need a functioning Chamber in order to do it? Far from being a pointless talking shop, as in October 2019, what we would have in this context is a functioning Assembly with Ministers able to be held to account. Perhaps if we want to talk about truth, we could start off with the whole truth and nothing but.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an additional minute.

**Mr Lyons:** The fact remains that the Member had the opportunity to turn up in October 2019 and did not take that opportunity to come here.

Let me make it very clear: I want us to have devolution in Northern Ireland, but I want us to have stable devolution in Northern Ireland. I will make this point: imagine for a second that we had on the Irish border what we currently have in the Irish Sea, with checks, control posts and, in the future, under the official controls regulation (OCR), charges. If there were checks, control posts and charges on the Irish border, that would not be a recipe for political stability in this place, and it is not a recipe for political stability when those things are taking place in the Irish Sea.

We need to see those changes. We need to recognise that Members on this side of the House have significant and serious concerns. I want to see that stable foundation. It is up to the Government to take action, but I hope that all parties in the House will recognise the concerns that exist and press for those changes that we all need to see.

**Mr Muir:** I will start by paying tribute to you in your term of office as Speaker. When you were elected as Speaker back in January 2020, I knew that you were a man of good workmanship as you helped to decorate my grandparents' home and did a very good job, and they were delighted with it. You did not fail to impress in your role as Speaker. You were fair and firm. You ensured that all voices were heard in the Assembly. With private Members'

business in particular, you ensured that a significant volume could be processed towards the end of the last mandate. I am particularly appreciative of that and wish you all the best in the time ahead.

The Alliance Party will support both proposals for Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Both candidates are strong and extremely capable and will be able to fulfil the role well. Today is decision day. The people of Northern Ireland are watching. We must elect a Speaker. We must be allowed to do our job. If the DUP is to proceed to veto the election of Speaker, that is an appalling abuse of power. Forgive me, but I shall take no lectures from the DUP about equality in Northern Ireland.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr Muir:** It is not lost on me that, back in 1998 when the Assembly first sat, six MLAs were pigeonholed into the category of "other". Mr Speaker, I am many things, but I ain't just "other". Today, we have 18 "others", but when the vote for a Speaker proceeds, our votes will be cast aside. They will not be equal, and a veto will be invoked to stop the Assembly doing its job, yet again pointing to why we need to reform the institutions. It is likely that there will be a clear majority for the election of a Speaker, but it will be blocked. The DUP seems to be addicted to the politics of deadlock, division and disruption. No single party should be able to hold the Assembly or the people of Northern Ireland to ransom.

**Mr Allister:** Since the Member is articulating those issues, maybe he will tell us what the Alliance Party's current view is on the fundamental building block that it holds to in respect of consent. Is consent not a fundamental building block of these institutions, whether one likes it or not, and, therefore, is it not wholly legitimate and within those processes to say, "Sorry, I don't consent"? There can be no compulsion to consent. Why should a community that has been told that GB is a foreign country consent to implementing such a thing?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an additional minute.

**Mr Muir:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I have found it interesting of late to see the Member coming out so strongly and fervently in support of the Good Friday Agreement. How times have changed. The people of Northern Ireland consented and voted overwhelmingly for these institutions to sit and

for an Executive to be formed. No single party should be able to hold this place to ransom. To use the sick and the vulnerable as leverage is shameful.

**Mr Poots:** It is somewhat cynical of parties that, for years, have been complaining that you cannot have majority rule to now call for majority rule. That, essentially, in the speech that we have just heard, is what Mr Muir was seeking in the House. He was railing against the Good Friday Agreement — the very agreement that they preached to us had to be accepted and that, along with subsequent agreements, has been accepted over the past 24 years. We are now in a circumstance where we require the consent of both communities to move forward on the issue that is in front of us today.

We also need to deal with the elephant in the room: the Northern Ireland protocol. We hear people calling out the cost of living. The reality is that the protocol will affect people's cost of living, not just in 2022 but in 2032 and 2042, if we do not deal with these issues now. It is incumbent upon us all to act. This should not be an orange, green, unionist, nationalist or "other" issue. This is an issue for all of us. When Marks & Spencer went to a House of Lords Committee this week, it said that it takes 20 staff and eight hours to load one lorry. Do you think that those costs will not be passed on to consumers in Northern Ireland? Do you think that when the Trader Support Service, which is spending £500 million a year, ceases to have government support, businesses will absorb that? Will they pass that on to consumers? When the grace periods that cover so much of this are removed and we go back to the normality that is sought by the protocol, we will have barriers placed on every mouthful of food, including food such as that which you consumed over lunchtime today. I pose this question: how does that impact on the European Union single market?

