

Ministers Reflect Danny Kennedy



1 October 2021

Biographical details

Assembly history

1998–2017: Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) member of the legislative assembly (MLA) for Newry and Armagh

Government career

2010–11: minister for employment and learning

2011–15: minister for regional development

Danny Kennedy was interviewed by Akash Paun and Jess Sargeant on 1 October 2021 for the Institute for Government’s Ministers Reflect project. The interview took place remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Danny Kennedy reflects on his time as minister for employment and learning and minister for regional development, relations within the Northern Ireland executive and the Northern Ireland assembly, and the challenges of cross-party working.

Akash Paun (AP): To start with, we’d just like to go back to when you were first appointed as a minister, initially as minister for employment and learning. How did you become a minister? What was the first day like, going into the ministerial office?

Danny Kennedy (DK): Well, obviously, it came about because the party had elected a new leader [Tom Elliot] and the [former] leader, a colleague who had been [minister for] employment and learning, Sir Reg Empey, had been in [the department] quite a number of years, I think, at that point, maybe three or four years. The new leader wanted to make a change and indicated that he was going to nominate me. Day one was a huge personal day of what felt like achievement, you know. You’re in politics to try and achieve something, not just on your own behalf, but on behalf of your party, but also on [behalf of] the people that you represent. On a personal basis, I had a sense of pride, personal pride, that I had reached that level within politics and was being given that opportunity.

Our system is that the nominating officer, i.e. the party leader, signed it off with the speaker of the Northern Ireland assembly and the appointment was confirmed and then senior officials from the department were available to meet and greet. We went immediately, pretty much, to the department’s offices for a first-day briefing and met with the private office staff, the senior [civil servants], the permanent secretary and all of the seniors involved. I then talked through a series of issues that were particularly relevant at that time, to get an early overview, and was given quite a substantial tome to look through in terms of a first-day brief, as to the organisational map, who did what

and where and how. So, it was quite a lot to take in. And you know, very quickly the feelings of personal pride evaporate into, you know: “This is a pretty important and huge task.” So you have to get straight into it. And I had to read up and get going as quickly as possible.

AP: And did you feel prepared for the role, or did it feel like quite a learning curve?

DK: It was quite a learning curve because whilst you, I think, have a sense of what the main duties of any department is, you don’t know that finer detail. And also, you’re getting to work with new people, and I think you have to adapt to that, and that’s always interesting. And they don’t know you; you don’t know them. You want to try and get off on the right foot. Even when it comes to asking stupid questions. As a minister, you don’t want to feel that you’re a complete novice or a complete idiot. You just have to overlook some of the gaps that you have initially and ask pertinent questions of senior officials.

But everybody was very welcoming, everybody was very professional in their approach, and I think that that helped because they know more than you do at that stage. You’re coming in with a different set of expectations. You’re coming with an expectation that: “I’d like to change x, y and z.” They’re saying: “Well, before you can change X, Y, Z, you have to know about A, B and C.” It’s finding that balance.

AP: You came into that job mid-term obviously, well, towards the end of the assembly term?

DK: It was quite late term. There were only about six months left until the next election.

AP: Given that context, were there still some big priorities that you had for that role, specific things you wanted to change or push through in your time in office, or was it more just a case of steadying the ship for that period?

DK: There was the big issue that was burning away, and that was student fees. And that’s, to a certain extent, never really been resolved in terms of the executive or the assembly. Six months out, before an election, there were political considerations as well as departmental considerations, both of which required careful handling, because you had to find the balance. Were you going to be left out on a limb in terms of [being] the minister responsible, in charge of a department where a key issue could impact on the entire executive, but where the entire executive would pile in on that minister, representing one of the smaller parties within the mandatory coalition? So, the dynamics of it were that there were political elephant traps that you had to be aware of, and yet there was the outstanding issue that had to be dealt with. So, you had to bear in mind what the balances were: political popularity/unpopularity, against getting things done and moving the issue on in a more positive and professional way. I focused on the latter.

AP: That was a period when the UK government was tripling tuition fees up to £9,000 [a year] in England, and obviously getting a lot of political flak for that. You decided, or the government, the executive, but presumably with you playing a key role, decided to hold fees down. How did you end up at that position? You were facing budget pressures, no doubt, because of austerity. Was it still relatively easy to achieve that outcome?

