
Northern Ireland Assembly

Thursday 12 May 2011

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon.

Assembly Business

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

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 today at noon on Thursday 12 May 2011. Please stand for the Speaker.

Roll of Membership

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to please take their seats. 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.

The next item on the Order Paper is the Roll of Membership. I remind the House that Standing Order 3(3) says that a Member shall be regarded as having taken his or her seat only when they have signed the Roll of Membership. I will not, therefore, take any points of order until after the Roll has been signed by all Members present and I have confirmed that Members have taken their seats.

I shall now explain the procedures for the signing of the Roll. After I have signed the Roll here at the Table, I will invite Members to come forward in their party groups. I will call the parties in alphabetical order. Mr McClarty, as the Independent Member, will be called after the party groupings. When each party name is called, I will ask Members of that party to proceed up through the Aye Lobby on my right. Members should then come forward to sign one of the two Roll pages on the table in front of me.

Members should enter today's date, print and sign their name and enter a designation of identity as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other". I draw Members' attention to Standing Order 3(7), which provides that a Member who does not enter a designation of identity will be deemed to be designated "Other".

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

(Mr Speaker signed the Roll of Membership.)

Mr Speaker: Order. We shall now proceed to signing the Roll. I invite Members from the Alliance Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Cochrane, Judith	Other
Dickson, Stewart	Other
Farry, Stephen	Other
Ford, David	Other
Lo, Anna	Other
Lunn, Trevor	Other
Lyttle, Chris	Other
McCarthy, Kieran	Other

Mr Speaker: I invite Members from the Democratic Unionist Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Anderson, Sydney	Unionist
Bell, Jonathan	Unionist
Bradley, Paula	Unionist
Buchanan, Thomas	Unionist
Campbell, Gregory	Unionist
Clarke, Trevor	Unionist
Craig, Jonathan	Unionist
Douglas, Sammy	Unionist
Dunne, Gordon	Unionist
Easton, Alex	Unionist
Foster, Arlene	Unionist
Frew, Paul	Unionist
Girvan, Paul	Unionist
Givan, Paul	Unionist
Hale, Brenda	Unionist
Hamilton, Simon	Unionist
Hilditch, David	Unionist
Humphrey, William	Unionist
Irwin, William	Unionist
Lewis, Pam	Unionist
McCausland, Nelson	Unionist
McCrea, Ian	Unionist
McIlveen, David	Unionist
McIlveen, Michelle	Unionist
McQuillan, Adrian	Unionist
Morrow, The Lord	Unionist
Moutray, Stephen	Unionist
Newton, Robin	Unionist
Poots, Edwin	Unionist
Robinson, George	Unionist
Robinson, Peter	Unionist
Ross, Alastair	Unionist

Spratt, Jimmy	Unionist
Storey, Mervyn	Unionist
Weir, Peter	Unionist
Wells, Jim	Unionist
Wilson, Sammy	Unionist

12.15 pm

Mr Speaker: I invite Mr Agnew of the Green Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member signed the Roll of Membership:

Agnew, Steven	Other
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Mr Speaker: I invite Members from Sinn Féin to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Anderson, Martina	Nationalist
Boylan, Cathal	Nationalist
Boyle, Michaela	Nationalist
Brady, Mickey	Nationalist
Clarke, Willie	Nationalist
Doherty, Pat	Nationalist
Flanagan, Phil	Nationalist
Gildernew, Michelle	Nationalist
Kelly, Gerry	Nationalist
Lynch, Seán	Nationalist
McCann, Fra	Nationalist
McCann, Jennifer	Nationalist
McCartney, Raymond	Nationalist
McElduff, Barry	Nationalist
McGuinness, Martin	Nationalist
McKay, Daithí	Nationalist
McLaughlin, Mitchel	Nationalist
McMullan, Oliver	Nationalist
Maskey, Alex	Nationalist
Maskey, Paul	Nationalist
Molloy, Francie	Nationalist
Murphy, Conor	Nationalist
Ní Chuilín, Carál	Nationalist
Ó hOisín, Cathal	Nationalist
O'Dowd, John	Nationalist
O'Neill, Michelle	Nationalist
Ramsey, Sue	Nationalist
Ruane, Catriona	Nationalist
Sheehan, Pat	Nationalist

