



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Business of Dáil	2
Nomination of Taoiseach (Resumed).	2
Business of Dáil	34
Appointment of Taoiseach and Nomination of Members of Government: Motion	36

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé hAoine, 6 Bealtaine 2016

Friday, 6 May 2016

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 12 p.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Business of Dáil

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It is proposed to take No. 1, nomination of Taoiseach (resumed). It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the arrangements for the nomination of Taoiseach shall be as follows: the speech of each proposer and seconder shall not exceed five minutes in each case; following which, statements shall be made by the main spokespersons for Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, AAA-PBP, Independents 4 Change, Social Democrats, the Green Party, or a Member nominated in their stead, and a non-party Deputy, which shall not exceed ten minutes in each case and such Members may share their time; following which, the Chair shall allow contributions for a period not exceeding 30 minutes; whereupon the Chair shall put the Question on any motion made in the order in which such motions were received; on conclusion of the votes on nomination of Taoiseach, the Ceann Comhairle shall call on all nominees for a five-minute statement in each case; and on the conclusion of nomination of Taoiseach, the Dáil shall adjourn for three hours.

An Ceann Comhairle: I take it that it is agreed.

Nomination of Taoiseach (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: I will now take nominations for the Office of Taoiseach.

Deputy Noel Rock: Tairgim:

Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Enda Kenny chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.

I move:

That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Enda Kenny for appointment by the President to be

Taoiseach.

Fourth time is the charm, as they say. As Deputies can see, I am very eager to get on with this speech on the fourth occasion. All of us in this Chamber have been trusted with the responsibility. It is up to us to build consensus. It is up to us to work together and it is up to us to reject the politics of the past and embrace the politics of the future. Resilience is needed. Patience is needed. Fortitude is needed and it has not been found wanting from many in this House. It would be remiss of me not to pay respect to those who have engaged and played their part in this process, those in Fianna Fáil, who have worked to compromise and those Independents who have worked together to build consensus, build foundations and build trust.

We are all aware that government is not merely about having power but about using it to achieve the kind of change we wish to see in our society. The truth is that no problem we face as a nation is bigger than our capacity as a people to overcome it. However, that requires parties and people working together and pursuing those same overarching goals of ensuring the well-being of our nation, our society, our people and the most vulnerable within it.

I have no doubt that the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, has done this and will continue to do this. I have no doubt that those of us who are willing can work together and will work together with trust, transparency and tenacity underpinning our efforts. This new partnership Government would work with an ethos of openness and inclusivity and I believe that nobody would be better placed to head that Government than the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny. History often has a tendency to chime with the present day and while we must today look forward and embrace the politics of the future, it is often instructive to learn from the past. In 1922, Michael Collins, speaking as he nominated a President, said “the Irish nation, at the present moment, is a ship without a captain, and a ship, as we all know, cannot get on without a captain.” Today we face a similar issue. Ireland needs a Taoiseach to match the challenges we have ahead, a Taoiseach to master the opportunities we face, a Taoiseach who can harness the great capabilities of this Parliament and a Taoiseach who will always put the country first. Deputy Enda Kenny is all of these things and he should be our next Taoiseach.

President Higgins often implores us to be the arrow and not the target, to lead and illuminate the path ahead, not just for ourselves but for others too, to learn from the politics of the past and embrace the politics of the future, to reject the politics of anger and embrace the politics of answers. That is why all of us chose to seek public office and why Deputy Enda Kenny came to lead our country in an hour of need. It is why I am nominating him to lead us at a time when, once again, we need leadership and a Government.

I will close with a quote from somebody who is not a US President, for once. It is Arthur Griffith, who wrote in the first issue of *Nationality* in 1915: “we believe, in short, that Ireland will be again one of these days what it was in a former day, the light of the world, and that the chief business of every Irishman is to hasten that day.” That was in 1915, 101 years ago. How far we have come but how far we still have to go. It has been 70 days, as Members are aware, since our election. We have capacity, opportunity and the ability to be the best country in the world. We also have challenges and the urgency of now is too great to ignore. We have no time to lose and it has been 70 days. I am proud to nominate Deputy Enda Kenny to be Taoiseach.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: It is my honour and privilege to second the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach in the Thirty-second Dáil. In the words of John F. Kennedy, “we must think and act not only for the moment but for our time”. Deputy Enda Kenny, over the

past number of weeks, has shown himself as a leader who acts and thinks not only for himself but for the good of the country and our citizens. Through negotiation and listening to the views of those elected by the people, Deputy Kenny has put the country first by reading the signs of the times and putting in place a programme for partnership.

We stand on the brink of the next important chapter in Irish history. It is important that we have a leadership with vision, compassion and a sense of common decency. Deputy Enda Kenny has all these qualities in abundance. I firmly believe Deputy Kenny, as Taoiseach, will leave the country on the right track, encouraging consensus and open communication in facing the many challenges that lie ahead for all of us in the Thirty-second Dáil. I therefore formally second the proposal that Dáil Éireann elect Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will now take other statements. Is the Taoiseach speaking on behalf of Fine Gael?

The Taoiseach: I think that will be after-----

An Ceann Comhairle: It is the main spokespersons. Who is speaking for Fine Gael?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Simon Harris): I apologise. I did not think I was meant to speak now.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Where is Deputy Shane Ross?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is slightly distracted.

Deputy Simon Harris: All of us must thank the Irish people for their patience and forbearance in what has been a very difficult period since the general election, as all of us in the House in all parties grapple to come to terms with the new political reality. We have been presented by the Irish people with a very diverse political position and I acknowledge the efforts by many in this House to try to ensure the outcome can produce a Government and bring us to this point today.

Today I truly hope we will see the creation of a partnership Government. This will be a Government that sets out a vision of a strong economy, but a strong economy that will help to deliver a fair society, with each - the strong economy and the fair society - dependent on the other to succeed. The success or failure of any new partnership Government will be measured not just in terms of percentage points of economic growth, bond yields or bond yield changes but rather by the quality of people's lives and the opportunities for a fair society for all our citizens. A fair community leans on a strong economy and, as we set about trying to put together a new Government, we are determined to build that competitive and adaptable economy right across the country, centred on the aim of decent work for everyone. This is at the heart of the development of the core ambition for a new Government. We now need to use our economic success to make the lives of all our people a little bit easier. The Government, though, will not achieve this ambition working alone. This is a partnership Government and it will not just be for those in government or for those in the Oireachtas to achieve it; we will also need to create the scope to empower communities and citizens so that we can all truly work together to achieve these aims. Ireland has changed and our citizens, rightly, have higher expectations. Politics must now respond to those expectations openly and quickly. It must offer people more choice and diversity and help them to be better able to manage threats in their lives. Our aim in 2016 must be to build a nation that values all our citizens. The deep economic recession and

6 May 2016

crisis this country faced has meant there have been many lost years and, indeed, many damaged lives from those difficult years. Those gaps cannot be instantly bridged; there will be bumpy periods ahead. There are potential shocks to our small, open economy. We must be prepared for these and, as we handle these difficulties, we must ensure that we put in place a Government that is able to respond to that. I truly hope Deputy Rock, on his fourth attempt, will manage that today. I joked with him that when I nominated the Taoiseach in 2011 it only took one go, but I am sure he will have persuaded us today.

As we form a new Government and as we develop a new programme for Government, the mandate for that Government must be based on three overarching elements: we must create a country that is a great place to rear our children; we must help all our people to fulfil their potential through the early years and through our education system; and we must ensure that work gives decent reward. We must create a great place to work and do business in this country, helping all our people find homes for their families and the supports that give their children a good start in life, in safe and sustainable communities. We must ensure that we create a great country in which to grow old, giving all our people confidence that they can get care when they need it and the chance to remain independent and secure in advancing years. We must be determined that this approach will take root in all our communities, both urban and rural.

One of the weaknesses exposed in the Irish governance system is that it is all too often focused on the short term and does not easily accommodate long-term thinking. There will be an onus on the Government and on all of us in this House to work to build action plans and to get the input of all Members - nobody has a monopoly on wisdom - to develop long-term action plans to address the challenges we face. There are policy challenges where long-term planning and thinking - and a degree of political consensus, I would argue - are vital to executing a timely plan. Such challenges include climate change and long-term funding models for pensions, higher education and health. We need to ask this Dáil to work with the next Government to develop long-term thinking in those important areas.

A new partnership Government will be, it is fair to say, unlike any other established in this country since the foundation of the State. This will be a Government that comprises great diversity, but the diversity in the Thirty-second Dáil need not result in division. Diversity is not the same as division, because I believe those of us in government and, indeed, those of us in this House, are united in our common cause to make life better for every person in every part of this country. We will argue over the modality of how best to do it, but much more will unite us than will divide us. This is the shared ambition that will burn strongly through the newly published programme for Government. It is worth acknowledging the process we went through in order to reach a point at which we could endeavour to put a Government in place. There have been formal processes of meetings and agreements since 24 March. There have been many hours and, indeed, days and weeks of formal discussions, informal conversations and sharing of priorities and perspectives. I truly hope those discussions will result in a Government that can address the challenges that this country continues to face.

The period of waiting must end for the Irish people. We thank the Irish people for their patience. However, the challenges ahead are building up. The opportunities for this country are great and many, and a new Government working with a new Dáil in a new manner can ensure that we collectively work in the interests of all our people.

Deputy Micheál Martin: On behalf of the Fianna Fáil Party I will outline our approach to this vote and to the broader issue of how our country is to be governed during the Thirty-second

Dáil. Today potentially represents - I use the word “potentially” noting the absence of the Independent Alliance, but that may change in the coming minutes - a major turning point for Irish democracy. It marks a decisive shift away from a Government with absolute power to control our Parliament. In many ways it is a new beginning, and it presents challenges and opportunities to every person who was given the honour of being elected to Dáil Éireann. It brings with it new rules and new expectations.

The result of February’s election was unprecedented. Fianna Fáil won the support of over half a million people. We had the highest increase in vote numbers, percentage of votes and extra seats won. This progress was seen in every part of the country. However, while this is a strong mandate, we accept that this is a diverse Dáil and we respect the mandate of others. My party presented a very clear platform to the people, and since the election we have worked every day to try to implement as much of that platform as possible.

The election represented an overwhelming rejection of the Fine Gael-Labour Party Government, its policies and its hyper-political behaviour. That is why we have sought to completely replace that Government. We sought to secure a Government led by Fianna Fáil with the inclusion and support of others. This was the only possible way of removing Fine Gael from Government. On three separate occasions we put this option to the House, and on each of those three occasions no party and no Independent Member supported the alternative. Those in the House who try to lecture us about facilitating a Fine-Gael-led minority Government need to remember that they refused point blank to vote for the only way of preventing this.

When we last voted on nominations for Taoiseach, there came a point at which we had to move on and consider alternative approaches. We did this because, unlike Sinn Féin, the hard left alliance, the Labour Party and others, we believe it is the duty of all Deputies to be constructive and we reject their approach of seeking to maintain a model of a dominant Government versus total opposition.

As the House knows, we entered into lengthy discussions with the Fine Gael Party concerning the formation of a minority Government. These negotiations were not easy, and they confirmed the serious and substantive policy differences between parties. We believe Fine Gael remains committed to the idea that the outgoing Government’s policies were correct, and it is reluctant to accept the need for a significantly more progressive approach in many areas. For example, there was near-total resistance to any major initiative that would tackle the massive increase in waiting times within the acute hospital system. Initiatives to address the social and economic damage of household debt received equally strong resistance. While the agreement does contain a commitment to restart efforts to build real North-South co-operation on services and policies, we see no understanding of the deep damage caused by five years of disengagement from Northern Ireland by a Government that is a co-guarantor of agreements that remain only partly implemented.

Just as important, five years of dominating the Labour Party and aggressively spinning everything has left a deep impact. As we saw yesterday, Fine Gael’s concept of partnership does not yet extend to agreeing in advance about media briefings. The difficulties encountered in reaching the short arrangement published earlier this week confirmed that no credible coalition between the parties was possible. Such a Government would have been all about sharing the spoils of power and not an honest partnership with an agreed action programme.

The arrangement we have reached is similar in scope and duration to models followed in

6 May 2016

many other countries. As we said when we first proposed the idea of a minority Government, they are a regular feature of successful European democracies with high standards of governance. The confidence and supply arrangement allows the Government to achieve and retain office for a defined period, enables it to administer agreed public policy and ensures that it is funded. However, it leaves the majority in Dáil Éireann to decide on the vast majority of legislative and other policies. This confidence and supply approach is today in operation in a number of European countries. The confidence and supply arrangement covers broad principles of policy and is comparable to a full programme for Government. It sets certain conditions on policy areas where Government is primarily responsible for introducing measures. I should have said it is not comparable to a full programme for Government. Fianna Fáil retains the right and ability to seek to create majorities for proposals outside of those agreed. We retain the right and the intention to actively scrutinise the work of Ministers and to propose resolutions seeking new policies and criticising existing ones. Fundamentally, it is up to the Government to come here and win debates in order to pass many measures and it is the Government's duty to allow this Parliament to play a full and active role in the development and enactment of policy.

The agreement covers three budget cycles, subject to an overriding framework. This framework requires that Ireland achieves the reasonable fiscal targets most parties accepted during the election. This will demand restrained budgeting which will see a significant fall in the relative size of the national debt. Where there is space for new measures, the weighting must be towards improving services, with a minimum ratio of 2 to 1 in favour of service improvements over tax cuts. Within the tax cuts, there must be a decisive shift towards a more progressive approach and the regressive policy of abolishing the USC during this Dáil will not be pursued. If the Government implements the agreement, it will allow important but sustainable relief weighted to medium and low-income families.

In terms of specific policy areas, there are important measures, but again it does not seek to be a comprehensive statement of policies for this Dáil. In each of our priority areas for delivering a recovery which is felt by all, there are provisions which will make a big difference. These include employment, homelessness, housing, training, education, health, urban and community development, tackling crime and strengthening the recovery. The people across rural Ireland know a two-tier recovery is in place and far more has to be done to address the issues impacting on people who live in rural Ireland.

In housing, immediate action on rent allowance and the housing assistance payment will prevent more people becoming homeless. There are commitments to build more local authority houses and to introduce an affordable housing scheme.

Deputy Bríd Smith: No, there is not.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Every Deputy elected to this House believes that more immediate action has to be taken on housing. We also have to address mortgage arrears and variable mortgage interest rates as families are still under enormous pressure. In education, the reduction of class sizes, the reintroduction of guidance counselling and the restoration of grant support for disadvantaged students to access postgraduate education are important and urgent measures. We have a strong society and a strengthening economy and this is because of the Irish people, the skills they have developed over decades, their commitment to community and their belief in building an inclusive future.

The damage caused by regressive and divisive policies in recent years has been significant.

The new Government has not committed to the scale of comprehensive and urgent action which we believe is needed. In many areas, the programme for Government represents a repackaging of current policies and bland aspiration rather than a radical commitment to action. Policy on health remains as incoherent as ever and specific actions in most areas are limited. Pushing for movement on these areas will form our priority in every part of our work in this House. We do, however, acknowledge that the programme for Government marks a step away from the priorities of Fine Gael and the Labour Party during the past five years. It now talks about a fairer Ireland much more and this is a step in the right direction.

Since our arrangement concerning a minority Government was published, we have had the absurd situation where parties who agreed to nothing are condemning us for not agreeing enough. In many cases, these are the same people condemning us for allowing Fine Gael back into Government having spent two months demanding we go into Government with it. Given Sinn Féin's attacks on us today, that party might take some time to look back on what it said before. I know Deputy Adams is a great believer in trying to delete past statements-----

A Deputy: Past history.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----but the record of the House still shows that on this day last month he said, "I urge [Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael], therefore, to accept the new realities and that they are the only ones fit to form a Government." Unlike Sinn Féin and others, we have worked constructively and have focused on substance and I believe we have achieved important progress. They believe in finding problems to exploit. We believe in finding problems to solve.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The House will shortly get the opportunity to vote on the Bill which will suspend water charges. Following a reasonable process, the majority in the Dáil will then decide what happens to water charges. In addition, the days of an out-of-control, bloated and arrogant commercial firm will be ended, Oireachtas and independent oversight will be asserted and the massive expenditures on lobbying, opinion polls and corporate brand building will stop. Water policy is not the most important issue facing our country and it has taken too much time. It should not have taken so much effort to reverse a clearly failed policy which had been rejected by the people following a full debate.

Deputy Alan Kelly, suffering from the withdrawal of his drug of choice, has claimed that it is treason to remove this regressive, inefficient and democratically rejected tax. If those in the Labour Party think it is treason to set out a policy, to cost it, to secure overwhelming public support for it and to try implement it, then that says much about the state of the Labour Party. The Labour Party remains so committed to a sure-that-is-what-you-say-during-elections style of politics that the only thing which currently unites its members is fury that another party might keep its promises. I note that the Labour Party's seven Deputies will today vote against Deputy Enda Kenny, apparently, although every one of them was elected on a platform of wanting to participate in a Government led by the Deputy.

The formation of a minority Government on the basis of a confidence-and-supply agreement represents one of the most radical changes in our politics since Independence. The rules of how we all do the people's business are changing profoundly. Fianna Fáil is very pleased that its suggestion on the Monday after the election for immediate movement on deep reform of Dáil proceedings has led to an ambitious reform programme that will shortly be implemented.

6 May 2016

If the House is serious about implementing this, then the Dáil will be a far more constructive and consultative place, one that will have to come up with solutions to issues rather than engage in the normal Punch-and-Judy politics. The end of the Government's ability to order all business-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy Martin, the time has elapsed. Can I take it that the House will allow Deputy Martin to conclude? Please conclude, Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It represents a major challenge to Government to treat the Oireachtas seriously and to build support for policies. However, it is also a challenge to every Member of the Oireachtas. As we have seen since the election, there are those who want to maintain the model of dominant government and total opposition. They do not like the challenge of finding compromise and building consensus. They want to maintain a winner-takes-all system so that some day they might get their turn. They are satisfied with the narcissism of large differences, where there is no such thing as a middle ground and where the only valid differences are those based on ideological clarity. We reject that approach and believe the people elected all of us to put in place a government and play a full and active part as parliamentarians in developing and enacting policy. With no fixed majority in the House, the only way any of us can pass measures is to make our case and build support.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Deputy's time is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Certainly, there will be a good deal of game-playing - like what we have seen in recent weeks - from a party that wanted to play politics on motions and so on without getting down to the work of actually getting something done.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: His time is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: However, I think we have seen over the past five years that the people are not fooled by such manoeuvrings. The Government will most likely regularly not get its way on motions and specific proposals. If it accepts this and reduces the number of areas where it demands the right to be decisive, then there is no reason to be concerned. If it maintains its obsessive focus on media spinning and presentation together with its habit of denying problems until they reached crisis level, then there will be serious obstacles to the working of this new reality.

We believed that Fine Gael should be replaced in government. However, the majority of the House refused to support us in this effort. We have accepted the responsibility we believe every Deputy carries of ensuring that a government is in place and of ensuring that we radically reform the Dáil in order that it will respond to the people's will, as expressed in the election.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Deputy has no respect for the Dáil.

Deputy Micheál Martin: By our abstention on this vote and the vote on the nomination of Ministers, a Government will be able to be formed. Commitments have been given to the effect that the worst elements of the last Government's policies and approaches will be ended and important progress will be seen in some areas. Most of all, the formation of a minority Government means that we will have an opportunity to continue to seek to implement the policies upon which we were elected by working to build a majority of support for them from opposition.

This new departure for Irish politics is a major challenge. It requires putting aside old as-

sumptions and lazy conventions. It gives everyone a role to play and a duty to be active and constructive. We accept this and we look forward to getting on with the business of this Dáil. Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle, for your indulgence.

An Ceann Comhairle: Our next speaker is Deputy Gerry Adams. I will extend the same facility to him in terms of additional time if the House is in agreement.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I will not be as long-winded, a Cheann Comhairle. If Teachta Martin follows the logic of his criticism of Fine Gael, then he should vote against today's nomination. Why did Fianna Fáil not form a Government with Fine Gael when Teachta Enda Kenny made that generous offer to Teachta Martin? It was because, according to Teachta Martin, he sought a mandate to put Deputy Enda Kenny and Fine Gael out of power, out of government. Yet, today, 70 days on from the general election, Fianna Fáil will support a fourth attempt to elect Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach and elect a Government.

What kind of a Government is it? It is one which has imposed a democratic lockdown on the Dáil. We cannot get on with our business. We cannot raise the legitimate questions that we have a mandate to raise. It is not a Government that enjoys the support of the majority of citizens. Moreover, if it eventually gets elected - I note the absence of some of the Independent Deputies or "Endependents" today - it will be, *mór an trua*, led once again by Fine Gael, aided and abetted this time by its new partners from Fianna Fáil and a smattering of so-called Independent Deputies. I congratulate them all on their magnificent negotiations in recent weeks. It is a wonderful job of work but have these negotiations delivered the real changes required to resolve the crises in health and housing, the abandonment of rural Ireland, the necessary work to build a fairer and more equal Ireland, including the ongoing efforts in the North? Those of us who have a genuine vision for a real republic, who want to bring the Proclamation of 1916 to fruition know full well of course that is not going to happen under this Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil arrangement. *Dhiúltaigh an Teachta Micheál Martin dul i gcomhrialtas le Fine Gael. Dúirt sé nach mbeadh a leithéid ann, ach is é sin go díreach an rud atá ann anois.*

This joint Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil programme is a master class in waffle and bluster. It has no real ambition, no big ideas, no costings, little real detail. Never was so much negotiated for so long for so little. There are a few miserly lines, not even a section on health, which say the "humane approach" for the revision of medical card provision should be maintained. What "humane approach"? I would dare the Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil leaders to stand up here today and tell the Dáil the current approach is a humane one, when all of us have constituents and there are citizens at their wits' end because they cannot get a medical card under the current regime.

In respect of housing, there is no commitment whatsoever on the construction of social homes. There is only a reiteration of the haphazard approach to a social State endorsed housing and homelessness crisis and emergency that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil caused in the first instance. We were told that the issue of water was the main point of contention between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and Fianna Fáil said quite clearly, and repeated several times in its manifesto, that water charges must be scrapped and Irish Water must be abolished. Now we are told that Irish Water remains and water charges are merely suspended. *Ní hé seo an méid a bhí á iarraidh ag na vótóirí.* Many of the "Endependents" who have almost signed up for this were among the most vocal opponents of the policy agenda of Fine Gael and the Labour Party, yet here they are, or indeed here they are not - where are they? - seeking to vote for Enda Kenny for Taoiseach.

6 May 2016

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Where is Shergar?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Maith an fear.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Deputy should leave the wit to Deputy Mary Lou McDonald.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Taoiseach said he would not countenance forming a Government beholden to Independents. He said it numerous times so there is another election promise out the window. Tugtar Rialtas nua ar seo, ach leis na daoine céanna agus an treo céanna. Ar deireadh, beidh na polasaithe agus na torthaí ceánna againn le linn an chéad Rialtas eile. However long the Government lasts, whenever it is eventually elected, if it is, Sinn Féin will fulfil its obligations as the real leaders of the Opposition. We will support positive measures brought from the Government and particularly the Opposition benches. We will oppose the Government when it is wrong. In the interests of citizens we will hold this Government comprising Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the “Endependents”, who will prop them up, to proper and robust account.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Tánaiste.

