



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Tributes to Lord Trimble,
Former First Minister

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Tributes to Lord Trimble, Former First Minister

Mr Speaker: Members will have been saddened to learn of the passing of the former First Minister the Rt Hon the Lord Trimble. Members gather today to provide an opportunity to pay our respects to Lord Trimble. After I have paid my tributes, I will invite Members to pay their respects.

Members, we meet today to pay our respects to the Rt Hon the Lord Trimble, who, sadly, passed away last week. It is only right that we gather in the Chamber to pay tribute to Lord Trimble, who holds the distinction of being the first First Minister of the Assembly and a Nobel laureate. It is one of the regrettable aspects of life and politics that it is often only on the passing of a colleague that we take the time to recognise the good that they did. I reflected on that with Daphne Trimble yesterday.

During the negotiations around the creation and implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and particularly when David was First Minister and I was the Sinn Féin Chief Whip, I had the privilege of regular discussions with David and his colleagues during that turbulent first mandate of the Assembly. With the passage of time, there is always the risk that our society forgets how far we have come and the historic nature of the Good Friday Agreement.

David, as people have referred to, was a complex and thoughtful character. As the leader of unionism, he carried a heavy burden. It struck me that he was always juggling between his heart and head in making his next call, but his head nearly always won. I recall an occasion when we were dealing with the latest round of crisis negotiations in Hillsborough Castle. David agreed to have a one-to-one meeting with Gerry Adams when, in truth, it was probably not politically very helpful for him to do so. I spoke to David to sort out the arrangements as he was waiting to see Tony Blair. As I spoke to David, I could see that he was trying to figure out how he could manage all of the calls on his time that day, including an operatic concert for a good cause that he strongly supported and, in his heart, clearly wanted to attend. David reached the conclusion that he could not do everything that people wanted him to do that day; it looked like the one-to-one meeting would have to wait. A short time later, word came back from David with arrangements for the meeting. He decided not to leave, and the negotiations made some progress. However, it took David a week or two before he spoke to me again afterwards.

There is no doubt that David Trimble took risks and took decisions, often in the face of fierce opposition, when it would have been personally easier for him not to do so. David and his family made sacrifices and paid a personal price for the leadership that he showed, but the Good Friday Agreement and the Assembly exist because of him and them. It is, therefore, fitting that, on the walls of the corridor leading to the Chamber, David features prominently in the images of the key milestones in the life of the Assembly.

I recognise today that the passing of Lord Trimble is, of course, a time of deep sadness for his party. We pass our sympathies to our Ulster Unionist colleagues. However, as always, our first thoughts are with the family in mourning. I extend my sympathies to Daphne and David's four children: Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah. Over the past decade, we have seen the passing of some of the most significant figures in recent political history, all of whom sought to make this place work: in the order of their passing, Ian Paisley, Martin McGuinness, Séamus Mallon, John Hume and David Trimble. Although many of you in the Chamber today may not have met them, the legacy of realising the potential of the Assembly and the agreements that were hard won now falls to you.

I now invite party leaders or their representatives to speak for about five minutes to pay tribute to Lord Trimble. I will then call Members as they rise in their place. I will not impose strict time constraints, but I encourage Members to be brief — probably no more than three minutes — to give time for as many Members as possible to contribute in the time that I have allocated for the tributes. When tributes have concluded, we will have a minute's silence. Members are then welcome to join me in signing the book of condolence in the Great Hall. The book of condolence will be available for Members, staff and visitors to the Building to sign. Members will now pay their respects.

Mr Beattie: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for facilitating this event, which is only fitting as we remember David. David came from a political era that very few here will remember, maybe bar yourself. It is difficult at times for those who did not live through it to fully understand the impact that David Trimble had on Northern Ireland and the wider island. Many in the Chamber will not realise that, before 1998, unionists and nationalists would not even be seen in the same room together, never mind share a handshake or form a Government with joint responsibilities. Yet, yesterday, at David's humble and dignified funeral, handshakes and pats on the shoulder were offered freely from every political corner with warm words of condolence. That is progress.

I am conscious, standing here today as the current Ulster Unionist party leader, that I do not have the words that will truly give tribute to a man committed to peace whose decisions shaped this island and its people and saved lives. David's life was one of service, of courage, and his vision was focused on peace. Ending the sectarian divide by bringing people together while promoting and protecting Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom was what David worked for tirelessly.

Above all else, David wanted to protect the Union, knowing that others did not wish similarly, and understood that others had different aspirations. He knew that people from all corners of society must want to live here, work here and raise their families and call Northern Ireland "home". That was his mission. His mission's success was the Belfast Agreement. He knew that we would have different points of view but we could and should work together. I quote Nelson Mandela:

"Negotiation and discussion are the greatest weapons we have for promoting peace and development."

David knew that. David knew that because David was a strategic thinker, unlike so many tactical, short-term thinkers of today. I am saddened that, while we speak so highly of him in death, we failed to do similarly in life. We should understand what David really gave to us all, to Northern Ireland, to the island and to the whole of the United Kingdom.

The last time that I met David was in early April of this year. I was not able to go to Queen's University to see the unveiling of his portrait, because I had COVID, but he joined me in Portadown in his constituency to go canvassing. I remember him getting out of the car park and Lady Trimble — Daphne — coming to me and saying, "David is very frail, so just do a couple of doors. Knock a few doors, let him speak to a few people, and then I will take him home." David was having absolutely none of it. He knocked every door. He stood there, and, when people came out, he engaged with them on what his legacy was, what our future was and the problems that we were facing here and now. He was surrounded by young unionists, which, I thought, was fitting. From one political generation, he was handing on to another political generation all his thoughts and feelings. There was

a fire in his eye for politics. Of course he was frail — we all saw how frail he was — but there was a genuine fire in his eyes and a fire in his belly, and you could see that as he spoke to people.

