

RE: Arlene - Inside Pols

Clive McFarland

Sent: 26 January 2017 17:40
To: Richard Bullick [richardbullick@dup.org.uk] Personal information redacted by the RHI Inquiry Timothy Johnston
Cc: John Robinson
Categories: Yellow Category

Would agree with Richard - decent run out.

Big focus on RHI but that was as much Arlene's doing as Mark's - she was happy to give long answers and was so keen to get all the points out that it took up most of the interview - but can't be accused of running away from it.

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From: Richard Bullick [richardbullick@dup.org.uk] Personal information redacted by the RHI Inquiry
Sent: 26 January 2017 17:11
To: Timothy Johnston
Cc: Clive McFarland; John Robinson
Subject: Re: Arlene - Inside Pols

I thought it was 7-8 out of 10

Sent from my iPhone

> On 26 Jan 2017, at 17:10, Timothy Johnston <timothyjohnston@dup.org.uk> wrote:
>
> I will listen shortly but in your view how did she get on?
>
> Sent from my iPhone
>
>> On 26 Jan 2017, at 17:02, Clive McFarland <clivemcfarland@dup.org.uk> wrote:
>>
>>
>>
>> <Arlene - Inside Pols.m4a>
>>
>>
>>
>> Sent from my iPhone

draft

Timothy Johnston

Sent: 26 January 2017 13:19

To: Arlene Foster [arlene@arlenefoster.org.uk]; Richard Bullick [richardbullick@...]; John Robinson

Cc: Clive McFarland

Categories: Yellow Category

Attachments: Media Lines.docx (117 KB)

Personal
information
redacted by the

Should you have stepped aside given what you now know has happened? Was that a mistake?

- Since the Executive meeting on 14 December I have argued that the best way to deal with all of the issues surrounding the RHI is through a full inquiry.
- No one is more pleased than I am that one has now been established.
- I can say honestly I have nothing to hide.
- I think that it is important that decisions on what happened and who is to blame are taken after and not before all of the evidence is considered.

- I did not think that standing aside was the right thing to do because I believed that I have done nothing wrong and that is a view that has been expressed by the Permanent Secretary of the Department for the Economy.

- Looking back with the benefit of hindsight perhaps it was a mistake to give Sinn Fein any excuse to collapse the institutions on this issue when it is now perfectly clear that this election was actually nothing to do with the RHI.

I had assumed when pressure came on the Executive that Sinn Fein would stand with those who they were in government with and not try to play catch up with the opposition.

We didn't collapse the institutions when the Finance Minister refused to stand aside last summer, we didn't collapse the institutions over the decision to take the Union Flag down over city hall, we didn't collapse the institutions when the police said that the IRA murdered a man in Belfast – instead we sought to work through the problems.

Are you sorry for your handling of RHI?

- Of course I am sorry for how all this has worked out. I made that clear in the Assembly before Christmas and I am happy to do so again.

- It will be for the public inquiry to decide exactly what happened and where blame and responsibility lies. I will leave those matters to the Inquiry but I think that it is becoming increasingly clear through the documents what happened and why it happened.

When did you know that the Permanent Secretary believed AC was involved in asking for delay etc?

- I was made aware of AMc belief between the Nolan interview on the Thursday night and the statement on Monday ...

- It would have been completely unfair to AC to name him in the Assembly when the PS stated that he had no evidence for AC involvement and AC denied it. Decisions are taken by Ministers not advisors.

Did you know when you made your statement in the Assembly?

- See above

Why were cost controls not implemented in 2012?

- The recommendation that was made to me in 2012 was that there was no need for cost controls because they wrongly believed that the tariff was set at a level below the market price and there would be no incentive to overuse.

Will you continue to remain outside of office after the election until the Inquiry is completed?

- At this stage with the SF demands it is far from clear that there will be any early restoration of devolution. As far as my position is concerned I am taking nothing for granted in the election!
- If pressed. I have always made it clear that I have nothing to hide and it is important to me that an inquiry gets to the truth. The people will decide whether I am a candidate for the position of First Minister in the first instance. I am asking for support for the negotiations that will take place after the election.

Can the potential overspend be reduced?

- Last week the Assembly passed regulations to reduce that overspend.

When will names be published?

- Simon Hamilton as ordered that the names be released but as you are aware there is an injunction in place to prevent the release of all of the names.
- I hope that the court will be in position to make a ruling on this issue in the coming days.
- For the avoidance of any doubt neither I nor my family were recipients of RHI in any direct or indirect way.

What is your message to voters in this election?

- I didn't want this election and just eight months after the last elections Northern Ireland does not need another election but especially in the present circumstances this election represents a big choice for people.
- Do they want to continue to build a better future or do they want Sinn Fein to be able to dictate what the future of Northern Ireland should be?

Is forming an executive likely after the election?

- I want to see devolution restored on a sustainable basis and that will require all parties to adopt sensible position.
- While direct rule is not my first preference I'm sure that I am more comfortable with a Conservative Government with a very small majority in the HOC taking decisions in relation to NI than republicans are.

How will you rebuild your relationship with SF?

- I have to say the claim that I had a bad relationship with SF was news to me at the end of last year. It wasn't what MMcG was saying in private and it certainly wasn't what he was saying in public either.
- I have indicated that I will work with SF and others if it is in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. Whether Sinn Fein want devolution remains to be seen.
- We must accept the reality of where we are and for the good of Northern Ireland see what attempts can be made to work collectively as politicians after the election.

Were you aware when SB left last year that he had RHI in his house?

- There is nothing wrong with any person being part of the RHI scheme as long as they behave within the letter and the spirit of the rules.
- SB made it clear that he had initially planned to go last May to pursue other interests. SB is now a private citizen and it's a matter for him on whether he wishes to make any comment on these issues.

Whilst many of the allegations around RHI are not now directed at you personally, or even at DUP elected members, many of them focus on the role of DUP SPADS. Do these back-room figures have too much power within your party? Should the public not expect the people they elect to be pulling the strings in government rather than these somewhat faceless individuals?

- This is one of the great myths that has developed over recent times.
- Advisers, advise and Ministers decided. Does anyone really believe that when Dr Paisley was leader or when Peter Robinson was leader that SPADs were pulling the strings. They weren't then and they aren't now.

Sinn Fein have linked some of the current difficulties, not just to the wider issues of RHI etc, but directly to you, not extending the hand of friendship or being fully engaged in the joint office that First Minister and deputy First Minister hold. Do you feel responsible for the election being called?

- I think that you are absolutely right that this election is not about RHI but about other issues.

- The suggestion that I was not fully engaged in partnership government is absolute nonsense. But you don't have to take my word for it. Read what Martin McGuinness was saying in public right up to last November!

With the announcement of Michelle O'Neill's appointment as SF leader in Northern Ireland there could be two women leading devolution here. Do you think her appointment will make a difference in how you would work with Sinn Fein?

- It isn't for me to decide who leads Sinn Fein anymore than it is for Sinn Fein to decide who leads the DUP.
- I have worked with MO'N in the Executive and if there is an Executive restored after the election with the DUP and SF the largest parties then I will seek to work with whoever they put forward.

Its clear there will be negotiations following the election. Sinn Fein have raised issues such as same sex marriage and the Irish language as being key issues for them. What ground are you going to give on those key areas?

- Our position on these issues will be the same after the election as it is before the election. I want to see devolution restored and to work to address the real issues that face the people of NI but if SF don't want to do that then it will be the Direct Rule that SF did everything they could to avoid over welfare reform.
- The other point I should make is that in negotiations after the elections it wont just be Sinn Fein that will have demands and we will be setting those out during the campaign.