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank the Ceann Comhairle.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Right now.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Labour Party will be voting against the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach today.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Well done.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: That is a big U-turn.

A Deputy: Not five years ago the Labour Party got on board with him.

Deputy Dara Calleary: They were not going to vote a second time.

A Deputy: Five years too late.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Overboard a second time.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: That is consistency.

Deputy Joan Burton: Assuming that a certain noble Member of the House shows up as we expect - we do not know where he is yet but presumably he will arrive, otherwise the Ceann Comhairle may have to call a sos to allow people address their phones properly and find out what exactly is going on - our vote will be principally due to the fact that this Government arrangement is something of a charade, but we may learn more as the day proceeds.

Talking yesterday about the length of time it had taken to produce this deeply flawed arrangement my colleague, Deputy Willie Penrose, referred to the old saying that a long churning did not make good butter. It reminded me of the advertising slogan, “I can’t believe it’s not butter!” In the case of this arrangement, nobody believes it is not a coalition. Let us be clear. It is a coalition - a coalition of convenience that puts naked political self-interest ahead of the people’s interests.

Deputy Dara Calleary: So that is the way you worked.

Deputy Joan Burton: Two deeply conservative parties have ended their pretence of civil war and done a deal.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It kept them opposed for long enough.

Deputy Joan Burton: However, it is a tawdry deal on a number of levels that carries the real risk of undoing the hard won progress made since Fianna Fáil collapsed the economy. I have been honoured and privileged to serve in various coalition Governments with both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. In those Governments the member parties worked together and compromised in the nation's and the people's interests.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Labour's way or Frankfurt's way.

Deputy Joan Burton: That is what coalition is about. There was a unity of purpose and trust, which is essential to the operation of a Government. Without a unity of purpose, a sense of direction and trust, the Government has a limited prospect of either reform or duration. This coalition of convenience is very different. As the leader of Fianna Fáil has just made clear, Fianna Fáil effectively will have its boot on the throat of the Taoiseach, meaning that it can push through whatever it wishes-----

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: Good.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----reject whatever it wishes and collapse the arrangement whenever it chooses to do so. Let us not be fooled by Deputy Micheál Martin's convenient and, presumably, limited pledge to support Fine Gael for a period. Fianna Fáil will pick its time, regardless of what deal has been done. Until then, as we have seen, it will put its interests ahead of the national interest every time. Water is probably the first example, but it will not be the last. Having learned nothing from the reckless abolition of rates in the late 1970s, Fianna Fáil identified water charges as a key priority-----

Deputy Bobby Aylward: The Labour Party got rid of them.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----although Deputy Micheál Martin has already downgraded it. Of course, the reason it was his priority was to protect his political hide from Sinn Féin.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Labour Party has more reason to worry about Sinn Féin than we do.

Deputy Joan Burton: In so doing and in Fine Gael's disappointing cave-in to Fianna Fáil's reckless demands-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Did the Deputy read her party's programme in 2011? It was against water charges.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----the coalition of convenience has all but ensured Ireland will have to wait for the top quality water and sewerage infrastructure that it desperately needs. All Members of the House know this.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: What was on the Deputy's posters in 2011?

Deputy Joan Burton: This is not an abstract price that will be paid. Homes and businesses will pay the price in the coming years. Will today's coalition of convenience give an assurance to the law-abiding, honest citizens who have paid their water charges that they will be fully re-

6 May 2016

funded and, if so, when? That is the least law-abiding people deserve, that their abiding by the laws of the State is respected by the Government and the governing arrangements of the State. At its very first test on a very difficult issue, the coalition has failed, but we will wait and see. How can we possibly expect this Government to deliver on future challenges? I notice, for example, that the patched-up programme for Government singularly fails to commit to delivering a living wage for workers, but a recovering economy needs to improve wages and to invest in upskilling workers to ensure people can both get jobs and maintain and retain jobs.

Is it any surprise when two conservative parties come together to form a coalition where business interests will take precedence over workers' interests? I notice, too, that the commitment to free GP care for all has been dropped or disappeared simply because it will be difficult to achieve. How will universal health care ever be delivered if this critical plank in the system is now abandoned? Does anybody now doubt that free GP care for young children and older people over 70 would have been delivered without the Labour Party in government?

There is token reference in the document to the challenge of future pension provision for older people. As Minister for Social Protection, I worked hard with many people both inside the House and outside it, and in government, to put in place the roadmap-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You attacked the vulnerable.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----for a dedicated pension scheme-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: You did nothing.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You protected savings.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----to ensure all workers have supplementary pension provision.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: In five years you did nothing.

Deputy Joan Burton: A Cheann Comhairle, I have not interrupted anybody and I understand-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Keep it for the *Sunday Independent*, Willie.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Yes. Hear, hear. Some respect, please, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----that people over here are smarting at the indignity of some of the things that they have agreed to, but I did not interrupt them and I do not expect them to interrupt me.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Hear, hear.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: So Willie, keep it for the Sunday Indo.

Deputy Niall Collins: Stop interrupting.

Deputy Joan Burton: That roadmap for supplementary pension provision is now ready. It can be implemented by the new Government. Older people and people at work need proper pension provision. We have improved pensions. We brought back the Christmas bonus - while you guys cancelled it - but it is not enough for people to live on an income and supports of

roughly €250 a week. We all know that. We have an ageing society.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Lone parents.

Deputy Joan Burton: So how come it did not even merit a look at? It is very disappointing if we are ambitious for a fairer and progressive Ireland.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: The Tánaiste should ask the lone parents about that.

Deputy Joan Burton: I doubt that the eighth amendment will now be repealed or even offered and put to the people during the course of this Government's term in office. The coalition of convenience has cynically kicked the issue to touch. The issue is when people will get a right to express their views on a needed change and a needed review of the Constitution. By contrast, if there is a problem that the new Government thinks can be solved by throwing money at it and hoping it goes away, it seems it is going to do that. Perhaps that is what the prolonged absences are about - some of that is still being thrashed out.

Virtually every Irish person is familiar with the concept of "one for everybody in the audience". That is what the negotiations behind this new arrangement have amounted to. At a time when Ireland has not reached a point of safety, when the public purse remains constrained, when there are potential risks such as Brexit on the horizon, Independent Deputies have been granted all manner of narrow constituency and sectoral pet projects without any evidence of costing, when they will be implemented and the duration and impact of the measures. Everybody here works hard for their constituents, but every Deputy in this House is entitled to put the Irish people's interest first, and is required to do that.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: We do.

Deputy Joan Burton: Nobody can say this has been happening in recent weeks. Perhaps some of the Independents can be excused on the basis they are new to this. Some of them chanced their arm and got away with it. In some ways they are unable to believe their luck, provided the talks finish at some stage. For Fianna Fáil, however, there really are no excuses. All Members know how Fianna Fáil operates: party before country.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Hear, hear

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Not true.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: They wrecked the country twice.

Deputy Joan Burton: However, for Fine Gael to sign up to this fairly tawdry arrangement is an entirely new and unwelcome departure. One hundred years on from the Rising that lit the road to independence-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Deputy did not come to Clonmel to celebrate Labour's centenary.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----the people deserve better from the two Civil War parties. They have ended their Civil War politics all right but only to concoct, as I stated, this coalition of convenience that it appears will put citizens' interests last.

I stress the Labour Party's vote today is not a personal reflection on the Taoiseach, who is an honourable man and a hard-working leader. Over the past five years, Deputy Enda Kenny

6 May 2016

worked day and night with my party to rescue the country from ruin and set it on the road to recovery.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: He followed Fianna Fáil's programme.

Deputy Joan Burton: In the future, the Labour Party will look at the issues on a case-by-case basis and when there is merit in supporting them, we will do so. While recovery has not yet been felt by everybody, there has been a huge amount of progress. It is difficult for Fianna Fáil to acknowledge that it left a ruin. There has been a significant amount of recovery, including unemployment figures showing the number of people out of work fell by more than 25,000 over the past 12 months. The Exchequer figures are ahead of target as people return to work and the tax take is increasing. One can see it in how the Social Insurance Fund is now in surplus.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Housing?

Deputy Jack Chambers: What about homelessness?

Deputy Joan Burton: When the Labour Party came in, we inherited a deficit of €2.8 billion.

Deputy Niall Collins: Why then was the Labour Party not re-elected? Poor you, not being in government again.

Deputy Joan Burton: A Cheann Comhairle-----

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have order for Deputy Burton please? Deputy Burton is about to conclude.

Deputy Joan Burton: In addition, there has been confirmation from the European Commission that Ireland again will record strong growth this year. These all are tangible signs of progress that will translate into new jobs for workers and into things getting that little bit easier for families who have struggled so much since Fianna Fáil's crash of 2008. This makes it all the more worrying now that the new coalition threatens to fritter away much of the progress. Labour's record in Government over the past five years is not without its blemishes. I would be the first to admit we probably ruled too much by the head and not enough by the heart at times, yet we always placed the interests of people ahead of any narrow political interests and, yes, we paid a high political price for that.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Joan of Arc. She is a saint.

Deputy Joan Burton: However, we would do the same again because it is only when the country prospers-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: A Cheann Comhairle, time.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Can we read the Order?

Deputy Joan Burton: -----and its people prosper that we get to anything that amounts to the vision of those who sacrificed their lives in the Rising.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you very much, Deputy.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Time is up.

Deputy Joan Burton: As for this coalition, effectively the agreement means the Civil War is over in political terms. However those parties have been afraid to go the whole hog. As I stated, I await the arrival of Deputy Ross and his indication of what has been agreed between the two parties.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I assume we will get the additional three minutes taken by other speakers.

An Ceann Comhairle: You certainly will, yes.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Fine Gael need it.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I can safely say I have never seen an incoming Taoiseach look so unhappy and there is a good reason for that.

Deputy Michael Creed: Enda, will you smile?

(Interruptions).

Deputy Alan Farrell: The Deputy is never happy.

An Ceann Comhairle: Order, please.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is because the Deputy who nominated the Taoiseach, one of his own party members, commended the Irish people on their patience and forbearance. There will be a collective groan in every living room in the country today. It is not personal, Taoiseach, but 75% of people did not want you returned as Taoiseach and they did not want Fine Gael in a position of power, yet that is about to happen.

We keep hearing about the dawn of a new politics. The programme for Government boasts that it will be unlike any other Government in the history of the State. We certainly can say that the traditional rules do not apply, because the two traditional parties have had to come to an arrangement. Instead of being able to field two teams, the capitalist establishment has had to field just one team. Fianna Fáil is stressing that this is not a grand coalition, but it is the first cousin of a grand coalition and it certainly looks like a grand coalition. Fianna Fáil has spurned the trappings of power on this occasion because in the run-up to the election it had to tack to the left to gain new votes, so it would not be fitting for it to go into government. If the Fianna Fáil Members think they can ride two horses in supporting the Government and leading this Opposition, they should think again.

Fianna Fáil is trying to claim credit because it supported the Government to get a deal on water charges, but it should be clear about this. The reason this was a sticking point in the formation of a Government was the mass movement that took place against water charges, and no other reason. It was not to do with Fianna Fáil. It also concerned the boycott which was maintained despite threats by the parties in government. I will raise this warning for Fianna Fáil: when this issue returns to the Dáil, which it has tried to prevent for the last two months, it could be the rock upon which it perishes. That is because it will be forced to take a position on water charges-----

Deputy Willie O’Dea: We have.

6 May 2016

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----and actually stick with its manifesto, which was to abolish them, not to put the question to a commission or suspend them. Fianna Fáil will be implicated in the policies of this Government.

For all the talk of new politics, looking through the programme for Government, it is clear that it continues the neoliberal trend we have seen in the last number of years. The first commitment it gives is to stick with the fiscal straitjacket imposed by the EU, which has led to a huge crisis in our public services, the health system and housing. By the way, there are no targets to reduce waiting lists, build social housing on a scale needed by local authorities, or any of the other issues that I am sure we will get a chance to debate soon. Neither is there any advancement in that programme of the desire for social change, particularly on key social issues such as repealing the eighth amendment of the Constitution, which is buried on page 158 of a 160-page document. It mentions setting up a citizens' convention, which is completely undemocratic and evades any responsibility. Despite all the talk of gender quotas, women are barely mentioned in the document. There is certainly no reflection of the desire for a separation of church and State, nor any reflection of the diversity that exists.

I have a question for the so-called Independents who are propping up this Government. What exactly is the point of voting for an Independent? In my opinion, most people who voted for Independents thought they were voting for people who were independent of the system and the establishment, and certainly independent of Fine Gael. Instead, however, they got people who are going in to prop up a Government either for personal advancement or for a pet project in their own area. People who voted Independent should mark this; they will have to vote left if they want real change that will challenge the establishment and the system.

Both inside and outside the Dáil, the Anti-Austerity Alliance and People Before Profit will work to advance the project of building a new party to represent workers and replace the Labour Party, which abandoned them. One need only look at events in America - not at Trump, but at the likes of Sanders - where such policies can gain huge momentum in a short time.

1 o'clock

We need a genuine left Government which will challenge the *status quo* and capitalism as well as taking the vast wealth, underlined in report after report, under democratic public control and putting people's needs before profit. This is the only way we are going to be able to deal with the burning issues of our time.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Despite the high-flow rhetoric and noble aspirations articulated both by Fine Gael today and by Fianna Fáil in their confidence and supply document, there is no real sign of either the new politics or the new policies people so desperately want. There was no sign of it in the long protracted process that has led up to this day in which Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael led us on a very merry dance. It might be understandable and justifiable if there were any substantial difference in policies between them. Then people could understand if that protracted process was going to lead us to a new departure in policies or in politics.

Of course, the truth is that there is no difference between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. They both promoted the policies and the interests of the bankers and developers who crashed the economy in 2008. They both agreed to guarantee the losses of those banks to protect those bondholders and those private interests while unloading the cost with vicious austerity on ordinary citizens. They both slashed the social housing and health budgets, which have left us

with such a devastating crisis. They both cut the jobseeker's allowance, first, for the under-20s and then the under-26s. They both cut the payments to impoverished lone parents and child benefit. They both signed up to water charges and even now refuse to abolish them when there is a clear mandate for this House to do so. They both refuse to repeal the eighth amendment, despite the deaths and suffering of women and families affected by fatal foetal abnormalities. They both refuse to increase the tax contribution of the largest and most profitable corporations in this country.

All of this might just be seen to be in the past if the programme for Government had new policies. However, incredibly, we still have not seen this programme as it has only been leaked. We are expected to vote for a Taoiseach having not seen this document. Where is the new politics there? In the leaked documents we have seen, this is the no change programme for Government. There is no change in policy or politics.

In the key areas of social housing, what do we have? It explicitly refers to more incentives for landlords, more incentives for developers and more outsourcing to the private sector to deliver social housing. All these are precisely the policies which have led us to the crisis today. The new programme intends to accelerate them. In the area of health, there will be an accelerated move towards an even more privatised and two-tier system where health services will be outsourced to the private sector, while the entire public health service is to be marketised.

Despite all the false concern expressed by the supporters of water charges about water infrastructure, there will be no significant increase in the level of investment in it. We have had such dishonesty on this issue over the past several weeks both from politicians and the media. Let us inform the people through this House of the facts. In 2007, €900 million was spent on water and sewerage infrastructure.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: When we were awash with money.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Even under the supposed Irish Water enhanced investment plan, at its height it will only reach €600 million. That is one third less than what was spent in 2007. Where is the rest of the money going? It is going into the pockets of highly paid executives, consultants and private contractors. That is the truth. It is not going into fixing the pipes or the water infrastructure but into lining the pockets of the same old gang. There is no change and no new politics.

I conclude by saying that despite all that and despite the political games, the commitment to the same failed policies, the denials by the Labour Party of its complicity in those failed policies, and the amnesia it seemed to suffer over that fact, there is great hope, because for the first time in the history of this State neither of the two parties that have dominated the politics of this State will control this Dáil fully. We saw a little sign of the impact of genuinely new politics with the effect that the mass movement against water charges has had on all of them. We still have not won, but, God, they have been forced to backtrack because of the power of ordinary people, whom those two parties, and much of the media, have vilified, disgracefully describing them in one article as being like the barbarian hordes, when in fact they are ordinary people who have been battered by unfairness, injustice and austerity for the past eight years because of the failure of the political establishment. They are close to a triumph on the issue of water charges and, as we all know, that battle was only a symptom of the much wider desire of ordinary people for fairness, equality and social solidarity. That is not something that will be delivered by this programme for Government, but it will be delivered by the movement of people power that we

6 May 2016

have seen on the streets for the past few years.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do we have a spokesperson for Independents 4 Change?

Deputy Clare Daly: Yes. When the non-appearance of the Independent Alliance is the most interesting development this morning, it sums up where we are at. I am hoping at this stage that they do not turn up and we have a general election, because I do not believe I can take much more of this. The air of unreality that has surrounded these proceedings is frankly shocking.

A Deputy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Clare Daly: We have the usual empty slogans and speeches, new outfits and new hairdos, but it is a million miles away from the real lives of citizens in this State. I would be relieved if I could turn on a television or listen to the radio without having to see an Independent wheeled out to tell us that they are battling for the national interest and not themselves. That is a relief, but we must ask at what cost, because what is being put before us and the people today are the same neoliberal policies perpetuated by the previous Government and the one before it. They are packaged up with a few bows to make them appear different, but they are the same.

I want to deal with the real world by sharing an e-mail I got this week from a constituent, a woman who is known to me, in which she refers to the tragic death of her sister as a result of mortgage debt, and other cutbacks, that she experienced. As a result of pressure that the bank put on the family, the woman's relationship with her husband failed. Her sister states:

Her Mental Health suffered and she sought help from her GP. She was on medication for depression but her GP [said] this needed to be re-evaluated [so] she was put on a waiting list to see a Psychiatrist who she had attended previously. The waiting list, with the cuts to Mental Health, was 4 months and [she] still [had] no date for an appointment. She had been working [but she was unable to keep it on so she was put on disability benefit], but a letter arrived to say she had not arrived for her appointment for her review so [her] payment was suspended.

The woman went on to state:

I found that letter and all the letters from the Banks and Financial Agencies scattered around her room on the 28th of January 2015.

Today I called the coroners office to ask when the inquest into her death will be [held].

Because of the high rate of suicide they are estimating 18 months ...

That is the Ireland for which the Members opposite have been responsible. The titbits of the programme for Government we have seen are a perpetuation and continuation of that situation, one in which only 26% of the population voted for Fine Gael and the Taoiseach.

When one takes in those who did not vote, it is less than 17%. Despite this, as a result of people who claim to be independent and Fianna Fáil, the Taoiseach will get his hands back on the reins - maybe. I remind him of one thing - today is the birthday of Robespierre, the famous French revolutionary who challenged the system and fought the old order. The Taoiseach is certainly not him but I remind the Taoiseach that he ended up on the guillotine, and I think that might yet happen.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: He was also responsible for the reign of terror. It was not a reign of terror.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Now more than ever and for everyone's sake we need an effective Government capable of tackling the big issues facing this country and correcting the mistakes of the past. Good government should be about creating the kind of country that ensures everyone can live life with dignity and opportunity. One cannot help thinking, on reading the new programme of partnership Government, that while well-meaning in parts, it is very long on aspiration and very short on specifics. We have seen many documents in the past which have promised much but delivered very little. Whatever about those Independents who will or will not take part in this Government, in the case of this Taoiseach and the Fine Gael Party we have no option but to judge them not on their promises for the future but on their actions of the past five years. These actions have seen huge divisions and deep social problems open up in Irish society.

We recognise that the economy is in recovery but this has been achieved at enormous cost to a great many people and has created a very divided country and a deeply fractured body politic. The Taoiseach's Government had choices about how that economic recovery would be achieved and he chose to ensure the burden of austerity would be imposed disproportionately on those who are least able to carry it. His budgets were regressive and each of them widened the gap between rich and poor. That is what he chose. Those choices have resulted in, for example, the rate of child poverty increasing to the point where one in nine children now lives in consistent poverty without adequate food, clothing or heat. His policies mean that 1,800 children are now growing up in hotel bedrooms and other emergency accommodation with more than 100,000 people on housing waiting lists and tens of thousands of other families in mortgage distress facing the loss of their homes.

Fine Gael's legacy sees half a million people on waiting lists for hospital services and many thousands more waiting for primary care services. Most concerning of all is the staggeringly high rate of mental health problems, substance misuse and suicide throughout this country. The budget choices of the last Government resulted in the burden of taxation being shifted downwards onto those who could least afford to pay and resulted in us now having the third highest cost of living in the EU along with some of the poorest public services. That in turn has greatly reduced purchasing power and has had very negative impacts on small businesses. These are all the appalling consequences of political decisions taken by the last Government. Was it any wonder the public was so incensed when Fine Gael came out with the slogan, "Keep the recovery going" and Deputy Michael Noonan tried to buy people's votes by promising a €4 billion tax giveaway? Nothing displayed more how out of touch Fine Gael was with the reality of people's lives and the condition of this country than that disgraceful election promise. The people gave their verdict and punished Fine Gael. It is indeed a bitter irony that it may well be that same party that will lead the new Government. The arithmetic of the election result meant that the only majority Government possible was one of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. That would have been a logical development in Irish politics. For its own reasons Fianna Fáil has eschewed that option.

So it seems we are now entering uncharted waters in which the Dáil majority may actually exist on this side of the House if this arrangement goes ahead. While that creates a huge amount of uncertainty for the future - and it is clearly by no means certain to happen today - it also opens up an opportunity for us to practise politics in a very different manner. It may now be possible to ensure that the Executive is actually answerable to Parliament, which is, of course,

6 May 2016

how it should be. Ministers may have to convince the Dáil that policies or legislation are actually worthy of support. For a change, Government will have to consider and frequently accept amendments from the Opposition. Indeed, if we are not to have gridlock, the decision-making process for Cabinet and the support structure surrounding it will need to change radically to accommodate this. I sincerely hope that work is already under way to underpin this.

The new configuration, along with the welcome proposals on Dáil reform, will challenge all of us - both Government and Opposition - to rethink how we practise politics. Hopefully, there will be greater potential for us to take a more problem-solving approach to some of the big issues facing the country, to ensure there is evidence-based decision making, to have open and objective resource allocation, and to ensure all budgetary decisions are equality- and poverty-proofed. Approached in the right spirit, the new configuration can enable each Member of the House to play a full and effective role on behalf of the people who elected us.