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: I invite members of the Social Democratic and Labour Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Attwood, Alex	Nationalist
Bradley, Dominic	Nationalist
Byrne, Joe	Nationalist
Dallat, John	Nationalist
Durkan, Mark H	Nationalist
Eastwood, Colum	Nationalist
Kelly, Dolores	Nationalist
McDevitt, Conall	Nationalist
McDonnell, Alasdair	Nationalist
McGlone, Patsy	Nationalist
McKevitt, Karen	Nationalist
Maginness, Alban	Nationalist
Ramsey, Pat	Nationalist
Ritchie, Margaret	Nationalist

Mr Speaker: I invite Mr Allister of Traditional Unionist Voice to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member signed the Roll of Membership:

Allister, Jim	Unionist
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Mr Speaker: I invite Members from the Ulster Unionist Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Beggs, Roy	Unionist
Copeland, Michael	Unionist
Cree, Leslie	Unionist
Dobson, Jo-Anne	Unionist
Elliott, Tom	Unionist
Gardiner, Samuel	Unionist
Hussey, Ross	Unionist
Kennedy, Danny	Unionist
Kinahan, Danny	Unionist
McCallister, John	Unionist
McCrea, Basil	Unionist
McGimpsey, Michael	Unionist
McNarry, David	Unionist
Nesbitt, Mike	Unionist
Overend, Sandra	Unionist
Swann, Robin	Unionist

Mr Speaker: I invite Mr McClarty, the Independent Member, to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member signed the Roll of Membership:

McClarty, David	Unionist
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Mr Speaker: I thank Members for their co-operation and patience during the signing of the Roll of Membership. Standing Order 3(3) states that my decision as to whether a Member has taken his or her seat is final. I can make that decision only after examining all entries in the Roll. To that end, therefore, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45 pm.

On resuming —

2.30 pm

Election of Speaker

Mr Speaker: Members should please take their seats as we move to the next item of business.

I have had an opportunity to scrutinise the entries on the Roll of Membership, and I am satisfied that all Members who have signed the Roll have taken their seat in accordance with Standing Orders. Regarding designation of identity, eight Members have entered a designation of “Other”, which I have deemed to be in order for the purpose of Standing Orders. However, the total number of Members designated as “Other” is nine, as we have eight Members belonging to the Alliance Party and one belonging to the Green Party who are all designated as “Other”. Details of all the designations have been placed in Members’ pigeonholes, and copies are available in the Rotunda.

As I am seeking re-election to the office of Speaker, I am required by Standing Order 4(2) to leave the Chair. Mr Sam Gardiner will preside as Acting Speaker for this item of business, and I invite him, as Father of the House, to come forward and preside over the election of the Speaker.

(The Acting Speaker [Mr Gardiner] in the Chair)

The Acting Speaker: Order. I 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 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 nominated and seconded is willing to accept the nomination. I will then ask for further proposals and follow the same procedures 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 the conclusion of the nominations if there are no further requests to speak, I will 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 will put the Question in relation to the next nomination and so on, until all the nominations are exhausted. Once the Speaker is elected, all other nominations fall automatically.

Do I have a proposal for the office of Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr M McGuinness: At the start of the last Assembly, the then First Minister and I agreed that we would ensure that the position of Speaker was shared across both traditions. In return for my party’s support for the DUP’s nomination for the position of Speaker, he indicated that his party would support the nomination of a Sinn Féin Speaker for this term.

In recent days, I have had further discussions with the First Minister. We have agreed that this position will be shared across both traditions during this Assembly term. We have agreed that it will be taken up initially by a Member of the DUP and that, after three years, the position will be taken up by a Member of Sinn Féin. Therefore, I nominate William Hay as the incoming Speaker for the initial phase. In May 2014, a Sinn Féin MLA will be nominated for this position for the remainder of the term.

I am very pleased to nominate Willie Hay, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work that he did as Ceann Comhairle in the last Assembly. As far as I am concerned — I believe that my opinion is shared by the overwhelming majority of the Members of the House — he did an excellent job, and I am sure that that is recognised by everyone. Go raibh maith agat.

