

## Launch of Dublin South Campaign/Selection Convention

3rd April 2007

Liz O'Donnell

For the last 15 years I have had the privilege to be TD representing the people of Dublin South. Even after all that time I still feel like a punter who got elected. I had no entitlement to it; by family or otherwise.



***Launch of Dublin South Campaign/Selection Convention***

***Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007 at the IMI Conference Centre Sandyford***

***Speech by Liz O'Donnell, T.D. (Dublin South)***



I was elected because I was part of a project called the Progressive Democrats. A party, which had space for me, personally and intellectually, and who invited me in and who still invites new people who want to contribute to public life.

Over those 15 years we have had our disappointments, our highs and lows electorally and otherwise. There has never been a party more frequently written off, even reviled than ourselves for our pro-enterprise, low tax beliefs. Gradually, when our policies were proven to work the reviling died down and the resentment set in. This is going to be a hell of an Election because we are in the way of a lot of people who want to be in power and out of the wilderness. Fine Gael that faded gene, now mainly a rural party, stands for little that's clear anymore apart from focus group populism and deep conservatism.

At least we know what Labour and the Greens stands for. We don't agree with their statist approach and their anti-business stance on so many issues. But they are at least in their own space. And that space has been in the opposition benches for the last ten years. It's a tough station and they will use any ploy to get into power.

Listening to the various Leaders' speeches over the last few weeks I have been struck by the litany of promises – cascading out of the TV. So many in all cases, that they lost all meaning to the listener.

In my view, the public don't even grasp them. Journalists count the promises and the whole thing descends to cynicism.

A General Election debate should be a much more sober and reflective business. A time for big themes and ideas rather than a plethora of promises couched in millions of euro. Sure, it's a time for robust debate but it should be about the parties communicating ideas and approaches, rather than a cacophony of traders in a market hawking their wares.

So what are our big ideas in the PD's. The same as they ever were – keep the country working by our low tax pro-enterprise approach to job and wealth creation. For us profit is not a dirty word. It is the single proven motivation for risk taking and enterprise, in turn generating jobs and opportunity and also revenues to the exchequer.

It is only because men and women work that we can speak of an economy at all. So our central abiding credo remains – a job is the best poverty beater; the best way to achieve one's full potential. We do not take jobs for granted. 600,000 new jobs have been created since we came into office 10 years ago. They didn't fall from the sky; they didn't happen by chance. Good policies and policy made them happen and the same is needed to sustain them.

It is our growth and enterprise that has allowed so many good things to happen for Ireland.

- Allowed us to become a world leader in terms of global development and assistance to the poorest countries.
- Has stemmed the trade of emigration which bedevilled generations.
- Allowed us to treble spending on health, education and social services.
- Deliver major roads and Luas.

Central to a successful economy is a successful and dynamic capital city. This morning I attended a Debate on Dublin and responded to Dublin Chamber's Manifesto.

Deliver, Deliver, Deliver was their message;

- Deliver on infrastructure, competitiveness, the NDP investment. Dublin Transport authority to integrate transport in the Greater Dublin area.
- Open up the Bus market.
- Modernise the Airport.
- End congestion.
- Deliver projects on time and within budget.

In most areas they were taking to the converted talking to me as a PD. And many of their agenda items will be matched in our Manifesto for Dublin.

## Taking on Vested Interests

As a small party, in or out of government, we can confront and challenge the vested interest when there is a clash with the public interest. Indeed we have taken on so many vested interests over the years. We have run out of voters! For decades in Ireland, difficult issues have been tossed around with decision or solution.

This party is not afraid of making decisions or living with the consequences. Think of smog and Mary Harney's decision – Think of taxis and Bobby Molloy's action.

Our more recent political history tells a similar story. Spiralling insurance costs, prison officer overtime, the need for a Garda Reserve - all issues passed around – by politicians afraid of the backlash.

Not us. We do the right things even if they are not popular.

Some accuse us of being too close to our partners in Government in the run up to an election. BUT, objective observation tells a different story. When we said café-bars would provide a much-needed alternative to dedicated drinking establishments and super pubs, where food and alcohol are available together, to inhibit binge-drinking and allow for better control over under-age drinking – we were right. That is why we will have café-bars as part of our next manifesto, and that is why we will have café-bars in the next Programme for Government. Because it is the right thing to do and we won't shy away from revisiting it.