We must now, at last, get serious about political reform - not just Dáil reform, but political reform. That means ensuring that openness and accountability become the hallmark of how public life operates. It means, for example, full and honest answers to parliamentary questions. It means ending cronyism. It means sidelining vested interests, reforming the Civil Service and reforming the relationship between senior civil servants and Ministers. Most of all, it means having an effective way of dealing with wrongdoing, white-collar crime and corruption, whether that is in politics, public life or business. We cannot have accountability unless there are consequences for those involved in wrongdoing, and too often there have been no consequences for such people. Tribunals have clearly failed. Commissions of inquiry are highly unsatisfactory. A Dáil investigation committee will not have sufficient powers. That is why the Social Democrats propose an independent anti-corruption agency with powers to investigate and, critically, to prosecute. We hope the Dáil will give positive consideration to this proposal.

There has been precious little evidence of new politics in recent years. Too often, information has to be dragged out of Ministers, senior figures refuse to take responsibility for mistakes, and reports are kept under wraps. This must change. For our part, the Social Democrats will play an active and constructive role in the new Dáil. We will support the Government when we believe it is acting in the public interest and oppose it when it is not. It is our intention to work collaboratively with any party or any Independents in the furtherance of progressive politics. There is an onus on all of us to co-operate in working to achieve greater prosperity, opportunity, equality and accountability in Irish society. Irrespective of the Government that emerges or does not emerge today, we must all rise to that challenge.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The Green Party entered talks with Fine Gael and the Independents who may or may not arrive here today. I am not breaking confidence, I am sure, when I recall that after those approximate two and a half days, when the Taoiseach asked us if we would be willing to support or take part in such a Government, we clearly said “No”. We indicated that we did not share the ambition set out in the partnership Government draft programme document before us today, which has not changed that significantly in the interim.

We can consider some of the key elements in that. We need to build 25,000 houses and there is a consensus in this House around that. We argue that we must go further and think about where we will build them, the quality of the houses and their price. We need to get that right and not just the numbers. We must also ensure that we get transport right, that we plan the development of our State and that we do not get involved in the old numbers game. We have seen the risks or dangers it brought in the past and we must think in a more long-term and sustainable

way in the context of planning. The document sets out that we need X numbers of jobs, which is a numbers approach, but we must be more strategic and ambitious so as to see the opportunities in digital and green industries. Ultimately, we need a strategic approach so we can be less reliant on foreign direct investment and more able to live by our own enterprise.

The Taoiseach may recall that I said we would not join the Government because we come from a left-of-centre perspective and we did not see that reflected in the document. The document still has an allocation to tax cuts at a time when we have funding requirements in health and education that should be given precedence. For that reason, we cannot support the proposed Government. In the intervening four or five weeks since that time, there have not been major changes here. What changes there have been have disheartened us immensely. The way the water issue was managed has let down the plain people of Ireland. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the way that was managed in subsequent weeks and we will seek a different approach in the next year if possible and if a Government is formed.

There is widespread dissatisfaction - to my mind - that we are debating the possible election of a Taoiseach. It seems, from online and social media, that certain people are engaged in a slightly different turf war. Is it possible this Parliament will not be able to elect a Government because we cannot accept European directives on how we manage our natural resources? I am reluctant to take a high-and-mighty position in this regard and the other day Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and I had different views about the climate change issue. If the Deputy does not believe it, in some ways one could accept that because he has a completely different world view to me. In fact, he sees a different world to the one I see. I am concerned that every other party or Deputy in this House accepts some of the scientific truth but none of the responsibility for action that comes with it. In some ways, that is worse. To be honest, I see nothing in the manifestos or talks to suggest that any other party or group on this side of the House has looked at that turf war and come out with anything but a short-term consideration that for certain sectional votes, they would not pursue what is the right path. There is no particular alternative which strikes us that we can vote for today. Where is the alternative Government? Is the alternative that we go to the people on the issues of protecting our natural resources and climate? It seems to be the question before us at this hour.

We will hold our vote, as we have done on previous occasions, to elect a Taoiseach. We will hold our vote as we hoped and still hope that there may be a possibility in this Parliament to do politics in a slightly different way, to be slightly less adversarial and to strengthen the role of the Opposition. We will take a strong role in criticising the Government at every turn and opposing as best we can but also proposing when the occasion arises. We will take up the offer contained in this document and that coming from the Dáil reform committee. We are due to see our paper published on Monday and we have that opportunity before us. It is for that reason alone that we would hold our vote - to say it may be possible. We are not all going to turn into Swedes or Scandinavians overnight, but we know that is not just new politics, it is better politics. It is a type of politics that we all know. Everyone who is involved in a voluntary committee across this country knows how to make that politics work, where one works with people. Most of us here have worked on county councils over the years. Who would deny that politics works on councils across the country, where we have coalition arrangements right across the political spectrum? The Green Party works with Sinn Féin in Dublin City Council, with Fine Gael in Dún Laoghaire and with others in Louth. The Green Party works in that way. We all do. Why, if we know that politics can work there, can we not try to make it work here? It does on occasion. We know sometimes that is the flash of our better nature in this Chamber. Why not give

6 May 2016

it a go if we manage to survive until 1.30 p.m.?

Deputy Seamus Healy: I am sharing time with Deputy Catherine Connolly. This Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and possibly Independent programme for Government is framed in the context of and is based on “our commitment to meeting in full the domestic and EU Fiscal rules”.

An Ceann Comhairle: Order, please. There is a Deputy on his feet and he deserves the respect of silence.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I will say that again. This programme is based, as it says in the document, “on our commitment to meeting in full the domestic and EU Fiscal rules”. The programme for Government is, therefore, based on the fiscal treaty, which totally concedes Irish sovereignty over vital national affairs and flies in the face of the 1916 Proclamation in its centenary year.

This programme for Government continues the failed policies of the previous Fine Gael-Labour Government and, indeed, the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Government in the new Dáil. It means a continuation of austerity, it means agreeing to continue to send €7 billion in interest repayments out of this country every year to pay off bondholders and banks and it means continued cuts in order to meet the structural deficit under the fiscal treaty and to meet the new debt-to-GDP ratio of less than 60%. It also means continuing the scandal of the lowest 10% of earners in our society paying a higher percentage of their income in tax than the wealthiest 10%. That is an absolute scandal and it is continued in this programme for Government. It means continued austerity for low and middle-income families but, conversely, it means continued recovery for the rich and powerful, the same people who now have assets worth €45 billion in excess of their value during the peak boom period. It means recovery for the 300 very wealthy people who increased their wealth from €50 billion in 2011 to €84 billion this year.

As a consequence of all that, there is not sufficient funding to seriously tackle the housing crisis, nor is there sufficient funding to tackle the health and hospital chaos and all the other areas in respect of which there is significant pressure. Worse still, the Department of Finance and the Central Bank have warned about the possibility of external shocks. That might mean an end to or a reduction in growth. If that happened, this programme for Government would lead to new, increased and worse cuts. Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Independents are sleepwalking the Irish people into supporting a deal and a fiscal treaty that is absolutely dangerous.

However meritorious individual concessions may be, they pale into insignificance in comparison to the continuing economic and social damage done by the last two Governments - and by this future Government - in complying with the fiscal treaty. I believe this treaty must be renegotiated. It has an absolute stranglehold on every family in the State. Under the deal, the new Government would come into the House to certify that a financial emergency continues to exist. This will enable the Government to confiscate private property; the private property of the little people - people who have made contributions to pensions to provide for their retirement. The very same Government is refusing to certify that a housing emergency exists in case that upsets the vulture funds and the big landlords. Therefore it is not surprising the deal does not commit to an emergency housing situation and the halting of evictions. This deal also continues the situation whereby families are being evicted by this Government and the banks it owns. That process will continue under this Government. It is a scandal and it must be stopped. It only requires the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance to instruct the banks, which are owned by the Irish people, to stop the evictions. No legislation would be necessary. The incoming Gov-

ernment should and must do that immediately or it will not just be Fine Gael, but also Fianna Fáil and the supporting Independents who will be blamed for every eviction, and rightly so.

I conclude by referring to a very well-attended meeting in Portlaoise last Saturday where families who are threatened with eviction gave the Government six weeks to stop evictions and to put a moratorium on evictions. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents should take stock of that situation and stop these evictions once and for all.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Faraor géar, ní bheidh mé in ann vóta a chaitheamh ar son an Teachta Enda Kenny inniu, ach guím gach rath air agus é ag fanacht ar an seisear atá fós ar iarraidh. Tá siad áit éigin san fhoirgneamh. Tá mé cinnte go mbeidh toghchán againn uair éigin, má tá sé de mhuintín acu teacht isteach sa Seomra álainn seo. Unfortunately I will not be voting for Deputy Enda Kenny today but I wish him the best of luck in the election that will take place at some stage, I am sure, when the Independents come in to the House - the Independents who are negotiating in the national interest, I imagine, outside the door. In the guise of new politics we are now sitting here waiting for an election with a programme for a Government that we do not have - presumably it is not even complete - while the Independents wrestle with their consciences outside. It is a cause of great disappointment to me that we are here 70 days after an election. The 70 days have really been used to allow both big parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, enough time for the figleaf to grow to hide the nakedness of their ambitions. This climate is not known to be conducive to the growth of figs and perhaps that is one of the reasons why it has taken so long. Clearly the fig leaf is to hide their nakedness. Fine Gael was rejected by the population but wants to stay in power at all costs and has come some way to changing its neo-liberal agenda. Fianna Fáil wants it every way; it wants to be in power and out of power at the same time and has negotiated that deal. If we on the left had behaved in this manner and if we had 93 votes we would have been absolutely vilified in the press and by the people for not forming a Government within the last 70 days.

From the little bit that I have seen on social media and from the documentation that we have been able to get, we see there are a number of good things in that document, such as the Minister for rural affairs, a commitment to reducing class sizes, a commitment to bringing back career guidance teachers, etc. While there are many good ideas, there is overall an utter failure to deal with the crisis in our society which is a result of relying on the free market. There is an utter failure to realise that the continued reliance on the free market is going to undo the economy and cost us more money in the long term. We have utterly failed to recognise that there is a national emergency in housing and that this is a result of pandering to the free market. There is an utter failure to realise that the health system is at creaking point and that a heartbeat down in Waterford is as important as a heartbeat in the west of Ireland or in Galway city. What we want from the Independents is pressure put on the Government to deliver a one-tier health system and not deals for individual constituencies.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: There is an utter failure to recognise the sources of poverty. I am reading aghast, and I hope I am incorrect, that we are looking at the role of the Defence Forces in providing skills to help people out of poverty. There is an utter failure to look at any of the reports produced by Government and non-government bodies about the sources of poverty, including lack of income and lack of access to housing and public health services. Surely if we have learned anything, it is that there are solutions. I am sick and tired of being told by my colleagues here to my left that we Independents have done nothing. We have come in every

6 May 2016

day to this Dáil. We have researched, spoken and suggested solutions. If we had the votes, we would happily take power. In the meantime, we will use our voices to point out that there are solutions that they are not taking and that the solutions they are adopting will cost us money in the long run and will not lead to an equal society which, in the long term, would be a much better economy.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh as ucht bhur fhoighne. Tá súil agam, as seo amach, go mbeidh i bhfad níos mó Gaeilge á húsáid sa Seomra agus go mbeidh toghchán againn uair éigin nuair a thagann na fir ar ais.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will now proceed to a 30-minute period for other contributions. I already have six Deputies offering so I ask them to be as brief as possible.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I think we should vote now.

An Ceann Comhairle: The first speaker is Deputy Willie O’Dea.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I asked to be next.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O’Dea is not speaking now. I call Deputy Mary Lou McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am assuming this is the sole occasion on which Deputy O’Dea will give way for me to speak.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: That is the new arrangement.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: It depends on what Deputy McDonald has to say.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: It is a new politics.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: We are 70 days on, a Cheann Comhairle, and we are still waiting. Waiting for Godot, although this is not so much Beckett as Flann O’Brien in the qualities of its absurdity. What do we know? We know that those in Fianna Fáil, despite all their protestations to the contrary, are prepared to put Fine Gael and Deputy Enda Kenny back into Government. We know of their absolute cynicism in this regard, but we also know now of their utter ineptitude. Not alone are they prepared to reinstate Fine Gael, but the price that they exacted for that was incredibly low. They leave us with Irish Water intact, charges merely suspended, no new initiative on housing - no new money for that worthy social need - and a health service in a shambles. I could go on but I will not, because I do not have the time to do so. It seems also that Independents are not really always as independent as they may seem. Here we are, within minutes of a vote for the highest office in the land, yet we are still gripped by a sense of uncertainty.

I have to tell the Taoiseach that we also know that whenever the issue is resolved and whenever the men march in and put him back into office, we will have a Government that simply pays lip service to fairness. In fact, it will be a Government for which “fair” is truly a four-letter word. We want the Taoiseach to know, and we want Fianna Fáil to know also, that on the Opposition benches we have a wide and diverse group of Deputies. Sinn Féin is the lead party of opposition in this Dáil.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: Who are you trying to convince? Yourself?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Sinn Féin will provide constructive and robust opposition to Deputy Kenny and his Government, if instated. We want him to know that we will be here on behalf of all those who rely on good Government and good decisions and who rely on change. The people really need fairness, and they understand what that word means because they have experienced so much unfairness, exclusion and injustice. We are putting Deputy Kenny on notice that if he attempts to inflict more hardship on those families and communities, then he will have us to answer to. He may have created a soft opposition in Fianna Fáil but we want him to know that there is no soft opposition from the benches of Sinn Féin.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, a Cheann Comhairle. As the House is aware, I worked with Deputy Enda Kenny in the most difficult of times and circumstances for our country during the past five years. I know him to be intrinsically decent and incredibly hard-working. Despite some of the comments made by other Deputies, I believe that history will treat the Government that he led during the past five years kindly.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: No.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: At the outset of this Dáil, the Labour Party set out two criteria on which we would cast our votes for Taoiseach. One was the content of any formal programme for Government proposed and its compatibility with the principles of the Labour Party. The second was the viability of the Government proposed and its capacity to deal with the issues that the country faces now and in future.

In the case of the programme for Government, when a senior Minister who is negotiating the programme for Government states nationally that a policy is not in the public interest and yet it is to be implemented, then new ground has been broken. Never in my time in the House has a government been formed on that basis. If the public interest is not the fundamental and overarching basis for all actions of a Government, then it cannot and does not deserve the support of this House. Policy has to be implemented in the public interest, that is, all the public's interest. National policy on health, education, justice or any other area has to be objectively determined by what is right and not by what is expedient.

Reform has been the hallmark of the past five years, with a bespoke Department with responsibility for reform. Let us consider one issue, the issue of justice - although we could take any. We have a new Garda authority now. We have two published reform plans that are root-and-branch analyses of how proper 21st century policing is to be determined. There should be some objective criterion that determines the number of gardaí rather than simply picking a number, to which I could add 1,000 while another Deputy raises me 1,000. There should be some objective criterion that determines the location of Garda stations or how resources are allocated. That is new politics but that is not what we have. We must have some objectivity in respect of how health policy, education policy, transport policy or any other policy is determined with the interests of every citizen at the core of it.

The second criterion was the stability and viability of any proposed Government. We need look no further than the seats beside me to answer that question. We are likely to see a minority government dependent on Fianna Fáil with an array of Independent Deputies, whose number we do not yet know some 22 minutes before we cast our votes.

6 May 2016

Government must be based on a common set of principles that are hammered out. I have always understood that. More fundamentally - I have been privileged to serve in three Governments - it must be based on trust. Does trust exist? That is the question everybody in this Chamber has to answer. Does trust exist in the arrangement now before this House? Will it be fit and able to face the issues which we will face as a country, ones that we know will arise and ones that may arise: Brexit, which will be seismic in its impact here; the future of the European Union, with new borders going up because of the migrant crisis; public sector pay policy; housing; homelessness; and health? All these things will need a united, focused and determined Government, not one which is intrinsically unstable and by definition temporary in nature.

My party, as many Members of this House are happy to acknowledge, suffered a very poor general election. The traditional view, one that I shared in the immediate aftermath of that election, is that we needed the time to recover before we faced another general election. Sometimes, however, there are worse things than a general election. Bluntly, trusting the future of our country to the sand on which the proposed arrangement for a new Government is presented to us is one of those issues and I for one have come to the view that a general election is preferable.

Deputy Bríd Smith: It is very difficult for people to go through this draft document that was leaked, rather than see what is being proposed in reality for this new arrangement with Deputy Kenny proposed as Taoiseach. One thing is for sure: there is no new politics going on here. In fact, it is the same old failed policies of the previous Government. However, what is interesting about the arrangement is that for the first time in the history of the State we see the two biggest parties helping each other to put forward an image that, on the one hand, Fine Gael can govern and on the other hand, Fianna Fáil can prop it up and at the same time be the leader in opposition to it. This is amazingly choreographed, even down to the phrase that they will have an open approach to avoid policy surprises. What does that mean? It is a polite way of saying that they will choreograph Dáil debates between them so that they can keep up the pretence that one crowd rules and the other crowd is in opposition. It is a very interesting arrangement we will see played out. The devil will be in the detail of the policies that will be put before us by the so-called new programme for Government.

I tried my best to look through the leaked document, not the completed one, and some of the things that spring out at me are very serious indeed. Leaving aside what has been said about social housing, one simple issue is how this programme will deal with children. My secretary was for much of her life a lone parent. She now has a job. She led an organisation called Single Parents Acting for the Rights of Kids, SPARK. She is utterly ashamed of, and disgusted with, Fianna Fáil today because it pretended to support SPARK when it was in opposition and is now backing up a situation which, according to the document, will reform the monitoring of child benefit payment by amalgamating the two existing school attendance monetary systems run by the Department of Education and Skills and the National Education Welfare Board to address poor attendances with some families. This sounds like linking child benefit payment to school attendance. My only answer to that is: Donald Trump, move over. That is outrageously right wing. If those who are sitting to my left, pretending to support lone parents when they suffered severe cuts under those over there, are seriously propping that up then we know where we are headed. There is very little difference between the policies of these two parties and they have consistently failed during the past ten weeks to illustrate what the differences are between them. Under previous regimes Fianna Fáil cut child benefit by €16 per month and Fine Gael cut it by €19 per month. That is a €3 difference between them. Fianna Fáil cut social welfare payments

for people under 20 years of age to €100 per week and Fine Gael cut social welfare payments for people under 24 years of age to €100 per week. Both parties voted for the bank guarantee, which has cost the State €65 billion so far. Both of them cut discretionary medical cards, Fianna Fáil for pensioners and Fine Gael for everybody else. There is so little difference between them it would make one weep. Both supported a 14-year jail sentence for women who procure abortion pills.

We must start by asking ourselves what we face. I will outline a number of the issues. The document refers to public sector workers. The workers who work in this House and elsewhere in the Civil Service and the public sector should take note that it talks about the gradual reform of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest, FEMPI, Acts. Trade union conferences due to be held in the next few weeks will propose the abolition of the FEMPI legislation, which was introduced as a major tactic to help bail out the banks, cut the pay of low-paid public sector workers and introduce the pension-related deduction. The parties talk about phasing that out up to 2020. In the meantime, they expect workers who are living on extraordinarily low pay despite a high cost of living, particularly in the cities where rents are soaring and where it is nearly impossible to buy a home on such wages, to say they will stand back and not play any role in the future. In addition, they are offering to increase the minimum wage from €9.15 to €10.50 per hour by 2020. In other words, they will give the most impoverished workers in the country an extra 27 cent per hour on which to live.

This will not happen in a vacuum; it will happen during very exciting times in this House. It will also happen with the focus on the people who have almost won in respect of water charges and on the great unwashed who are out protesting and standing up to the Government. They will do the same, given their increasing confidence, and fight the Government on housing, health and so forth. The darkest hour is often before the dawn. With the combined right-wing shape of the House, we are seeing a resurgence in the confidence of ordinary people. When that resurgence meets with the draconian measures and lack of real change under this programme, we will be in for very interesting times. We will put ourselves firmly and squarely on the side of those who fight for real change rather than the same old policies which are choreographed by two groups of people who could be looking into a mirror given that there is so little difference between them.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The leaked document which we have all seen is proof, as if we needed it, that some people will do and say anything to hang on to power. It is nothing short of shameful. I proudly represented workers in the public service for many years, under both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and they will not be impressed by a single word in this document. The Government appears to have shifted from keeping the so-called recovery going to moving towards a fairer Ireland. I doubt that the Government would recognise a fairer Ireland even if it met it on the road, with two pints in its hands and saying "Hello".

I note that there is no mention of workers or workers' rights in the document. I am not surprised, but workers should be made aware of it. The health care section mentions funding and MBAs for senior managers. Recruitment is listed under "ambitions". There is no plan for recruitment or to attract doctors and nurses back into the health service. Furthermore, there is no mention of the people who clean our hospitals, keep them secure and feed patients. I can only assume from that glaring omission that they do not feature in the Government's plans at all. We on these benches and the people outside know what the Government has planned for those people is nothing less than outsourcing. They will know that. They will see that. They are not mentioned in the document. We know what the Government wants to do with them and

6 May 2016

we will fight hard and oppose it tooth and nail when the Government tries to outsource aspects of the health service.

In some respects this programme for Government talks the talk. It looks well, it reads well, but it will ultimately let people down. There is no new politics and no new thinking. This is nothing but cowardice and a shameless and shameful grab for power.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: It is fair to say that the previous Government did get some things right in a difficult environment-----

Deputy Damien English: Thank you.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: -----but it also got many things wrong. After five years in here trying to change some of the things I and the Social Democrats believe they got wrong, my conclusion is that at the heart of the errors the previous Government made was a failure of ideology. Allowing a republic where one child in nine lives in daily poverty to continue is not a failure of policy, it is a failure of ideology. Designing and implementing five regressive budgets in a row that asked those who had the least to bear the greatest burden was a choice. It was a very damaging choice and it was a failure of ideology. Selling more than 13,000 family mortgages from IBRC to vulture funds, many of whom are now having to deal with those vulture funds who are making very serious profits, rather than facilitating the families when every other situation had to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis was a failure of ideology.

Campaigning to cut taxes at a time when parents are putting their children to sleep in the back of cars is a failure of ideology. That failure of ideology continues through to the leaked document we saw outlining tax cuts to investment ratios of 1:2. The previous Government, Fine Gael in particular, campaigned on a slogan that we have to make work pay. It is one of the three pillars of its 130-page manifesto, Making Work Pay. The ideology says that if one taxes people for working, one is disincentivising them from working so they will not work and one has to make it pay for them to work. However, objective, impartial analysis from the OECD says that Ireland has between the lowest and the fourth lowest tax wedge, tax on work, in the OECD, depending on what type of family one is in. The Government that is coming in now is backed up by a document whereby it is going to continue with tax cuts to make work pay, because presumably work does not pay. At a time when one in nine children are living in poverty and we are dealing with a homelessness crisis, when there are not enough gardaí on the streets, it is not just a failure of policy, it is an absolute failure of ideology.