The Acting Speaker: The proposal is that Mr William Hay be elected Speaker. Is there a Member to second that?

Mr P Robinson: I am delighted to second the proposal of the deputy First Minister to nominate my friend and colleague William Hay for the position of Speaker.

William and I have been friends for many decades, and I know well the strength of his character. During the previous Assembly term, every Member of the Assembly saw how fairly he represented the House and how impartial his judgements were, and I believe that he won the respect and admiration of the whole House. Although I was not part of the initial discussions about which the deputy First Minister spoke, I fully honour the arrangements that he set out,

and my party will go forward on that basis. We welcome the opportunity for William Hay to be returned to the Chair once more.

The Acting Speaker: Members, you have heard the nomination, which has been seconded, for Mr William Hay to be elected Speaker. Mr Hay, are you prepared to accept that nomination?

Mr Hay: Yes, I accept the nomination.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any further proposals?

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

Mr Elliott: I congratulate the Speaker designate, William Hay, and congratulate all the Members who have either been re-elected or elected here for the first time. Mr Hay presided over proceedings in the House for the past four years, and I welcomed his contribution. He did an excellent and fair job in the Chamber, and I am sure that most people recognise that.

I look forward to a positive working relationship in the Assembly. That may not always happen, and it may not always be possible. However, where it is practicable, I look forward to that. I also look forward to dealing with the real issues for the people on the ground, especially issues around unemployment, jobs, the economy, health and education. Where possible, I want to see that positive relationship, have those debates and ensure the best outcome for everyone.

Ms Ritchie: Since Mr Hay is the only nominee and is the Speaker elect, I offer you congratulations on behalf of the SDLP. We had a very good working relationship in the previous Assembly. We did not necessarily always agree with your decisions or adjudications, and you will no doubt expect the same level of accountability from us during this mandate.

On behalf of my party, I offer congratulations to all those who have been returned, either returning Members or new Members of the Assembly. The SDLP looks forward to working with everybody in a constructive way on a range of issues. There is absolutely no doubt that the people of the North of Ireland have spoken, given us a mandate and told us to get on with the work on behalf of the people. They are looking for representation and for delivery on

issues such as employment and unemployment; how you bed down an economy; how you provide a better and more efficient health service; and how we can deliver the best education for all our children throughout the North of Ireland. They are also looking at skills, training and higher education and are looking for a good deal for the whole community. That is the challenge that has been put in front of us all.

We are very happy to work with the outgoing and incoming Speaker, Mr Hay, and the Members who are elected as Deputy Speakers. Naturally, the SDLP will put forward its nomination.

Mr Ford: On behalf of the Alliance Party, it also gives me great pleasure to support the renomination of Mr William Hay as Speaker. I have not known him for as long as the First Minister has known him, nor do I share the Derry/Londonderry connection that the deputy First Minister has, but I have known William for 13 years, since we both arrived here just after the Good Friday Agreement. Our group has always found him to be an honourable and decent Member of the House in any role that he has had. During the four years that he has acted as our Speaker, he has been a good and fair representative of the House.

Like Margaret Ritchie, I have not always agreed with Mr Speaker Hay, although that may say more about me than it does about Mr Speaker Hay. However, it is absolutely clear that he has been fair and honourable in his work in the Chair and when representing the Assembly elsewhere. Most particularly, he has stood up for the rights of each individual Member in this place against whatever outside forces might bear down upon us. On that basis and in the spirit of goodwill shown around the Chamber, we have great delight in supporting his nomination.

Mr Allister: The election of a Speaker for any legislative assembly is, of course, an important occasion, not least for the minority voices in it. In that, I declare a very obvious interest. It has been rightly said that you can judge a parliament or an assembly by how it treats its minorities. Therefore, I look forward to seeing how this minority is treated in this Assembly.

At a personal level, I have no difficulty in conveying my best wishes to William Hay as Speaker, but I note that he is, today, the nominee of IRA/Sinn Féin. I note that his elevation is again the consequence of another sordid deal between the DUP and Sinn Féin. I

wonder what additional price the DUP paid to buy back the mortgage that was offered by Ian Paisley four years ago, when he offered Sinn Féin the role in 2011. I am sure that we have not seen or heard the whole price that has been paid in that regard, and now we can look forward to a new depravity in the arrangements of this House when, in 2014, a member of IRA/Sinn Féin takes over the leadership of it. It falls as a shame on those who have facilitated that arrangement.