David was still very committed to politics, and, of course, the last issue that he dealt with was the protocol. He made known his views about the protocol. He thought that the protocol undermined the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and we have said that time and time again. It has irked me on many occasions that people have said that the protocol protects the Belfast Agreement, when David was saying that it was damaging it, but that is for another day. That is not for today. David knew that with intense complexities come intense simplicities; that is a quote from Winston Churchill.

Lots of people will say kind words today, and I want to finish by mentioning two people who surrounded David in 1998 and leading up to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Of course, there were an awful lot more, but I do not have time to mention them all. The first, clearly, is John Hume. Without David, there would never have been a Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, but, without John Hume, we would have had no pathway to get there. Those two brave, courageous men, who were visionaries, stood shoulder to shoulder to give us the peace that we have today. They must be remembered together. The second person is Lady Daphne Trimble, who was far more than just a wife to David. She was his strength when he was in doubt. She shared with him the hard times and the abusive messages. Daphne was a driving force who lived the sleepless nights, the troublesome days and the endless media interpretations of her husband's actions.

Lord David Trimble was the first First Minister, an MP, a peer of the realm and a Nobel prize winner, but he was also a husband, a father, a grandfather and a brother. My thoughts are foremost with Lady Trimble, Richard, Victoria, Sarah and Nicholas and the wider family circle, friends and colleagues, and with Northern Ireland, which has lost a giant of a politician the likes of whom we are not likely to see again.

Mrs O'Neill: I join colleagues across the House to convey my sympathy and that of those on these Benches and in the Sinn Féin party to the family and friends of the late David Trimble, whose service of thanksgiving we celebrated in Lisburn yesterday. In particular, I offer my condolences to David's wife, Daphne, and their four children, Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah. The loss of David Trimble is a significant moment in our political tapestry, but it is first and foremost a devastating loss to his family, his friends and his colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party. Our thoughts are with you all at this time.

I did not know David Trimble personally; I knew him only by his reputation as a former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party during the 1998 Good Friday Agreement negotiations. There is no doubt whatever that he made a huge contribution not only in reaching that historic agreement but by getting his party to sign on for it despite the huge challenges that he faced. He went on to lead the new Executive as First Minister and joint head of Government with the late Séamus Mallon of the SDLP. David served not only as First Minister and Member of the Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Upper Bann but as an MP and later as a life peer in the House of Lords since 2006. He has left behind a legacy of hard work and commitment to creating a better and a peaceful society that will always be to his credit. Despite our different political outlooks and the fundamentally different political opinions that we held on the constitutional way forward, I respect those differences, which are all equally legitimate aspirations that are held dearly by all of us and by those of us who are from different political traditions on these islands.

Today, I put on record our recognition and our respect for the courage and generosity and the personal risks that were taken by David Trimble to achieve peace in Ireland. As we mourn his passing, let those of us in the House today reflect on the present realities and, a quarter of a century on from the hard-won peace, recognise that only through political maturity, civility and cooperation will politics work and deliver for the people whom we all serve collectively. Next year we will mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. It would be a travesty if the political accommodation, which our agreement is, the political institutions, the relationships North/South and east-west are not reset between now and then.

I have no doubt that history will be very kind to David Trimble for the huge part that he played, but it will be equally unforgiving to those of you who obstruct progress or refuse to show leadership. What was achieved by David Trimble together with the leaders of nationalism and republicanism, the Irish and British Governments, the United States and the EU should not be underestimated. It can also never be taken for granted. He and all of them leave a legacy of which any politician would be rightly proud. The Good Friday Agreement is a gift to today's generation, and its promise must be fully realised. I stand here today as a leader of the Good Friday Agreement generation. I want to lead, and I want to work with all of you and with those whom you represent. Anyone who sets out to undermine that work and who turns this place upside down should not be in politics.

We are thankful for the work and the contribution of Mr David Trimble, former First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive, husband to Daphne and father to Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah. May he rest in peace.

Mr Poots: First, I express my sincere sympathies to Lady Daphne Trimble, Victoria, Richard, Nicholas and Sarah at this difficult time. As with all such occasions, whilst everyone can express their sympathy, the people who really feel the pain are the family, and our thoughts and prayers are with them at this time.

My first awareness of David Trimble was back in 1973. He stood in the election for the Vanguard Unionists. My father also stood in that election. David Trimble was not successful. He was a young man then, and he did not get elected. Then, in 1985, I sat with him on a group in Lagan Valley responding to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We were devising peaceful means of protesting against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which David had taken great exception to. As a constitutional lawyer, he had significant grounds for doing that. I then joined him in the Forum in 1996 when he led the Ulster Unionist Party into the talks. A group of us went to South Africa in 1997, and it was a significant time. First, we met the lead people in South Africa who were engaged in the peace negotiations there. One thing that I remember clearly was Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer indicating that, whenever they hit intractable problems in the process, they pigeonholed them, came back to them at a later point and dealt with the problems that they could deal with. Some weeks after returning from South Africa, David Trimble chose to do that when it came to the issue of decommissioning. I believe that that was a key point in encouraging David Trimble to take that decision. Obviously, in 1998, we got to the Assembly and the agreement itself.

