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Bonnie *Plan PIA*
W. McLaughlin
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93938 SER EI
74163 STOCAS G
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'CHANCE FOR A REAL POLITICAL DIALOGUE'-KING

SPEAKING AT STORMONT ON HIS RETURN TO NORTHERN IRELAND THE SECRETARY OF STATE, RT HON TOM KING MP, SAID:-

'I'M VERY PLEASED INDEED TO BE HERE AGAIN AND TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO RENEW MY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE PROVINCE. I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE CLEAR THAT I DISCUSSED IT WITH THE PRIME MINISTER BEFORE THE ELECTION, AND I MADE CLEAR TO HER THEN THAT, IF WE WERE SUCCESSFUL IN THE ELECTION, AND IF SHE ASKED ME TO DO SO, I WOULD BE VERY HAPPY INDEED TO RESUME MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

IN MY JUDGEMENT THERE IS NO MORE CHALLENGING JOB IN GOVERNMENT THAN THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT I HAVE THE HONOUR TO HOLD FOR THE PROVINCE. NOR I THINK IS THERE ANYWHERE THAT I KNOW WHERE ANY IMPROVEMENTS THAT WE CAN MAKE CAN MEET MORE OBVIOUSLY THE NEED, WHETHER IT BE NEED FOR MORE JOBS IN THE EMPLOYMENT SIDE OR THE NEED TO TRY AND LIFT THE BURDEN OF FEAR AND PERSONAL TRAGEDY THAT HAS AFFECTED SO MANY IN THE PROVINCE.

THE GREAT CHALLENGE THAT WE FACE NOW IS THE NEED TO BREAK THE DEADLOCK OVER POLITICAL DIALOGUE AND I THINK EVERYBODY RECOGNISES THAT WHILE PEOPLE WERE WAITING FOR THE ELECTION, THE CHANCE OF ANY REAL DIALOGUE WAS VERY SLIM INDEED. NOW THAT ELECTION IS OVER, NOW WE HAVE A SITUATION IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN RETURNED, WITH A STRONG MAJORITY. THEREFORE THE TIME HAS NOW COME WHEN WE CAN LOOK TO THE FUTURE AND SEE IF WE CAN FIND A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY FORWARD. I'M ABSOLUTELY SURE, FROM ALL MY EXPERIENCE IN THE PROVINCE, AND ALL THE DISCUSSIONS THAT I'VE HAD AND THE LISTENING THAT I'VE DONE, THAT THAT IS WHAT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN THE PROVINCE NOW WANT.

I'M MOST ENCOURAGED TO SEE, AND I THINK ALL THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES REAFFIRMED THEIR BELIEF IN THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE, SO THE OPPORTUNITY IS NOW THERE, AND I WANT TO MAKE CLEAR THAT I SHALL BE VERY ANXIOUS INDEED TO RESPOND SYMPATHETICALLY TO ANY PROPOSALS THEY MAY PUT FORWARD. THIS IS NOW A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PROVINCE AND, AFTER ALL THE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES THAT WE FACED IN MONTHS GONE BY, THAT OPPORTUNITY IS NOW THERE AND I VERY MUCH HOPE THAT NOW TOGETHER WE CAN ALL TAKE IT.'

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