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Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

Grma a Chathaoirleach, agus ba mhaith liom biouchas a gabhal libh as ucht an cuireadh.

I would like to thank the committee for the invite today to discuss the views of the next generation of political representatives, and the politics and currents affairs of the North.

To give you an understanding of my own views I should give some insight into my background.

I am currently an elected councillor on Lisburn Castlereagh Council, to which I was successfully elected in 2019. I also ran as a Parliamentary Candidate that year in the 2019 Westminster Election.

In my professional life I work in Belfast's growing technology sector as Software Engineer and Development manager.

Although I am a political representative within South Belfast and Lisburn & Castlereagh Council. I am originally from Derry City. I was born and raised in the Bogside area of the city, where I attended the local Integrated Primary School at the direction of my mother, whose ambition it was that my brother and I would grow up engaged in a positive cross-community environment and experience and build friendships with those from different backgrounds and communities to our own. Many of those friendships still last to this day.

In January 2020, my son was born in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, in Drogheda. My partner is from Navan, co. Meath, and our family relationships, like a growing number of others on this Island, naturally extend beyond the artificial boundaries imposed upon us. From Derry, to Belfast, from Meath to Lisburn and Castlereagh, we are as Irish as the next family, and the fluidity of our lives across the border give a broadened sense of just how small our Island actually is.

It is my ambition that my son, will grow up in an Ireland free from these artificial boundaries and the division they sow, in a Unified Island, within a unified community. But in order to realise that reality, we must see the appropriate preparation, planning and civic engagement.

Irish Unity and the provisions for constitutional change are a cornerstone of The Good Friday Agreement, it is imbedded in the very heart of the Agreement which outlines clearly our pathway to the unification of Ireland and dictates, that a new constitutional future in Ireland can only be achieved with the democratic consent of the people of Ireland.

It is my belief that this generation want their say on that future.

Like me, they are ambitious for change. They see the unnatural imposition of partition on their lives and aspire to build something better. Not just for them, but for their children.

I have always believed in Irish Unity. Brexit has caused a paradigm shift in many peoples thinking, and there is now a rapidly growing and diverse constituency that recognises the huge potential of a single all-island economy and a unified nation within the European Union.

These conversations have already begun. They are happening in our offices, via Zoom, and in homes across the country.

I speak daily both with constituents and work colleagues in my profession, many from a unionist background who are now ready to have that conversation, and eager to know what a new Ireland could look like.

23 years on from the Signing of the Good Friday Agreement, We must now move to provide them with answers.

It is my view, that this conversation is headed in only one direction and in the coming years there will be referenda on Irish unity, North and South; as outlined in the Belfast Agreement.

People want their say. The success or otherwise of those referenda, however, will hinge on the preparation's, the engagements, and the dialog we make today.

It is my belief that this generation is the one that will finally make our ambitions for Irish Unity a reality.

They are ready for that task, and come to it with a renewed determination and ambition to deliver for all our people as part of a New Ireland.