DK: What of course had happened during the course of [the policy making process] is that everyone had referred it to some kind of review, undertaken by an independent expert. We had one running that was being conducted by a lady called Joanne Stuart from the Institute of Directors. And she had done a considerable amount of work and was allowed to present her findings. And from memory, her findings did involve charging, not at the levels of the rest of [the] UK, but certainly something that would have meant about £5,000 or £6,000 per year, and capped at that. Now, because we were so close to the election, the colleagues around the executive table were obviously cautious. They didn't, I suppose, ultimately want to get caught out the way the Liberal Democrats got caught out in Westminster, where having made a manifesto commitment that said they wouldn't apply charges, when they got into the office, they changed that. And that's kind of remembered. They never really recovered from that politically, certainly in subsequent early elections.

I had that consideration, from a party point of view. I had to judge what was going to be acceptable, not only to the student population who didn't really want to pay anything, who thought that, you know, everything should be free. And to be fair, a previous generation of Northern Ireland students had actually received money to go to university; they had been grant-aided. But everything had changed and so the issue was: Could you cap it at a reasonable level, expect some contribution from the students themselves or their families, and sell that? So it wasn't a particularly easy decision to try and balance.

AP: So you ended up with that as a compromise figure?

DK: Yes.

AP: That must have been a tricky one to balance. Then moving forward in the story, you weren't in that role for very long – six or eight months.

DK: Six months, something like that.

AP: And then there was the election and on the other side of the election you moved to the regional development portfolio. How did that come about? Was that just because the departments were allocated differently between the parties and that was the job you were asked to take on?

DK: With our system, your electoral strength following an election dictated the pick, if you like, what number you picked at.

So the big departments, I mean health and education and the big spenders and the [Department for the] Economy, and Finance are always, you know, the big sexy first picks. Health has now gone down the list, actually, and is now very much the last pick for anybody to do because the issues are so great, and the money is basically not there. However, that cannot be said for the Ulster Unionist Party because the health portfolio has been our chosen first pick in at least two executives. The two big options open to us were either DRD [the Department for Regional Development] or the [Department for] Communities. At the time, welfare reform was a very prominent issue, both at Westminster and locally, and there was a wrangle as to what measures Westminster would give, in addition, to soften the impact. So in the end we opted for regional development, which of course is really infrastructure. It's now changed again in that they've added what was part of the old DoE [Department of the Environment] such as driver licensing and MOT tests etc. But it was mostly infrastructure, along with being in charge of Northern Ireland Water and Translink, the transport holding company. So it was a really big department, an important department. Quite a big spender in terms of overall budget, so it was seen as a good option.

We had gone into the election with a manifesto that talked about parking charges. At the first-day briefing with the permanent secretary, who later became the head of the civil service in Northern Ireland, Malcolm McKibbin, the conversation was dominated by our manifesto commitment on parking charges and how simply it wasn't affordable for the department. He just said: "Look, in order to achieve that, you're going to have to cut the decks out of something else," you know. So that was a lesson there that you need to be careful what you pray for, sometimes, in that when you make commitments and then end up in charge, it's not terribly easy always to deliver on those. But it's a political necessity because colleagues in the party are saying: "Well, that's what we promised, that's what we have to do, you know, so go and do it." And then you tell them: "Well, that will mean something else will be cut as a result of that." So that was interesting.

AP: So you had to drop that pledge, did you?

DK: No, no, we had to carefully balance how we presented it in the end and make significant changes. We were able to say: "Well, we'd like to do this, but because we don't have enough money or we're not given enough money, we can't achieve it all, but we can make inroads, and make improvements to it, with a view to ultimately changing the overall system."

AP: To be clear, this was about removing parking charges in public car parks?

DK: Departmental car parks, public car parks.

AP: Aside from this manifesto issue, what were your big priorities for the role?

DK: I think the big priorities were to deliver on some of the major infrastructure schemes in terms of improving the road network. We were able to bring forward a couple of really important [projects], the A26 and A2 and A8. But the discussion was rather dominated by the upgrade proposals for the A5, which the Irish government wanted to contribute to, because the improvement would be to the road from Donegal to Belfast, which obviously it starts in the Republic [of Ireland]. But the main part of it was from Londonderry down through Northern Ireland, leading across the border and eventually winding its way to Dublin. That had been a scheme that was talked about for, oh, 20 years. But it was a political requirement around the executive table, particularly from the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] and Sinn Féin, who saw it as an important scheme to the island of Ireland, by improving that particular road. So there was a lot of contention around that. It became agreed around the executive table, not particularly by me or my party, but it was made an executive priority. I was the minister in charge of that department, and I had to be mindful of that.

