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## Local & National

### Paisley cautious in heated Assembly exchange on past

Tuesday, February 05, 2008

By Noel McAdam

First Minister Ian Paisley and senior Ulster Unionist David Burnside clashed in the Assembly yesterday over victims and the past.

The DUP leader told the South Antrim MLA he would be "better keeping his mouth closed" about the past.

But Mr Burnside was also rebuked by Speaker William Hay as he said Mr Paisley had "gone back on many of the things he has believed as a Protestant and unionist leader".

The exchange brought an accusation from Alliance deputy leader Naomi Long that Mr Paisley had added to public confusion about the consultative group on the past, headed by former Church of Ireland Primate Robin Eames, ex-Policing Board deputy Denis Bradley and the newly appointed Victims Commission.

Mr Paisley said he "greatly regretted" last week's publication of the biography of one of the four new Victims Commissioners Patricia MacBride, which described her brother as an IRA "volunteer" killed on "active service... because this is a time when we should be treading carefully."

During Assembly Question Time Mr Burnside said there was no doubt the Eames/Bradley group contained a "line of thinking" which is at least examining making victims "equivalent to IRA/Sinn Fein perpetrators of an armed insurrection in this province."

Repeatedly asked by Mr Hay to frame his question, Mr Burnside asked Mr Paisley to "at least stand firm" on there being no equivalence between victims of a terrorist insurrection and "those who were the perpetrators over the last 40 years?"

Mr Paisley countered: " Looking at the man who is asking the question and looking at his past I think he would be better keeping his mouth closed about past issues."

Responding to Ms Long, Mr Paisley said there had been many weary nights as a result of terrorism.

"This is the reality which we have to face up to," the North Antrim MP added, saying he hoped people could be "soft enough to forgive, but wise enough not to be taken in."

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