The Social Democrats – I am sure with many others here – would love to be in government. We would love to be driving policy but we do not see evidence that the ideology has changed. As other Members have referenced before, there are some welcome phrases that it is hoped will be followed through in this coming Dáil, but what we do not see is a change in the ideology that has led to an awful lot of very bad things happening to a lot of vulnerable people in this country in the past five years.

I hope we are at a time where we can start rebuilding society. If we are to rebuild a republic that genuinely provides every single man, woman and child with dignity and opportunity, then we need to do it with a different ideology based on values of dignity, genuine equality and democracy.

Consequently, for this reason and many others, we in the Social Democrats do not believe the ideological basis of what Members are about to see will be good for this country and for that

reason, we will vote against this Government.

Deputy David Cullinane: Members had hoped that after three failed attempts to elect Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach and after 70 days and long hours of talks and negotiations between all the parties that will be part of the Government, the farce would come to an end. However, it has not come to an end. The Minister of State, Deputy Harris, spoke earlier about a partnership Government but where is the partnership? One arm of the Government, namely, Fianna Fáil, claims not to be in government at all. It claims to be in opposition but also supports this partnership Government. The Independent Alliance has just arrived into the Chamber, having kept Members waiting, and the farce has continued right up to the 11th hour. I wonder what people outside the Chamber think about all this. I often hear people state this place is a bubble and that those who occupy the seats, especially on the Government side, live in a bubble and do not understand what it is like for people outside the Chamber and it is hard to argue against that. I wonder what the people lying on hospital trolleys across the State as I speak think of this ongoing farce. I wonder what parents of children with disabilities who cannot get the resources and supports they require for their children think of this farce. The Taoiseach claims to have met a number of homeless people and I wonder what they would think of this farce. What of all those families who are living in front rooms or are in emergency accommodation? I wonder what they think of this farce.

I have read the document that has been published and agreed on by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and some Independents who have changed their stripes and have changed from being opposed to the policies of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to now propping up the Government. One thing is certain which is that it is a recipe for more of the same and for keeping things as they are. It will keep in place the two-tier unfair health service, the housing crisis will continue, there is nothing for workers' rights and people will still live in poverty. What does the Taoiseach say to those people who want real change? Deputy Micheál Martin stated earlier that Sinn Féin had a chance to support him as Taoiseach. That is not a choice because Fianna Fáil is not up for change. When one sees that party's fingerprints all over these documents, it is quite clear it has signed up to a conservative Government with Fine Gael and is not interested in change. We in Sinn Féin want to build a real alternative. We will lead the Opposition and Fianna Fáil members can get it out of their heads that they are now an Opposition party. The lead party of opposition will be Sinn Féin.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Hear, hear.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: Dream on.

Deputy David Cullinane: We will be a strong and a fair Opposition and will provide robust opposition, but we also will be constructive.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: That would be a first.

Deputy David Cullinane: In the context of the new dispensation Deputy Micheál Martin, the Taoiseach and others state exists, they must also do business with Sinn Féin. When Sinn Féin brings forward proposals, which we will as we have many ideas and solutions, there will also be an onus and a responsibility on the Taoiseach and those who are part of this new arrangement to work with us. We are up for that challenge but sadly, when I consider what has been agreed, I must be honest with those outside this Chamber who are in dire straits and are seeking change and state they will not get it from this conservative arrangement of Fianna Fáil,

6 May 2016

Fine Gael and Independents who have changed their colours and their stripes because they wish to get into power.

An Ceann Comhairle: As no other Deputy is offering at this point, in accordance with the Order of the Dáil I am required to put the question.

Cuireadh an cheist: “Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Enda Kenny chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Taoiseach.”

Question put: “That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Enda Kenny for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 59; Níl, 49.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>D’Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>

<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Joe Carey and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Mick Barry and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Question declared carried.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis glacadh leis an gceist.

An Ceann Comhairle: A Thaoiseach, ar mhaith leat rud a rá ag an bpointe seo?

The Taoiseach: Ba mhaith liom ar dtús mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le chuile Teachta a thug vóta dom sa toghchán seo. Ba mhaith liom freisin mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leo siúd nár ghlac lena gcuid vótaí a chaitheamh chun mé a thoghadh mar Thaoiseach. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta Rock agus an Teachta Ní Bhroin as ucht moladh a thabhairt dom.

I am grateful for the trust the Thirty-second Dáil has placed in me to lead the new Government as the country leads a new century. The circumstances of today are very different from those of five years ago when Ireland was in deep crisis and when our very survival as an independent country was in doubt. I promised at that stage that the new Fine Gael and Labour

6 May 2016

Party Government would work night and day to rescue the economy, fix the public finances and get the people back to work. I pay tribute, in particular, to the members of that Government from the Labour Party - those who are present - for their work during that period and who will be stepping down shortly from their ministerial offices. They know what it means to act in the national interest come what may. They know what it means to have to make difficult decisions and stand over them and to place the needs of the country and the people above all else. I thank them for their service and support and wish them well for the future.

While I contend that we fulfilled our core mandate to move the country back from the edge of an economic cliff, I acknowledge and understand very many people have not felt the benefit of a recovering economy in their daily lives. While five years on Ireland is a better place and a safer place, we face many serious challenges that we know of both home and abroad. If economic survival was the urgent priority of the previous Government, using a strong economy to improve the quality of the lives of our people must and will be the priority of the new Government. That fundamental principle will be the bedrock of our policy programme.

Therefore, the Government that I will lead in the very different circumstances of the Thirty-second Dáil will be a very different kind of administration formed in very different and almost unprecedented circumstances. The verdict of the people in the recent general election means that no party or group has any mandate to instruct, force, direct or coerce anybody to do anything they do not want to do. Therefore we must all work together in the best interests of all our people.

It has always been the case that under Bunreacht na hÉireann the Taoiseach and the Government of the day are responsible to Dáil Éireann. That will never be truer than in respect of this Thirty-second Dáil, a Cheann Comhairle, over which you preside, in terms of the reform of this Chamber. The engagements that have taken place over the past ten weeks between parties, between groups and their affiliates, and between the Fine Gael Party and the Fianna Fáil Party have demonstrated that a very significant number of Deputies in the House are willing to try to make the current political configuration work in the interests of our people and the country.

In that same spirit, I commit myself and the incoming Government to work in partnership with the elected Members of this House to devise and implement solutions to the many problems facing our people. I take on board the constructive comments from the many comments made by Members from the benches opposite earlier today. I will energetically oversee and implement the programme for Government I have agreed with the Deputies and groups that are part of the new Administration. I will play an active role in implementing comprehensive reform of the Oireachtas, both Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, and in so doing I will discharge my responsibilities as Taoiseach to the very best of my ability as I have always sought to do. However, those responsibilities will be shared by every Member of Dáil Éireann in a way that they have never had to be shared before. Everyone will have an opportunity to play a constructive role as we work in partnership together to build a better Ireland. It will be a great test of our democracy, of our character and of this House - a test, I am convinced, we will pass.

This Government has much to do. Our country faces many challenges. That was the message the people gave in the election and was the message that has been repeated by so many Deputies present on so many occasions. The new Government has listened to that message and we will act on that message in an attempt to redress many of the difficult challenges people face every day. This programme sets out a vision for a more caring, more prosperous and fairer Ireland. At the heart of that programme for Government is a belief in the enormous potential

of our people and our country. That potential lies within every citizen whatever their age and wherever they live. The new Government will be driven by a firm belief that good politics can help realise all of that potential in the interests of all our people throughout the country.

I have been here for many years, as the Ceann Comhairle knows. I have seen things that people once thought were impossible come to pass and become commonplace. I have seen days in this Chamber filled with hope and indeed days that were seared with despair. There have been years of difficulty, years of bloodshed and, thankfully, years of precious peace. The greatest challenges have been met and the widest of chasms have been bridged. Recent years saw sovereignty lost and then our sovereignty regained. The commemoration of the centenary of the Easter Rising has given all of us a moment to reflect with pride on the achievements of those who went before us and the achievements of our independence. As servants of our democracy, whether in the Government or the Opposition, we now have a new opportunity to help write the next chapter of the unfolding story of our country. In doing so, we draw inspiration from that heroic generation that gained Ireland her freedom. Like them, we should never forget the hard-earned lessons of history and, like them, we should never set limits to our ambitions for our people or for the country.

It is my great honour to accept the nomination of Dáil Éireann for the position of Taoiseach. I now have a duty to go to the President to inform him of my nomination in order that he may appoint me as Taoiseach. Accordingly, I suggest that the House be suspended for three hours before we resume to deal with the nomination of members of the Government.

Sitting suspended at 2.30 p.m. and resumed at 5.30 p.m.

Business of Dáil

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): For the information of the House, I propose, notwithstanding the previous order of the day, that with the approval of the House the sitting be suspended for a further 45 minutes.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is that enough?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Can the Government not get Deputy Kelly out of the Custom House?

Sitting suspended at 5.35 p.m. and resumed at 6.15 p.m.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders that: the proceedings on No. 2, approval of nomination of other members of the Government, shall be brought to a conclusion after three hours and 45 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply: the speech of the Taoiseach and the leaders of Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, AAA-People Before Profit, Independents 4 Change, Social Democrats, the Green Party, or a Member nominated in their stead, and a non-party Deputy, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; the speech of each other Member, who shall be called upon in the following sequence, shall not exceed ten minutes in each case: Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, AAA-People Before Profit, Independents 4 Change, Social Democrats, the Green Party, non-party; and Members may share time; until the Dáil

6 May 2016

shall otherwise order, the order in which questions to members of the Government other than the Taoiseach shall be asked in accordance with Standing Order 39(2) shall be that in which members of the Government will be listed in a resolution approving their nomination by the Taoiseach for appointment by the President; and the Dáil shall adjourn on the conclusion of No. 2 tonight at 10.30 p.m. and resume at 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 May 2016, when the Order of Business will be decided on that day.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 2 agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 3, without debate, agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal that the Dáil, on its rising today, shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 May 2016 agreed to?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I take it the Ministers want to read into their briefs over the coming week, but there is an urgent necessity for the Parliament to organise itself as well. I ask that early next week the Whips of all parties meet with the Chief Whip to work out, for example, how many Oireachtas committees there will be. We need to get the committee system up and running as a matter of urgency. There has not been a proper Whip system in operation for the past two weeks and we have been quite tolerant of how debates have been organised in a haphazard manner regarding timing. It is important, coming out of what is happening at the Sub-committee on Dáil Reform, that early next week work can begin on identifying how many committees will be established, and their nature, so that we can organise ourselves in such a way that when the Dáil does come back we can start working effectively, efficiently and purposefully, and that debate takes place not for its own sake but with proper Ministers who are accountable to the House and who may be appointed this evening following the vote. That is extremely important. There is a great deal of work to be done next week to make sure that this Dáil and the Oireachtas are organised properly and effectively so that we can get down to business and get work done through the committee system as well as the plenary system.

The Taoiseach may also indicate a realignment of Departments in his speech, which is equally important for the committees that will be established to monitor and hold the Departments to account. That also has an impact on how the Opposition works. On that basis, we will not oppose the reconvening of the Dáil on Tuesday week, but we do think a lot of work needs to be done next week to get the Parliament in working order, which it is not in at the moment.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The last thing this Dáil needs, and the last thing the public would tolerate, is either the reality or the perception that the Dáil is not going to function for another week. It is absolutely imperative that the Taoiseach clarify that in the course of the period intervening to the proposed resumption date the Committee on Housing and Homelessness appointed by this Thirty-second Dáil will continue its work and the Sub-committee on Dáil Reform will be ready to report on its recommendations on the commencement of the new Dáil session as of next Tuesday week. It is absolutely imperative that the Taoiseach confirm this evening that he will use the intervening time to ensure that not only the Dáil but also the Seanad - both Houses of the Oireachtas - are ready to get up and running and function in an appropriate and businesslike way as of that date. I am not a fan at all of the fact that the Taoiseach of the day has the power to appoint 11 Members of the Seanad, but it will not function until that is done. Will the Taoiseach confirm to the House this evening that he will use the intervening period to proceed with that and that there will be no impediment to the Seanad's commencing its business as and of that date, or preferably earlier?

The Taoiseach: In response to the points raised by Deputies Martin and Ó Caoláin, the in-

tervening period will be used for that purpose. I have already asked that the decision be made in respect of the number of Oireachtas committees that we will have. The Ceann Comhairle has a specific responsibility in chairing the Sub-committee on Dáil Reform. I agree with the sentiments expressed by Deputies Martin and Ó Caoláin that when the Houses come back they should be able to work immediately and efficiently in the interests of our people.

Question put and agreed to.

Appointment of Taoiseach and Nomination of Members of Government: Motion

The Taoiseach: B'áil liom cead a chur in iúl, mar eolas don Dáil, gur chuir mé m'ainmniú mar Thaoiseach in iúl don Uachtarán agus gur cheap sé mé dá réir.

I beg leave to announce, for the information of the Dáil, that I have informed the President that the Dáil has nominated me to be the Taoiseach and that he has appointed me accordingly.

Tairigim:

Go gcomhaontóidh Dáil Éireann leis an Taoiseach d'ainmniú na dTeachtaí seo a leanas chun a gceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar chomhaltaí den Rialtas:

I move:

That Dáil Éireann approve the nomination by the Taoiseach of the following Deputies for appointment by the President to be members of the Government:

<i>Proinséas Nic Gearailt</i>	<i>Frances Fitzgerald</i>
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I also propose to nominate her as Tánaiste.

<i>Mícheal Ó Nunáin</i>	<i>Michael Noonan</i>
<i>Risteárd de Briotún</i>	<i>Richard Bruton</i>
<i>Siómón Ó Comhánaigh</i>	<i>Simon Coveney</i>
<i>Leo Varadkar</i>	<i>Leo Varadkar</i>
<i>Cathal Ó Flannagáin</i>	<i>Charles Flanagan</i>
<i>Pascal Ó Donnchú</i>	<i>Paschal Donohoe</i>
<i>Heather Nic Unfraidh</i>	<i>Heather Humphreys</i>
<i>Siómón Ó hEarcaí</i>	<i>Simon Harris</i>
<i>Micheál Ó Críod</i>	<i>Michael Creed</i>
<i>Donnacha Ó Neachtain</i>	<i>Denis Naughten</i>
<i>Seán de Rossa</i>	<i>Shane Ross</i>
<i>Máire Mistéil Ní Chonchubhair</i>	<i>Mary Mitchell O'Connor</i>
<i>Katherine Zappone</i>	<i>Katherine Zappone</i>

They will be assigned Departments of State as follows:

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<i>Department of Justice and Equality</i>	<i>Frances Fitzgerald</i>
<i>Department of Social Protection</i>	<i>Leo Varadkar</i>
<i>Department of Finance</i>	<i>Michael Noonan</i>
<i>Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</i>	<i>Paschal Donohoe</i>
<i>Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation</i>	<i>Mary Mitchell O'Connor</i>
<i>Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine</i>	<i>Michael Creed</i>
<i>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</i>	<i>Katherine Zappone</i>
<i>Department of Health</i>	<i>Simon Harris</i>
<i>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</i>	<i>Charles Flanagan</i>
<i>Department of Education and Skills</i>	<i>Richard Bruton</i>
<i>Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government</i>	<i>Simon Coveney</i>
<i>Department of Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources</i>	<i>Denis Naughten</i>
<i>Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport</i>	<i>Shane Ross</i>
<i>Department of Rural Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht</i>	<i>Heather Humphreys</i>

I will assign the Department of Defence to myself. I intend to nominate Deputy Paul Kehoe as a Minister of State attending Government as Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Defence with special responsibility for the Department of Defence.

I propose to nominate Maire Whelan SC for appointment by the President to be the Attorney General. I also propose to nominate Deputy Regina Doherty as Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and Government Chief Whip and Deputy Finian McGrath as Minister of State attending the Government and Minister of State at the Departments of Social Protection, Justice and Equality and Health, with special responsibility for disability issues.

It is also my intention to restructure the Government to align it with the priority objectives of the new Government. The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government will become the new Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. There will be an action plan for housing and homelessness and a dedicated Cabinet committee on housing, which I will chair. Responsibility for the environment, including climate change, will transfer to a new Department of Climate Change, Communications and Natural Resources. There will be a new Department of Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. This will retain all of the functions of the former Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It will also be assigned responsibility for the roll-out of rural broadband and the development of the post office network. In addition, this new Department will be assigned responsibility for the Leader programme, an expanded town and village renewal scheme and the Tidy Towns scheme, the Western Development Commission, the implementation of the report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas, the dormant accounts fund and social enterprise. There will be an action plan for rural development and a dedicated Cabinet committee on re-

gional and rural affairs which I will also chair. This will provide for effective monitoring of delivery and clearer co-ordination across all policy areas that affect rural Ireland.

I am acutely conscious of the honour that has been bestowed upon me by this House. I assure the people of Ireland, the Government and every Member of the House that as the current custodian of the Office of An Taoiseach I will use this term to make life better for all our people. The Government is both ambitious and optimistic. In its make-up alone it is unlike any other established in Ireland since the foundation of the State, comprising members of my party, members of the Independent Alliance and a number of Independent Deputies. Its formation process proves that politics is not about power and its attainment but always about what is possible, the possibility of what can be achieved and what can be achieved not for parties, individuals or sectors but for the entire country. That sense of possibility is the touchstone of a partnership Government for a fairer Ireland.

The formal process of meeting and agreement began on 24 March last. There followed many hours and days of formal discussions and informal conversations. It was crucial not only to get it done but that it be got right, to understand the make-up of the new Dáil and to reflect the new partnership and spirit of partnership that was asked of us. I happen to be the longest serving Member of the Dáil and have been through many extraordinary times in this Chamber, but this is the most different, challenging and, indeed, exciting of any of them. I hope that we will all embrace it and, as Members of the House elected by the people, realise the historic moment that we are a part of. I certainly will. No one in the negotiations suffered from certainty. After 70 days of talks and negotiations we agreed not alone our programme for Government, but that there is no place or function for political pessimism in our Administration and no limit to political possibility. There was a palpable sense in all of the talks, including with those who decided they would not join the Government, that politics as we knew it had changed forever.

All of us involved in the talks agreed that, economically, Ireland was going in the right direction, and for our country's future, we must ensure that continues. We hope to continue to be the fastest-growing economy in Europe this year. We were equally agreed that politics itself would not just have to change direction, it would also have to change its dimensions and include the particular qualities of resilience, kindness, insight, empathy, dignity and resolve.

I have noted before the old observation that people live not only their own lives, but they live the life of their time. While on the international stage the official record of the life of Ireland is one of exceptional growth and recovery, it is in the lived experience, the personal experience of people that the national life is revealed. That is why with the new Government I am anxious that the national record of the life of the time, be it the surge in tax receipts or the headlines on growth, must be more in tune and aligned with the personal record, which is the lived experience of the people. We must ask how alive we are willing to be to the experience of all our people, and to the opinions of those with whom we differ or even strongly disagree.

Fianna Fáil knew, as we did, that with the election the traditional rules no longer applied. It was fitting that on the centenary of the Rising of 1916, both parties managed to start to sweep away some of the old ways and find a way to work together. I thank the party opposite for that. I believe the Thirty-second Dáil will make a new and collaborative approach not only with the partners of Government, but indeed with the partners of the Opposition. I believe all of us in the House are *ad idem*, that our function is to use Government, and see it used, to effect the kind of change, opportunity and compassion we need and desire in our society.

6 May 2016

The Thirty-second Dáil is an unprecedented challenge but it is equally an unprecedented opportunity. In fact, it is a unique opportunity to begin this very day as a society and as a nation with a Government based on an articulated consensus around the issues that really matter to the lived experience of our people. Our country and our people have come through an unprecedented economic crash. Every family in Ireland has been touched in some way or other during the crisis. For the past five years I and the previous Government have worked to end the crisis, exit the international bailout and to help the creation of new jobs. Now the foundations of a growing economy are in place. While the sense of economic crisis may have passed we still have a great deal of work ahead of us to ensure that work and opportunity is present for all families across Ireland.

Today, Ireland also faces other challenges in the areas of housing and homelessness, in health care provision and in providing relief for working families. After the general election and 70 days of intense debate it is now time for new and immediate action. One of my immediate priorities is to ensure the Government is fully engaged on the UK referendum on EU membership, which is now less than seven weeks away. While it is clearly a matter for the British people themselves to decide, it is of profound importance and consequence both to the EU and to this country. Uniquely for a non-Commonwealth country, Irish citizens living in Britain will have a vote on 23 June. British citizens living here will also have a vote, and of course the issue of EU membership directly affects voters in Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom's referendum campaign is now entering a critical phase. It is an important time for everyone on these islands and in Europe, particularly for those who work in companies that export goods and services to Britain. I intend to make a number of visits to Britain and Northern Ireland over the course of the next two months. I will ask a number of Ministers to visit Britain during this time to reach out to Irish citizens and to engage with friends and the wider business community who have an interest in British-Irish economic co-operation. Moreover, because I believe it is of critical importance that our voice is heard as Britain's closest neighbour and friend on this issue, I also intend to invite Members of the Opposition, where appropriate, to attend particular occasions with Irish communities in Britain.

We are acutely aware of what has been called a once-in-a-generation decision facing the British people and are respectful of the sovereignty of that decision. That said, Ireland is the only country that shares a Border with the UK. We have strong historic, economic and personal ties and move easily across these islands to do business, visit families and celebrate each other's culture. Every week, we trade €1 billion between our two countries in goods and services - goods and services produced here in Ireland. We are co-guarantors of the peace process in Northern Ireland and are partners in Europe. We want to ensure there is no doubt about the Irish Government's position and that its message is heard clearly. Prime Minister Cameron kindly telephoned me this afternoon and I said I would do whatever I could usefully do to help in the run-up to the referendum. I will meet the Prime Minister as our schedules permit. British-Irish relations are stronger than ever. The close working relationship and the understanding Prime Minister Cameron and I have developed will help to build these relations further and we hope the UK stays with us in the European Union. Europe, Ireland and the UK will be all the stronger for that. It is important to note that were the decision to go the other way, obviously Ireland would still have special relationships with Britain. Ireland would still work in the context of co-operation with Britain from a European point of view, but the unknown quantity would be the reflection of how European Union countries would look at Britain were it to decide to leave.

While the programme for Government is extensive, at its core is one simple objective,

which is to make people's lives better in every part of Ireland. The economic recovery remains central to the Government's work and the people have worked hard for this progress. A fair society must lean on a strong economy and only with a strong economy can we deliver on the key goals of the Government, which are to make people's lives better, to provide homes for the people and to make Ireland a great place in which to grow up and grow old. Under the Government's first priority, it wishes to help working families, and to do that, we must secure a strong economy. The programme for Government contains ambitious plans for more affordable child care, more and better jobs, lower taxes on workers, help for low-paid workers and safer streets. An urgent challenge for the new Government will be to remedy and fix the housing and homelessness crisis and the emergency that now exists. As a country, we still are building far too few homes for the people following the construction crash. It is not acceptable to anybody that in 2016, families are living in hotels and bed and breakfasts and I am sure fixing this is a matter on which all Members are united. That is why the Government will publish a spring economic statement shortly to set up the parameters of the budgetary and economic policy for the coming year, which will build on the strong progress that has already been made. I firmly believe Ireland is a great country for families to raise children in and so on. After a period of tough economic times, we must invest in new services to look after the people better, both young and old alike. New investment in hospital and primary care centres will be at the top of the Government's investment programme to ensure we can all live in a country of which we can be proud. As part of this ambition, the Government will focus specifically on improving the disability and mental health services.