I am one of only four people who sat in that Assembly with David Trimble who is in the Chamber now. We had our exchanges — quite robust exchanges — and I certainly hope that David enjoyed those exchanges as much as I did. Those challenges in politics are good for it. I made a number of observations about David Trimble over that time. First, his ability and intellect were evident for all to

see. His attention to detail was second to none. He was so focused on the detail that, sometimes, he did not focus on the message. He was brave in that he took on the challenges that came his way. They were not easy, particularly in a constituency like Upper Bann where the unionist population is very strong. They were certainly uneasy with much of what he was doing, and that transpired in future elections, but he was a dedicated unionist.

In the latter days, David gave his opinion on the Northern Ireland protocol. I will quote what he had to say, because it is important that, when we are remembering David Trimble the peacemaker and his role in the Belfast Agreement, we listen to the views that he articulated on the issue. Writing in 'The Irish Times', he said:

"This false mantra of protecting the Belfast Agreement and keeping the peace in Northern Ireland has become the shield behind which the EU, the Irish Government, nationalist parties in Northern Ireland, UK politicians, and even ... president Joe Biden hide behind when challenged about the damage to democracy and the economy in Northern Ireland as a result of the protocol. They believe, by invoking the hard-won agreement that I helped negotiate 23 years ago ... justify the indefensible attack on the rights and livelihood of all Northern Ireland citizens that the"

— unpractical —

"and unreasonable ... requirements impose on the part of the UK in which I live. But rather than the protocol protecting the Belfast Agreement, the fact is it is pulling it apart."

We would do well to listen to the words of David Trimble over the next number of weeks. I trust that we will get the Executive up and running. I trust that we will ensure that the peace that has existed in Northern Ireland over the last 25 years exists for many years to come and that we will give political leadership in doing that.

Mr Muir: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I rise today with my thoughts first and foremost at hand to offer my sincere condolences to Lord David Trimble's family, including, most especially, his wife, Lady Daphne Trimble, and his children Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah. In speaking today, I am conscious that many are mourning the loss of a family man and a close Ulster Unionist and Conservative party colleague. My thoughts and prayers are with you all today.

In rising to speak about Lord David Trimble, I am aware, as a North Down MLA, that David was a Bangor boy. He grew up on Victoria Road in Bangor, attended Bangor Grammar School and, for so many years, was a member of Bangor Abbey LOL, with which he was often seen out parading in Bangor on the Twelfth. I am also aware of a complex character who could be thran at times but who was a family man to his core and whose portrait rightly hangs in the Great Hall behind me to record his positive contribution to this place and to Northern Ireland more generally.

There are many things on which I and Lord Trimble would have differed, but I come here today in the knowledge that we all get involved in politics often for one common purpose: to leave this place that we are privileged to represent in a better state than we found it. To that, David Trimble made a significant, substantial and positive contribution, rightly recorded in history and recognised by the award of the Nobel peace prize alongside John Hume.

In giving thanks, it is important to realise that Lord David Trimble's work was done in the context of some of our darkest days in Northern Ireland. There are, sadly, too many to recall, but the horrific atrocity that unfolded in Omagh remains etched in my mind. I can still also remember the scenes in Poyntzpass on 3 March 1998 following the double murder of lifelong friends Philip Allen and Damien Trainor in the Railway Bar. When David Trimble and Séamus Mallon walked through the village, it gave me hope when it was in such short supply.

Lord David Trimble's work was also done at great personal cost, with armed protection required for so many years. The scenes of him and Daphne being badly jostled at the election count in 2001 told a story of leadership. His wife and family endured the most horrendous verbal and physical abuse, but, despite that, he did not quit; he fought on. At the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, he could have walked away when others left, but he stayed. Despite colleagues publicly arguing against him, he persevered.

While working in the Grand Opera House in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I was often witness to the latest goings-on at the Ulster Unionist Party offices, with the media performances from the pro- and anti-Trimble factions of the party sometimes more regular and, perhaps, more popular than the shows that we were putting on. Despite that, due to the courage and tenacity of many, including Lord Trimble, the Good Friday Agreement, unlike other agreements, has endured, serving, in effect, as a new constitution for our new Northern Ireland.

Thankfully, Northern Ireland is a very different place now from what it was in 1998, but we should not kid ourselves that we do not have much further to travel: we do. The prize of a truly reconciled people, a place that everyone is proud to call "Home" and fully functioning institutions remains, sadly, yet to be achieved. With so many of the giants of the peace process no longer with us, current and future generations turn to us in the Chamber today to take the baton and complete the journey set out in 1998.

In closing, the words of Martin Luther King come to mind. He remarked:

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Lord David Trimble measured up very well against that test. For his service, courage and leadership, I give thanks.

Mr O'Toole: Many of us in politics will pause at times to think, "Why am I doing this?". A small number of politicians are engaged in it simply in order to be someone. Most of us, I hope, are in politics to do something. Very few politicians are able to claim a record of achievement as profound as that of David Trimble, Lord Trimble. He led unionism to a historic and far-reaching compromise that created, among other things, the institution in which we meet today.

Since the creation of this jurisdiction a century ago, successive leaders of unionism had struggled to deliver meaningful compromise without attracting the demon accusations of Lundyism and treason. Trimble faced those accusations but stuck at it. Dogged, diffident and sometimes difficult, he used a sharp, penetrating legal mind and remarkable tenacity, as well as the strategic insight mentioned earlier, to achieve and then, critically, to implement a deal that esteemed both historical traditions and constitutional aspirations and acknowledged the interconnectedness of this island and both islands.

In the SDLP, we feel a particularly acute sadness at the passing of David Trimble, our partner in peace and co-Nobel laureate, as he was, with John Hume who served in the first First Minister's office alongside Séamus Mallon and then Mark Durkan. They, along with others, walked that difficult road of peacemaking together.

