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The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

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Long calls for calm ahead of homecoming parade and protest

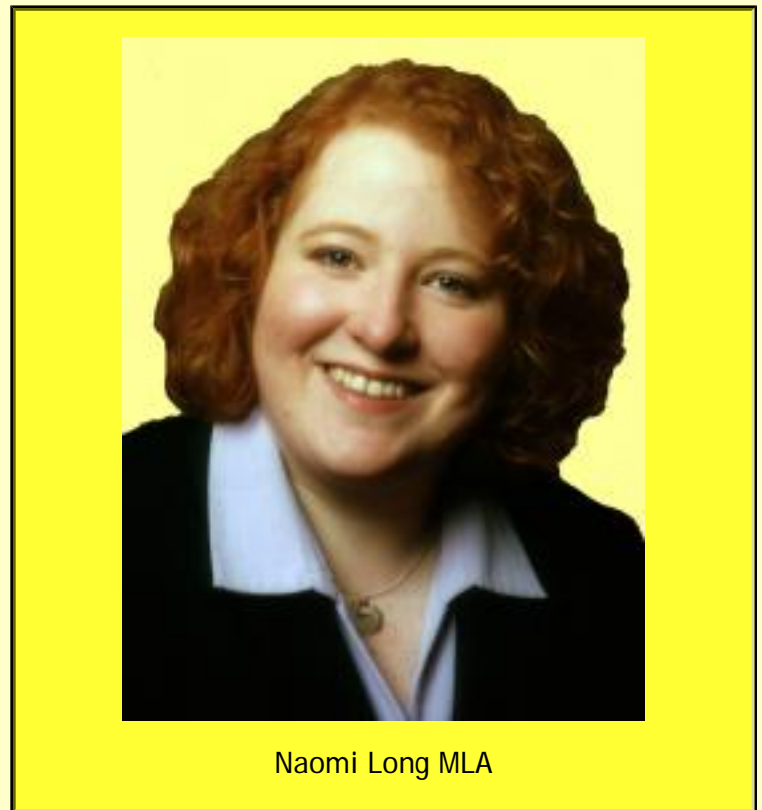
11.22.09am UTC (GMT +0000) Wed 29th Oct 2008

Alliance Deputy Leader and Belfast City Councillor, Naomi Long MLA, has called for calm ahead of this weekend's homecoming parade and the counter protest in Belfast city centre.

Naomi Long MLA said: "With only a matter of days until the homecoming parade and the counter protest, what we need are cool heads and calm words, yet the language and attitudes in the debate around these events are becoming increasingly inflammatory.

"I believe that it would be in everybody's interests if both sides would adopt a more measured approach and take a step back from the brink, otherwise there is a significant risk that the raised tensions will be exploited by elements who are intent on destabilising our community, and could lead to violence on the streets whether the organisers intend it or not.

"I acknowledge and respect the right of those who have organised the protest to do so; however, I would seriously question the wisdom of exercising that right at the same time as the homecoming parade on Sunday. Having established their



Naomi Long MLA

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right to protest with the Parades Commission, they could voluntarily choose not to exercise it this Sunday in the interests of the wider community.

"Those who oppose the homecoming parade, for whatever reason, are under no obligation to be there and take part. I would simply ask that they would show maturity in respecting the wishes of those who do want to attend without the fear of conflict between supporters of the parade and those at the protest hanging over them.

"If, as a community, we continue to lock horns on these issues and refuse to show any generosity of spirit towards those with a different perspective, then we are condemning our community to the destructive cycle of the past. In this situation someone has to be the bigger person, show real leadership and diffuse the situation."

ENDS

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