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NOMINATION OF ALLAN ROBERT BELL MHK AS CHIEF MINISTER.

STATEMENT OF POLICY PRIORITIES.

Since 2008 global events have changed our world and as these events continue to unfold and economic storm clouds gather they ensure that the next five years will be the most challenging period that we have faced for a generation, both for Tynwald and also the Island.

However we must not let ourselves become downhearted. In the early eighties we also faced very difficult economic times and by working together and developing long term strategies, both social and economic, ultimately we succeeded in developing one of the most successful economies in Europe.

I am proud that I was part of the team which developed that recovery strategy and with the benefit of my experience of that period , 27 years as a Member of the House of Keys with a wide range of Government and Parliamentary responsibilities and especially latterly , as Minister for the Treasury and Economic Development over the last turbulent ten years, I now offer myself as a candidate for the position of Chief Minister.

Without question our twin top priorities have to be the rebalancing of Government finances in the wake of the VAT changes and the stimulation of further economic growth and diversification to provide new revenue streams for Government and jobs for our people.

However we must not allow our pursuit of these vital goals to blind us to the need to maintain our social cohesion and quality of life . The next Government must provide the leadership and openness needed to promote a fully inclusive, compassionate and, above all, fair society if we are to succeed. A society which is at ease with itself.

To deliver these ideals I would propose two initial reviews.

Firstly to endorse the principles of the long term strategy document, The Development of a Prosperous and Caring Society which laid the foundation for our current success in 1987 to see what we can learn from that far sighted strategy and to build an updated range of options for the next 20 years.

I believe that we should take advantage of our current difficulties to move beyond short term palliatives and, through working together, produce a long term vision of where we want the Island to be in the future.

Secondly I believe we need to revisit the Report on the Scope and Structure of Government. I would propose to reconstitute the original committee and charge them to produce an update on progress so far and suggestions for the future. Once completed I believe we need a full Tynwald debate on the issue to identify a collective and acceptable way forward.

Central to any changes which may be identified in this report must also be a change to the culture of Government, without which any new proposals will fail. We cannot continue to deliver services and achieve the savings we need without challenging the long established processes and working practices across Government. To achieve these changes we need to engage staff at all levels, from Chief Executive to middle management and especially our front line staff, including the relevant Unions.

In driving through change I believe in two principles. Firstly, a slash and burn approach to downsizing Government too quickly will be very damaging to both the economy and society and a more measured approach is called for with a judicious use of our Reserves when necessary. Secondly there can be no ring fenced sacred cows in the review process. We must scrutinise every aspect of our operations.

To stimulate further economic activity we must build on the very effective and cooperative relationship we have with our business community. They know better than ourselves where the opportunities lie and Government must be prepared to support them in expanding existing business and also diversifying into new sectors for the future.

Our economy overall has not been in recession and is still growing, and this is recognised by our continuing AAA credit rating. To maintain that vibrancy we must have a stable taxation system and I would seek to maintain our 0/10% corporate tax structure. This has now been accepted by the international community and we must fight to protect it.

The UK is in the process of establishing enterprise zones in deprived areas. We have to ensure that the whole of our Country becomes an enterprise zone, with appropriate incentives, cutting through red tape where necessary and providing the necessary infrastructure and incentives to attract new business. We also need a review of our planning system to ensure that it gives adequate consideration and priority to economic development.

Greater coordination across Government with regard to training and retraining has already begun. We must build on this to raise the skill levels in our workforce and also to help tackle the growing issue of youth unemployment. We must give hope and confidence to our young people that they have a future here.

In spite of the problems we have faced with our VAT Agreement, I do not believe that the time is right for abrogation. It is still broadly beneficial for the Island and any change at this time could seriously damage the economy.

I do believe though that we need to consider and cost our future options with the aim of improving our understanding of all aspects of the agreement in anticipation of any arbitrary actions by the UK Government in the future.

Our experiences with the UK over the last few years lead me to believe that we must reassess the value of our reciprocal agreements with that country. The UK is currently reviewing both its pension and benefit systems with an eye to future reform. Any changes will directly impact the Island.

I believe we need an in depth review of these issues, especially the benefit system, to investigate whether it would now be more appropriate for the Island to develop its own procedures to establish a new structure more suited to our own needs rather than follow a system which will be ideologically tailored for the needs of the UK.

