

Opening Power to Diversity



Charles Titus was placed with Michael Creed TD from February to July 2014

Biography

Charles is from Nigeria and gained his Irish citizenship in 2008. He has been awarded a LL.B in Law and Psychology and an LL.M in Human Rights and Criminal Justice from the University of Limerick. Charles also holds a BA in English (Ed) from the University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. He has worked as personnel assistant to the Clerk of the Ondo State Legislative Assembly where he was responsible a variety of tasks including the filing and gazetting of legislative debate records, Bills and enacted laws. Charles was politically active prior to his naturalisation and has participated in every election since gaining citizenship in 2008. Charles runs his own car valeting service and was heavily involved in youth service organisations in Nigeria.

Diary

Part 1

The first three weeks of my placement have been socially enriching, politically insightful and educationally informative particularly because of my previous experience of working in one of the State Parliament back home in Nigeria. It is amazing to note that legislators in this country do more than legislate, attend committee meetings and/or constituency clinics. Deputy Creed like other TDs, take time to read every letter and email, answer every phone call when possible, welcome visitors

and deal with other miscellaneous issues. The reality is that Irish people actively engage at various levels with their elected representatives. It reminds me of what the former Irish President Mary Robinson said in her memoir: *“Democracy demands more of citizens than a passive role in between elections. It is not enough to vote every few years and then sit back and let all decisions be taken by a small group”*. I have learnt that Irish citizens don't sit back, yes, they don't sit back, and that is why sometimes Government is forced to have a rethink on certain policies as a result of pressure from citizens. I must confess I have a lot to learn if I intend one day to be a politician, particularly at local levels.

My first week like anyone taking up a job for the first time was a bit challenging. My desk and access to internet were not ready even though Deputy Creed had set the ball rolling sponsoring me for internet connection, arranging for my desk and giving me three research topics he would want me to work on. Deputy Creed took me around and formally introduced me to some Dáil staff and Deputies. For the first time in my nine years living in Ireland, I watched live Dáil debate. I also got a historic tour of Leinster house which was personally rewarding and educative to me as an African-Irish. Particularly, becoming informed and gaining an understanding of the history behind every painting, the tri-colour, the repairs and the independent proclamation of the Irish Nation.

So far, it has been absolutely thrilling and remarkable working in Leinster House and I am really enjoying it. As I walk towards the office every Tuesdays and Wednesdays from Kildare Street with the thoughts of preparing for the day's job I cannot but notice the welcoming and very helpful Dáil staff. I feel very privileged walking up the stairs ahead or behind Ministers, TDs or Senators and exchanging pleasantries with them. I cannot but reflect on the humility and modesty at which these politicians relate to those around them, it is a lesson I hope to instil into my future career.

Part 2

Leinster House has witnessed a lot of dramatic scenes and revelations in the last five weeks. Recent controversies about Charities, alleged Garda corruption, Garda Ombudsman, Commissioner's resignation and attempted vote of no confidence tabled against the Minister of Justice, Equality and Defence as well as dramatic demonstrations taking place outside the gate at the opening and closing of office hours challenged my thinking on politics in Ireland.

Behind the scene, TDs' are busy meeting constituents, addressing issues affecting these constituents both at the Dáil and constituency levels, meeting company staff and strategising on how and what to do to save jobs, and prevent them from going into receivership. At Committee Rooms, they grill bank

executives and officers on their strategies and methods used in examining mortgage arrears with a view to design a sustainable solution to mortgage arrear problems.

As an African-Irishman, working in the Dáil has been more than a learning process. **To be physically present while some of these issues described above are debated and dealt with is mind opening and inspiring.** To have an input into some of the legislative process as well as local/MEP election campaign is remarkable, and gives me extraordinary feeling of belonging.

Although, I have worked on various topics such as: Judicial Appointment Procedure; Permanent Defence Force and Other Ranks Representative Association (PDFORRA) regarding their 'Post 94 Soldiers' Contract' issues; and the 30 Years Rule and Right to Access Public Records. However, I am proud to report that the 30 years Rule and Right to Access Public Records had made it to the Dáil's Draft office. This may positively contribute to the initiation of a Draft amendment to the National Archive Act 1986, if amended. The amendment would ensure that the release of State records on issues of mutual interest between the Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain is synchronised to avoid distortion in favour of British Opinion in shared historical perspective. This is a landmark achievement which gives me the greatest sense of confidence and desire to work harder.

Finally, attending Senator Deirdre Clune's campaign committee meeting in March for the first time gave an insight into Irish election campaign strategies. Even migrant statistically represents almost 12% of the voting population, it is surprising to observe that they are not always included in campaign plans. **I raised the issue and chipped in some strategy on how to embrace migrant communities, particularly, African migrant community for the purposes of local/MEP elections.** When Deputy Creed who doubled as campaign manager to Senator Deirdre Clune asked me to organise the African community to meet Senator Clune on her campaign trail to Limerick, I was delighted and immediately swung into action and successfully organised a meeting regarding same.

Part 3

Time flies, doesn't it? Looking back, I would say that the last five and half months have given me a lot to think about politically. As I sat down to commence the writing of my final journal article which allow me to update my activities on a weekly basis in Leinster House, it reminds me of the fact that my internship expires after 5pm on Wednesday. To me, it is inevitable that the programme will end someday, **the thought I can no longer walk in and out the way I had done in the last five and half months brings a strong nostalgic feeling and memories of Leinster House.**

The act of legislating and governing which is assigned to both Houses of Oireachtas and executive is undoubtedly straight forward. However, the politics that goes with carrying out this act can be very

complex and sometimes produce dramatic scenes. The modus operandi of what it takes to be a successful politician or political party is an act that must be learned. Take for instance, legislative scrutiny; ability to deal with lobby groups trying to influence and shape legislation; the handling of constituents and matters arising therein at both constituency and at the Dáil level; actively contribute to Dáil's topical business matters; the skill of asking parliamentary questions and so on. The OPD scheme has given me the privilege to do just that, whether or not six months is enough to acquire these skills and knowledge is arguable, nonetheless, it is definitely enough time to pick up some useful politicking skills.

A quick reflection of the last few months tells me that, I was indeed lucky to have covered almost everything that needed to be covered as far as what this scheme is about. I have carefully observed Deputy Michael Creed carry out his parliamentary functions and duties with due diligence and care. In doing so he gave me access to his office and actively exposed me to all aspect of his job. I can proudly report that I engaged with various activities which cut across: routine administrative work, attending probing parliamentary committee meetings, representing him in public briefings, participated in a successful election campaign of MEP Deidre Clune and carried out researches which I suppose were the more interesting, rewarding and daunting part of my experience.

On the flip side, projects which I started but didn't get to complete aren't pleasing to report. Just fortnight ago, I met the Legislative Draftsman to discuss the objective and rationale behind our proposed amendment to the National Archive Act 1986, regrettable, I will not be there to see the bill tabled before the Dáil for debate. Also, my current research on alcohol and harm caused by binge drinking to individuals, families, communities and the State with a view to bring in reform proposals is something I shall elect to complete outside the OPD scheme. Be that as it may, I would join Julius Caesar to say that I came, saw and conquered. To Michael Creed TD, I must say thank you very much for opening up your door to me. To Crosscare Migrant Project, Joe and Staff, I say well done. Keeping the scheme going is a difficult task but by all means should be sustained because there is no better way to make people like me learn and participate in the political process of our new home – Ireland.

