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Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Owen Paterson MP - Washington USA Wednesday 16 March 2011

WEDNESDAY 16 MARCH 2011

Extracts from speech by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Owen Paterson MP - Washington USA Wednesday 16 March 2011

(Supporting the political institutions)

.....I was very fortunate when David Cameron appointed me last May to be the first Secretary of State to take on the job with devolution largely completed.

Most of the key public services, like health, education and policing, are run by locally elected and accountable politicians. And politics is more stable than for more than a generation.

The Coalition Government in London stands fully behind the political institutions established over the past decade. We want to see devolved government work.

And we want to see the closest practical co-operation between North and South and between the administrations in London, Belfast and Dublin.

In a few weeks the Northern Ireland Assembly will complete its first full four year term. Given the history and legacy of the past forty years that is an achievement.

But people have a right to expect more; survival cannot be an end in itself. Over the course of the next Assembly the demands on politicians to deliver and make a real difference to people's lives will increase.

And there will be pressure for the institutions to evolve. I'm on record as saying that over time I would like to see a more normal system, with a government and opposition, consistent with power sharing and inclusiveness.

Equally, however, I have stated that any changes to the current institutions could only come about through agreement between the parties in the Assembly.

(The Union and consent)

Let me also be clear about one other issue. My party and the Government believe in the United Kingdom.

David Cameron and I have said many times that we will never be neutral in expressing our support for the Union. That remains the case.

We want the United Kingdom to endure and prosper. But ultimately the constitutional future of Northern Ireland is not a matter for me as Secretary of State or David Cameron as Prime Minister to decide, even though we have our own views.

As the Belfast Agreement makes clear: 'it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment...'

So be in no doubt. We support the Agreement and the consent principle at the heart of it.



News Releases

Paterson Condemns Attack on Dolores Kelly

FRIDAY 15 APRIL 2011

PATERSON ATTENDS ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT HOMECOMING EVENTS IN MARKET DRAYTON AND SHREWSBURY

TUESDAY 12 APRIL 2011

Heed the Words of Cardinal Brady - Paterson

WEDNESDAY 6 APRIL 2011

Written Ministerial Statement - Publication of the Report of the Rosemary Nelson Inquiry

TUESDAY 5 APRIL 2011

Written Ministerial Statement - Two Year Extension to Non Jury Trial System

TUESDAY 5 APRIL 2011

Owen Paterson - Oral Statement on the Murder of Police Constable Ronan Kerr

MONDAY 4 APRIL 2011

The Coalition Government will always uphold the democratic wishes of the people in respect of their constitutional future.

We will also work closely with all parties and all parts of the community to build a peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland for everybody.

A Northern Ireland in which everybody is treated with equal respect – whatever their background or political aspirations.

We believe in a shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland. And we will always do the right thing for Northern Ireland – whether it's helping those people who lost their savings in the Presbyterian Mutual Society or apologising for Bloody Sunday.

(Economic recovery)

Central to our ambitions is the economy. Rebalancing the UK economy is a key priority of the Coalition Government after more than a decade of over reliance on public spending.

We need to encourage the private sector so that it can lead the recovery and ensure that we return to sustainable growth.

And reducing the record deficit we inherited is the single most important measure towards recovery and growth.

If we don't take steps now to live within our means, we'll end up paying higher taxes, higher interest rates and face far deeper cuts.

There would be slower growth, less investment and higher unemployment.

So we've established a credible plan for deficit reduction that has been endorsed by the IMF, the OECD, the European Commission, credit rating agencies and the leading business organisations.

But we have to do more than just reduce the deficit. Our aim is to be the most pro-growth Government in memory.

So growth will be at the heart of the Budget that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, will unveil next week.

(Northern Ireland open for business)

In Northern Ireland, for reasons we all understand, the overdependence on the public sector is more acute than elsewhere.

Don't get me wrong. Northern Ireland is an excellent location to do business.

Just ask the New York Stock Exchange or CitiGroup to name just two recent high profile investors.

In particular we benefit from...

...the English language ...excellent transport connections to the rest of the UK and Europe ...significantly better education results than other parts of the UK

...two brilliant universities ...highly competitive operating costs compared with the rest of the UK and Western Europe

...the first region in Europe to have 100 per cent broadband access ...Project Kelvin, a new 40 gig per second transatlantic link between North America, Northern Ireland and Western Europe ...a strongly pro-business climate led by the Northern Ireland Executive

...and, not least, the benefits of being part of the UK economy in which our structural deficit will be eliminated over the course of this Parliament and which is poised to return to steady growth.

(Corporation Tax)

But I believe that we can do even better. Northern Ireland has some world-class businesses; we just need more of them.

That's why, working with the Treasury and ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive, we are looking at some really radical measures to help make the private sector flourish and attract new investment.

One of these is to transfer responsibility for corporation tax from the Treasury to Stormont. I've been promoting this for the past three years and believe that it has the potential to make Northern Ireland a beacon for foreign investment.

So I very much hope that we shall be launching a major consultation on it within the next few days. And I'd encourage anyone thinking of investing overseas to watch this space closely.

(Residual Terrorists)

Unfortunately there are still some people who don't share our ambitions to make Northern Ireland a better place for everybody.

They want to undo the agreements and plunge Northern Ireland back into a dark past. They are small in number and have virtually no political or electoral support.

Bluntly, they offer absolutely nothing. Working with the Northern Ireland Justice Minister, the Chief Constable, the Irish Government and the excellent new Garda Commissioner we will ensure that they do not succeed.

That's why I've just agreed with the Treasury an exceptional four year, £200 million funding deal to enable the Chief Constable to tackle the residual terrorist threat.

As the Prime Minister has made clear, we will protect the people of Northern Ireland with all means at our disposal.

(Conclusion)

It's over three and a half years since David Cameron appointed me Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary and nearly a year since I've been doing the job for real in government. And I remain hugely optimistic for Northern Ireland's future. The main paramilitary campaigns have ended.

Devolved government has been restored. Relations within our islands have been normalised and have never been better.

New investment has come in. We can all look forward to a future underpinned by democracy and the rule of law.

So, in conclusion, thank you to those of you who maintain a positive interest and influence. And to any of you who might be less familiar with Northern Ireland, I look forward to welcoming you soon.

I guarantee that you won't be disappointed.