Additionally the UK has suggested amalgamating its tax and national insurance payment procedures. If things stay as they are, the Isle of Man will have to follow suit if any changes are made. This may also not be in the best interests of the Island.

A major problem facing most developed countries is an ageing population. During the last five years the number of Isle of Man pensioners has increased by over 2000. This rate will accelerate and we need to plan to deal with a higher dependency ratio and the consequent costs of medical and social care, especially nursing care in old age. I propose that methods of funding these costs be fully investigated and that a commission be established to review the situation along with proposals to maintain the sustainability of the Manx state pension.

Events of the last few years and the implications of my suggestions, including the protection of the economy, prove beyond doubt that we have to become a lot more proactive in dealing with our various international partners. I have extensive experience in promoting the Island in the wider world and with negotiating in hostile environments.

If I am elected Chief Minister, raising the Island`s profile would be one of my top priorities. However I recognise that there have been limited opportunities for other Members of Tynwald to gain greater experience in this area. I would undertake to ensure that whenever possible other Members are encouraged to build their experience and confidence to help protect the Island`s reputation in the future.

Improved communications off Island will be vitally important in the future. However, so will internal communication too. If the outgoing Government can be criticised for one thing it is that we have been very poor at keeping the public fully informed as to progress in many areas. I believe we need a complete rethink on how Government and Tynwald communicates with our people. We have to be more open and honest, especially when making what may well be difficult and painful decisions in the time ahead. Even where there may be disagreement, people are more likely to accept a decision if it is clearly explained beforehand.

To build that essential trust I would propose to introduce the Freedom of Information Bill, whilst accepting that there are areas where confidentiality has to be protected. However it must also be recognised that it may come at a high cost if the Jersey example is accurate, and other areas of Government expenditure will be adversely affected.

Additionally I would undertake to hold public meetings around the Island periodically to reach out more effectively to our people.

At this stage I do not intend to go through all the possible issues facing us in the time ahead but I would comment on a few which I believe need to be addressed.

The construction industry is a very important element of our economy and is struggling as a result of the economic slowdown and the reluctance of banks to lend. We should use this opportunity to utilise their spare capacity to address our housing problems, particularly the current shortage of starter homes and progress the Dept Of Social Care`s Housing Review with some urgency.

Although we will have reduced revenues in the next few years we have to do our utmost to protect core services. I am concerned by what appears to be a growing problem of Health Service waiting lists. In spite of our various initiatives waiting times are going beyond acceptable levels.

I still believe that we need a definitive review of the scope and structure of Local Government. This is needed to improve efficiency and value for money at local levels and to free Members of Tynwald to be genuine national politicians, focussing more on the broader strategic issues. Extra powers, such as street cleaning and minor road repairs ,could be devolved from central government. Once the new role of local government has been identified, a rate revaluation should take place to introduce a fairer system across the Island.

Like many members of the public, I have been dismayed at the amount of time spent in the last House navel gazing with respect to internal constitutional matters. In principle I agree with direct elections for Legislative Council as long as we do not create political instability in the process. I would support a totally independent review to introduce new thinking into the debate leaving Members more time to deal with more pressing issues.

Energy costs have a massive impact on inflation, which is detrimental to both households and business alike. We should encourage the development of renewable energy and reduce our energy waste. There is a clear economic imperative to do this as every pound saved is a pound which can instead be spent in our economy.

These are but a few of the challenges the Island will be facing over the next five years. More than ever before, I believe Tynwald , collectively, has to give the leadership and vision to unite and inspire our people to successfully navigate these turbulent times.

If I am given the privilege of being elected Chief Minister I promise that I will do my utmost to promote a unified team , not only in the Council of Ministers, but right across Tynwald and beyond. This is not the time to be distracted by yesterday`s squabbles or overbearing egos. I do not have all the answers and I will make mistakes. I am only human.

I would hope that all Members who wish to contribute will be given the opportunity to do so and I would hope to also draw on the very extensive experience we have within our midst outside of Government.

I promise that I will be accessible to everyone and provide a listening and collegiate leadership wherever possible.

Internationally the world economy is in uncharted waters. There is no quick or easy answer to the challenges which face us. However, we start from a position of relative strength. We have to look to the future with confidence and self-belief, working together to defend our achievements, our rights and our independence. I offer you my experience to help deliver that belief.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allan Bell". The signature is written in black ink and includes a long, sweeping underline stroke that extends to the right and then curves back down.