The new partnership Government will get to work immediately on the many serious challenges facing Ireland. The first 100 days will provide a comprehensive agenda for all Ministers of the new Government and for every member of the Oireachtas. The Government will shortly agree and publish a plan for its first 100 days in office based on the programme for Government.

The new Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government will begin immediate preparations for the development of an action plan for housing, taking into account the views and suggestions of Government, the Oireachtas and civil society. I commend members of the Committee on Housing and Homelessness who, at the moment, are giving their views on proposals in respect of housing. This will be a road-map for a resolution to the current housing crisis and will require the assistance of all Members of the Oireachtas in its implementation and across Government.

I want to make it clear that there will be new attention put on our psychological and emotional well-being as a country. It is clear that children and teenagers particularly need support to navigate a world which, while it can be marvellous, can equally so be quite merciless.

Within the first 100 days, we will establish a national taskforce on youth mental health to consider how to address such challenges, to teach our young people resilience and how they and their families can access the services they need.

Every community in this country has been afflicted by suicide or self-harm. Connecting for Life, Ireland's national strategy for suicide prevention, has many commitments that do not have a financial cost. They require a political and community commitment. It is up to all of us every day to make that difference.

I wish for this country to become more aware of how we depend not alone on those in our community, but frequently also on the kindness of strangers. We must be that kind stranger

ourselves, on occasion.

As I said earlier, I commit to working in partnership with all the Members of this House to deliver real solutions to the problems facing our country. I look forward to that work and I commend these nominations to the House.

I will give this commitment, irrespective of party, non-party or political creed, in so far as I am concerned as Taoiseach, and honoured to be so, to work with all the Members of this House in the interests of our people and our country. I recognise that we are in a very different situation and I hope I can respond in a proper and fitting fashion to the many cultural and attitudinal changes that are required to bring about a Government, in a minority situation, that will be in the interests of all our people and our country. I guarantee that the members of the Government will do their utmost, individually and collectively, to work with everybody here to make this Thirty-second Dáil one that will leave its mark for the betterment of all our people to build that fairer society of which I have spoken.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Irrespective of the political differences on various sides of the House, I would like first of all to congratulate the Taoiseach on his re-election to that office. I would also like to be first to congratulate all the individuals whom the Taoiseach has proposed to serve as Ministers in the new Government. For any citizen of this Republic, being proposed for important public office is a moment of great pride. In particular, it is a moment of immense satisfaction for their families, parties and supporters.

On behalf of Fianna Fáil I wish the Taoiseach well in the challenging work ahead. He takes up office at a time when the people of Ireland have demanded a new direction. They have said clearly that they do not accept the last Government's narrative. They saw a complacent, arrogant and increasingly out of touch Government which was mainly focused on praising itself, while issue after issue was left to reach crisis level.

The composition of this Dáil and the fact that we now have a minority Government, directly links to the fact that the people have rejected the old way of conducting the public's business. As we heard in the debate earlier, there are those who are angry not to be able to keep to the old certainties. It is indeed easier to have a House nicely divided between those who control everything and those who can focus on giving loud speeches. These are people for whom ideological purity and campaigning is always preferable to actually getting anything done.

I would like to congratulate certain Deputies and parties for their creativity in saying both that we had a duty to be in government with Fine Gael and that we are to be condemned for allowing Fine Gael to be in government. This Government is being formed because of Deputies and parties who refused to support the only alternative available. Fianna Fáil's Deputies are the only Members of this House who voted for an alternative.

We have chosen the path of constructive opposition and will not bring down the Government if it honours an agreed broad policy framework. Equally, we retain the right and intention to use our mandate to try to construct majority support for our policy initiatives. We believe the first duty of the people's representatives is to work to solve problems. That is how we are approaching the work which this Government will do and, more importantly, the work which this Dáil will do.

This is the first time that a non-single-party Government has been presented to the Dáil for appointment without the programme for Government having been published in time for it to be

read in detail. This is a bad start for a Government which cannot survive unless it starts to understand what partnership and consultation mean. This would in other circumstances be a basis for voting against the holding of this vote today. However, as far as we can see, the programme does not row back on agreements reached earlier this week and the programme is only binding on the 58 Deputies who have agreed to form a Government.

Of the eight Independent Deputies who are part of this Government, seven required specific policy commitments before agreeing to participate. We have been told no commitments have been made other than those contained in the programme for Government. We ask for this to be confirmed on the record by the Taoiseach, the Ministers and Deputies concerned.

When discussing this programme for Government, it should be remembered the last one became widely acknowledged as a work of fiction. Even though it was written to claim credit for developments mostly under way, its great promises of development and reform were abandoned. Its promises of fairness and equality were pushed aside in favour of regressive and divisive policies.

The new programme again uses the language of fairness. From our experience of negotiations with Fine Gael, it is not clear the party has any real understanding of what that term means or the urgent needs of the public. Over its five-year term, the former Fine Gael-Labour Government adopted a consistent policy of allowing crisis after crisis develop in vital areas. Where there was no existing blueprint to follow, the priority was public relations rather than policy planning.

This must be a Government and a Dáil which ends this practice and delivers urgent action combined with credible planning. The housing and homelessness emergency represents the direct outcome of a complacent and arrogant policy. The reorientation of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government towards housing is welcome. However, action is needed across the full range of areas. The commitments we received concerning rent allowance and mortgage relief are important, but only a start. The committee being chaired by Deputy John Curran is doing excellent work. We want the new Minister to engage with it immediately and to ensure future action is agreed in co-operation with the Dáil.

The comprehensive failure of health policy in recent years is undeniable. The collapse of the former Government's compulsory insurance approach and the massive increases in waiting times were only part of the problem. The resistance of Fine Gael and the Minister for Health, Deputy Leo Varadkar, to acknowledge this is a major gap between our parties. The investment in the National Treatment Purchase Fund is only a small part of what needs to be done. Waiting lists are too long and overcrowding in emergency departments is still not being tackled in a comprehensive and collective manner. The lengthy section on health in the programme for Government is defined by the repackaging of existing policy. Fianna Fáil is clear that it will oppose the agenda of outsourcing work from the trusts and the proposal to convert the HSE to a commission is not acceptable. It is simply a way of putting in play the building blocks for a private health insurance system which we cannot afford and would make matters much worse.

Given how important health is and how there is no majority for the former Government's policies, the Minister and the new Government need to commit to a genuine consultation. They also need to understand they will not succeed in pushing through their highly ideological agenda.

6 May 2016

I wish the new Minister for Education and Skills well in the role. It is an exciting and challenging Department, as I know well. It is also an area which has been defined by drift and a distorted belief in picking fights rather than tackling problems.

7 o'clock

Some of the very worst decisions of the last Government were its regressive policies on education. The commitments we have received on reducing class size, restoring guidance counselling and extending grants to postgraduate students from disadvantaged areas are only the tip of the agenda that must be addressed. It was appalling that postgraduate grants were ever abolished. It flew in the face of the idea that we are developing as a knowledge economy, and it deprived the children of many working people and families of the possibility of pursuing postgraduate education, which is now an essential element of the education continuum from early education. This is something that needs to be addressed by the new Minister and by this Dáil.

Given the collapse of partnership within education, the growing conflict and the delay of important reforms, we believe that a new Green Paper on education is needed this year. It should be informed by an open consultation both in the Oireachtas and outside.

Deputy Eamon Ryan's claim earlier that the plain people of Ireland had been let down by the fact that water charges will be suspended and decided on by the majority of the Dáil is only true if one assumes that the plain people of Ireland do not care about democracy. We absolutely understand and support action to tackle major environmental issues. Climate change is at the top of this agenda, but also important are water conservation and quality. With the discredited, marginal and regressive charges out of the way, and with an end to the out-of-control commercial mandate of the water bureaucracy, hopefully policy will now focus on improving conservation and quality.

This Government is taking office at a turbulent time internationally. We unequivocally believe that Ireland must take a constructive and positive approach to reforming and developing the European Union. The Government must take a more active role in formulating new policies. The British referendum on leaving the EU is a defining moment which carries many dangers for our country. Before the last Government it was a tradition that parties that took a constructive attitude towards the European Union were regularly briefed on key issues, and there was a consensual approach to defending and promoting Ireland's interests. We need a return to that policy.

The disengagement from Northern Ireland over the past five years caused immense damage. It must be reversed. The continued decline in turnout for Assembly elections confirms again the level of disillusionment.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Not true.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We need to reinvigorate the working of the agreed institutions and policies. We need a Government that accepts its role as a co-guarantor of agreements, and this includes insisting that the dominant parties in the North meet their obligations. Our agreement with Fine Gael includes a commitment to seek to expand North-South activities. We want this to be activated immediately to stop the self-defeating spiral of inaction from beginning again. In our view, the matter of North-South bodies has been left in a vacuum for far too long. We need new North-South bodies. For example there is no reason not to have an all-island enterprise body similar to Enterprise Ireland. It makes perfect sense in terms of synergies between

small and medium enterprises, SMEs, here and across the Border. There is just no activity from either of the parties in the North to move that agenda because, in my view, some do not have a commitment to the North-South agenda and have been very lax in promoting and developing that agenda. We can have all the meetings we like about the Narrow Water Bridge and so on, but that is taking people down the road of no return. The Narrow Water Bridge could have been built if there was a commitment by the parties in the North and by our Government in the past two years, but people played politics with it and it got put on the back burner as a result.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: If there had been a commitment by Deputy Martin's party while in government.

An Ceann Comhairle: One speaker, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As said before, we have chosen the role of constructive opposition. We will hold Ministers to account for their individual and collective actions. We will demand a decisive shift from the unfair and damaging policies of the past five years. We will vote against the Government when we disagree with its proposals and when there is a credible alternative. There are those who want to focus on speeches and empty motions rather than the far more difficult challenge of delivering results. That is their choice, but we choose a different way.

This is not the Government we believe reflects best the priorities of the people. It is not a Government that marks a clear enough break from the past. It is, however, the only Government the Thirty-second Dáil is capable of forming, and it includes important departures in policies. In accordance with our commitment, we will not vote against the Ministers proposed by the Taoiseach. We will work constructively with them and we will hold them to account.

I know the Taoiseach will be appointing the Ministers of State early next week or whenever, but what has happened in the last 48 hours leaves a lot to be desired and flies in the face of the sentiments he articulated earlier regarding a change of attitude, a change of culture and a change of approach. What transpired here today before the vote on the nomination of Taoiseach was shambolic and unacceptable and there are many disillusioned people on the Independent benches who are clearly annoyed with what transpired. There was no need for it and it speaks to the need for a culture change within the majority party in Government towards people who are joining it. I understand there will be rotations of Ministers of State annually. That is not good governance.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: You will have to get in first, lads.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is not good governance that one Minister gets it for one year and swaps with a Minister the following year.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: No, it is by day and night.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The fact that it is on-----

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is power sharing.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: By day and by night.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The fact that it is on-----

6 May 2016

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is a new Government, power sharing. Get over it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I suggest to the Government that it needs to show confidence in what it is about because the fact it is yearly suggests that maybe the Ministers concerned are not that confident about the longevity of the Government. They need to get more confident about what they are about and what they have signed up for.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: They need a two-sided coin.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: We can have car-pooling.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I would like, in particular, to congratulate the Minister, Deputy Ross.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That is the Luas strike solved.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: CIE is finished anyway.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I want to let Deputy Ross know that my late father was a founding member of the NBU and we will be watching the Deputy closely. It is 35 years since Deputy Ross first acceded to a hereditary seat as a Trinity Senator. Since then he has been a constant presence in Irish public life. He has been a senior journalist, stockbroker, Fine Gael councillor for Bray and regular media commentator. It took considerable skill for him to maintain his image as an outsider. I wish him well and look forward to how he will do this as a member of Cabinet, although I think he has already started in terms of the premature revelation of his ascent to high Cabinet office. The Taoiseach will have a difficult task ahead of him in terms of reining the Deputy in. He needs a tutorial on the Official Secrets Act as a matter of some urgency.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Government will have the *Sunday Independent* on board.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That said, we wish all Ministers well in their various endeavours. We will work to hold them to account. We want to work constructively in terms of this Dáil and in terms of tackling the problems that face the people and bringing about effective solutions to those issues, because what matters is improving the quality of life of the people of this country. The Fianna Fáil Party is determined to play its constructive role to ensure we can do that. We wish the Taoiseach and the new Ministers well in their work.

An Ceann Comhairle: I understand Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin is sharing time with Deputy Ó Laoghaire and Deputy Martin Kenny.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I will be, yes.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputies leaving the House to do so silently and show respect to the Deputy in possession.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Maybe the clock would not start until I have silence.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, has now fulfilled his

and Fine Gael's ambition of being elected Taoiseach for a second and consecutive time. It is a proud moment for him and for his family and I wish him well on my own behalf, personally, for the time ahead. That said, I could not support his reappointment as Taoiseach on a political level. Along with his Labour Party coalition colleagues he has spent the past five years inflicting on citizens some of the meanest and harshest cuts ever seen in this State. The Fine Gael-Labour Party term in office, the Thirty-first Dáil, was characterised by cronyism and patronage, serving domestic and European elites instead of the citizens of this State. That Government used its majority to railroad regressive legislation through the Oireachtas, including introducing water charges, establishing Irish Water and setting up the family home tax, also known as property tax. It frequently guillotined legislation and ignored entirely the mandate and views of the Opposition. Its general election campaign, inspired by the British Tory party, failed miserably and the electorate rightly rejected both Fine Gael and the Labour Party.

What did the electorate do? They demanded change. That was the first clear message of the election result. Things have changed and they will continue to change. The days of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil dominating Irish politics are now clearly over. In their desperation to try to halt the inevitable, both these parties are now party to a Government and programme for Government, and Fianna Fáil also claims to be in opposition. Who does it think it is kidding? This is an effort to slow down the process of fundamental political change which is under way, but it will not wash and it will not work. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are playing for time, kicking the inevitable down the road. It is all about political control and political power, nothing more or nothing less. That is why Fianna Fáil is content to support Fine Gael in Government. That is what it has chosen to do.

Did Deputy Micheál Martin or any Fianna Fáil candidate say to the electorate in the recent general election, "Vote Fianna Fáil and put Enda Kenny back as Taoiseach."? Sinn Féin and those we represent did not vote to re-elect Enda Kenny, nor did those who voted for Fianna Fáil. However, Sinn Féin, unlike Fianna Fáil, once again opposed the appointment of the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny. We did not abstain today. By its actions, Fianna Fáil has forfeited its leadership of the Opposition as a result.

Deputy Barry Cowen: In the Deputy's dreams.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We in Sinn Féin for our part will take up that role and with other progressive parties and Independents will provide effective and constructive opposition.

Deputy Michael Noonan: God help us.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We will robustly hold both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to account and continue to build popular support to tackle the social, economic and societal challenges we face - and, yes, to reunite the people of this island.

The Oireachtas must now be allowed to get on in a serious way with addressing those challenges facing citizens in their daily lives, and that means being ready to hit the ground running on Tuesday week. It means getting straight down to business. The Seanad must sit as soon as possible and serious consideration must be given to shortening the summer recess in light of the time this Government's formation has taken. I ask the Taoiseach to note that point well.

I conclude by wishing the new members of Cabinet well in their respective positions. Some are new and some are in their former positions. I wish them well not for their sakes personally

6 May 2016

but for the sake of all our people and especially those whose lives can and will be affected by the decisions they make and the measures they implement.

Go raibh rath Dé ar an obair agus ar an Dáil uilig.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: As I canvassed in the recent general election, it was clear to me that the level of anger, frustration and sheer disappointment that the public felt at the previous Government had not dissipated or subsided with time. People felt betrayed by promises forgotten. They were livid that relatives were waiting long hours or days on a trolley or months and years for essential procedures, or that people they knew were staying in a Trav-elodge or overcrowded accommodation to the extent of squalor or homeless shelters waiting desperately for housing. All the talk of tax cuts, primarily for the wealthy, just infuriated them, when as a nation we cannot house our people or take care of those who are ill. It is no great surprise to me that Fine Gael in Cork South-Central polled approximately 26% of the vote, and, even with the Labour Party, the former Government polled only around 30%. In 2011, that was 53%. With respect to the Taoiseach, people in Cork South-Central did not vote for Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach, yet this afternoon I was the only Deputy from my constituency to vote against him. Déanfar tréaniarracht sna seachtainí le teacht an dallamullóg a chur ar dhaoine faoin mbeart agus faoin gcomhaontas a rinne Fianna Fáil le Fine Gael. Déanfar iarracht a léiriú go bhfuil Fianna Fáil i measc lucht an Fhreasúra ach i ndáiríre tá an Rialtas ag brath ar Fhianna Fáil níos mó ná mar atá siad ag brath ar aon duine eile chun go mairfeadh an Rialtas ar feadh na trí bliana atá aontaithe acu.

It will certainly be an interesting session, and those of us on the Opposition benches will have to work twice as hard not only to hold the official Government on the right hand side of the House to account but now also to hold the would-be government-in-exile on the left hand side of the House to account. We will certainly do that. As much as there will be an effort by Fianna Fáil to try to hoodwink people, their fingerprints are all over the leaked programme for Government. The document officially agreed by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael was a mere precursor - a trailer, even - for the leaked document. The contents of this deal would have been discussed in detail by the two parties. Unfortunately, the Independents are essentially the patsies for this deal, allowed to tweak it in parts after the biggest parties agreed it. They will recognise that in time.

A Government's legacy depends on what it delivers. Time will tell what that will bring, and I do not wish ill for this Government. I wish the Taoiseach and the appointed Ministers well. It is a special day for them and their families. The new Minister responsible for agriculture, Deputy Creed, has already started his job, strategically placing himself next to the Minister responsible for transport, Deputy Ross, where I presume he is lobbying for the N40 to be put back on the table.

The indications for this Government are not good, and the programme for Government will not come anywhere near dealing with the crisis in health. What has been committed to is essentially running to stand still. Water charges have been kicked down the road, but it seems they are not gone for good. The proposals to tackle the housing crisis will not solve it. Some of these proposals are the reason we are in our current position, encouraging speculation and pushing people who should be in social housing into the private rented market. Deputy Martin and Fianna Fáil are responsible for this programme for Government and many voters will be sorely disappointed and will even feel betrayed. Níl aon fhís ag baint leis an gclár Rialtais seo agus is beag fíis atá ag baint leis an Rialtas seo ó Fhine Gael nó ó Fhianna Fáil. Rialtas Tadhg

an dá thaobh atá ann.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are trying to put off the inevitable, because Irish politics is changing. For our part, Sinn Féin will continue to lead the genuine Opposition in the Dáil and work towards real change in Irish politics, which is sorely lacking on this day in a first progressive Government.

Deputy Martin Kenny: On a personal level, I congratulate all the members of the new Government and the Taoiseach. It is a special day for all of them, and I am sure everyone in the House wishes them well in future.

We have a new Government at long last, and Fianna Fáil feels it has pulled the ultimate stroke, as it has designed the programme for Government, handed it to Fine Gael and opted to sit on the Opposition benches, taking no responsibility for its implementation. This is the biggest scam in the history of Irish politics, but it will not get away with it. This Dáil will, once and for all, expose Fianna Fáil's populist, unprincipled and self-serving approach to Irish politics. The reality is that Sinn Féin will lead the Opposition in this Dáil, as we will be the only party genuinely opposing the Government while Fianna Fáil collaborates from the Opposition benches. There is a new Fine Gael Government, put there by Fianna Fáil, and, complain though we might, we still have to get on to the work of addressing the very long list of problems that past Governments have neglected for so long.

Our broken economy is badly in need of repair and the lack of good jobs or opportunities for our young people must be solved. The new configuration of this Dáil means business as usual is no longer possible. During the election campaign, Fine Gael had the arrogance to poster the towns in my part of the world with the election slogan, "Keep the recovery going." That only served to add insult to injury. The financial markets, the corporations and the banks were satisfied with their recovery, but the people continue to suffer. Nowhere did they suffer more than in rural Ireland and in my constituency.

The previous Government's priorities were not Sinn Féin's priorities and they were certainly not my priorities. I have four children coming of age and, like other parents, I want to see them have a future here in Ireland. I campaigned on a new deal for the west. What we have now is no deal for the west or for rural areas and anywhere with low population levels. We have been neglected for so long that we feel completely forgotten. Government policies were to send the young away. Historically, that has consistently been the policy of Governments in the face of economic difficulties. This time the economic mess was bigger and the numbers emigrating were larger. Fixing the real problem, a broken domestic economy, never seemed to be on the agenda, and that certainly has to change in this new Government. Balance has always been missing from Ireland's economic structures. Except for long periods when virtually nothing was happening, we have only seen bubbles or burst bubbles. We urgently need to rebalance the economy, to rebalance the relationship between Dublin and the rest of the country, and to rebalance the traditional industries with 21st century businesses. It is about creating a future for the west that is not limited to agriculture and forestry and which better utilises the competitive advantages of our lower cost of production. Our farmers need to be supported by Government to be profitable in their efforts and not abandoned to the tycoons of the meat industry and the greedy corporations.

The generation of the 1916 Rising had vision. The Proclamation, which now occupies such a revered place in the pantheon of human rights documents, offered a vision for a better future

6 May 2016

through freedom. Its promise was what can be achieved by ordinary people when they have that extraordinary benefit of freedom, equality and opportunity. Those benefits of freedom do not come free. They require investment and work, not disinvestment and bleeding the regions to feed the banks and the markets. We need investment, infrastructure and imagination. We need an investment plan and an investment fund. Sixteen years into the 21st century and 26 years into the Internet age, the first thing we need is to imagine a better future and then build consistently towards it. That will require building business-grade broadband first and it will also require improvements to other physical and social infrastructure. That means budgets that will prioritise investment, not tax cuts at the top for the already well-off.

Our greatest resource is our people, especially our young people, with their creative new ideas and almost limitless energy. The real task that lies ahead is to capture that energy, empower their ideas and channel their skills into building a more diversified and healthier future economy. We must provide opportunities that will allow our children to raise our grandchildren in rural Ireland with full and proper education and health services. A more balanced economy across the regions, with a mix of businesses - small as well as large, low-tech as well as high-tech - will be required to guarantee that when the next economic shock arrives, be it external or home-made, we will have a healthier jobs base to fall back on.

Sinn Féin, as the real Opposition in this Chamber, will keep the pressure on the Government to deliver regional economic balance, to put a fund in place for rural economic development, and a plan for rural Ireland. Sinn Féin will work through the structures of the Dáil to be positive and constructive, to bring opportunity and prosperity to all of Ireland, rural as well as urban.