No doubt that arrangement was facilitated by the fact that, in his four years as Speaker, from what I could see, Mr Hay made several pro-Sinn Féin rulings and several anti-freedom of speech rulings and sought to block the telling of the truth about individuals such as bomber Kelly, who sits in the House. He brought no credit upon this House or upon himself in seeking to suppress freedom of speech during that time. The jury is now out for the next four years. I will watch with interest during the coming three of those four years, while he holds that post courtesy of Sinn Féin, to see whether he finds the courage to come down on the side of freedom of speech in this House.

The Acting Speaker: No other Members have indicated that they wish to speak. *[Laughter.]* Are you pleased at that?

Question, That Mr William Hay be Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr William Hay be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: I have great pleasure in declaring that Mr William Hay has been re-elected Speaker. I ask him to come forward to take his rightful position. *[Applause.]*

2.45 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Mr Speaker: Order. First, I want to thank the proposer and seconder of my nomination as Speaker. I also want to thank Members for their continued support during the previous mandate and, I hope, during the current mandate. I appreciate greatly the fact that I was the first Speaker to be elected by the Assembly and am now the first to be re-elected.

I am always conscious of the privilege that it is to hold this office. It is not always easy for the

Chair to please all of the people all of the time, but Members know that I have always sought to be fair and will continue to do so. Members know that, if they have issues or problems, I have an open-door policy for those who want to talk to me. I will always act in the Assembly's interests, and I look forward to working with all Members of the new Assembly. Once again, I thank all Members for their support.

Election of Deputy Speakers

Mr Speaker: Order. The next item of business on the Order Paper is the election of Deputy Speakers. Standing Order 5(1) requires three Deputy Speakers to be elected. The procedure for electing Deputy Speakers will be the same as that for the election of Speaker. I will ask for nominations, which must be seconded. I will then confirm that the Member accepts the nomination, and I will continue in that way until there are no further nominations.

I remind Members that a debate may take place after I announce that the time for proposals has passed. Do I have any proposals for the office of Deputy Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr Doherty: As Sinn Féin's nominating officer, I nominate Francie Molloy as Deputy Speaker. He held the post in the previous Assembly and proved to be a very able Deputy Speaker. He was also very much a part of your working group, Mr Speaker, in conducting the business of the House. Therefore, I nominate formally Francie Molloy.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Aontaím leis an mholadh. I second the proposal for Francie Molloy to be LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Speaker: Mr Molloy, do you accept the nomination to be Deputy Speaker?

Mr Molloy: A Cheann Comhairle, glacaim leis. I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further nominations?

Mr Elliott: I nominate Mr Roy Beggs for the position of Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Mr Kennedy: I second that nomination formally.

Mr Speaker: Does the Member accept the nomination of Deputy Speaker?

Mr Beggs: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Is there any further nomination?

Ms Ritchie: As the SDLP's nominating officer, I have great pleasure in nominating John Dallat, the Member for East Derry. In the past, John has been Deputy Speaker and a member of your working group, Mr Speaker. He is a person of considerable principle and integrity.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Mr McGlone: Cuirim leis an mholadh sin go foirmiúil, a Cheann Comhairle. I second that nomination formally, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Mr Dallat, do you accept the nomination?

Mr Dallat: I am happy to accept the nomination, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further nominations? I see that there is none. A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I remind them that they may speak only once during the debate and will have three minutes in which to speak.

Mr McCallister: Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. I also congratulate other Members on their re-election. I know that there was concern in Hansard, as it thought that its workload might be cut; however, it was glad to see that Conall McDevitt was returned. *[Laughter.]* Of course, we were all relieved to see that.

The offices of Speaker and Deputy Speaker are important in protecting the rights of Members and in standing up for the institution; therefore, it is important that they be elected and deemed to act fairly. I am confident that the three nominees will achieve that. I look forward to working with them in building up the reputation of the House and protecting Members' rights.

