

# THE NEW NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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*My dear John,*

Thank you very much for your letter of 17 September conveying the sentiments of your Branch meeting.

After almost eleven years of leading Alliance, it was something of a wrench to relinquish the Leadership as you might imagine. I have greatly valued my time in the 'driving seat', not least because of the opportunity it has given me to become better acquainted with the lifeblood of the Party - its members. Over the years I have been privileged to witness the commitment and sheer determination of our members to the principles of a fair and tolerant society. That the Belfast Agreement so clearly reflects the goals that Alliance has long sought is a source of great pride to me and, I hope, to all our members.

Although my new role as Speaker of the Assembly means that, for the duration of my tenure, I will be unable to have a high party political profile, I continue to be just as committed to the success of those Alliance principles for which we have worked together for so long. Doubtless I shall continue to meet many of the Ards people from time to time and I look forward to being able to share with them the sense of pride that it was all of us together who have maintained the liberal tradition in Northern Ireland's politics.

With every good wish.

*Yours,  
John*