Deputy Alan Kelly: On this critical day in our country, I would like to state the following for the record: it was truly an honour to serve with the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, as a Minister in the previous Dáil. Today is a very special day for the Taoiseach, Fionnuala, the children and all his extended family. I congratulate him on his achievement. It is a historic day for him and I congratulate him on it. I believe history will be kind to the Taoiseach, who in the previous Government, along with Eamon Gilmore, Deputy Joan Burton and many others, guided this country through one of the most extreme crises Ireland has ever faced. Decisions were made that were difficult in the short term, but necessary to secure the long-term future of our country. The fact is that Fine Gael and the Labour Party did secure that future. We achieved a huge amount, turned the country around and put it where it is now. However, I have to admit I fear that this Government, given its make-up and its construct, will not be able to continue this trajectory while also maintaining the principle of fairness as much as possible.

In all my dealings with An Taoiseach, his staff and other Fine Gael Cabinet colleagues, many of whom are in front of me here, business was always conducted with honour and there was, for much of that time, unity and a sense of purpose with regard to improving the State. I genuinely hope this carries on to the next Government and I extend my sincerest congratulations to all those who were appointed here today. For each and every one of them, and for their families, it is a great day. I particularly congratulate those who have been appointed for the first time. It is a fabulous day for them and I wish them the very best of luck. I also wish the best of luck to the three Ministers who are taking over components of my own former Department. It is important that, as I stand here, I offer them any help I can give in achieving an orderly transition to the new Government.

When it comes to fairness, it is important to look through the programme for Government and what is referred to in it. The way in which the programme is constructed is very worrying

in many areas. For instance, there is no commitment in the programme for Government to a living wage, which is something I and many of us in the House believe is absolutely necessary as we go towards a fairer society. Nor is there a commitment to continuing the work of the previous Government under the former Minister of State, Deputy Gerald Nash, and the commitment to ending pay discrimination in the public service. We are no longer in a financial emergency, and this should be reflected, whether it is in the public service, workers' rights or in ensuring that people have greater futures. This document also appears to be very limited in its taxation measures, in its measures regarding wealth redistribution and in the whole area of ensuring that people will have adequate incomes into the future as the economy grows.

With regard to health care, free GP care is also very much absent, and in fact the document is silent on where that is going, which is very worrying. It is very clear throughout the document, and from promises that have already been made by the outgoing Government, that there are repeat commitments in a whole range of areas far too numerous to mention here. If some of the Independents think new commitments were given in particular areas, including rural development, jobs, regionalisation, town and village renewal schemes and housing, they are wrong.

Unfortunately - and I mean this - we now have a Government that is built on sand. Everyone knows that there has never been a Government in the history of the State that was created in such farcical circumstances over the last few months and the last few hours. What we saw this morning on the vote for Taoiseach was bizarre and embarrassing for this House. Frankly, it was cringe territory. It was simply incredible. I never saw so many of those who are now Government Deputies with reluctant faces on them looking at their phones and wondering what was going on in the last-gasp negotiations with Independents who were trying to stoke out one last cave-in by Fine Gael outside this Chamber. This is not new politics, unfortunately; it is old politics at its worst. While I wish it the best, we all know that this Government is not viable in the long term. We have a programme for Government whose figures simply cannot - and I mean this - ever actually add up. What happens, for instance, if all the commitments in the programme for Government are actually honoured and then the numerous independent reports come back and recommend implementation, particularly of those measures on the Independents' wish list? Where is all the funding for these going to come from and what area of public spending that is necessary in the public interest will suffer? Whether they are railway lines, roads or other vanity projects, I believe many of these projects are simply impossible to deliver. I am afraid the Independents who are part of this Government will find that out to their cost pretty quickly.

Any Government that is formed has to be formed on the basis of trust. I believe there is no trust in this Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael arrangement with Independents. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael took 70 days to write a seven-page generic agreement. That is ten days per page.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: It did not take that long to set up the quango.

Deputy Alan Kelly: That was incredible.

Deputy Barry Coven: If you had taken half as long a few years ago you might have a few more around you.

Deputy Willie Penrose: Barry, will you go back to sleep?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): One voice, please.

6 May 2016

Deputy Eugene Murphy: What about the new quango?

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Why did you not try to write the Tesco ad?

Deputy Alan Kelly: Now we have a Government with the support of 59 Deputies, which was being negotiated literally until the very last few minutes. There is no real trust here. There is no common platform or purpose. Colleagues, we are all here to represent the public interest, so what about the public interest? Negotiating sweetheart deals around the country to stay in Government is simply not in the public interest.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Including the one in Tipperary.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Cheek.

Deputy Alan Kelly: We have often heard in here that decisions on Garda stations, schools, hospital wards, etc., should be based on objective expertise and be in the national interest.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Yes.

Deputy Alan Kelly: How can the deals that the Independents stroked out of a weary, desolate and desperate Fine Gael be in the public interest?

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: This is jealousy.

Deputy Alan Kelly: For example, I hear, through the media, that we are getting a second cardiac unit in Waterford. That may be welcome and that is fine.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: It is very welcome.

Deputy Alan Kelly: However, I wonder how the people of the north west, particularly the Deputies who represent Sligo, feel today, given that they do not have even one permanent one in their area. These grubby little deals will all have to be published in full so that the public and this House can see every single detail down to the last comma. If any Independent comes in here and says something else that is on that list subsequently, unfortunately, we will have to call everything to account.

I want to express some concerns also about the proposed reorganisation of ministerial roles, particularly for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Three Departments are replacing the old Department, and I wish all the Ministers the best. First, I welcome the fact that we now have a Department with responsibility for climate change. That is critically important. However, I note from the way the Department has been divided in three that there is no section on the environment. The Taoiseach may want to clarify where the environment role is and, effectively, who will be the Minister for water.

Deputy Finian McGrath: You made a great job of it.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I wish those Ministers the very best.

The second issue I have relates to the community section of the Department. Why did the last Government spend so much time trying to integrate all the community organisations with local government when it is now gone? Similarly, while I support the concept of a housing Minister in principle, it is not yet clear whether the new housing Minister will have additional powers over and beyond the ones that currently lie in the Department. I will reiterate my belief,

which I have stated here and before the housing committee, that banking rules, taxation policies, NAMA and the rent supplement scheme are all matters that should be governed by a housing Minister. Otherwise, the creation of such a title and such a Ministry will be pure tokenism. I gravely doubt that this will materialise.

There are also some hidden dangers in the measures proposed in the programme for Government. They may cause even further delays in housing. While I in no way oppose a review of the planning system, the point remains that planning permission is in place for more than 27,000 units in Dublin on which there has been no action. What if the building industry and developers now, as a consequence of the programme for Government, decide to wait until the reviews of planning and building standards are complete before proceeding with developments? This could be an unintended and rather negative consequence, something I urge the Taoiseach to examine. It has the potential to delay housing response further, especially in the private sector. It will not ease the issues we all have in housing and homelessness, of which we are all well aware.

The actions proposed in the programme for Government for housing, those led out in the Trinity treaty, are for the most part under way. Those listed in the programme for Government are under way. In fact, of the 55 housing actions mentioned, more than 40 are already under way and a further four were taken directly from our party's manifesto.

Moreover, I note that the commitment to generate 17,000 social housing keys across all schemes this year has been dropped. This is most concerning and I want it explained. We need to keep building on the processes in place. The first three months of 2016 saw the greatest number of people leave homelessness and enter secure tenancies in Dublin. We need to maintain that momentum. The new Minister responsible, Deputy Coveney, needs to take on the concerns and ideas universally expressed in the Committee on Housing and Homelessness, at which I have spoken.

Despite all that, I wish this Government well, genuinely - such is the freedom of opposition. We all have a vested interest in this Government lasting some period. The Labour Party Members, former colleagues of Fine Gael Members in government, will play a constructive role and will provide solid, constructive and sensible - I emphasise the last word - opposition at all times.

Deputy Paul Murphy: What about water charges?

Deputy Alan Kelly: I put it to my colleagues in Sinn Féin that just because they keep saying Sinn Féin is the main party of Opposition does not actually mean it is true. They may keep repeating it, but we will see in future.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: It is true.

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Can we have one voice, please?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We have been doing it for the past five years.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I have highlighted several issues. Above all, I object to the blatant betrayal by my former colleagues of those who did their legal and civic duty and paid their water bills as well as their treasonable betrayal, along with those in Fianna Fáil, of the long-term national interest of delivering a modern water infrastructure that is fit for purpose, rather than

6 May 2016

pumping hundreds of tonnes of raw sewage into our rivers and seas every day.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: They are the most right-wing party in the Chamber.

Deputy Alan Kelly: For that reason and all the other reasons I have adverted to, the Labour Party cannot support this coalition of puppetry involving Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Independents. Unfortunately, it is doomed to failure.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: It is an awful pity Deputy Kelly was not in government for the past five years.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The next slot goes to AAA-PBP. I understand Deputies Mick Barry and Gino Kelly are sharing time.

Deputy Mick Barry: After 70 days we have a Fine Gael and Independent minority Government, but it is a three-legged Government not a two-legged Government. It is a statement of fact that the Fine Gael-Independent minority Government cannot survive without the support of Fianna Fáil, which will prop it up for the lifetime and the duration of this Dáil. Thus, we might say that we have in the form of this new Government a new troika, involving Fine Gael, Independent Members and Fianna Fáil, operating within the straitjacket of the European Union fiscal rules.

I will make a point about the Independent Members in a moment but it is no secret that the two pillars of this Government are Fine Gael on the one hand and Fianna Fáil on the other. The talk about something which is radical and new is somewhat ironic. In reality it is a double helping of the same old, same old. Many people voted Independent in the general election in February. The vast majority of those people did not vote to put Fine Gael back in. They did not vote to put Deputy Enda Kenny back in as Taoiseach. To echo the point made by my colleague Deputy Coppinger today, those who want something genuinely independent of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in future will have to vote left. Of the Independents who are to become senior Ministers, Deputy Denis Naughten is a former Fine Gael Deputy, Deputy Shane Ross is a former Fine Gael councillor, and Deputy Katherine Zappone was nominated to the Seanad by a Fine Gael-Labour Party Administration. If this is a rainbow Government, all the colours in that rainbow are various shades of blue.

When I read the document today the points on health stood out. The new Minister, Deputy Harris, will be in charge of continuing the dismantling of the HSE, turning hospitals into hospital groups and trusts, with hospitals making their own decisions. When I read this I thought I had seen it before somewhere. I went online and found a document produced recently by UNITE, which organises health service workers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It described the policies implemented in the UK under the rule of new Labour and the Tories. Some of the points in it sound familiar. Every National Health Service hospital was forced to turn into a trust by 2014. Hospitals were set up like businesses, with greater autonomy. That meant they could raise private finance and enter into agreements with the private sector, which led to hospital departments being outsourced, wholesale privatisation and part-privatisation. That is the agenda that the Fine Gael-Independent minority Government, propped up by Fianna Fáil, will pursue in the health service: an agenda of privatisation. It will be vigorously opposed by us and, I am confident, by health service workers as well.

Deputy Leo Varadkar is to take over the Department of Social Protection. I presume he will be responsible for the section of the document that refers to labour activation schemes. One

scheme, to be called Fit to Work, will be aimed at people with disabilities and illnesses. This was done recently in the UK. It has been a disaster.

The Taoiseach: It will not be a disaster here.

Deputy Mick Barry: The Taoiseach says it will not be a disaster here, so maybe we will ask for a commitment on this. The companies that got the contracts in the UK have been the subject of an investigation by the National Audit Office regarding their financial claims about the numbers on the schemes and this and that. It has become a major topic of debate in the House of Commons. One of the companies that got the contract is called Seetec. Seetec is the company that was given the contract here for JobPath, another labour activation scheme. We will watch this Fit to Work scheme very carefully. The members of the media should watch this attempt to take the road that was taken by the UK. In reality it is a scandal in the making, and we will watch it carefully.

The document makes some important points about the minimum wage, which is to be €10.50 within a five-year period. Let us break that down. It is less than a 30 cent increase per year for five years. In a country where more than one worker in five is officially low paid, where a huge proportion of those below the poverty line are the working poor, where a greater percentage of our workforce is officially low paid than that of any other country in the western world with the exception of the United States of America and where the costs of housing and rents are skyrocketing, the proposal is for a 30 cent increase in the minimum wage per annum. This is shameful stuff. Clearly, what is needed is an immediate increase in the minimum wage to €12 as a step in the direction of it being €14 shortly after that.

Deputy Coveney will take responsibility for housing. There is no mention of council housing in the document. It appears that social housing for the new Government will mean the privatisation of social housing, the housing assistance scheme and the like. Is the Government, in reality, suggesting the abolition of council housing during a housing emergency? Speaking of the housing emergency, the document indicates that there will be NAMA funds to provide affordable housing directly. That is good, but when will it happen? After 2018. Does the Government not realise there is a housing emergency in the State at present? How on earth can it talk about 2018 for those projects to begin?

There is a kick to touch on the eighth amendment by means of a citizens' convention. Members of Fine Gael were leaking to the media in a boastful way, promoting the idea overnight that they had resisted the opposition of Independent Deputies to scrap a convention on this. However, with such a narrow majority in the House, will the Government be looking over its shoulders at rural Deputies, in particular, with strong anti-abortion views? That kick to touch will take even longer than many might think. That will not be acceptable on this side of the House.

The Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit will offer strong, vigorous and independent opposition to the new Government and its policies. It will be a radical left opposition. We have led the opposition on the streets over the years in the boycott campaign and the campaign against the water charge, which has had such successes in recent weeks. We will continue to campaign outside this House but also to provide strong, vigorous and independent left opposition within the House.

Deputy Gino Kenny: I was elected by the people of Dublin Mid-West as a voice against the ideology of austerity. Austerity seeks to punish collectively the working people of this

6 May 2016

country for the greed of a few. That few, who caused financial and economic chaos, thought they had got away with the perfect robbery. They almost did, until the people of Ireland rose up against the imposition of water charges. Deputy Enda Kenny was right when he said this was about more than just water. The water charges were everything that is wrong with a system that makes the working people of Ireland, who got us out of the financial mess over recent years, pay for it again.

To make no bones about it, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party have brought untold misery on working people in Ireland over the past eight years. This Administration, like the previous two Governments, will continue with the same neoliberal agenda. I have seen how people have been demoralised and beaten down by the Government's policies. I will give one example. The Government said it would reduce the waiting time for emergency departments in hospitals, but there is no commitment to reduce the waiting lists for non-emergency procedures. I have met people who are waiting for years for operations. If one belongs to the 40% of the Irish population who are on medical cards, one will wait 125 days for an MRI scan. By then, the cancer cells might have grown to dangerous levels. In contrast, if one has the money, one can pay for a private MRI scan within six days. With early detection, one's chances of survival dramatically increase. Those shocking figures show how Ireland's two-tier health system leads to the earlier deaths of poorer people.

In Britain the NHS guidelines state that a suspected cancer patient should be seen by a specialist within two weeks. In other words, he or she must get an MRI scan and meet a specialist long before an Irish patient is even diagnosed. The total failure to provide for early detection in the Irish public health system is one of the reasons poorer people die earlier. A recent study by the Irish Council for General Practitioners found that cancer related deaths in the lower socio-economic groups are double those among higher socioeconomic groups. The programme for Government will not change that one iota.

Today is the first day a Fine Gael Taoiseach has been re-elected, but that re-election is a hollow victory. Essentially, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have now merged and have been soundly defeated by a popular movement never seen in the history of the State. The water charges movement brought the best out of people. It brought people together and gave them confidence not only in themselves but in their communities. It politicised them and made them question everything about what was wrong in politics in this country. It gave us hope and gave the voiceless a voice. I want the Government to take note that a sleeping giant has awoken and is never going to sleep again. There is a new resurgence of militancy in working class communities throughout Ireland and they are more organised than was previously the case.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The next slot is for Independents 4 Change. I call Deputies Tommy Broughan and Seamus Healy, whom I understand are sharing. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: On a personal level I congratulate the people who have been appointed as Ministers and who will receive their seals of office very shortly. Personally, I wish them well. This is a sham Administration. It is a temporary, ghost Administration, one that we know cannot and will not last.

Years ago the great John Healy, the political journalist, a predecessor of Stephen Collins and Pat Leahy, used to write repeatedly that the greatest disaster for the Irish ruling class would be if Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael ever got together, because if they got together and became bedfel-

lows, as they are tonight, then the chance was there for other parties – parties on the left of the political spectrum – to organise in opposition and eventually to have a left majority Government. The arrangement today, with essentially a Fine Gael front with direction and operation from Fianna Fáil behind the scenes and the unfortunately pathetic Independent window-dressing Ministers, is designed to postpone the inevitable until the day when parties of the left will be strong enough to form a Government.

The Taoiseach said earlier that “politics as we knew it had changed forever”. The direct opposite is true. He spoke about 100 days of action, but he has wasted more than 70 days for two very short and generalised documents which do not indicate any dramatic new initiatives. I welcome the creation of a Department of housing in particular, and a Department of rural affairs. As for the Department of housing, it has been clear for a long time that it is necessary to have a Department that is focused completely on housing. It was striking that the outgoing failed Minister with responsibility for housing, Deputy Alan Kelly, who did not deliver, was lecturing Members about what could be done from this point onwards. This was the Minister who had a simple task over the past two years, which was to increase the production of new houses to 2,000 units plus per month, but he simply failed to do it. He came up with all kinds of scams to ensure there would be no direct social housing and there still would be a reliance on the developers who bankrolled Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael over the years. Nevertheless, it is good that there at last is to be a dedicated Department of housing. As for the Department of rural affairs, I support my rural colleagues. In areas of rural Ireland I know well, I am aware that services have fallen down or disappeared in many critical areas. It will be valuable that the new Department for general community affairs will give emphasis to this issue.

However, it must be stated that the Government already has a hackneyed appearance. It essentially comprises the same old failed Ministers coming forward here after an interregnum of three and a half months to offer Members a supposedly new and innovative Government. As Deputy Shortall has stated a number of times recently, the result of the 2016 election was that Fine Gael was defeated devastatingly and lost 25 seats, or was it 26 seats? Moreover, the Labour Party was almost obliterated. That was a rejection of those parties and all their policies. Yet, in this surreal atmosphere tonight, Members somehow are back again with the same people and policies, courtesy of the puppet masters over there on the Fianna Fáil benches. As stated previously, the reality is that this is a Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael Government for as long as it lasts. It is an acting Administration. Yesterday it was possible to discern a kind of anguish on the faces of the senior Fianna Fáil Deputies from the last Dáil, perhaps led by Deputies such as Deputy Michael McGrath. They saw themselves going into an honest arrangement, a Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil Administration, which, to be fair to the Taoiseach, he offered to Fianna Fáil, presumably with rotating taoisigh and so on. Such Deputies saw themselves as part of that kind of Government, but instead, Fianna Fáil decided it would engage in this incredible and non-transparent arrangement whereby that party will be the directors and Fine Gael and the unfortunate Independents will be the front people.

A Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael alliance is logical. If one looks back to the collapse of the economy in 2008, I remember the then Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Enda Kenny, on the night of the blanket bank guarantee - when only the Labour Party stood aside - leading Fine Gael into the lobbies behind Fianna Fáil. He backed Fianna Fáil at every turn down to the 2011 election. In turn, Fianna Fáil then returned the favour. Throughout the lifetime of the last Dáil, Deputy Ross and I noted that on key financial measures, that party walked through the lobbies in support of Fine Gael a number of times. What I used to call the iron alliance of Irish politics in discussions

6 May 2016

within my former party - namely, that of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael on practically every county and city council in the country - is now beginning to emerge clearly here tonight as the Government. As other speakers have observed, there is no fundamental difference if one considers the range of policies on the economy and banking, as well as the disastrous performance in housing and health. Incidentally, I wonder about the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, who was such a wry observer of the Department of Health when he was the actual Minister responsible. He could appear repeatedly on the media to state such and such a thing was happening. He would note that the waiting list for ear, nose and throat services was 18 months but that it could be worked on and could be organised. Even this morning, he came out with this type of observation from outside. Will he do the same in the Department of Social Protection? Will he be telling Members how things could be organised better in respect of benefits and so on? He has been a fundamental failure in the Department he now is leaving.

8 o'clock

So Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are bedfellows at last, with Deputy Micheál Martin the chief puppeteer and these unfortunate Independents the dancing puppets in front of the Dáil. They are so-called Independents because they went out with the rest of the Independents, the rest of us, and campaigned for fundamental changes, including an end to water taxes, an emergency housing budget, an emergency house building programme and major action on health and disability. As a previous speaker said, there is a sense in which Deputy Ross and Deputy Naughten are coming home to their party tonight. They have put on those old blue shirts again and are togging out with the rest of that blueshirt Government. They are coming home, swing low sweet chariot. Those Ministers clearly show, through the front people, that this is an actual Fine Gael Government.

Deputy Finian McGrath has made a lot of promises. We remember him in Dublin North-Central as the Deputy who propped up Bertie Ahern's Government for nearly two years when there was no need because my colleague here beside me, the leader of the Green Party, Deputy Eamon Ryan, was happy to go into government to prop up Mr. Ahern and Mr. Brian Cowen for three or four years and lead the country to disaster.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Get over it.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I found Deputy Eamon Ryan's speech this morning extraordinary. The leader of the Green Party has an extraordinarily hard neck.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Deputy Broughan has a brass neck. He sat on his hands for the last few months. The people of Dublin know it. He is deluding himself.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I met people as well but I did not betray them like Deputy McGrath has done. He made commitments. This is the second time he has done this. Deputy Finian McGrath was never an Independent and was never on the left.

Deputy Zappone and myself were on a couple of programmes putting the Independent case. She might remember that I joked she would be the Minister for Education and I would be the Minister for Finance. If we got enough Independents and enough left people we would run the government, and get rid of Deputy Noonan and his conservative policies. The question is, however, what can be done? What can somebody like Deputy Zappone actually do this year? The reality is that the 2016 budget was decided and fixed on all the key elements. Reading the stability programme update one can see that we suddenly, by the stroke of a pen from our Euro-

pean colleagues in Eurostat, lost a big chunk of money. Although he is not in the Chamber now, Deputy Noonan is anxiously worried about what is going to happen. What room for manoeuvre is there in the Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil so-called Independent Government? There is none.

We still desperately need a broadly-based, left-of-centre government of change. In the few months that this Government will last, we have to try to build together on these benches a strong alternative to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, to ensure that we have a voice for those who desperately need it most of all.

Deputy Seamus Healy: From what we have seen of it, the programme for Government makes it quite clear that what we have here is more of the same - more of what has gone on for the last eight or nine years. It was started by the Fianna Fáil-Green Government and continued by the Fine Gael-Labour Government, which was effectively the same. The document itself is vague, aspirational and uncosted. It is quite clear, however, that this is a continuation of austerity and a situation whereby low and middle-income families have been effectively disadvantaged by this and previous Governments. Unfortunately, this position will continue into the Thirty-second Dáil.