Having dealt with taxis, we turned our attention to buses. Consider the thousands of people who use Dublin Bus every day.

If the Progressive Democrats had not been in government we would not have seen **any** reform the bus market. We pursued this reform to benefit commuters. We have secured that the new the Dublin Transport Authority will procure the next 100 buses for new routes in Dublin from the private sector only.

After that, all new routes will be subject to a competitive tendering process open to all operators. Dublin Bus will have to prove it is efficient and competitive enough to secure the subsidy for new routes. This is a sea change in the Dublin bus market and not before time.

Confidence in our democracy is at a low ebb with uncertainty over registers. Our citizens expect and deserve an electoral system that they trust. That is why in the next government we will establish an independent Electoral Commission to take charge of the overall election process in this State. To compile and maintain the electoral register. And that is why we will resist any electronic voting system that does not deliver the transparency and accountability that Irish citizens expect.

Another item that is exercising the minds of voters, commentators and politicians alike is that, the property market and reform of the stamp duty regime.

We raised this reform at our meeting in Malahide last September. We identified stamp duty as an issue of huge concern for thousands of homeowners and would-be homeowners and see scope for a significant re-adjustment of the duty for homeowners. We said this would be in our manifesto. Sensitivity of the property market to speculation about things like stamp duty didn't deter us from speaking out about an unfair tax which needs to be changed and is important to people.

We said at our Conference that our reform would be delivered with an immediate effect – to prevent any market stall. Opposition proposals – bizarrely – state that stamp duty reform should take place over three years! When we say we will reform tax, we do it.

This is my 4<sup>th</sup> Election and as time passes so do the issues change. Right around Dublin massive development has meant a diminishing level of open space. Protecting open spaces for community use in cities may require putting public interest over vested and private property interest.

Here in this Constituency, the physical landscape has change utterly since the last Election. New roads have been completed; Luas has arrived and already is being extended to Cherrywood and possibly to Terenure and Rathfarnham.

Schools have opened, Dundrum Town Centre has arrived. Beacon Hospital and A & E and an amazing level of residential and commercial development is taking place. During construction, inevitably there is disruption, but in the main, residents of this constituency are progressive reasonable citizens who are not anti-development.

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has a new management team to drive and oversee the planning and development of the county. There is concern and perception that planning a development has been developer led and there is some evidence for this.

There was a sinking feeling that our local authority has become a cash cow and revenue collecting body from developers, rather than a Public Authority protecting the public interest. This is being addressed under new management and a greater sense of trust is being built up as between residents and management.

This is a very critical time in the development of our communities in Dublin South. We now have the money the competence and expertise to really plan properly for sustainable communities.

- Business as in (Sandyford Business Estates) which generate 60% of all revenues to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council needs to be facilitated by road and transport policy makers. Residents' views must be respected and heeded.
- Greater Density – a key element of sustainable development in the county, particularly along road and rail corridors can be achieved and must be achieved without skyscrapers. You can have density without tall buildings towering over 2 storey homes!

I welcome the benchmark heights contained in the recent by Urban Initiatives report which indicates 4 to 7 storey height and with scope for taller landmark buildings only as an exception to the general rule in the County.

With all this development, in our county and city of major importance is that we plan now to protect existing open space which is diminishing by the week with the scale and demand for development. From time to time panic erupts in happy neighbourhoods when out of the blue a planning application appears to develop an open space. A space, which status is in question legally and which the local authority needs to secure. This is widespread. At my request the Manager has undertaken a review of such open spaces with a view to securing legally the title for the Council to retain for open and recreational space. Similarly, with falling congregations and rising land values, from time to time lands used for educational, sporting and recreational use are lost to communities and snapped up by developers.

That is why in the next government we will create “green-lungs” in our towns and cities. We will ensure the ‘hands-off’ zoning by Local Authorities of all sports, recreational and education-related lands, to prevent development on land important to communities. That is why we will require all local authorities to legally secure the title on all open spaces for recreational and amenity use.

I feel we must take action now in the public interest to protect such green recreational spaces, if necessary by legislation and even by constitutional amendment in the public interest.

It has been quite a week in Northern Ireland. There is something special and memorable about Dr. Paisley and Adams burying the hatchet, transcending their respective tribes and smiling into the camera at the same time. In the same week Bono is made a Knight of the British Empire! After so many false dawns the vexed quarrel really is over and we are in a new optimistic phase of building a dynamic all-island economy which may well be the making of the New Ireland.