



Special Guest, Secretary of State Owen Paterson (seated), pictured with Dr. Conor Patterson, President, Newry COCET, Margaret Ritchie M.P., and (rear) Patrick Maloney, Chairman Dundalk Chamber of Commerce Dominic Bradley M.L.A., Mayor Mick Murphy and Kamala Shirin Larkidbir U.S Council Gen-



Secretary of State Owen Paterson, Guest of Honour pictured with sponsors Adrian Toner, Mayor Mick Murphy, Orla Jackson C.E. Newry C.C., Dr. Conor Patterson, President of Newry C.E.C.E.T and Patrick Murtagh, Canal Court Hotel.

Secretary of State attends Newry Chamber's Annual Dinner

SECRETARY of State for Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson MP, was the Special Guest of Honour at the Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade's Annual Gala Dinner on Thursday in the Canal Court Hotel, Newry.

The event marked Mr Paterson's first official engagement in Newry since his appointment to Office. The audience included a who's who of business and political leaders including Adrian Toner of First Derivatives, Brian McConville of the MJM Group, Dr Gerard O'Hare of Parker Green International, the new Minister of Employment and Learning, Danny Kennedy, SDLP leader, Margaret Ritchie, the US Consul to Northern Ireland, Kamala Lakhdar, as well as leading public sector officials including Liam Nellis, Chief Executive of InterTradeIreland.

The Secretary of State commended Newry city, its citizens and business leaders on having a strong self-help ethic that had endured and brought success through the most adverse of circumstances.

He had earlier met with civic leaders to discuss their concerns about funding cuts and the economic crisis south of the border. They also discussed his ideas on reducing corporation tax in Northern Ireland and designating the region as an Enterprise Zone.

The Secretary of State told the assembled audience that Northern Ireland had got a very good deal from the UK Exchequer. But, he said, Northern Ireland would have to contribute its fair share in his Government's effort to reduce "unsustainable" levels of public expenditure in the UK. There would inevitably have to be cuts. Cuts in "waste" which would, he contended, deliver "monster savings". He cited the doubling up of provision to facilitate the separate education of children from the two communities as one ex-

ample. He went on to outline how a reduction in Northern Ireland's rate of corporation tax in exchange for a further cut of between £100m and £200m from the Block Grant each year would be a "game changer" making Northern Ireland and Newry much more self reliant and the best place in Western Europe for overseas investors to put their money.

Dr Conor Patterson, President of Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade told the Secretary of State that there were a number of export businesses in Newry doing exceptionally well despite the domestic economic climate and that no other area had catalysed every £1 of public investment allocated to it like Newry: "There can be few places which have taken the self-help ethic as far as Newry", he said.

The Chamber of Commerce President added that in the context of the unprecedented economic collapse in the South, the public recognition by the British Chancellor, George Osborne, that the Irish Republic was one of the UK's most important trading partners and that its having a thriving economy was vital to UK national interests, had been a very important statement for Newry. Conor Patterson said: "Perhaps nowhere in the UK jurisdiction is more linked to the fortunes of the Republic's economy than Newry." He added that this alongside uncertainties as to what Northern Ireland's capital expenditure budget would be during the next eight years had generated great local concern.

"Stakeholders in Newry have drawn up a Vision for the area with infrastructure improvements as its central plank, most importantly a Southern Relief Road which would allow traffic to flow more easily through Newry

from South Down and Ireland's fifth largest port at Warrenpoint to the main north/south trade route on the edge of the City. This and other related investments in park and ride and City Centre regeneration have been economically and technically appraised and costed. Our fear is that a reduction in Government capital investment resources over the next 10 years could stymie such projects without which Newry and Northern Ireland could not achieve your vision of a dynamic and self sufficient economy. The development deficit, Secretary of State, has a price tag if it is to be addressed."

Conor Patterson pointed out that it was more costly in Northern Ireland to provide services per capita, not just public services but private services as well, such as electricity and gas. Economies of scale could not, he said be achieved in Northern Ireland like they could in Finchley or Sussex.

This alongside the decades of violent turmoil which the region had endured and the barriers to all-island trade and economic co-operation which had only really begun to break down in recent years, meant that Northern Ireland's circumstances were unique: "It is, therefore, perhaps a little unfair, Secretary of State to liken the public sector in Northern Ireland to that in Gorbachev's Soviet Union, with all that that implies in terms of waste and inefficiency".

The principle sponsor of the event was the locally owned and managed global business, First Derivatives. The venue sponsor was the Canal Court Hotel.

Mayor Mick Murphy, Newry & Mourne District Council officially welcomed the Secretary of State to the region.



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