I want to compliment all the right to water and right to change campaigners. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to oppose metering. They fought Irish Water in their estates and forced a retreat both on Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Indeed, we are on the cusp of a famous victory. All I will say to those campaigners is well done and stay organised opposing the water meters. We will see an end, once and for all, to these charges.

This document is a disappointment for all those involved in the housing and homelessness area. There is no declaration of a housing emergency and absolute vagueness as to how it will deal with the issue. Today, 500 families face repossession orders in the courts. That is not to mention the 6,000 people, including nearly 2,000 children, who are in emergency accommodation. We have no emergency local authority house building programme, while housing provision has been effectively privatised. Nationally, there are well over 100,000 people on local authority waiting lists. In County Tipperary, there are more than 2,000 people on that list. We need a declaration of a housing emergency along with an emergency house building programme. This country was able to build up to 10,000 local authority houses annually between the 1960s and the 1980s. We should be able to do that and a lot more now, if the political will was there. Unfortunately, it is not.

We need to stop evictions. As I said earlier today, this Government, as well as the previous one, can do that by a simple instruction to Allied Irish Banks, Permanent TSB and the EBS. The people of this country own those banks. The Minister for Finance and the Taoiseach can instruct those banks to refrain from issuing repossession orders and evictions. They should do that immediately.

I hope the new Minister for Health will bring new and clear thinking to the health area. We certainly did not get it from the previous Minister or his predecessor. I am deeply disappointed the whole area of mental health did not get a Minister at senior level in Cabinet. It is an area which is significantly important. It has been a difficult area in my constituency when the Government closed the acute psychiatric unit at South Tipperary General Hospital. It now apparently wants to close the residential unit at Mount Sion in Tipperary town.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: This is a proud day, personally, for the Taoiseach being re-

6 May 2016

elected, as well as a proud day for Fine Gael. I am sure it is also a proud day for those who have been appointed or reappointed to ministerial office and for those who will fill the Minister of State ranks. On a personal note, I wish them all well in the work ahead.

Days like this, however, should be a proud day for all of us. When I sat in the Chamber this morning, like everyone else I could not ignore the empty seats opposite. It represented a Government which was obviously cobbled together at the 11th hour. I have often said I feel proud to be Irish, but I do not feel proud how we govern ourselves. We are absolutely past masters at creating problems and then trying to resolve them. We need to stop doing this.

In that way I am concerned about the deals which may have been done to facilitate the formation of this minority Government. It seems like a long, expensive shopping list which may favour one constituency over another. That is not the way we should be doing things. On the face of it, the new Government is also very conservative and not reflective of the collective mandate. It will have to be rebalanced by the power that will transfer to the Dáil. This is all the more essential with the opportunities which will open up in the new reformed arrangements. We need to make these work and the Social Democrats intends to play a full role in this.

Undoubtedly, there has been an imbalance in the recovery but that imbalance has been felt in urban as well as rural areas. For example, a family with a child who has a disability that is desperately seeking services will not have felt the recovery, irrespective of where they live. The services are threadbare, and the issue is not about geography. It is about the philosophy that sees the development and delivery of good quality public services as a lower priority than cutting taxes. From what we have seen so far it is difficult to understand how there will be a fundamental shift. I ask myself if those services will be threadbare at the end of this Government's term, however long it lasts. I have no doubt that someone like Deputy Finian McGrath, for example, is very well-meaning with regard to disability services but will the money be available to create services that will deliver the kind of response that is needed?

We see a housing crisis tonight that will confine 1,800 children to emergency accommodation. Those children live within range of the M50, which demonstrates that the urban-rural narrative is not an accurate narrative. The origin of the problem is not urban versus rural. The origin of the problem is the liberal market approach that has been taken, and that liberal market approach has been on steroids in terms of how it has manifested itself in our politics in recent years.

In respect of housing, that approach has failed, and not for the first time. We have seen it failing in the 1950s in terms of the response to a big housing problem. We have seen it fail in the 1970s when there was a big housing problem because the State has to intervene, and we believe the State has to intervene.

The sole reliance on the private sector to provide housing is at the heart of that failure, and the liberal market approach to resolving this problem will continue to fail. We see a social democratic approach, which is a much more interventionist approach, as being the way forward. We need to take a different approach and move beyond the mere bricks and mortar approach to housing policy. The development of a national housing and land strategy is essential, as is the recognition that the new dominance of renting requires fresh thinking and rights and responsibilities from the perspectives of both landlord and tenant.

Housing policy, building a single-tiered national health service, ending child poverty and

the development of an anti-corruption agency are key areas we have identified and communicated. While we do not see a role for ourselves in a Government dominated by a liberal market approach, we are committed to engaging in the new scenario where power will be shared with the Dáil for the first time, and we intend engaging constructively with that.

When we knocked on doors in February I was heartened by the response. I felt there was a political maturity that I had not seen previously. That political maturity is a real opportunity that requires a different response. By maturity I mean that there was an understanding of the need to build and deliver better public services, and it was well understood that those services had to be paid for.

People expressed concern for children and their families who were homeless. They were horrified that in a developing country there was not a point beyond which no one should be permitted to fall. They were ashamed, and believed that we could do better than that. They expressed real fear about the dysfunction of the health service. Many felt they had been pushed beyond what they were able to give and expressed a real fear about making ends meet. While they were prepared to pay for the building and development of public services, they were not willing to accept how money was being wasted.

Irish Water represented everything that was wrong with the way we govern ourselves. For the first time those who had paid their taxes, many of them all their lives, stood up and said, "No. This is as far as we are prepared to go." They were angered and emboldened by the description of them as some sort of spongers.

They knew well that they did not cause the crash. We were being asked to accept the same old politics where one section of society was being asked to pull their belts so tightly that they began to suffocate while they felt that others, who were benefitting from a system designed by the Government which seemed to reward very well connected insiders such as the owners of Siteserv, were picking over their bones like vultures. If the proposed commission on Irish Water is designed with one purpose - to achieve an outcome that argues for the retention of Irish Water - it will be reacted to with understandable anger. It must not be packed with people who can only see one approach. I have heard people say on many occasions that while Fianna Fáil broke the economy, the Fine Gael-Labour Government broke society and threatened our collective spirit. We are a very resilient people and that was shown at the ballot box. Regressive budgets, targeting the poor, and a Government that produced a growing inequality were just not acceptable. One thing that we must demand from this Administration and which was missing from the last Administration arises from the finding of the Moriarty tribunal. If the millions of euro and the years spent on that particular tribunal are to mean anything, we must see actions arising. At the start of the last Administration, the Taoiseach gave a very forceful speech that I remember quite well. I dug out a bit of it because it is worth remembering. It was sincerely meant at the time but we have to consider what happened afterwards. The Taoiseach welcomed the fact that there was a comprehensive debate happening and he said:

I am sure that Members will appreciate that I am somewhat constrained in what I can say because there are legal proceedings before the courts. A devastating critique of a powerful elite exposing a gross abuse of privilege; a rank abuse of public office and a devastating abuse of public trust is how I described the first Moriarty report when I sat in the seat currently occupied by Deputy Martin. Across Ireland, four years later, people might think, "Here we go again." I assure them that is certainly not the case because the recent election did matter. The people's vote did and will bring change. They were right to place their trust

6 May 2016

in a new Government. Consequently, on this final Moriarty report, they can expect anything but more of the same. I know that yet another report reeking of fanatical greed or an obsessive attachment to power and breathtaking attempts to acquire, use and access privilege is enough for the people of Ireland. In fact, it is too much.

It goes on. The Taoiseach talked about people being in very straitened times, hurting and suffering badly. They expected change and they expected the last Government to do things differently. One of the things that will have to happen is that there is some conclusion on that and the current Cregan investigation into IBRC. We cannot be dissuaded from seeking answers by veiled threats that it may cost more than intended and may take years. That cannot and should not be the case. We have to find a timely and cost-efficient way of dealing with this, otherwise what we are saying is that there are whole groups of people and whole organisations that cannot be held to account. That cannot be how we govern ourselves. I cannot accept that. It is incumbent on this Government to address these issues. One of the things we have suggested is an anti-corruption agency with the power to prosecute. We earnestly ask for it to be considered because we have to stop this round of tribunal and report and nothing evolving from it. That is the kind of old politics that has to stop. The previous Government had the largest mandate in the history of the State.

What we got as a result was a distortion of the democratic process with guillotines being used and Bills being rammed through the House without adequate scrutiny.

As the political landscape now shifts to an entirely different new way of doing politics in Ireland, it is important for us to acknowledge the opportunities that presents. For our part, the Social Democrats will work very constructively with all elected representatives in this House to achieve better outcomes for our citizens. However, it must be done in a way that opens up Government in a much more transparent way and builds confidence in politics, which has been dealt a severe blow over the past ten years. I do not think the past 70 days or today has been a particularly proud moment.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Before Deputy Broughan leaves, I wish to make a brief response to his speech before commenting on the Taoiseach and the Ministers. I commend them and wish them well on taking their seals of office as officers of State. I have known Deputy Broughan for 20 years. We were on a council together and we were on a committee here together. I listened with interest to what he had to say. I say one thing, not in self-defence, but just to give a perspective of where I come from. To a certain extent I wish the others well because it is on behalf of the State. The left stands for the State and believes in the State. One hundred years on from the foundation of our State why do we continue to knock the State?

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Deputy Ryan bankrupted the State.

Deputy Finian McGrath: And knocking Independents trying to do something.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I will respond to that. People can be critical of the decisions we took at the time. There are different views; let history decide. First, we tried to be progressive as best we could in every tax or other measure we put in place. The economists have recognised that in our budgets. Second, one has a certain sense in that situation that one does not want the State to fall. One actually values the State and the services it provides to our children and families. There is that instinct in government that it is not all bad and it is not that one is out there for some mendacious reason. One is there because one likes the State, because one is proud of

the State and one wants to protect the State.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Control the State.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The Deputy could say control, but that is just giving my perspective. I just wanted to make the point before Deputy Broughan left that it is in that spirit that I wish the Members opposite well.

I take up the opportunity the Taoiseach has provided. He said that he and his Government will be willing to do things differently. In doing things differently, we might start by looking at some things we are doing well in our State and think how we could do more of that rather than always looking to see what we are bad at. I accept we need to change what we are bad at but the mental shift that might come from seeing the State in a different way might actually lead to a better outcome.

It is in that spirit that I comment on certain points of the partnership Government draft programme that I managed to download this morning and have been reading throughout the day in a positive perspective. I make one broad point. I agree with the assessment on page 12 of the document that as well as the immediate tasks we have in terms of building houses, providing jobs and community health-care systems, we have an opportunity to change the way we approach big long-term challenges we have. In some ways we need to change not just the nature of the partnership or politics in here, but we need to have a wider partnership change in looking at those big long-term issues.

We need to involve the public service and civil society. I have heard the Social Democrats propose this in some of their policy documents. We need to bring in other people, open debate and change the nature of partnership in that sense. Why not take that idea? There are places throughout this document where that sort of idea is repeated in terms of wider consultation.

I know we have done it before. Obviously we did it in the late 1980s when we got out of a State crisis by starting a partnership model. That evolved to the more recent incarnation. I have not been closely involved for the past five years and so perhaps I am not up to speed with the latest developments. However, it evolved with complex pillars. People can disagree or otherwise about the nature of partnership, benchmarking and so on. We need an evolution in that sort of partnership process. It should be more diverse, flexible and directly connected to citizens in different ways rather than just the official organs of partnership.

We attended the dialogue in Dublin Castle last summer that was an example of innovation. In the break-out session with the then Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, there was a good conversation involving Deputy Cowen and others. We realised the lack of connection between the citizen and the State, or the lack of a sense that the State belongs to all our citizens, is one of the biggest difficulties. It is hard to get things done or changed because of that sense of disconnect. It is the wider sense of partnership change that I support and welcome. I look to use it as we consider in a two-year period some of these long-term challenges.

That period is two or three years, however long the Government lasts. It is subject to there not being an economic crisis internationally and our economy being kept on track. We can expect a very significant increase in the amount of funding that would be available for large capital projects, so we should use that preparation period for a real expansion of the budget, and the capital budget in particular, that might be possible to try to get consensus and buy-in from a range of different actors to get this right. It would honour the 100th anniversary of our Parlia-

6 May 2016

ment and not just the 100th anniversary of the State.

There are a number of issues that must come under long-term consideration. In some cases there is both a short and long-term aspect. One of the issues that should have been listed on page 12 is the development of a national spatial plan. In negotiations we had briefly with Fine Gael and others in Government Buildings, I recall officials from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government saying they expected to present a national spatial plan in the early part of 2017. It is a difficult task, and to a certain extent we really got that wrong 15 years ago. In the early 2000s we did an infrastructure investment plan and a spatial plan afterwards, so it was not in the right order. A decentralisation plan ignored any spatial planning completely.

Deputy Ross is now Minister responsible for transport and he will have to work on that with Deputy Coveney on the housing side. They will have to figure out how it will work and how we will get over the political temptation that every Deputy from every constituency wanting it to benefit his or her constituency. How will we manage that spatial plan in which we will not just come up with the same old wish list and 20 or 30 centres of growth? How will we grow Limerick and make it a real centre of development, changing it so that more than 3% of the population lives in the city? We will have to do the same in Dublin and Cork. In this two or three-year period, we need to get the people and politicians of Limerick thinking about how it can really evolve and develop. We can say the same about Waterford or any of the big cities. One of the tasks of any Government in this Parliament is to think about how we can do spatial planning well, as we have not been good at it. Maybe by consulting more widely, mixing it up and putting the responsibility back into the regions - perhaps revising the nature of regional governance, which I would like to see done right - we could help make it happen.

There is an interesting challenge to which I wish to contribute. The document rightly sets out that we must do a climate plan in the next six months and we must also do a dialogue with the people to get wider buy-in and understanding of the radical change we need to make if we are going to do anything seriously on the climate issue. It is a tough timetable. If we are going out for consultation, we must get away from the tick-box consultation we have tended to use over the years. We need genuinely to empower local communities and put the big questions to people. We must ask if they really want to be part of this, how they want to do it and what it means. We must look through it as an opportunity to do real development and create economic activity. As a party we are very interested in trying to contribute to that and putting some creative thinking around how the State engages with communities to make us really good at that.

There is difficulty in terms of urgency. Some of the stuff we have to do immediately, while some of it is long-term. The paper rightly sets out that we have to get consensus regarding investment in health and education. Which party here said that it would take two terms to get health policy right, and maybe three? Maybe the first thing we should do regarding getting that right is to get some sort of agreement here. I sense there is widespread understanding that we should have a single-tier health system which we would pay for in a different way from the way we are doing so at present. Could we do that in an open consultation process over two years? We would not necessarily introduce all the changes, but to get broad agreement on the approach would not be a bad achievement if we managed it in a cross-party way. Similarly, how will we fund education? Some of these issues are long-term and others are immediate. I do not think we can leave our third level education system hanging for two years while we work out the funding of it, because it is in a funding crisis. If one speaks to anyone in the colleges, one will hear it and we all know it. Our colleges need funding now, so how do we do that, as a long-term

project and as a short-term action?

I just want to set out some wider approaches in the time I have. I mentioned the idea of wider partnership already. Second, there is some discussion in the document about how the public service itself is monitored. We should not get hung up on a big regulatory system where it is a tick-box exercise and where every public service is laden down with meeting targets and producing outputs, where it is all part of such a rigid structure that they do not actually get their job done, they cannot innovate, they cannot be responsible and they cannot have a sense of pride. We should look to bring the public service in to liberate it in this State of ours of which we are all proud and to change working arrangements.

To make things really work, we need to get citizens involved, as I mentioned earlier. One aspect of this document that I liked is that sense of actually going back to strength and community development, such as on page 134. We did it in the early 1990s and we lost it in the past ten years. We went from a community-centred, empowered system to the State providing community services - the State running the services, rather than the community. I agree with the objective on page 134 to really empower community engagement and give responsibility and it is one of the things I would like to see delivered. I agree with the point made on page 159, the very last page of the report, which is short relative to what I might have written on it, that to help that happen we really need to empower local government. We have to give up power from this House and we have to decentralise power. If we are to get that sense of citizen engagement and good planning, we must give responsibility back to our people. We can do that through directly elected mayors, as is hinted here, and through new tiers of governance below the county council level, making the public participation networks, PPNs, really work. That could be helped by having some system of voluntary, non-paid borough, district, rural and urban councils. That would be a good output, which I am sure we will get agreement on. We would have some expertise on how to do it. We have all been involved in that sort of community sector.

There are two other projects I have a particular interest in helping to deliver. There are also many others and my colleague, Deputy Catherine Martin, will be able to add to the list if she kicks in, but I will discuss two now. One is set out on page 50 of the document, the idea of adopting a community or public banking system along the lines of the Sparkasse model in Germany. That would be an example of taking something that is working elsewhere and developing it here. The real attraction of the Sparkasse model is that it keeps money in the community. It is about regionally structured banking - really professional banking - that supports local business in that the deposits raised in the region go back to the region. It brings responsibility as well as economic growth for those areas, and that is a strength of this system. I would love to see the Sparkasse model implemented here. I know Irish Rural Link advocates it and it is cited in the document here as being quickly deliverable. We can test things. We do not have to do it all. We should be more flexible in terms of trying things. If they do not work, we can step back. We should be more innovative and flexible in how we work.

Similarly, I like the proposal on page 24 of the document to go with the cost rental model of social housing. I believe the State has to step up. Going back to my very first point in response to Deputy Broughan, I am from the left. I believe in the State and I believe in the State providing social services. I believe we should be developing social housing. I do not think it should be privatised. A cost rental model might do it, using both local authorities and housing associations.

I will finish with words the Taoiseach said. What he said echoed what I have heard my col-

6 May 2016

league, Deputy Catherine Martin, say, which is that we should move away from thinking just of economic statistics to thinking of the lived experience of our people. In particular, as I heard him say, we should consider the mental health of our young people and how we strengthen that. That is about more than numbers and growth. As I said this morning it is about values, a sense of culture, how we raise families and not just doing everything for economic interests alone. It is about not just seeing ourselves as the big competitor with everyone working frantically all the time with prices going up to pay for everyone working all the time and that kind of circle. A country based on certain more qualitative values and the measurements of those values may be something we should look to trying to achieve. I take the Taoiseach's point about how we should change, but maybe we should change our measures of success and start measuring quality of life improvements as the key target we should be looking to improve. The use of economic growth indicators is one of the reasons people have lost faith in the current economic orthodox system. Let us change the rules, change the measures and change the way politics works: that is from the left. I thank the Taoiseach.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Independent Deputies Shane Ross, Denis Naughten and Finian McGrath will share time of five minutes each.

Deputy Shane Ross: First of all I say thank you to Deputies from the other side of the House who have wished us well as new Ministers in this Dáil. I take issue with Deputy Broughan and others-----

Deputy Finian McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----who describe us as decorative and wilting flowers on the Fine Gael front. We are not very decorative, but we certainly resent the fact that we are described as such by someone who has decided on his own volition to be a voice in the wilderness of politics for many years. The only problem for Deputy Broughan is into which wilderness he decides to drop every time there is a new Dáil. The Independent Alliance made a decision which is not shared by many on the other side of the House that it would decide to enter Government if it could extract or agree the terms which it needed from a Government coming into power.

We believe that in the last few weeks we have agreed such a programme and a programme which will begin, and no more than begin, a radical change in Irish politics. The Independent Alliance consists of an extraordinarily disparate group of Independents who have found it difficult to come down this road but have managed to agree on enough things to be a coherent and cohesive group and to have found themselves in government in a very short time. To those on that side of the House who are so sceptical I say that I welcome today the ideas that have come from that side already. I welcome the ideas of an anti-corruption agency made by Deputy Catherine Murphy. I say she should come and talk to me about that. I do not know what my powers are and I do not know what I can do in government but I will try to do so. I and those of us who have come to power by this route will welcome and adopt ideas coming from the Opposition benches, from our own benches and from our colleagues in government. That is what the new Dáil is about. That is the only way it is going to work and that is why we are in government.

People are sceptical but I had a conversation last night with the Taoiseach. I was talking to him about Dáil reform and I asked him about an issue - a last point I had forgotten to ask about earlier - which was the abolition of the Economic Management Council. I thought it was going to be like one of these thorny topics which we had been through over the last few weeks. He told me okay, it is gone, that it had been needed for a particular time and it is not needed any

more and I was to consider it gone. To me that was very encouraging because it meant that one of those obstacles to Dáil reform, one of those rather secretive bodies that had dictated to the Cabinet and to the Dáil the agenda of what came out to the country, was now a thing of the past. It was only a small thing, but to me it was something significant that was happening. It was something which I hope begins to mark the reform that this Government has already promised in the document we have been discussing today, the programme for Government.

There has already been a U-turn on Seanad reform by this Government. The Committee on Dáil Reform, which I have sat on up to recent days and which Deputy Ryan has set on, is an all-party group which has been able to find agreement on matters of great importance to us all and will reform the way everything happens in this House.

I am not promising the world, but I am saying what the world is now promising. Let us give it a chance. Let us talk to each other, because what I have seen today is a certain amount of bankruptcy. However, it is not on this side of the House. The contest in this Dáil today has been between Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin and other members of the Opposition. We do not want to see that. Let us see ideas come from them rather than see them sniping at each other on that side of the House.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Tell them.

Deputy Mary Butler: We are not sniping.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: We are not sniping.

Deputy Shane Ross: In this short period, we have introduced into this programme for Government many elements of real reform. We will have to be judged, as this Government will be, on whether they are introduced and how soon they are introduced. However, do not tell me that some of the things in this would have not been done without Independents in government. Do not even mention to me the fact that we are sitting here doing very little to fulfil our promises. Which of the Deputies across from me ever introduced when they were in government such radical measures to reform the Judiciary? Which of them would have done it and which of them championed it? Let me say this. When I was sitting on the backbenches over there-----

A Deputy: We miss you.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----not very long ago, I introduced a measure to reform the Judiciary and change the way judges are appointed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ross, are you sharing your time equally?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid you are eating into the time of your colleagues.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am very sorry. The worst opposition came not from this side but from that side. It came from all. However, we will change this, mark my words.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Good.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: If we vote for it.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I thank Members in the House for their good wishes. There is

6 May 2016

an obligation on each one of us as elected Deputies to try to form a Government. Some people decided to sit back and not engage in it. Others stepped up to their responsibility. These were people such as Deputies Michael Collins, Mattie McGrath, Noel Grealish, Michael Harty and me. We spent the past 70 days engaging with both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael trying to put a Government together. As a result, we now have, I think for the first time since 1948, Independents in Cabinet. The last one to fill that role was a fellow county man of mine, James Dillon.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: Mary Harney was there.