Ms Ritchie: On behalf of the SDLP, I offer congratulations to the three nominees for the position of Deputy Speaker. Through our nominee the last time, we were happy to participate in the working group with you, Mr Speaker, and we will continue to have a good working relationship through our Deputy Speaker and a constructive working relationship with other Deputy Speakers and with you. At the end of the day, we are here to work on behalf of the people and to deliver for them.

Mr Ford: On behalf of my group, I am happy to support the three nominations. I think that the continuity of your remaining in post, Mr Speaker, with two of the three Deputy Speakers is a good thing. I have no doubt from what I have seen of Roy Beggs in the Chamber that he will make an excellent Deputy Speaker. Some day, perhaps in three years' time, we will see people being selected purely on their merits and not simply on party nominations. That would really be a

sign of maturity in this place. In the meantime, I wish the three nominees well.

Mr Allister: I certainly have no difficulty in offering congratulations and support to the two untarnished democrats who have been nominated: Mr Beggs and Mr Dallat. As for the third nominee, Mr Molloy, I certainly wish to make it abundantly clear that, though he doubtless will take office with the support of his friends from across the Chamber, he will not take office with my support.

Today, I cannot but recall the guidance and information provided by the Member of Parliament for Upper Bann, Mr David Simpson, when he revealed something of the true nature of Mr Molloy. I simply want to say —

Mr Speaker: Order. I must ask the Member to take his seat. We must deal with the business that is before us in the House, which is the election of Deputy Speakers. That is all there is. I must and I will remind the Member that there is no problem with him getting to his feet to speak on the issue of Deputy Speakers, but to widen the debate is totally and absolutely wrong.

Mr Allister: I had no intention of widening the debate, nor have I done so, in my belief. I was referring precisely to one who has been nominated, and I was reminding those who shortly will vote for him about what their colleague Mr Simpson said. Was he telling lies? Was he telling the truth? Do those on my left simply not care?

I stood in Ballymena on Saturday. I listened to three successful Democratic Unionist candidates piously and arrogantly claim that their election was the smile of God on the DUP.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat, and I will not call him to speak on this subject again. I will move on. The Member should remain seated.

Mr Allister: It did not take you very long —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after I have dealt with this issue.

Question put, That Mr Francie Molloy be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Some Members: Aye.

Mr Allister: No.

Mr Speaker: The election of Deputy Speaker requires cross-community consent. Clear the Lobbies. The Question will be put again in three minutes' time.

Question put a second time.

Mr Speaker: Under Standing Order 27(4), when the Speaker calls for Tellers from each side on a Question but, within a reasonable time, two Tellers have been nominated from one side but not from the other, the determination of the Assembly shall be that of the side for which two Tellers have been nominated. As only one Teller has been nominated for the Noes, the Ayes have it, and I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Francie Molloy be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

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

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Roy Beggs be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Question, That Mr John Dallat be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr John Dallat be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

3.00 pm

Mr Speaker: As three Deputy Speakers have been elected, that item of business is concluded. I offer my congratulations to the successful candidates, and I look forward to working with all the Deputy Speakers.

I will now take Mr Allister's point of order.

Mr Allister: When you call a Member to order, my expectation — maybe it is wrong — is that there would be an identification of the issue on which a Member has transgressed. I have not heard any such identification, and, so that we all might learn, I would be graciously obliged to hear it.

Mr Speaker: When the Member has been in the House for some time, he will find that I do not get into debates about points of order. I often

tell Members that points of order are not for debate and that, if they feel very strongly about a particular point of order or issue, they can come and talk to me in my office or go to the Business Office or wherever they feel they might get an answer. Once again, I say to all Members that I have an open-door policy, and I ask them please to come and talk to me about any issue that they feel strongly about.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, if it is the Speaker's belief that a Member of the House has transgressed, surely that Member is entitled to know where the Speaker believes he or she has transgressed.