Every Member should be joining as one voice and saying that the Northern Ireland protocol does not work, cannot work and needs to be replaced. We should stand together to deliver that. Rather, we have this nonsense about its rigorous implementation. Some parties called for the rigorous implementation of the Northern Ireland protocol. Let us be clear about what would have happened: 40% of the medicines used in our hospitals — the generic medicines that come from Great Britain — would be denied access to Northern Ireland.

The same people who, a few years back, talked about rigorous implementation, thus denying medicines and medical equipment to our

hospitals and the ability of supermarkets and retailers in Northern Ireland to bring in goods barrier-free, are now saying that they are concerned about healthcare and the cost of living. We need to deal with that issue. We have to deal with that issue. We will deal with that issue, and we will use whatever leverage we have to ensure that all the people of Northern Ireland will get a good deal: not just unionist, nationalist or other but every single person.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr McCrossan:** Mr Speaker, I take the opportunity to thank you and wish you well for the future. It looks, however, from what we are hearing in the Chamber today, as though you will not be going anywhere.

It is fair to say that the people at home who are watching today, and who have been watching since we returned to the Assembly at the beginning of the week with some hope, will be very disappointed. In fact, they are sick, sore and tired of the regurgitated narrative and same rubbish that is spilled in the House to distract from the real-life problems that are affecting people's lives. Regardless of how anyone may feel about the protocol and the difference of opinion on the protocol, no one in the House was given a mandate to sit at home tomorrow: nobody.

What about the sick in our hospitals? What about cancer patients who cannot be seen? Those are your families and mine. They are the people whom you represent and I represent. What about the families who opened their door to each and every one of us during the election period whom we all promised to help? There are those who cannot heat their home, those who cannot feed their family and those who are struggling even to travel to work to make ends meet. I knocked the door of everyone, regardless of political or religious background, because I believe in the common good and in standing up and representing each and every single citizen in my community. Not one person in West Tyrone mentioned the protocol, which begs the question: does my colleague in the constituency Mr Buchanan have a mandate to sit at home after today? No, he does not.

We really need to get past the age-old argument of them and us.

**Mrs Dodds:** *[Laughter.]*

**Mr McCrossan:** People are absolutely sick of it. You can laugh, Mrs Dodds, but the reality is that people at home are not laughing. They are

crying. They are upset. Many people whom I have engaged with have asked how we get past —

**Mrs Dodds:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCrossan:** I will not just yet. Your laugh was insult enough, thank you. I will not be giving way, Mrs Dodds.

How do we move forward from here? The reality is that deadlock, destruction, division, drama and distraction do not solve any of the problems. We in the House have been given a collective mandate to put people first and to make the problems that people are facing our number-one priority.

Mr Poots mentioned barriers to food. What about the barriers to people's livelihoods because they cannot afford to eat? What about the barriers in front of people that mean that they will not get access to necessary, essential and life-saving healthcare? I can tell Members that, when you are sitting holding the hand of a loved one who has not got the treatment or care that they need at that critical moment, you will think long and hard about any distraction and drama over a protocol, because that is real life. You can play a game of chess around the Chamber all that you like, but, as the next move is being contemplated, people are suffering and dying. So much for an era of hope, a new start and a fresh beginning.

I am a young person in the Chamber. I am hopeful about the future of this place, but it is very hard to remain hopeful when people can return in a fresh mandate with such ridiculous excuses for not forming a Government and refuse to put the interests of each and every citizen in this place first.

**3.30 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call the next Member to speak, I want to make the point that we are in danger of raising the temperature but making no further progress. I appeal to parties not to feel it necessary to respond to one another. That will not bring us anywhere or give us any further results or progress. I offer that as a suggestion. We are not helping ourselves. The public will be listening to an argument that is not about electing a Speaker but about our wider political problems. We are not here to debate those because we will not resolve them this afternoon. I ask parties to desist from wanting to come in, one after another, to respond to issues or points made by the previous Member. That will just go around the houses for the rest

of the afternoon with no further progress and bring this place further into disrepute.

**Mr Middleton:** It should come as no surprise to anybody in the Chamber or, indeed, to anybody in Northern Ireland, that the DUP is serious about dealing with the Northern Ireland protocol. Over the past two years, time and time again — in the Chamber and in meetings with the UK Government, the Irish Government and the European Union — we have reiterated the concerns about the Northern Ireland protocol of not just unionists but all our people. We were met with — unsurprisingly, we are being met with it today — laughing, sniggering and the dismissal of unionist concerns as if they were somewhat lesser than anyone else's.