David Trimble was a committed and convinced unionist, but he was more than that. He had an ethical and intellectual analysis of this complex place that went beyond a simply one-dimensional perspective. His Nobel lecture stands as a particularly eloquent and insightful testament, and he used that eloquence not only to articulate his historical position and that of the community he represented but to acknowledge the experience of others. The Northern Ireland state, he said, had been:

“a solid house, but ... a cold house for Catholics”.

Those were important, resonant words.

If David Trimble was sometimes criticised by his opponents and nationalists for being difficult or sometimes hesitant in selling the deal that he negotiated, it must also be said that he did more than any other unionist leader to acknowledge the shortcomings in the post-partition settlement and find creative, ambitious ways of building something better. Lives are better in this place because of David Trimble. Lives were saved because of him. His place in British and Irish history is assured.

As well as passing on our condolences to his Ulster Unionist colleagues today, who are rightly proud of his legacy, we want to pay special tribute, as others have, to Lord Trimble's family: his wife Daphne and his children, Richard, Sarah, Nicholas and Victoria. They, too, had to walk the difficult road of peacemaking with their husband and father, supporting him but also coping with absences and what must, at times, have felt like unbearable stress.

We have lost one of the architects of the hopeful future promised in 1998. Coincidentally, tomorrow is the two-year anniversary of the passing of John Hume. Other leaders mentioned earlier have passed in recent years too. Meanwhile, this institution languishes, and the public grow ever more cynical about its existence. Twenty-four years on, nearly a quarter of a century, from the creation of the Good Friday Agreement, a generation of architects of peace, of master builders — prime among them David Trimble — are passing. If we want to honour them, we need to start building again.

Mr Tennyson: I, too, would like to add my condolences on the passing of Lord Trimble, particularly to his wife Daphne; his children, Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah; and to the wider family circle. I also extend my sympathies to Lord Trimble's colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party, who, I am sure, are feeling the weight of the loss of a mentor and a friend. While, of course, it is those closest to Lord Trimble who will feel his loss most acutely, all of us in Northern Ireland are the poorer for his passing.

Lord Trimble will, of course, be remembered for the role he played in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement. He was courageous and crucial, taking political risks to secure support in his own party and in the wider community as well as to steady these institutions in their infancy. It was, at times, an unenviable task, and, yet, his dedication to public service and commitment to peace remained unwavering and uncompromising. It was that very dedication and commitment that has now earned Lord Trimble a well-deserved and distinguished place in our history books.

Now, I may not have been around when the agreement was signed. I am fortunate enough not to have lived through the horrors of the Troubles, but I am also young enough to have benefited fully from the achievements of Lord Trimble and all those who reached across bitter divides in 1998 in the pursuit of a better future for me and my generation. It is thanks to him and others like him that I have had the opportunity to serve in the Chamber and grow up in a more peaceful and prosperous society than that of my parent's generation. For that, I and, I believe, all of us owe Lord Trimble an enormous debt of gratitude. Twenty-four years on, he and those around him set us on a path to reconciliation. The best and most fitting tribute that we in the Chamber can now pay is to complete that journey, to show that same courage and determination and to work together to finally realise the full potential of 1998 and the legacy that he has gifted to us.

Mr Givan: David Trimble, the first First Minister, was a man who was prepared to take on responsibility and lead in the most challenging of times, in those early years of the institutions that were created from the Belfast Agreement, and I admire and respect a man who is prepared to take on that responsibility. It is undeniable that the institutions where we now sit and seek to serve the people of Northern Ireland owe their creation to David Trimble and the pivotal role that he played in their establishment through the agreement that he struck in the Belfast Agreement. He was a committed devolutionist, someone who was committed to the principle of power sharing, and fundamentally important to him and what he sought to achieve in the Belfast Agreement was the principle of consent. Those are ideals that I share: power sharing, the principle of consent, working together and making this place work.

What struck me about David Trimble was how he commanded ultra-loyalty from his closest friends, and I could see that yesterday at the funeral. People followed him because they believed he had a vision and the strength of character to lead to where he wanted to go to achieve his objectives, and those people have been ultra-loyal to him. I know that, on the Benches beside me, the Ulster Unionist Party is feeling the pain of that loss. Some are here because of David Trimble. They got into politics because of David Trimble. I want to pass on my condolences to you at this time. That loyalty was forged in the heat of battle, and David Trimble faced many battles. He stood strong in the position that he held. He was prepared to back himself, and, again, I admire and respect David Trimble because, once he took a decision, he was prepared to go out to defend it and to sell it. I admire the courage that David Trimble showed.

David Trimble was not just the first First Minister; he was a family man. That came out yesterday at the funeral. He liked to go narrowboating on canals in England, reading books at length. Even when on holiday, church had an important role for David, and they sought a church service that they could go to. His family have paid a price that none of us will be able to testify to properly. There were the lonely hours when Daphne was worried about her husband and the threats that he endured and was under: "Would he come home? When was he coming home?". The children would often have seen their father being subjected to much ridicule and, indeed, receiving much support. They can tell a story that none of us can properly tell. I thank Daphne and the family for the sacrifice that they made in supporting their husband and father, David Trimble.

I will close my remarks with one of the verses that were read at the church service yesterday. It is from Psalm 34:

*"I will extol the Lord at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.
I will glory in the Lord;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
Glorify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together."*

Mr Elliott: Mr Speaker, I thank you for holding this event and giving us this opportunity. It would be fitting for us to look round and see what is here. I do not think that any of us would be sitting in here if it were not for David Trimble.

I had the privilege of being a Member of the Assembly with David and his colleague in the Ulster Unionist Party. David was the first person whom I ever witnessed speed-reading documents. When I joined the Assembly, I thought, "Do we all have to learn that trade?". I certainly could not have done it. What amazed me was that he was able to speed-read and take in the detail of the documents. That is something that has lived with me.