And so we worked faithfully and honestly through some of the processes. But as it turned out, some of those stages were hampered by environmental challenges and court challenges. And we were taken to judicial review, where I think, of the 12 points, we won 11 of them, but were knocked back on one, on an environmental issue, and that caused delays. I was blamed around the executive table and the allegation was made that I didn't really want the scheme to happen and it was either incompetence or malevolence on my part that was preventing its progress. That led to some pretty heated discussions around the executive table. It wasn't a particularly popular scheme. It became a political division between nationalists and unionists, which is the wrong place for such an important infrastructure scheme to be.

AP: It was Sinn Féin primarily who were pushing it as a priority, was it?

DK: Yes, it was. And deputy first minister, Martin McGuinness, represented part of that area and saw it as a real priority, for the infrastructure but also as a sort of a political totem pole that things were happening on an all-Ireland basis.

AP: So that was a tricky issue that dominated quite a bit of your time.

DK: It did.

AP: During that particular episode and more generally, what was your experience of working with the civil service within your department? Did they give you, from your perspective, the support that you needed? Were there ways that you felt that their effectiveness could have been improved?

DK: There was contention about the route of that particular scheme. When I had gone into the department, I wanted to look at alternative options. You know, was that the only route that had been identified and was it the most cost effective and was it the most achievable? But officials at that stage had pretty much made up their mind [about] the route that they had chosen, which had gone through a series of processes against alternative routes, it is fair to say. But they were reluctant to change the route, principally I think because the executive had made it an executive priority and were fixed on that particular route. So any attempt to alter that route would further delay the scheme.

So officials got a bit nervous about that [the request to look at other options] and kind of said: "Well look, minister, we've been through this, we've looked at all the options and we believe that this route is the best one." So I did have some difficulty. There was a reluctance for them to consider an alternative route, which might have been more acceptable. Because a lot of the land that was being used for the route that had been [chosen] was good agricultural land and there was a sizable lobby from the agricultural community who said: "Look, if you tweak that route and take an alternate, we'll not lose as much good agricultural land."

And of course, the other issue about Northern Ireland is land and territory and that's an important consideration in the politics. And there were issues around that, but I made my decisions based on the facts presented to me by officials.

AP: Okay. That's a little bit cryptic but are you able to elaborate on that point a bit?

DK: Well, I need to be reasonably careful on this, but there was a perception that some of the land that was gone through was unionist-owned land. And that [the road] would effectively cut through a swathe of ground that was owned by members of the local unionist population, which ultimately would call into question the viability of their farm and their farm business. So they were kind of saying: "We're losing this and we're being forced off the land," if you like. And in the Northern Ireland context, those community issues are significant. But again my decisions were based on proper consideration of all of the issues.

Jess Sargeant (JS): We'd like to talk about some of your experience of working in the executive committee and the relationships between the different political parties. What was your experience of decision making in the executive committee and what was the role of the deputy first minister and the first minister in that?

DK: Well, I think our system, although it's a mandatory five-party executive even to this day, is bound really by the relationship between the two largest parties, who in that case were the DUP [Democratic Unionist Party] and Sinn Féin. And those two parties determined what issues were presented at that executive level.

There was a frustration from the smaller parties, including ourselves, that the agenda wasn't always agreed on time. You went to executive meetings that were scheduled to take place at 2 o'clock and you were kicking your heels until the meeting maybe started after 4pm because of the lack of agreement, and papers being exchanged between the two main parties, dots and i's being settled. So there was that frustration.

And of course, [there was] the frustration that the other smaller parties like ourselves were excluded from those discussions, you know. We were not allowed to make a contribution it seemed. Having made initial comments to an executive paper when it was first circulated, when the final draft came out for consideration by the executive, some of our stuff frankly didn't appear and wasn't properly considered. So [we went] from a five-party mandatory coalition to really the two big parties dictating terms, which then again was their right because of their electoral strength. But it didn't, I think, make for a good government, and doesn't even to this day.

I think those frustrations are still there and finding solutions to it [is] difficult because in politics, to the victor, the spoils, you know. We're kind of hampered by a political system that doesn't really deliver quickly the requirements for the general population. It's too much of a political carve-up, you know: "You get something on that, and we'll get something on that." That's not the way to do public policy. It ought to be that everybody gets something. Shared responsibility became a political carve-up and to this day I think that's one of the frustrations of the system.

