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Senator talks back on 'victim' mindset

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

The outspoken Irish senator Eoghan Harris last night (Wednesday) told a west Belfast audience that republicans needed to abandon their "state of victimhood" and move on with the future.

The newspaper columnist was participating in the annual West Belfast Talks Back event, part of Feile an Phobail.

More than 600 people packed into St Louise's Comprehensive College in west Belfast to hear the contrasting views of the DUP's Edwin Poots, Sinn Féin's Caitriona Ruane, Police Board chairman Sir Desmond Rea and Mr Harris.

However, Mr Harris said he was not prepared to listen to pro-Sinn Féin "nonsense" and dismissed the need for a truth commission to investigate state collusion.

The commentator, who holds the unique position of having been an adviser to Official Sinn Féin, Fine Gael, the Ulster Unionist Party and Fianna Fail during his political career, said he had not travelled to west Belfast to "tell republicans what they wanted to hear".

There was laughter among the audience when Mr Harris said people in the Republic viewed northerners as "extremely odd" people.

"The Irish people in the south would likely as not regard you as extremely odd people," he said.

"You appear to have moral problems with the republican victimhood."

Mr Harris said he was totally opposed to republican attempts to equate the actions of the British army and RUC with those of loyalist and republican paramilitaries.

He described Gerry Adams's leadership in bringing the IRA away from violence as "epic" but said republicans were weakening their "moral authority" by engaging in a campaign of "victimhood".

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Edwin Poots, the DUP culture minister, accused nationalists of "raking over the past".

He criticised an anti-collusion march due to take place in Belfast on Sunday afternoon.

"If you are going to embed yourself in the past forever you are only going to bring more and more pain upon yourself," he said.

"You are going to let the healing process continue for a period when it should be over and it's about time that people decided that they should move on and leave the past behind."

However, Mr Poots refused to be drawn when asked by a member of the audience if he would also encourage the Orange Order to move away from the past.

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