I thought that, apart from being Ulster Unionist Party colleagues, I did not have a great lot in common with David Trimble — he was an academic, and I certainly was not — but I learned yesterday that we had something in common: we did not always get a good school report. That is particularly relevant to me.

David Trimble was committed. He was committed to his family, the Union, Northern Ireland and devolution. I always admired the fact that, whatever David Trimble said and took on, he believed in it. Sometimes, people take on an argument, debate or issue when they, personally, may not believe in it, but David Trimble did not. He absolutely believed in it.

We have heard and witnessed people lauding the Belfast Agreement who may not have lauded it at the time. I have always thought that David Trimble might have been bitter about that, but I do not believe that he was. I believe that David Trimble thought, "If those people want to laud the Belfast Agreement and what we did at that time, so be it. If it will make Northern Ireland a better place and is for the benefit of the community, by all means, do it and take it on". I believe that he was not bitter about that at all.

Unfortunately, his career as an elected politician was cut short, and I believe that that was because people let him down. The UK and Irish Governments let him down. They saw an opportunity to bring other people into the fold and to the fore, and they let David Trimble and others down at that time. He was also let down by the IRA, which refused to decommission. David Trimble could have had a much longer career as an elected politician only for that.

Finally, I offer my sympathy to Lady Daphne Trimble and to their family, Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah, at this very difficult time. I wish them well, and I hope and trust that David's legacy will be something that they can remember.

Mr McGrath: I, too, offer my sincerest condolences to David Trimble's family: his wife, Daphne, and his children, Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah. David was, first and foremost, a husband and father. For them as a family, this is a time for grieving, and we offer our condolences to them.

David Trimble was a former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. I extend my condolences to them as his political family who worked with him over the years and through some of the most difficult times in our history.

Lord Trimble knew the importance of taking difficult political decisions, and he took the significant flak that goes with taking those difficult decisions. That requires somebody who is very brave in the work that they do. During those times, as we moved towards the Good Friday Agreement, I was completing my time in university and moving into the world of work. Amongst my generation, you could sense that people knew that something significant had happened and that something really different was taking place that would allow our lives to be completely different and better. Many among my generation are thankful for the work of David Trimble and others in delivering that change. Irish history will reflect the decisions, work, effort, sacrifices and valour that David displayed, and British history will do likewise. It has already been said that many people would undoubtedly be dead today if it were not for the decisions that Lord Trimble took and the hard work and effort that he, along with some of my SDLP colleagues and others in the House and others who have passed on, put in.

I will go back to where I started: this is, first and foremost, a family time. I offer my condolences to the Trimble family and to the Ulster Unionists.

Ms Bunting: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for making arrangements for us to pay our respects to Lord Trimble in this way and in the Chamber. Given his place in our history and our Assembly, it is right that we gather in this place and not in the Senate Chamber to mark his passing.

It is sad for us all that yet another household name — a key player in our political history and in the establishment of what was then known as the “New Northern Ireland Assembly” — has passed. As our first First Minister, Lord Trimble led Northern Ireland through difficult days in the course of difficult times.

I did not know Lord Trimble personally. I voted against the Belfast Agreement; indeed, when he was in Hillsborough Castle negotiating, I was outside protesting. I have, however, worked here since the beginning, and so I have many memories. In those days, the political debates were, some would say, passionate — others would say that they were brutal — but the atmosphere was always electric. It was different then. Queues would form as the general public, guests of Members, Assembly officials and party staff lined up to secure a place in the Gallery, excited to watch and listen as the big beasts of our day — big beasts they were, seasoned politicians and operators forged in the worst of our experiences — traded verbal blows on the constitutional position, exclusion and confidence motions. It was not for the faint-hearted. Those who were newer to the scene were honing their craft, eager to build reputations and to prove their mettle in the first Assembly for a generation. A small few of them remain MLAs to this day.

At that time, it felt like the heart and soul of Northern Ireland were at stake. It was always teetering on the verge of collapse, and it did collapse. As ever, trust was at a minimum — does that sound familiar? — but Lord Trimble ploughed on. He persevered in the face of staunch opposition and at personal cost, because of the courage of his convictions and his firmly held belief that he was doing the right thing. That is an admirable quality.

I recall from those times a formidable, robust and sharp opponent with little patience and a “Take no nonsense” attitude but an opponent whose face lit up when he laughed and whose whole upper body shook and joined in his amusement and merriment.

Lord Trimble’s dedication to the agreement that he co-authored remained prevalent right until the end, when he warned of the fatal damage being done to it by the protocol, to which he was vociferous in his opposition. Even up to recent days, he used his skill, intellect, considerable influence and strong advocacy for the good of his country and the Union that he loved.

As Chief Whip, I wish, on behalf of the DUP, to express condolences to our friends and colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party. We have been in your position. We know your sadness, and we extend our heartfelt sympathies to you as you come to terms with a massive and significant loss.

The keenest loss will be felt by Lady Trimble and the children. They will be a family in unspeakable pain and sorrow that many, if not most, in the House will know and understand. While words do not and cannot change the circumstances, we trust that the Trimble family will have been carried along and, to some extent, upheld in recent days by the tributes that paid to their loved one and the worldwide esteem in which he was held. We are immensely sorry for your loss. Please know that we are thinking of you and praying for you all in this time of grief that the Lord will draw near, bring you comfort and bless you richly with happy memories of not just the politician Lord Trimble whom the public saw but the David Trimble — husband and dad — whom only you knew.