When we presented papers, or papers were sought from the department, we would have met with the special advisers. It was their job to sort out and speak to the other parties and say: "Look, this is what we're thinking. Have you any thoughts on this?" And that system worked reasonably well, and I think the relationship within special advisers was okay and there was a bit of toing and froing. But when it came to the really big issues, the two parties really dominated discussion on that and dictated terms.

JS: You gave an example earlier of where you were expected to deliver on the priority of the executive. Were there other examples of priorities that you yourself had identified that were frustrated because of lack of agreement in the executive?

DK: Yes. Obviously, money is always one of those issues. Because the DRD had responsibility for Northern Ireland Water, there was the issue of water charges. The rest of the UK pays water charges; we don't in Northern Ireland. And eventually the Treasury got fed up and said: "Well, you know, you're not getting any more money as a consequence of [the] Barnett [formula – the system for calculating UK government block grants to devolved administrations] until you sort it out. If you want to spend your money from the block grant avoiding water charges, you can do that, but we're not giving you extra money to do that."

The same issues around student fees applied to water charges. People recognised that it was an issue in terms of what it was costing the assembly and executive in terms of money, but the bigger parties didn't want to take the hard, politically unpopular decisions. And I think the one consistent criticism of the success of the executive or otherwise in Northern Ireland is that they're more inclined to do populism than [take] the really hard decisions. Now, people will say: "Well, you know, there's no point making yourself unpopular." And I understand that. But is that ultimately the best thing to do in terms of the overall governance of Northern Ireland? But there still, to this day, I think, remains the sort of attitude that: "You can't do that, because people will not like us for that." Whereas I think people will understand, particularly in terms of the austerity at the time, and the Conservative government were very miserly in terms of what they were allocating, we felt, we all felt within the executive. But it didn't lead us, or force us, to take some of the decisions that I think the Treasury thought would be forced upon us. We simply avoided them by cutting all their services.

And then I found that out as a consequence that my budget was being further trimmed. I was told to go and look for money elsewhere, which wasn't available or couldn't be legally obtained, and that was to raise money through the port of Belfast. But that wasn't possible. Both the first minister and deputy first minister knew that, but kind of said: "Well, manage your budgets." But subsequently that led to cutbacks in some of the services that I was able to offer in terms of really basic services like fixing potholes. We just couldn't afford it and that led to significant public criticism. It led to other parties piling in and saying: "Kennedy can't manage his budget," when they knew themselves that that budget had been slashed, simply because they weren't prepared to take action on other things where money could be freed up. That happened as we got closer to the election. And I don't think there was any coincidence in that. I think it was a two-phased approach. They would make the accusation that: "Here's someone who can't manage their budget, you're not getting your grass cut, your hedges cut, you're not getting your basic potholes fixed and why would you vote for that party?" That was the correlation, you know. It's politics.

JS: Were there examples of where you worked with other departments, with other political parties? Are there any particularly good or alternatively particularly bad examples of cross-departmental working?

DK: Yeah. I mean I think there were issues where there were cross-cutting [concerns] where we were able to join with other departments and make a difference on things. The problem with DRD is the infrastructure stuff is so expensive. Partnerships with the other departments were largely small matters, you know what I mean – fairly small amounts of money to allow things to happen. But at least, you know, there were efforts. I think there wouldn't have been that much notice [given] then, they weren't significant in terms of their overall impact, but I suppose at a local level on certain things there would have been something gained.

JS: From the outside, it looked like the period in which you were in government was a fairly stable time for political relationships within the executive. Does that ring true from the inside as well, or were there underlying tensions?

DK: I think it's fair to say that mostly the relationships were fairly civilised. I think there was only one occasion where there was a kind of stand-up row about that A5 scheme, that we talked about earlier. And the deputy first minister, Martin McGuinness, and I had a fairly robust exchange. But that aside, you try to work as collegiately as possible with colleagues, on the understanding that there were things that you could co-operate fairly easily on. If it was something around transport that affected schools, then you could work with the Department of Education. And if there was something around health and NI Water and the conservation of water and the purification of water for people's health, we were able to do that as well. So there were areas where you could co-operate. But there were always significant political issues and tensions between the two big parties against the three smaller parties in the politics of Northern Ireland.

JS: You mentioned some discussions you had with the UK government over water charges. Were there other areas in which you liaised with your counterparts in the UK government and what was that experience like?

