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Latest News - Ulster Unionist Party

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As we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Belfast Agreement, the Ulster Unionist Party's East Antrim MLA John Stewart has said lessons must be learned from the Belfast Agreement and that political stability and reconciliation through tolerance, partnership, respect and building mutual trust is the only way our society can progress.

John Stewart MLA said:

“I was a Fifth Form pupil at Carrickfergus Grammar School when the Belfast Agreement was signed and was approved by the people in the Referendum. I was young but can vividly remember the wave of optimism that swept our country at that time.

“Looking back, that initial optimism has been subverted in many ways, especially by people who, for tactical not principled reasons, opposed the Agreement at that time, and now owe their political careers to the compromises that others in leadership of both unionism and nationalism made in 1998.

“In this age of fake news and where the rewriting of history has become commonplace, it is worth restating the truth that it was the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP who made the deal, not the DUP who walked away from the talks or Sinn Fein who, when the final agreement was put to the party negotiating teams for

ratification, abstained. Trimble and Hume deserve the plaudits, certainly not Paisley and Adams.

“The Agreement was by its nature a compromise which did not give everyone all they wanted. It was certainly not perfect, but a core value was the principle of consent, where the constitutional future was placed firmly in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland, and was endorsed in a binding international agreement. It secured the Union as long as the majority of the people of Northern Ireland want it to remain. Those of us who are unionists need to spend more time persuading our neighbours that the union is the best way forward for everybody, rather than indulging in the chest-beating, Lundy-searching version of unionism promoted by some.

“Sadly, the 'behind closed doors' deal by the DUP / Sinn Fein at St Andrews in 2006 drove a coach and horses through the principles of the Belfast Agreement and turned every subsequent election into a top dog competition over the First Minister post that encourages sectarian division and has left us with the political stalemate we now find ourselves in.

“We must learn the lessons of the Belfast Agreement. Political stability and reconciliation through tolerance, partnership, respect and building mutual trust is the only way our society can progress. By creating an inclusive, respectful and tolerant society we can continue to find converts and preserve the benefits of Northern Ireland remaining within the United Kingdom.”