We are here today to say that we want to be in a position to elect a Speaker. I want to be in a position where I can deal with the other priorities in our five-point plan. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to do that. I want people to understand that, until the concerns of unionists, of businesses that are suffering at the hands of the protocol and of people who face a rising cost of living and rising prices in supermarkets have been addressed, we will not be back in the Executive. They need to understand that loudly and clearly. Despite all the concerns and views that we reiterated over the past couple of years, we were ignored, dismissed and dented. Unfortunately, whilst we were raising those concerns, Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin were breaking lockdown rules by running down to Dublin to call for the rigorous implementation of the protocol.

**Mrs Long:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. An allegation has just been made that lockdown rules were breached by a trip that we took to Dublin to meet the Irish Government. Lockdown rules were not breached or I would not have travelled. I ask the Member to reflect and withdraw those remarks.

**Mr Speaker:** OK. Can we have no further conversation on that matter?

**Mr Middleton:** There was guidance on lockdown, and people will judge that for themselves. It was clear where the priorities —

**Mr Speaker:** Will the Member desist from going further down the line of the intervention? Please make your contribution relevant to the motion.

**Mr Middleton:** As I was saying, it was clear where the priorities of those Members lay on whether they were fighting for the people of

Northern Ireland or on behalf of the European Union. That is the point that I was trying to make. Whilst they were doing that in Dublin, they were undermining not just their colleagues in the Chamber with whom they are supposed to be power-sharing but a large section of our community.

The DUP has been focused on trying to resolve the issues around the protocol. We have not seen progress. We have met the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister. We have heard a lot of words, but, unfortunately, whilst some of it may be encouraging at this time, it is just words. We need to see that come into action. We made it clear to the electorate that we want to see the Northern Ireland protocol removed. We want to see the Irish Sea border removed. We will ensure that that is the case before we return to the Assembly.

As I reiterated, I want to get on with dealing with all the other issues with Ministers in place. I welcome the fact that people want to resolve waiting lists. We have had two years, and, of course, a couple of weeks before the election, everybody wants to resolve everything. Now is the time for you to get your shoulder behind the wheel. Join the rest of us who want Northern Ireland to work. Join the rest of us who want power-sharing to work. It will not work whilst the views and concerns of one section of our community are dismissed, laughed at and called "Rubbish", as they were by a Member across the Chamber.

**Mr Speaker:** We have two further Members on the speaking list. I appeal to Members for that to conclude the debate. At least allow the general public out of their misery.

**Mr McNulty:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. *[Translation: Thank you, Mr Speaker.]* Comhghairdeas *[Translation: Congratulations]* on your service and ádh mór *[Translation: good luck]* in the next phase.

My father, despairing over the deadlock in this place, reminded me of an old Irish tradition: meitheal. *[Translation: working gang.]* The meitheal was the high point of the year. In days gone by, families in my townland and in townlands across Ireland cut corn, made hay and picked spuds in their neighbours' fields as often as they did in their own fields. Through that spirit of meitheal, people survived and thrived. Women and men worked in parallel to win the harvest. There was a great sense of camaraderie and support with problems to be solved, and the craic was mighty.

The meitheal was the high point of the year. Let that be now. Let us recapture the meitheal in our shared home place. Let us build a society where our children live and learn together, where neighbours carry each other in tough times and where all communities pull together for the common good. Let us build a society where meitheal sweetens our victories and takes the sting out of tragedies and challenges. Let us build a new Ireland for all.

**Ms Sugden:** Like others, Mr Speaker, I join in wishing you well in your retirement, whenever that may happen. You have been a fair Speaker, particularly in relation to smaller parties and independents, and, as someone who sits in this back corner, I appreciate the voice that you have given us. I certainly hope that your successor will also be mindful of those smaller voices, which, on their own, can sometimes be quite loud.

Good afternoon, Members, and congratulations to each of you on getting elected last week. It is my pleasure to sit amongst you in the Chamber, and it is regrettable that it may be one of the last opportunities for a while to do that. I congratulate in particular the women MLAs who were elected. For me, the election campaign felt particularly brutal towards women. The fact that you saw it through and managed to get our numbers back to where they need to be — we are not there yet, but we are making steps towards that — is remarkable, so I congratulate you all. That was despite the abuse that some of you faced, which was unacceptable, and we should very much stand against that.