DK: I wanted to consciously reach out to the devolved administrations in Cardiff and Edinburgh, as well as Westminster. But I think that attitude may well prevail even to this day where some in Westminster demonstrate a condescending attitude and feel slightly superior or more significant. We had some engagement with Westminster on key issues, [around] infrastructure. But we did try to develop, particularly with Scotland, links that would improve [relations] on either side. Now, even at that early stage a special adviser wanted me to look at either a bridge or a tunnel between Northern Ireland and Scotland, long before Boris Johnson [the UK prime minister] made it more popular, or at least raised it publicly. But I think we were more interested in upgrading the infrastructure, the existing infrastructure, the A75, I think it is, on the Scottish side, and the road to Larne on our side, which is the road that connects most with Scotland.

On our side we did improve and upgrade the A8, the road to Larne, but getting the Scottish administration – again, this was due to money – to upgrade that for the lorry drivers of Northern Ireland, very little was done about it.

We met through the British–Irish Council, sort of on a bi-yearly basis. Those council meetings were hosted in various capitals, and we went along and talked about co-operating. But I think most of that was a bit superficial because in the times of austerity there wasn't a great opportunity to share additional resources to do something that looked as if it was, not international, but certainly inter-regional.

JS: And what about your relationships with your counterparts in the Republic of Ireland?

DK: My counterpart for a large part of my time in DRD was Leo Varadkar, who later became Taoiseach. And we, I suppose we were [meeting] regularly. North–South was more regular than East–West. And again, there were issues of co-operation, which were straightforward and made common sense really. Again, some of it was dominated a bit by the A5 scheme and the frustrations around that, particularly with the Irish. The Irish, I always felt, played a bit of a game in that they were contributing but their economy was in poor shape too at the time and I knew, and they knew, I think, that they couldn't really afford it. So whilst they protested about delays to it, they weren't entirely unhappy because it meant that they didn't have to release any money towards it. There was always a fear on their part, never really spoken about, but a fear that why would they spend taxpayers' money in another jurisdiction when their own road infrastructure needed to be upgraded in certain parts of the Republic. I think that was something that was largely unspoken, but I think both recognised that there was an issue around it.

JS: Presumably as minister for regional development, part of your funding came from the EU level, because EU funds are invested in infrastructure. Did you have any interactions with EU institutions directly or was that all through the UK government?

DK: I made a priority of getting a team set up to focus on European opportunities, or how we could avail of the trans-European transport network scheme that was available for funding and we were quite successful in getting grant aid to schemes that we had put forward for it. And I found through engagement there that Europe had an open door. Whereas there was still a bit of an issue around the Treasury, who wanted to regard monies that Europe was giving [as theirs], that they had a clearing house basically, and that it would go to the Treasury first and then they would release it to Northern Ireland. We always felt that that meant that they would want to allow Europe to pay the money that the Treasury should actually pay, whereas we wanted both; we wanted the Treasury allocation on top of the European thing, but Westminster played a game on that and were very hard to break down.

JS: What was your relationship like with the assembly? Did you feel that you were adequately scrutinised in your role? Did you have good relationships with, for example, the committee that was responsible for scrutinising you?

DK: The nature of Northern Ireland politics was that where your own party had a minister, you were supportive, [but] where it was a political opponent, you could do as much kicking as you like, and that, I think, prevails to this day. Sometimes we felt that the committee were just being obstructive for the sake of it, although, to be fair, I had a good relationship with the then chair of the committee for regional development who was there for [almost] the entire period. Just a few months out from the election, the DUP changed the chair to be more aggressive and sort of act as more of a Rottweiler in terms of attacking me, under the title of scrutiny. But it wasn't scrutiny, it was more politically motivated. But again, that's politics.

JS: We started with your first day, the first things you did when you became a minister. I think we want to take it back now to your final days or months as a minister. What were your final actions before leaving office?

DK: I think everyone wants to leave office being remembered for at least one thing. It's not possible in politics generally to be remembered for a series of things, particularly in times of austerity. But what we had during my time in the department was we promoted cycling. We wanted a cycling revolution, that's what it was called. And everywhere I went I was encouraged to cycle and, you know, we cycled in some of the most interesting places. We promoted it actively. I created a team within the department so that we could improve the infrastructure locally, particularly around Belfast, the city of Belfast. And that actually went down really well with the cycling fraternity and also environmentalists. And it was linked into lifestyle change. So we were able to do a bit of cross-cutting [work] on it with [the Department of] Health and even [the Department of] Education. And so that, I suppose, was what I would be remembered for, if remembered at all.