Mr Allister: I have known David Trimble for most of my adult life. When I enrolled as a student in the law faculty at Queen’s University, David was one of my lecturers. You did not have to sit long in a David Trimble lecture or tutorial to recognise that you were in the presence of a supreme academic and an intellectual of giant proportions. David manfully did his best to teach me two of the driest subjects in the legal curriculum: land law and equity. His lack of success in attaining enthusiasm on my part for those subjects was a failure not on his part but on mine.

There was a fellow student in respect of whom David subsequently engendered great enthusiasm in a different and far more lasting sphere. Of course, my fellow student Miss Daphne Orr went on to become Mrs Daphne Trimble. What a rock Daphne has been for David through the years. It was clear to all that, during his most turbulent political years, Daphne was indeed that rock. Of course, in more recent times of failing health, she was a tower of strength to him. And so our thoughts today, first and foremost, are with Lady Daphne and their four children and wider family. It does not matter how big a name one might have or how huge a household name someone might be; it is in the bosom of their family that they are loved and missed most, and so it will be in the Trimble household.

Of course, David Trimble’s name is synonymous with the Belfast Agreement, and there I come to the territory where I disagreed with David Trimble. To me and some other unionists, the Belfast Agreement was built on the mass injustice of the release of hundreds of terrorists of all shades onto our streets as a precursor to terrorists in government. That was all part of a structure that has proved to be failing and dysfunctional ever since. One of the reasons why it is failing and dysfunctional is that, although to David, perhaps, and, certainly, to the unionists who voted for it, the Belfast Agreement was meant to be a settlement, it was to republicans and nationalists only ever a process, in which the insatiable had to be fed ever-constant concessions, thus creating the very instability from which it continues to suffer.

Although I disagreed fundamentally with David about the Belfast Agreement, I have to say this: David Trimble was more honest politically in his espousal, promotion and operation of the Belfast Agreement than those who supplanted him as the leaders of unionism, supplanting him by vilification of his agreement and of the man to an extent that was often vicious and unnecessary. Having so vilified and destroyed, the very same people and party then donned the political clothes of David Trimble to operate to the full the very same agreement that they had vilified throughout those years. That is why I say that David Trimble was more honest in his espousal of the Belfast Agreement than those — or some of those — who vilified him.

That political dishonesty was compounded by the pretence that, at St Andrews, radical change was made to the Belfast Agreement. The only radical change was a change for the worse, whereby the First Minister now comes not from the biggest designation in the House but from the biggest party. That move of short-termism and self-serving interest, primarily by the DUP, causes us now, even though unionism is still the biggest designation in the House, to look at the prospect of a Sinn Féin First Minister and the lead party of the biggest designation, the DUP, acting as their hapless bridesmaid. Yes, I disagreed with David Trimble very much about the Belfast Agreement, but I recognise that he was the more honest one when it came to the espousal and promotion of that agreement.

I am happy that, in latter times, I found common cause with Lord Trimble in opposing the protocol. He was, of course, a joint applicant in the ongoing judicial review challenge to that protocol. I am very grateful — as unionism should be — for the intellectual dissection that David applied to the protocol, identifying and seeing that it presented peril not only to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland but to the very institutions that he sought to create. The clear message is that a choice will come for adherents to the protocol: do they want to cling to the protocol, or do they want to cling to the agreement that David Trimble formed? Frankly, I do not believe that you can have both. I think that David Trimble saw that, when he said that the protocol was ripping the heart out of the agreement.

I will finish where I started by expressing again our heartfelt sympathy for Lady Daphne and the Trimble children. Mr Speaker, if I might, by an uncanny coincidence, another lecturer of mine in the law faculty died on the same day. I refer to Gillian Kerr, the widow of the late Lord Brian Kerr, our former Lord Chief Justice, who served in the Supreme Court. By uncanny coincidence, Gillian Kerr also died on 25 July. I express sympathy and condolences to the sons of Lord and Lady Kerr, who, in a very short time, have lost both father and mother. They too made a mark of particular significance on the history of the Province.

Ms Bradshaw: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to speak. For the most part, it has been a moving experience to listen to the complimentary and heartfelt tributes to Lord David Trimble. I hope that Lady Trimble and their children take comfort from those and the many other tributes given by people across the globe in the last few days.

I wanted to share my experience of David. It was an individual event, but it is worth adding to the commentary as we reflect on his life. About 12 years ago, I was in London with a former Member of the House, Sandra Overend. As people will recall, she represented Mid Ulster. David invited us to dinner in the House of Lords with his wife Daphne. It was a special treat in a fine location. I really appreciated it at the time, and now, in this time of reflection, I appreciate it even more so.

I have a few takeaways from that evening. The conversation was about current affairs, about what was happening in the world around us at that time. It was not about harking back to the past, nor about David reliving his contribution to the Good Friday Agreement. It was not what we would refer to in this part of the world as “dining out on something”. What struck me about the man is that he lived for the moment and was more focused on looking at how the actions of today can impact on the future. As the current leader of the Ulster Unionist Party said of him, he was a humble man. He was ever thinking about wider society. Despite the widely held perception of David as strait-laced, almost starchy, we had really good fun that evening and shared plenty of laughter.

That leads me to the other point that I want to make. He was most relaxed and comfortable in the company of his wife. He showed a softer side. We all know that, in politics, we rely heavily on our partners, spouses and children. We need people in our lives whom we can trust and who provide us with a sense of normality and groundedness when the world around us can be hostile and bleak. David and his children experienced that more than most, so we all owe a debt of gratitude to David Trimble, for he endured the most harsh criticism and threats and upset to his family life to ensure that we lived in the peace that we and our children enjoy today.