Mr Speaker: Order. You are almost reaching the point of challenging the authority of the Chair, and I would not go there. I certainly would not go there.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that Mr Allister is the new kid on the block. However, for his benefit and that of my party, I ask you to do us the courtesy of checking his remarks in today's Hansard and getting back to us. I believe that his remarks were unparliamentary, and, for all his ability to scrutinise, he clearly does not understand the Standing Orders of the House. If he has not already been given a copy of Standing Orders, perhaps he could be furnished with one.

Mr Speaker: I am always happy to give new Members some latitude. However, let me say clearly to Members, as I said many times during the last mandate, that courtesy, good temper and moderation are the standards required during any debate in the Chamber. I remind all Members from all sides of the House to be of good temper in the Chamber.

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Appointment and Pledge of Office

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 for nominations. The nominating officer of the largest political party of the largest political designation shall nominate a Member of the Assembly to be First Minister. The nominating officer of the largest political party of the second largest political designation shall nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

I have received a letter from the nominating officer of the Democratic Unionist Party advising me that Mr Sammy Wilson will serve as the nominating officer for the party today. I call Mr Sammy Wilson to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the First Minister.

Mr Wilson: Nominating officer sounds like a very grand title.

I wish to nominate the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to be First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and it is with great joy that I do so. I have known Peter for 40 years, and I could not have imagined that, when I first knew him as party secretary in our rather dowdy offices in Ava Avenue off the Ormeau Road, he would one day be in a position to be nominated to this high office. Even further beyond my imagination was that I would be the person to nominate him. *[Laughter.]* Given the annoyance that I have probably caused him over the years, I was surprised that he asked me to nominate him, but he did. He may have had some regrets and wondered what was coming next when he came into the Chamber and saw me reading 'Private Eye'. *[Laughter.]* However, it is an honour to nominate him for this position, which he has held for the past three years, having inherited it from the former leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Dr Paisley, and now taking it in his own right. He has earned it. I say "earned it" advisedly because we are where we are because of the vision that Peter Robinson had of a stable Stormont. He looked at the problems for the first Assembly and asked how we could avoid going up and down like a yo-yo. As a strategist, he looked to see what could and had to be done and how that could be delivered and worked on.

For the past three years, Peter Robinson has steered the Executive and Assembly through difficult times. Many said that the stumbling block of the devolution of policing and justice could not be got over. It was his skill in negotiating through those difficulties that brought the stability of full devolution to Northern Ireland. He also led the Executive in the past two years of the Assembly to deal with the recession and the savage cuts in our Budget as a result of decisions made at Westminster.

I know that he will not mind me saying that all that was against the background of massive media publicity against him, domestic difficulties and personal disappointment. To those of us who observed the impact of that on him, it showed what a unique leader we had. Many another person would have folded, thrown in the towel and said that it was not worth it, yet he lived up to the civic responsibility placed on him by the people of Northern Ireland, his party colleagues and the House. For that reason, he has earned this position. He approached the last election with trepidation because many said that it would be very difficult to fill the shoes of the previous party leader, who led the party to become the biggest in 2007. He not only followed those footsteps and filled those footprints but did more than that, which is why we are here with the biggest grouping that we have ever had and the best election success.

We will, over the next four years, face great difficulties in making the Assembly work more efficiently, deliver more quickly and become more relevant to the people in Northern Ireland. We have also to steer our way through the economic storms that lie ahead. There is no better person to do that job than Peter Robinson.

Mr Speaker: Mr Robinson, are you willing to take up the office of First Minister?

Mr P Robinson: I am.

Mr Speaker: I now call on Mr Pat Doherty, as nominating officer of Sinn Féin, to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As nominating officer for Sinn Féin, I nominate Martin McGuinness MP MLA as deputy First Minister.

I have known Martin probably even longer than Peter has known you as Speaker or, as we like to call you, Ceann Comhairle. Throughout that time he has been able to show extraordinary leadership. However, that really manifested itself as we moved towards the negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement. His ability to lead in the peace process, the political process and the reconciliation process has been quite extraordinary.

Over the past four years, he served as deputy First Minister, for the first year with the Rev Ian Paisley and for the three years after that with Peter Robinson. That working relationship between the deputy First Minister and First Minister has shown a collective leadership for all the people across the Six Counties.

I have no doubt that, as we move into this new term, Martin will continue to show all those leadership qualities and lead us collectively to a better place.