Just before I left office there was to be a national award of the UK cycling organisation for who had done most to promote cycling within the United Kingdom. And the word came back that they were going to nominate me. But in the intervening period, the politics of it meant that I was leaving office almost at the same time, and they didn't want to dip into any kind of political controversy, so in the end the award went to somebody else and I missed out. But I kind of do regret that even another month in office would have made yet another big step along the way for that type of recognition – not for me personally, but for promoting cycling and a healthier lifestyle.

We had a very good international conference where we had speakers from Holland and Denmark and places like that. We went out to those countries. In some ways the culture of those countries when it comes to cycling is different. There is a lot of opposition, or some opposition, from people who say: "Oh, cyclists are a waste of time and on a

Sunday morning you can't get anywhere and, you know, they're riding three abreast," and all of that. There was a certain amount of negativity, which we were overcoming actually, in the debate about lifestyle. We had hosted, along with the Department of the Economy, headed then by Arlene Foster, the Giro d'Italia. And that was a huge international cycling event that we were very much part of. It was a huge event for Northern Ireland to host even at that stage, and there was enormous interest. So we were getting quite a lot of credit for that. And I suppose that's the legacy I would like to be remembered for.

JS: After the election, the UUP decided not to go back into the executive and instead to form part of the official opposition. To what extent were you involved in that decision and if you were, was that at all influenced by your experience in government in the previous executive?

DK: I think we actually made that decision about a year before the election, or a number of months before the election, and we were going to fight the election on the basis that there needed to be an opposition. My concern, I think, was that the system that is in place doesn't really allow for an opposition in terms how it would properly be financed, because an opposition cannot simply be an opposition for opposition's sake, it has to be an alternative government. And in our system in Northern Ireland, that's not possible at this stage – the systems are not there. I had that view, but I did recognise that there was a clear majority within my party that said: "No, opposition is the way to go." For me to have sort of publicly contradicted that would have smelt a bit of self-preservation in terms of being more interested in holding office than taking a wider perspective. So, you know, I publicly supported that, even though I had private reservations about how it would actually work in practical terms, although I didn't share those reservations with the party leader or wider party. In the end it didn't yield us great benefit or electoral popularity. It wasn't the big game changer that we hoped it would be because simply the systems are not in place.

JS: You may have already answered this question when you spoke about your legacy, but it's one we ask everyone. The question is: What are you proudest of having achieved during your time as minister?

DK: I think probably the cycling thing. I think the infrastructure changes. When I drive on the A26, when I drive on the A8, when I drive on the A2, I rather fondly remember that those were projects that I had played a leading part in bringing forward. But I think that's the case for any infrastructure minister. I mean, you're going to have to build a road somewhere, otherwise you're not a good infrastructure minister. What I think was something different, that was probably the cycling revolution.

JS: And then the final question: What advice would you give to a future minister on how to be effective in office?

DK: I think you have to understand the limitations that you have, that you have to concentrate on one or two key projects, one or two key priorities, probably no more than two, because your ability to change things in a relatively short window [is limited]. Most people get two, three, four years, something like that. It's not a long time in overall government terms. So I think you have to identify one, two probably at the most, priorities for which you will want to be remembered. And so, you know, you want to put your effort into that. Obviously they have to be sensible proposals; they have to be properly thought out. But I think that's the best you can hope for when it comes to making your own mark. Everything else is really the mark of the department. It is a curious thing.

JS: Is there anything we haven't asked you about that you wanted to talk about or say on the record?

DK: It's been even interesting for me to reflect on some of this stuff and I don't think we do that very often. You see, without the civil service, and without officials providing advice, things end pretty quickly, you know what I mean. You go from one day being in charge of a department, millions of pounds and all of that, there are maybe hundreds even thousands of staff. And then it comes to a shuddering halt. And adapting to that change can be an issue.

But, I was very fortunate, I got the opportunity. I made a little go a long way in terms of my own ability, I always say that. But I'm pleased I've had that experience; I enjoyed the experience while I was there. It's hard work. It's harder work than people imagine. Long hours. Painstaking. A lot of reading to be done to properly understand issues before you make fairly important decisions, late into the night. You need to be out and about, you need to be seen, you need to be active, you need to be answering questions and be able to hold your brief in the chamber, to respond, you need to have that in-depth knowledge. So it does impact quite a lot on your private life and family life even. Those sacrifices are sometimes not seen or recognised. But when you're given the opportunity, when you're in politics and you love politics and politics is your thing, the opportunity to serve is a very good thing.

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