The situation in Northern Ireland is still far from perfect. We have relative peace, but there is some way to go on the journey to reconciliation. Let us, the MLAs elected by the people in May this year, take the sad passing of Lord David Trimble as an opportunity to remember how important the Northern Ireland Assembly is in its ability to take action that will improve the world for our constituents now and in the future.

I extend my deepest sympathies to David's political colleagues in the Chamber and at Westminster and, of course, to Lady Daphne Trimble, her children, family and friends at this very sad time. May he rest in peace.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank you and the Members of this mandate who made their way to Harmony Hill yesterday.

Today, I have two indelible images of David. The first is at Poyntzpass, after the murders of Philip Allen and Damien Trainor. He hooked up with Séamus Mallon — the two of them were about to become the original First Ministers — and they walked slowly, deliberately, down the main street in a show of solidarity. For me, it was a vision of the potential not just of power-sharing but of taking responsibility to end the mayhem. The second image was later that year, after the Omagh bomb, when he went to Buncrana and attended the funeral mass for the three young men who had been blown up by republicans. He did so knowing that he might provoke the anger of the Orange Order, but he did so because he had a greater responsibility: that of First Minister of Northern Ireland.

On the night that David died, I found a clip on the internet of a town hall meeting from '98, when he was under severe verbal fire from angry anti-agreement unionists. He stood up and responded by saying, “If any unionist thinks that they can impose their will on all the people of Northern Ireland, the British Government and world opinion, they are deluded”. That warning is as valid today as it was 24 years ago and not just for unionism; it is valid for nationalism, for republicanism and for all of us. I hope that we learn the lesson, because, if there is a legacy and a tribute that we can pay to David — not just David but to John Hume, Séamus Mallon, Martin McGuinness, Ian Paisley and the rest — it is to return to the spirit of the 1998 agreement and to remember that there is a concept called “the

greater good”, which says that the only way forward is to prioritise the needs of the people over party political concerns. That is what David did, and let us remember that he did not have to. He already had a career; he was a respected and successful senior law lecturer at Queen’s University. He could have chosen to stick with that relatively easy and comfortable path, but, instead, he chose a different way. On his path, he faced challenges that the likes of us will never have to overcome. I, for one, will be eternally grateful to him and for the support of his family, which allowed him to achieve what he achieved.

Mr McNulty: I offer my sincere condolences to David’s wife, Daphne, and their children, Richard, Victoria, Nicholas and Sarah, his UUP colleagues and friends and all his friends and family at this difficult time.

When I think of David Trimble, I have a vivid and visceral memory of how, in 1998, he walked up the street in Poyntzpass shoulder to shoulder with my predecessor and friend, Séamus Mallon, to show solidarity with the families of Damien Trainor and Philip Allen after they were indiscriminately murdered in Canavan’s Railway Bar. Together, as the leaders of unionism and nationalism, David Trimble and Séamus Mallon sent out a resounding message that the evil men and women of violence would not be allowed to derail the peace process. That hugely symbolic and courageous gesture, just one month before the Good Friday Agreement was signed, was an enduring and iconic moment in the peace process. It soothed people, reassured communities and gave renewed hope that people across the North could put their differences aside and build a peaceful and shared future. When David Trimble walked up the street in Poyntzpass, peace was far from assured. It could not have been easy to walk that walk, especially given the highly charged atmosphere at the time, but he did it, because it was the right thing to do. That was the measure of the man.

David Trimble was relentlessly focused on doing everything in his power to bring peace and power-sharing to the North. He showed extraordinary vision and courage to walk the path of peace and took massive risks to ensure that another generation of young people would not have to live in a society where violence, brutality and bloodshed were the norm. Like Séamus Mallon and John Hume, David Trimble will rightly be remembered as a man of peace. Through their vision, courage and fortitude and through the work of others, there are undoubtedly people alive today who would not be had it not been for the peace process.

Yesterday, Reg Empey mentioned arithmetic: the 24 years since the Good Friday Agreement and the 24 years pre-Good Friday Agreement. I did the arithmetic and found that 2,541 people died by acts of violence in the 24 years pre-1998. There were 2,541 families ripped apart by the evil of terrorism. All that anyone can hope to achieve before they depart is to leave the world a better place than they found it, and it is fair to say that David Trimble achieved that and then some.

I will finish with an excerpt from David Trimble’s lecture after being awarded the Nobel peace prize jointly with John Hume:

“the mountain, if we could but see it clearly, is not in front of us but behind us, in history. The dark shadow we seem to see in the distance is not really a mountain ahead, but the shadow of the mountain behind — a shadow from the past thrown forward into our future. It is a dark sludge of historical sectarianism. We can leave it behind us if we wish.”

I measc na naomh go raibh sé. [*Translation: May he be in the company of saints (May he rest in peace).*]

Mr Aiken: It is clear that Northern Ireland is in a much, much better place for the vision, leadership, inspiration, courage and — to use that Ulster-Scots word — the occasional “thranness” of David Trimble. It was my privilege to know and work with Lord Trimble; indeed, not so many months ago, we were engaged with others in the House on the upcoming case against the protocol that is being taken to the Supreme Court. While, sadly, it was clear then that his health was failing, his intellect remained razor-sharp. He was setting out points of law and arguments to be put forward. That he was vexed by the Northern Ireland protocol was obvious. That he knew that it undermined the very principles of the consent mechanism that he fought for in the Belfast Agreement was also clear. As he mooted, “How could placing internal borders within the United Kingdom not be seen as interfering with our constitutional settlement?”. While some of his legal arguments saw me stretching for my international law textbooks, it was a fundamental fact that the peace agreement that he was instrumental in was being undermined. That was what angered him most and what drove him on. That one of the architects of the Belfast Agreement was wilfully ignored, misquoted or had his words plainly and egregiously shaped into opposing arguments, especially by the EU and Dublin, was especially galling to him. That David’s role in creating and delivering the peace was oft overlooked, both by neglectful omission and often by design, is also a sad reflection on what we could call the “peace industry” that has developed across academia, civil society and much of the media.