Once again, it is my great pleasure to nominate Martin McGuinness to be deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Mr McGuinness, are you willing to take up the office of deputy First Minister?

Mr M McGuinness: I am.

Mr Speaker: The Act requires that the persons nominated shall not take up office until they have affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. I will take points of order after this item of business is concluded.

When both Members nominated have done so and I have announced that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have taken up office, I will invite each of them to make a short address to the House.

I ask the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

Mr P Robinson: I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: I ask Mr Martin McGuinness to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

Mr M McGuinness: Dearbhaím téarmaí an ghealltanais. I affirm the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: I confirm that the Rt Hon Peter Robinson and Mr Martin McGuinness have affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office and have taken up office as First Minister and deputy First Minister in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I offer them both my congratulations and invite them to address the House.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I begin by congratulating you on your re-election as Speaker of the House.

It is a great honour for me to accept the nomination to be First Minister. It is a privilege, one that I find all the greater because it flows directly from the votes of the people. I am humbled by the trust that they have placed in me. However, there is no mistaking the message of the electorate; it is as plain as a pikestaff. The electorate made it very clear to all of us as we went around the doors that they wanted to see us create and safeguard employment. They want us to help the vulnerable in our society and improve front line services. However, they also want to see us unite this Province and create a shared society. In short — my party managers would not forgive me if I did not say this — they want to see us moving Northern Ireland forward.

I want to make it clear that there are those outside who think that they can disturb the will of the people through terrorism. There might even be some inside who think that they will do that by political means. To all of them I say that I will be a thorn in the flesh of anyone who tries to obstruct the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland. The truth is that this society works best when it works for all. I was at the Balmoral show yesterday, where I bumped into a gentleman who said that he travels around the world. In the past number of months, more than at any time in his life, he has been able to tell people whom he meets that he is proud to come from Northern Ireland.

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.

I congratulate all those who have been re-elected, and I congratulate those who have been elected for the first time. I also remember those who have not returned but who served the House and this community in the past. However, the elections are over, and now is the time to govern.

As a society, we owe much to those whose lives have been lost or damaged during this period of conflict. None of us should forget the past, but we must all live in the present and plan for the future.

The people have spoken. Their verdict is clear. The new Assembly gives us the chance of a fresh start with a renewed mandate. Let us use it to create the new Northern Ireland. Four years ago, we began a journey to a better future. Although there have been ups and downs along the way, that journey continues, but I am absolutely sure today, more than I have been at any time before, that Northern Ireland's best years lie ahead. Mr Speaker, I pledge to this Assembly today that I will work to make sure that those best days become a reality.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, to address the House.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé an-bhródúil le bheith ar ais arís mar LeasChéad Aire. First of all, congratulations to you on your election as Ceann Comhairle — as our Speaker.

I am very honoured to be back again as deputy First Minister in this Assembly representing Sinn Féin, and I thank my lifelong friend Pat Doherty for the nomination. At the end of the mandate in March, I said that it was tremendous that we had come through the full four-year term. It was the first time in almost 100 years that a locally elected Administration, elected by and truly representative of our community, had taken vital decisions and passed legislation of benefit to that community. In my view, that was a wonderful achievement. Of course, all that was tested during the election campaign. As the First Minister said, the message has come through loud and clear that, no matter what their allegiance, our people are telling us, their elected representatives, that they want us to work together.

At the beginning of the last term of our mandate, questions were asked about the DUP's mandate. It was said that it did not speak for the unionist people and that it had pulled a confidence trick in going into government with Sinn Féin. Whatever about the doubts then — personally, I had no doubts — there can be no doubt whatsoever about the result of this election. There can be no doubt about what people are saying to their elected representatives.

In her remarks, the leader of the SDLP, Margaret Ritchie, graciously conceded that the people were telling us to stop the bickering and infighting and to join together and unite on behalf of their interests. What are their interests? They are manifold. As Peter said, there are people outside who wish to destroy everything that has been built up over the past 15 years. They do not represent anybody but themselves and their own selfish objectives, and they now find themselves totally isolated from the opinions of the vast majority of the people who live on this island. So they have no mandate whatsoever. They may try to use the argument that conditions exist now that allow them to do that, but those conditions do not exist. The conditions that exist now are the conditions that the people have signed up for. They are the democratic conditions that we find ourselves returned to this House to observe and push forward.

