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I am deeply grateful for the signal honour which Dáil Éireann has conferred on me today, but I am conscious also that the office of Taoiseach lays a very heavy burden of responsibility on the holder.

In shouldering that responsibility I am greatly strengthened by the knowledge that I will have the help and support of my colleagues in the Government, in the Parliamentary Party and in the Fianna Fáil organisation throughout the country.

I am very heartened also by the hundreds of messages of support which I have already received from people from all parts of Ireland - North and South - and in every walk of life.

The changes taking place in the Government today provide us all with an opportunity for a new beginning, one where all the major groups in our society, Trade Unions, Employers,

Farming Organisations and all those who have a contribution to make to the political, economic and social advancement of our people can set aside sectional differences, one where we can all together harness and pool our energies to achieve our overriding common purpose - the welfare of all the people of this Island - North and South.

It will be the constant endeavour of the Government, as it has been of its predecessor, to achieve the unity of the people of Ireland by agreement, in independence and in a harmonious relationship with our neighbour Britain.

It will be our determination to promote the development of political institutions which will ensure full civil rights and equality for all the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure that security in the area operates impartially through acceptable structures.

It will be our aim to encourage and promote the development of social, cultural and economic links between North and South.

It will be our aim to bring about conditions where all the people of this island, regardless of class or creed, can live in peace and harmony under the common name of Irishmen. Anyone who can contribute towards that end will always find my door open to them.

If there is one area of activity more than another which needs to be examined with a new sense of urgency it is the whole field of industrial relations. It will be an important objective of the Government to effect major improvement in this area which is so crucial for our welfare and economic development.

We are now on the eve of a new decade. It is a time of serious challenge for all of us in Ireland on every front and for every aspect of our society. The problems facing us as a nation are many and grave. But it is also a time of great opportunity. The growth in our human, economic and cultural resources open up new horizons of achievement for us as a people. Among all these resources, there is no asset more valuable than our young people, now over half our population. If we can offer them the leadership and inspiration which they expect, and provide them with the opportunities which are their due, no obstacle or difficulty will stand in our way. Those who laid the basis of our independence and founded our institutions were inspired by a steadfast faith in the potential of the Irish people. With our young people, with the resources now at our command we can vindicate that faith

as never before in every field of endeavour. Let us all, together, summon the will and the determination to do so.

I would like to pay a well deserved tribute to my predecessor Deputy Jack Lynch who did me the honour this morning of proposing my nomination for the office of Taoiseach.

I express to him and to his wife sincere good wishes for their retirement and my appreciation of the enormous personal assurance which I have already received of support and assistance.

My earnest hope is that his wide experience and wise counsel will continue to be available to me, to our party and to our country for many years ahead.

I would also like to avail of this occasion to pay tribute to the memory of Seán Lemass. In almost every area of

life in Ireland today we are building on foundations laid by him and shaped by his energy, insight and wisdom.

Patriotism for Seán Lemass meant an ideal of unflagging service to the practical welfare of his country. To me personally, as to so many others, his achievements will be a never-failing source of guidance and inspiration.

I would like again to express my appreciation of the great honour which has been conferred upon me. My programme, simply stated, will be to do everything that lies in my power to enable all our people, and especially our young people, to give truly of their best in the service of our common welfare and our country. I pledge to Dáil Éireann and to the Irish people that I will wholeheartedly devote myself and whatever abilities and talents God has given me to the task that lies before me.