A couple of years ago, at a luncheon hosted by Nancy Pelosi, I sat beside a US Congress leader who had apparently — I use the word “apparently” clearly — been instrumental in writing the agreement. I pointed out that it was sad that even the likes of George Mitchell had not bothered mentioning David Trimble in some of his previous remarks. The so-called US expert said that he did not know what David had to do with it and that it was all down to Hume/Adams. I, as the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party at the time, corrected him, as you can imagine, reminding him that at least the Nobel prize committee could recognise who the real architects were and that he should open his narrow perspective and do the same. Regrettably, the very same politician still parrots that reductive narrative, most recently in this very Building.

It is those points of wilful misdirection that we all — in politics, academia, the media and civil society — must address. Without David, there would have been no peace process, and many more would have been murdered and maimed. The writing out of his and unionism’s vital contribution should not become just another inconvenient truth for those determined to reshape the narrative. Only by fully accepting David’s central role, often against the closed orthodoxies in Dublin, London, Washington and elsewhere, can we really identify the lessons that he taught us: that we need to maintain and, hopefully, build on the peace for all our futures in Northern Ireland.

Much will be said of David’s legacy as we lead into the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Belfast Agreement. The legacy should be that the consent mechanism must not be jettisoned just because narrow majoritarianism has now been achieved by some sectors of our fractured community, with the implication that, somehow, all communities’ views will have to be just weighted and not fully considered. If that narrative becomes the norm, the peace that David fought for will be undermined and discredited. David sacrificed so much for peace. He did it because he believed in higher principles.

Much of the political impasse that we are at today has been created because, rather than support David, it was deemed expedient by some who are now retrospectively praising him to bring the extremes into the fold, no matter the obvious cost to the political centre, to democracy and to good governance — all things that were, regrettably, sacrificed in recent years. There is clearly something Wagnerian in the collapses that have occurred — something akin to the ‘Ring’ cycle — that would have resonated strongly with David.

We cannot continue in the same vein, however. The Belfast Agreement that David secured is too precious to be undermined by those who pay lip service to its goals. To properly remember him and to do his legacy justice, we must all commit to getting back to the intent of what is now, collectively, our agreement and redouble our efforts to put the Northern Ireland people first. It is for all of us, especially for Daphne and David’s children, Richard, Victoria, Sarah and Nicholas. That should be the commitment for such a great leader and statesman.

Mr Butler: First, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving us the time and space today to remember Lord David Trimble.

Lord David Trimble has been described and commentated on in many ways by many people over the past 25 years. His historic ascent to the position of first First Minister of Northern Ireland, when, in partnership with others, most notably John Hume of the SDLP, he secured a once-in-a-generation chance for peace, meant that he would for ever be subject to that discussion, dissection and public debate.

In the week that has passed since his death last Monday, I know that it has been of great comfort to his family to hear, read and receive high praise from almost every corner of the globe in recognition of the difference that David made, not only in Northern Ireland but around the world. There is no doubt that his significant and lasting political contribution was in securing peace for all the people in Northern Ireland with the Good Friday Agreement. Many of us will be eternally grateful for the fact that countless lives have been saved. I come from the generation that lived, knew and understood what those days and steps cost not only David but his family and his party — my party. If ever proof was needed that doing the right thing is never wrong, that is it.

I want briefly to describe the David Trimble that I knew. In good, old-fashioned Presbyterian terms, I will use a little alliteration, borrowing from his speech in 1998, in which he used the phrase:

“a pluralist parliament for a pluralist people”,

I will describe David using four Ps.

David was a partner. He was blessed to have had one of the best partners in life that anyone could wish for: Lady Daphne, his wife. If you have ever met her, you will know that she is and was the epitome of support, strength and loyalty. That enabled David to do the things that he did. It was mentioned yesterday and has been mentioned today that loved blossomed many years ago in Queen’s University, when David was Daphne’s lecturer. The partnership and accomplishments that they effected will last for many years after his passing.

David was also a parent and grandparent. He was blessed with four wonderful children, all grown adults now, of whom he was immensely proud. Richard, Victoria, Sarah and Nicholas, we share your

grief and thank you for sharing what will have been a dark day for you. All of us suffered as we laid your dad to rest.

David was also a parliamentarian, as we know. His intellect, memory and legislative mind are likely to have been unequalled in living memory here. He enjoyed, I believe, every moment that he got, whether it was in Stormont, sitting as a MP in Westminster or, latterly, in the House of Lords. Politics was certainly not where David's life course started, nor, I believe, possibly where he meant it to go, but, like many others, I am so glad that it did.

Lastly and, perhaps, most significantly, David was a peacemaker. Peace never comes without cost. It never comes without rancour. It never comes easy, nor is it delivered by the weak. It takes a person of significant courage, vision and ability to take the hits and remain committed to putting people before self. Matthew 5:9 says:

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be the children of God."

David was a peacemaker, and that is how I will remember him always.

Mr Speaker: I thank all Members for their contributions this morning. As a mark of respect for Lord Trimble, I ask everyone to stand for a minute's silence.

Members observed one minute's silence.

Mr Speaker: Members, that concludes the tributes to Lord Trimble. I invite party leaders or their representatives to join me in the Rotunda before proceeding to the Great Hall to sign the book of condolence, followed by any other Member who wishes to do so. Thank you all very much.