I congratulate every single Member who has been elected to this Administration. The power-sharing North/South and east-west institutions and the agreements that flow from all that, whether they are at St Andrews or at Hillsborough, bind all of us together. There can be no question whatsoever about how, in pursuance of all that, we have improved the quality of our people's lives — for many, beyond belief. Many people thought that it could not happen and that there was no prospect whatsoever of unionists and republicans or nationalists coming together in a united way to push forward the governance arrangements that were established as a result of agreements. We have confounded them all. We have done it, and we have to continue to do it in the time ahead.

There are big issues facing us. Yes, we have different allegiances. There are people in the House whose allegiance is to what they call the United Kingdom. I am an Irish republican, and my allegiance is to the people of Ireland, but I

can work with people who observe a different flag without being offended by that. It is not too much to expect that they can work with me without being offended by the flag that I give my allegiance to.

There is a big challenge ahead. This was an election like no other in the history of the Northern state. This was an election where parties did not tear strips off one another, apart from the odd wee blow-up. On the whole, people recognised that something very powerful had happened during the past four years, and as we move forward —

Mr Allister: You would know all about that.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: As we move forward, we do so together, united, not fighting against each other in the battles that are out there but fighting one big battle in the interests of our people and doing so together. What is that battle? That battle is against the word "recession". It is against unemployment, disadvantage, inequality and poverty in our society. It is a battle for jobs.

One of the unique experiences that Peter Robinson and I had was travelling to the United States of America. On many occasions, Arlene Foster was with us. We can say without fear of contradiction that our united approach brought more jobs to the North of Ireland than have been brought at any other time in the history of the Northern state. Just think what more we can do if, for example, we can get an agreed outcome in the negotiations on corporation tax. We can bring thousands more jobs here.

The First Minister and I went to the Balmoral show, and we are involved in important negotiations about what to do with the Maze/Long Kesh site. We believe that that site can bring many thousands of jobs for our people. Much construction work can be done if we apply our talents and abilities to how we move forward to bring more jobs for our people, how we can protect front line services and how we ensure that we protect the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society. That is the work that I want to engage in over the next four years, not bickering and fighting with anybody.

When we leave here today, the First Minister and I, along with other party leaders, will go to Stormont Castle to set about that work. I want

us to get off on a good footing. I want us all to recognise that our people deserve better. Yes, the past four years were a huge success, but they could have been even more successful. We know what more needs to be done. Let us knuckle down to that in the coming period. Let us confound everybody. Let us continue to work together in a united way and ensure that we continue to improve the quality of the lives of the people whom we represent. We can do that without undermining the political allegiances that we have in this House. That is the spirit in which I am going forward.

It was an honour to work with Ian Paisley during what were historic times. It has been an honour to work with Peter Robinson over the past three years, and I look forward to the work of the next four years. We can do it but only if we stand together. United we stand, divided we fall.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Allister has a point of order.

Mr Allister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Have the norms of procedure in the House been so distorted that, although we are filling the offices of joint First Ministers, we deny the opportunity to debate that proposition, particularly in circumstances where one of those is a self-confessed terrorist commander?

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. I can almost guess what he is raising in points of order; I am almost ahead of him. However, the Member should read about the process and read the Act. This process is for nominations; it is not an election, as was the case with the Speaker and Deputy Speakers. There is no requirement for a debate on this issue — *[Interruption.]* Order.

That concludes this item of business, and we shall now move on.

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership

Resolved:

That the Business Committee shall consist of:

The Speaker (Ex officio)

Mr S Dickson

Mr J McCallister

Mr C McDevitt

Mr P Maskey

Lord Morrow

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Mr P Ramsey

Mr R Swann

Mr P Weir — [Mr Speaker.]

Mr Speaker: I advise the House that the Business Committee is scheduled to meet 15 minutes after the House rises to consider further business. An Order Paper for the next meeting will be issued as soon as possible.

Adjourned at 3.25 pm.

