

**Speech of Micheál Martin, TD
On election as Leader of Fianna Fáil
Wednesday 26th January 2011**

This leadership election was conducted in a very different way to many political contests.

Each of the candidates promoted a positive message and we engaged each other in serious discussion about the role of our party and the future of our country.

I want to thank Brian, Mary and Éamon for the spirit in which this election was held and for their statements of support for me.

It is a great honour for me to have been elected to serve as the eighth leader of Fianna Fáil.

The biggest motivation for me in seeking the leadership of the party is that I believe the tradition it represents has a unique and positive role to play in our country's future.

I was not born into party politics. My family's values were those of republican nationalism and community involvement. My father worked as a bus driver, helped found their union and was active in many local groups.

Growing up what I saw from politics was how political leadership could be a driver of social progress.

With my brothers and sisters, I was part of the first generation to have a chance to complete second-level education and go on to university.

Our city of Cork experienced many tough times, but it was helped to rebound with sustained economic and social progress which is visible in all areas.

The direct link between this progress and decisions by a succession of people such as Seán Lemass, Patrick Hillery and Donogh O'Malley is absolutely clear.

This tradition and what it has meant for the communities I grew up in is why I chose to join Fianna Fáil and why I now wish to lead it.

At its most creative and effective we have always been committed to a middle-way which believes that a commitment to both economic growth and social progress can and must go hand-in-hand.

The empty slogans of the ideologues of left and right have never and will never deliver for the people of this modern democracy.

Under my leadership Fianna Fáil will be clear in its approach to the urgent issues of today and in the path it proposes for the future.

With the right policies Ireland can and will come through this crisis. It is the duty of every party to be specific and credible.

Many colleagues and party members have made submissions relating to the programme we will finalise in the next few days.

We will go into these in detail next week, but I can emphasise the core points.

There is no credible route forward for our country without tackling the fiscal deficit.

The National Recovery Plan is detailed and open on exactly what we propose. This will be central to our programme.

However, even at a time of crisis like this there is a lot that can be done on other areas.

We will set out policies on job creation which show how we propose to help individuals access training and education and also how we propose to help businesses.

As recent major jobs announcements have confirmed, support for competitive enterprise is the most effective foundation for delivering well-paid and sustainable jobs.

We will address this in detail, including how to ensure that all regions benefit.

Education as a vehicle of social opportunity remains a core value for me and we will set out our approach on this.

Most importantly, I am determined that we will set before the people policies which show that we understand the lessons of what has gone wrong in recent years.

People seeking partisan gain, or offering superficial commentary, promote the idea that there are simple explanations.

The truth is that the biggest failings have been systemic failing which go to the heart of our political and governing system.

Our country needs a determined approach to getting us through to recovery and it needs an equally determined approach to reforming politics and government.

We will offer a radical and substantive programme of reform in this election and we will work for it afterward.

In the coming weeks we will have one of the most important general elections in our history. The next Dáil will make decisions which will determine much about the future of our country.

One of the ways in which politics has failed is that our elections have been dominated by soundbites, personality and political tactics.

Our country needs an election which is as serious as the issues we must tackle.

This can only happen if the leaders of the parties show a real commitment to moving away from political business as usual.

Central to this must be real debate between us about what our parties are proposing and what we can deliver in government. The traditional model of elections debates is seriously flawed and must change.

I have therefore already written to Enda Kenny and Eamon Gilmore asking them to join with me in agreeing to the most extensive and detailed series of debates yet seen in an Irish election.

Specifically, I have asked them to agree to hold two debates between us three, one at the start of the campaign and one at the end.

In addition there would be a series of one-on-one debates between us and a separate debate in the Irish language.

In the past they have both called for such a series of debates so I hope that agreement can quickly be reached.

Some people appear to want a coronation rather than an election. Some suggest that it is all over before it has started. I can assure you that my party intends campaigning with energy and with fresh ideas.

We intend to talk about the future of this country - about how the economy can be restored, jobs created and our system of politics and government fundamentally reformed.

Fianna Fáil has always been bigger than its leaders. The organisation is made up of ordinary people who work in their communities and take nothing from politics except a sense of making a contribution.

I am proud to have been elected to serve as their leader.

I will work every day be true to the best traditions of this party and the spirit of the community in which I grew up and has given me so much.