I am now the longest-serving independent in Northern Ireland Assembly history, and that is a great honour for me. You may not recall it, because it is nearly eight years ago, but, in my maiden speech, I reminded Members to take responsibility for the power that they held. I will revise that to say this: take responsibility for the power that you have been gifted. There is a difference between the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive. The Northern Ireland Assembly is directly elected by the people of Northern Ireland. It is the people who have given you power, and the people want you to do a job. They want us to lead. They want us to take forward issues that matter to them and their families.

The protocol is such an issue. It deeply saddens me that the protocol has become an orange and green issue, because the protocol affects everyone in Northern Ireland. The issues relating to the protocol are not insurmountable, but they require a cross-community approach or an approach from

every Member to try to fix those issues. We will not do that by not sitting here. We are not a voice by not sitting here.

It is important that we send a clear message that we, as Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, need to fix the issues that matter to people in Northern Ireland. It is disappointing that we are unlikely to elect a Speaker today. To me, the Northern Ireland Assembly is more important than the Northern Ireland Executive. It provides accountability. It provides a voice. It is representation for every member of Northern Ireland. I do not stand here to bring my views and baggage to the table. I stand here representing the constituents of East Londonderry, and each of you sits in your seat representing your constituency.

It is those people whom we will have to tell that we are not going to work next week. I really hope that we find a way through this situation, because Northern Ireland deserves better. I know that that is a phrase that is often used and almost misused, but Northern Ireland deserves better. That means fixing the protocol, but we need to do that together.

**Mr Speaker:** No further Members wish to speak.

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

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 28; Noes 26.*

**AYES**

**UNIONIST:**

*Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Beattie, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Elliott, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Stewart, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann.*

**OTHER:**

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

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Butler and Mr Stewart.*

**NOES**

**UNIONIST:**

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

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr K Buchanan and Mrs Little Pengelly.*

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>[51.9%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>[27.8%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>

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

*Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).*

**Mr Speaker:** The Question on the first candidate was negatived. I will now move to the second candidate.

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

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

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 62; Noes 25.*

**AYES**

**NATIONALIST:**

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

**UNIONIST:**

*Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Beattie, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Elliott, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Stewart, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann.*

**OTHER:**

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

*Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Hunter and Ms McLaughlin.*

**NOES**

**UNIONIST:**

*Mr Allister, Mr Bradley, Mr Brett, Mr Brooks, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Erskine, Ms Forsythe, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kingston, Mrs Little Pengelly, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr K Buchanan and Mrs Little Pengelly.*

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>[71.3%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>[28.6%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>

*Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).*

**Mr Speaker:** Members, the Assembly has been unable to elect a Speaker today. Therefore, we are unable to conduct our next item of business. We can proceed no further. Any further sittings of the Assembly can be held only to first elect a Speaker and Deputy Speakers. Under section 39(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I will remain in office until my successor is elected. I am particularly conscious that functions remain for a Speaker to carry out in these circumstances and, particularly, that it is my responsibility to engage with the parties and bring Members back for a further sitting to elect a Speaker and Deputy Speakers. I would, of course, prefer that to be as soon as possible, and I will continue to engage with parties to ensure that a further sitting can happen as soon as possible. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to adjourn the sitting until a future date, the details of which will be communicated to Members in due course.

I am conscious that there may be some points of order following today's decision. It is unlikely that those will be for me to address, but there is no provision for a debate at this stage. However, I am conscious of the circumstances that we are in, and, therefore, I am prepared to allow a short period, if Members wish to make a few brief remarks for the record. It is not compulsory, but Members are free to say a few words.

**Mr O'Toole:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make a very brief point of order. I want to put on the record again, on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland, my deep frustration and disappointment that we are not forming a Government today.

Mr Speaker, I ask for your advice on two matters. First, in the absence of even a shadow caretaker Assembly, are MLAs able to ask caretaker Ministers, including many Members on the DUP Benches, who still hold ministerial office, questions for written answer? Is that in order? Can those questions be submitted? Secondly, as my party qualifies to be in opposition, what consideration will be given to allowing parties that qualify for opposition to organise themselves into an Opposition to challenge the caretaker Ministers and hold them to account?

**Mr Speaker:** We will look at the second question, but the Assembly cannot do any further business, so, in a way, we are very limited in what we can do. Members can, however, submit questions for written answer to Ministers. They can submit the five questions a day that it is permissible for Members to ask. The Whips were advised of that on Wednesday morning past. I thought that that went out in an all-party notice, but if not, I will do that.

Was there somebody else? Did I see another Member indicate? There are no other contributions.

*Adjourned at 4.11 pm.*