Deputy Denis Naughten: It is important to acknowledge that this is not a perfect Government. It has had a difficult birth and will face many challenges, but it is our duty to try to make it work. It will appear strange to many that the old ways of doing business can no longer stand. A Minister can no longer bring any new law into this House, apply the Whip to it and ram it through the Dáil. Instead, the Dáil and the Government must work in a co-operative and consultative approach, trying to build alliances and securing support.

On the issue of climate change, we will have to deal with the whole political spectrum from Deputy Eamon Ryan to Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and everything in between, and that will not be easy. The Government faces huge challenges in health, housing, development and international threats as well as the threat of climate change. I am here to try to make it work with others, as a team, and to navigate through these challenges. I am in this House 19 and a half years at this stage. I spent most of my time on the Opposition benches. During that time, I could count on one hand the Ministers who were prepared to engage constructively with Members of the Opposition, although these Members of the Opposition wanted to come forward and try to provide solutions. I will work with anyone in this House, no matter what his or her background and no matter from what side of the House, who is prepared to work constructively to deal with those challenges.

We do not have the solutions. We should not have all the solutions. This is about working together to deliver for this country as a whole. The Government will try to turn the tide and bring about a real recovery to provincial towns and rural Ireland. It is about bringing life back into these small towns. The lifeblood of our economy is dependent on those small towns. It is easy to look the other way and say it does not matter in the overall scheme of things because it is only a matter of one small town, but collectively these towns matter as much as the cities and they drive as much business and trade.

In his contribution earlier, Deputy Alan Kelly said that some of these policies had been seen before. Some of them are Labour Party policies, some are Fine Gael policies, some are Fianna Fáil policies, some are Green Party policies and some are policies from the Independents. I thank everyone who has contributed to this programme for Government, everyone who has provided an input. They have tried to engage constructively during the past 70 days and put their stamp on it. Let us all try to work together to deliver on it for all our constituents and for the country as a whole. We now have a partnership agreement across this House. Let us try to make it work.

Deputy Finian McGrath: First of all, I thank the Taoiseach for this nomination. It was a great honour and privilege to be nominated as a Minister of State with responsibility for disability matters. I thank my election team and supporters. I thank my colleagues from all political parties for their personal best wishes. I welcome my two daughters, Caoimhe and Cliodhna, and my sister, Marie, to the Visitors Gallery tonight. It is a great personal honour and privilege

for our family, something I am deeply honoured by.

It is a great honour to serve the people. From a political point of view, I urge Deputies to read the details in the programme for Government. I call on Deputies to open their minds and look at what is on the table. This is no grubby deal; it is a programme for Government. I will not take any lectures from Opposition people who sat on their hands for the past 70 days. Some of us have tried. It was neither easy nor popular, but we tried, and I make no apology for doing that. We will not be taking lectures from those people. I call on people to read page 4 of the document. This programme for Government is all about a just and decent society. It is about a more inclusive prosperity. This partnership Government is unlike any other established in Ireland since the foundation of the State. All of us agree that government is not about having power; it is about using power to effect the kind of change, opportunity and compassion we need and desire in our society.

This Dáil is diverse but not fragmented. We are united in our common cause to make life better for every citizen in every part of this country - every part of the island. This is a shared ambition and it burns strong and bright in the programme for Government. I would like to see an Ireland that looks after its people from the time they come into the world to the time they leave it. I want to see an Ireland where everyone is given the opportunity to succeed, one in which no one is left behind. I want to see the best life opportunities possible for all our people.

I do not accept this talk of a grubby deal. In this programme for Government we will increase funding for home care packages and home help every year. We will extend medical card entitlement to all children in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance in budget 2017. Approximately 10,000 children will benefit from this initiative. No one should have the brass neck to call this a grubby deal. This is a programme for Government, a programme of inclusion, a programme for a just society. The Government will proceed to design and planning stage for a dedicated cystic fibrosis unit at Beaumont Hospital for inclusion in the 2017 capital plan. Cystic fibrosis, and the Members opposite come in here and tell me this is a grubby deal. I will stand and I will take any heat from any Member when I defend people with cystic fibrosis. We are trying to do something while the Members opposite sit on the fence.

In respect of disabilities, I got a commitment from the Minister for Justice and Equality halfway through the talks, not towards the end of the talks. Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and we will ratify that over the next six months. In other words, disability, and the rights of people with a disability, will be at the heart of this Government. We will also support an increase in disability allowance, carer's allowance and the blind person's allowance. Please do not insult the people by calling this a grubby deal. We will also support the transport service for young people with disabilities. I ask my colleagues to look at the positive aspects of this programme for Government, and, yes, we are open to ideas, as my colleague Deputy Ross said. We want to be an inclusive Government, but we are going to be radical, progressive and responsible.

Deputy Frances Fitzgerald: What a refreshing speech we heard from Deputy Eamon Ryan, who noted how important it is even occasionally to comment on what is going well. If we could do that even occasionally in this House we would be able to think more clearly and find better solutions to the many problems out there. I believe the people watching today, the citizens, would welcome it, because there are things that are going well in this country, but of course there are many challenges as well.

6 May 2016

It is a particular honour, one that I recognise and value highly, for me to address this House as Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality. This partnership Government is not just new; it is profoundly and radically different. As everybody knows, it has taken time, commitment, energy and effort to reach this point. It has taken a willingness to listen, to question and to accept differing viewpoints, traits that are important and that we need in abundance if we are to meet the socioeconomic and international challenges that we face in this world.

We do stand, as Deputy Finian McGrath said, united in a new commitment to people who have not yet benefited from the economic recovery, who are unsure about their future, who are ill or suffer from a disability or have been swept to the margins of Irish life. Success for us will be measured by an improved quality of life for our people and by the opportunities a fair society provides for every single citizen. My party's commitment to a just society is deep, and the difficult decisions we have taken over the past five years, along with our Labour Party colleagues, have meant that we now have the foundations in place to do just that: to create a just and caring society which gives equal opportunity to all. We saw that in the marriage equality referendum which so gripped this country last year.

When we look at this Government we see a brand new diversity, one that matches the construction of our nation at this time. Diversity is a challenge and a strength. It gives strength and insight. It turns issues on their side to give us a fresh viewpoint. I pay tribute to the Taoiseach who has recognised that diversity and its importance by making a historic decision to appoint six women to the Cabinet.

Uniformity of thought will not be present in this Government. It will draw on radically different viewpoints and ideas, putting people and partnership at its core. It will be consultative rather than prescriptive, valuing and respecting the differences around the Cabinet table and in different Departments. Dáil reform at its best should be able to do that as well.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I thank the Members of the House for the good wishes that have been extended to the new Government this evening. I thank the people of Dublin Central for giving me the great privilege to serve in the Dáil. I also wish to acknowledge my family, my Mam and my supporters who have supported me in getting to this point. I thank my former colleagues in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. They await with great interest the arrival of Deputy Ross. He has a fantastic Department that will stand with and behind him at all times. I also wish to acknowledge the pleasure it was to work with the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, and to see his unyielding commitment at all times to Irish sport.

I look forward to continuing to build on the progress that was achieved by the former Minister, Deputy Howlin, and on the work done by the Minister, Deputy Noonan, in my new role. What they achieved, with the support of the people, was and is vital. A falling rate of unemployment matters, as does a falling deficit and falling bond yield. We have seen the damage that the opposite of those can do to communities and families. More particularly, they matter now because they give this Government and Dáil the tools we need to take children and families out of hotels and into homes. They give us the tools we need to ensure those who need public services the most can access them, regardless of their income.

I am conscious that it is ten weeks since the Dáil was elected. I have had the opportunity to engage with many Deputies on the formation of the Government. It was clear from all the Deputies I engaged with, both party and non-party, that their convictions and intentions reflected the fact they wanted the best for our country. Regardless of whether they completed the

process to the end, we tried to reflect their sentiments and beliefs in the programme for Government. However, it is also obvious that some Members sat in splendid, and sometimes not so splendid, isolation, telling us to hurry up and form a Government with the sole intention of seeking to rubbish it. Tonight, Members called for vision, but all I heard from them was vitriol. Other Members have called for new politics, but all I hear from them is the worst of the old. I have heard about their alleged commitment to constructive opposition, but all I hear is their determination to oppose all, regardless of merit.

As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I wish to play my part in this Government and Dáil by remembering the word “public” in the title. This is not the Government’s or my Department’s money but the money of those who elected us. It is the people’s money and it must be invested wisely.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is eating into the time available to his colleague.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I will conclude with this point. I will have an open door and open mind to every Member of this Dáil, be they in the Government or the Opposition. I ask them to approach their responsibilities in the same way. I ask that not because the Government demands it - what role do we have to do that? - or that the Dáil deserves it - what role does the Dáil have to do it? - but because our country deserves it.

9 o'clock

An Ceann Comhairle: Next, sharing a slot, will be Deputy Willie O’Dea, Deputy Marc MacSharry and Deputy John McGuinness.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle, our understanding was that we had ten minutes each, but you seemed to indicate that we have ten minutes between three of us.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is what is in front of me here, I am afraid. It is the order of the House. It is based on the concluding time.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: A Cheann Comhairle, I wish to put on record that in this session, Fianna Fáil, with almost 30% of the seats in this House, has had less than 5% of the time. It is happening constantly.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: It is happening the whole time.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: There are parties in the House, such as the Green Party - and good luck to the Green Party; I have nothing personal against it - that have two Members, yet they have as much time as us, with 43 Members. Earlier, Deputy Catherine Murphy, speaking on another topic, talked about a distortion of the democratic process. If one wants to see a distortion of the democratic process, this is a textbook example. I object in the strongest possible terms. This is not new politics.

Deputy John Brady: But Fianna Fáil is with the Government.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: To repeat what Deputy Catherine Murphy said, it is a distortion of the democratic process, and it must change, because we are not going to put up with it. I want to make that absolutely clear.

6 May 2016

In the two or three minutes I have, I wish to dispel a few misconceptions. First, it is well known that we had the option of being part of this Government. We were approached and offered half the positions, half the spoils of government, by Fine Gael. Honouring our election promise, we did not avail of that. We did not take up that offer because we had committed not to do so. However, we also committed to campaigning to replace the outgoing Government. We tried assiduously to establish a minority Fianna Fáil Government headed by Deputy Micheál Martin. Unfortunately, we failed to do so. We did not have the numbers, but that does not mean we did not try. We tried, in keeping with our election promise.

We were presented then with a stark choice - to either support an arrangement such as the one we have, or have another election. I do not know about other people, but I do not fear another election. My canvassers are suffering withdrawal symptoms at the moment, so I do not care if there is another election. However, from talking to people from one end of the constituency to the other, and to people I meet in Dublin, I have concluded that the people of this country do not want another election. Consequently, how does one serve the public interest? How does one honour the public will? It is by trying to avoid another election, which we have worked tirelessly to do. But make no mistake about it - we are not part of the Government. When the Tallaght strategy was in place in the late 1980s, nobody imagined that Fine Gael was part of the Government. It simply supported the Government on certain issues from outside. That is precisely the position we intend to adopt.

We are the lead party in the Opposition. Make no mistake about that. Other people in this House can keep telling themselves that they are the lead party in opposition. Sinn Féin is good at telling itself things, but its members are the only people who believe themselves.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Deputy O'Dea is right.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The fact of the matter is that we are the lead party in opposition. If one looks at the framework document, one will see that our support for the Government will be based on its implementation of those principles, which are designed to make a fairer and more just society in this country. This country will be a better place for the fact that we have such an input in policy because of our position of strength on the Opposition benches.

I wish to make one final point. This morning, Deputy Bríd Smith accused us of changing tack on lone parents. As somebody who carried the party policy on that issue, I refute that completely. The fact of the matter is that if anybody looks at our manifesto they will see that our proposal is to improve the lot of lone parents and to reverse the damaging changes to the lone parent allowance made by the outgoing Minister for Social Protection. Those changes were all based on the principle that it would encourage people to go out to work if it were made less attractive for them not to do so - that if we gave them less, more of them would go out to work.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: Fianna Fáil gave them cuts when it was in government.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I do not know in what school of economics the Labour Party got that-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have one speaker please?

Deputy Willie O'Dea: -----but the lone parents did not share its view.

To be clear, if you consider the framework document, which is the only document to which

I am a party and to which my party has signed up-----

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: The Deputy is-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O’Sullivan, please. If the Deputy would address his remarks through the Chair and try to ignore Deputy O’Sullivan, please.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: As my transfers helped to bring her in, I suppose she can say a few words. However, the framework document is the only document to which I and this party are parties. Deputy Bríd Smith referred to another document, namely, the programme for Government. I have not yet studied it. It was signed-----

Deputy Bríd Smith: The devil is always in the detail.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Just a minute now. I did not interrupt the Deputy.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I am not interrupting the Deputy. I am just saying the devil is in the detail.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: She is interrupting me.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Excuse me, but she is interrupting me.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Please desist.

Deputy Bríd Smith: The Deputy can ignore me if he wishes.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O’Dea, to conclude.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Fianna Fáil is party to the framework document. There is no hint or suggestion that we are going to do anything but enhance the position of lone parents in that framework document. If there is a phrase or a promise contained in another document that will in some way diminish, punish or reduce the position of lone parents, I will conclude by stating I do not care what document, contract or agreement it might be in. As far as I am concerned, it could come out of the Magna Carta but neither my party nor I will support it. If that is not simple enough for the Deputies, they can come up and see me some time.

Deputy Bríd Smith: We will hold the Deputy to that.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Marc MacSharry. You have two and a half minutes I am afraid.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The Ceann Comhairle might show some leniency. I congratulate all the Ministers, the Taoiseach and so on. I had plenty to say in that regard but do not have the time. I will make three points, the first of which is on health. I have to hand the programme for Government and I say “fair play” to Deputy Halligan, who I note is getting an additional cath lab in Waterford. A total of 106,000 people live in Waterford, it has a motorway all the way to Dublin and is 75 short miles to Cork. In the north west, which is represented by other Members such as Deputy McLoughlin, Deputy Martin Kenny, Deputy Scanlon and myself from Sligo and Leitrim, there is no cath lab. If one has a heart attack in our part of the country, one

6 May 2016

is at a disadvantage and has a lesser opportunity to survive that incident. The national cancer control programme, in the context of the north west, is a total disaster. Galway, the supposed centre of excellence that serves the north west, is beyond capacity. However, the programme for Government contains nothing about that and I wish to ascertain what will happen in that regard.

As for rural Ireland, I offer my congratulations to all the Ministers. It is nothing personal but of the 18 positions that were announced by the Taoiseach today, 72% of them went to the greater Dublin area, as well as a small number to Cork and Limerick. There is nobody from the north-west of Ireland. Moreover, in the ultimate display of contempt for rural Ireland, I gather that Deputies Moran and Canney were obliged to beg to share an individual junior ministry. The senior role in respect of rural Ireland has been stuffed into the portfolio of the Minister, poor Deputy Humphreys, together with regional development, arts, culture, Gaeltacht and whatever else. While there is no question but that she is good, nobody is that good. Where is the commitment for rural Ireland? Is there a desire to consider matters strategically, to invest and to rebalance the IDA budget and put the regions to work, instead of consistently looking at the regions from a national perspective as a pain in the national side? The issue must be examined strategically. There must be investment in those areas and they must be put to work in order that they can make a more sustainable contribution to the national effort. This must be done and in the context of the framework to which Fianna Fáil has agreed to facilitate a minority Government, I do not see much in this thus far to show the kind of commitment Fianna Fáil expects with regard to rural Ireland and equality in the health service nationwide.

I will conclude shortly but on agriculture, I wish the new Minister, Deputy Creed, well. The focus on agriculture must be on market access and that cannot be done through Bord Bia. The Minister, Deputy Humphreys, was here recently listening to a debate when I stated Bord Bia is the best in the world at what it does but it is not products such as Tullamore Dew and Ballymaloe relish that need to be sold. Markets must be found for the unfashionable unsexy forequarter beef, which is difficult. It comprises more than 40% of the animal, is for sale for less than €3 and that is not sustainable. An assistant secretary and a junior Minister are needed in the air full time to get rid of BSE-era regulations that are blocking our produce from getting into markets and getting open live cattle markets in order that we have a balancing factor here against the processors and the vested interests. I conclude on those basic points. I wish the Government well but for as long as Marc MacSharry is in this House, let no one think that Sinn Féin Members are the main Opposition, no matter what Fianna Fáil is facilitating. While I genuinely wish the Government well, the programme for Government has nothing in it to show a level of commitment to rural and regional Ireland that is any greater than that of the previous Government. While the devil may well be in the detail, there ought to be an awful lot more detail about what the Government is going to do in the constituencies where, as an outgoing Government, they were wiped out.

Deputy John McGuinness: I want to congratulate each and every Minister who was appointed today and I wish them well. I wish the Taoiseach well also. He is a man of compassion and understanding, as I know from personal experience. I was glad to hear him speaking today about what citizens can expect from this Government. I ask Ministers to look at the programme for Government and detail the timeframes. The timeframes I have heard for various targets this evening range from the 2017 budget onwards, but the people are suffering now.

The Minister for Justice and Equality should immediately examine the eviction courts that take place all over the country. They are evicting families from their own homes, but the legal

representatives in court do not even know the details of those they represent or of their family homes. If one attends those courts, one can see that they do not even read the papers that are presented to them. People are being evicted regularly each week. I am asking the Minister for Justice and Equality to immediately intervene to suspend what is going on in those court actions. A fairer place is required for those difficulties to be ironed out for the individuals and families concerned.

I ask the Government to examine the issue of mental health immediately. Apart from cut-backs in mental health services, we have seen in individual cases that it costs families a small fortune to get private intervention. That is because they could not get that intervention through the public health service. Young people are queuing on waiting lists for treatment while on extensive medication, and their lives are being ruined. Some of the mental health issues stem from the pressures that banks are putting families and business people under. There is no mention of this in the document.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should conclude.

Deputy John McGuinness: The Government needs to spell out clearly what it will do to intervene.

One other intervention is required with regard to Irish Water and small businesses. The procurement process for Departments, including the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is not working for small businesses. I hear no discussion about that or about rates.

I have one request for the new Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, who is responsible for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. He should extend the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the end spend of taxpayers' money. The Minister, Deputy Harris, knows what this means. I ask local government to be included within that remit also.

An Ceann Comhairle: In response to the points made by Deputy O'Dea, I would point out, first, that the allocation of time is in accordance with an order of the House made earlier today, to which all Members of the House agreed. Second, the Sub-committee on Dáil Reform will produce a report next week which will identify proportionality in terms of the allocation of time and resources as being a key issue.

We now move on to the Sinn Féin contributors. Deputies Louise O'Reilly, Carol Nolan and John Brady are sharing this ten minute slot.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I echo much of what Deputy MacSharry said about the programme for Government. We were not impressed with it either and that is why we voted against Deputy Enda Kenny for Taoiseach. We can say that today the Taoiseach has made history. He has managed to cling on and achieve re-election.

I echo what other Deputies have said in congratulating those Ministers who are returning and in particular those Ministers who have been appointed for the first time. I wish them well in their endeavours. I fear that I am about to contradict some of what I have just said, but I will continue. What did we get in the programme for Government after 70 long days? Did we get a fairer more progressive tax system? Did we get universal health care or affordable child care? Or is this package simply more of the same, tinkering at the edges to deliver some parish pump wins and secure support for the Taoiseach? I do not see any big vision contained in the pages

of the programme.

What big vision for health was cooked up between the two main parties? Over the past several years, we did not get any of the promised reform of our health service. Now in the era of the so-called “new politics”, it is time we had a much-needed debate on the real issues in the health system, the real reforms needed and the resources which can make a real difference. Unfortunately, the programme for Government has none of that. A cursory glance at the document tells us that the new Government is full of ambition and good intentions. It tells us it will make efforts to prioritise aspects of the health service. What it is lacking is detail on how these will be achieved.

The section on health is divided into seven areas with a separate section on mental health, which is to be welcomed. The document looks at primary care, rural practices, healthy Ireland, emergency and acute services, waiting times, HSE reform and funding. It is devoid of real policy change, any detail or vision. It is destined to fail. Sinn Féin believes reform must be implemented in a planned and strategic way to move definitively towards a universal system of health care. There are many honourable aspirations in the document, such as tackling waiting lists. However, €15 million to deal with 500,000 people on waiting lists, people who desperately need to access services, does not add up. Similarly, taking one section of the health crisis without dealing with other elements of health care is short-sighted.

The programme speaks of annual performance targets. However, as seen with previous targets set by health Ministers, this will not be sufficient. The ever lengthening hospital waiting lists are a product of understaffing, a lack of capacity and inefficiencies in the system. There is nothing in this document which will incentivise even one nurse to return to this country. This document not only fails support staff working in our health service, but fails our nurses and doctors too. The programme continues the two-tier nature of our health system which is, in and of itself, central to the health crisis. The omission of support staff from the programme is a failure. It signals outsourcing, as I said previously.

After the remarks made by Deputies O’Dea and MacSharry, it must be pointed out Sinn Féin now leads the Opposition. We led it in a vote against Deputy Enda Kenny for Taoiseach. We did what we said we would do. We did not prop them up.

Deputies: Not so.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Sinn Féin Members just sat on their hands.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Sinn Féin did nothing.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an gCeann Comhairle as ucht an deis chun labhairt anseo.

I hope, rather than believe, that this incoming Government will deliver the much-needed change for our citizens and my constituents in Offaly and north Tipperary. The legacy of the failed politics of both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is evident in our towns, villages and communities. They have been ravaged by high unemployment, lack of services and a decimation of existing services. For example, there has been bad flooding on the River Shannon in west Offaly. There were months where homes and businesses were destroyed but all we have is report after report and talking shops. Immediate action is what those affected want. The Minister in charge of this area needs to take urgent action against flooding in Shannonbridge, Banagher and

Shannon Harbour.

The people of Offaly and north Tipperary in my constituency have been let down by the failed politics of austerity introduced by Fianna Fáil and then replicated by Fine Gael. Just this week, I have been contacted by a number of very distressed constituents. It is beyond justification that those people are suffering that hardship they are in. That hardship demonstrates the failure of the outgoing Government.

I have been contacted by members of a family who are due to be evicted within the next month on foot of a repossession order by a bank. This family has special needs children but they have been given no supports and have been told that they have to leave their home. The banks were bailed out by the people of this country so why do we not return the compliment now, safeguard our citizens and stand up for our people? That is what we should have been doing all along.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: You got an e-mail from NAMA the other day.

Deputy Carol Nolan: It was also brought to my attention that five tenants in the Birr area of south Offaly have been issued with repossession orders by a bank, and some of those tenants have young families. That is not just confined to urban areas. It is happening in rural areas as well.

I have been contacted by a constituent to advise me that she received notification that respite care services in Birr have been cancelled at very short notice for the next two weeks, allegedly due to staff shortages, leaving an exhausted carer who is trying to take care of her elderly mother with a harsh choice either to cancel her much-needed break or leave her mother with no care other than two short daily toilet calls by a nurse. That is disgraceful. It is beyond belief that this is happening in 2016 yet Deputies here marked the centenary and marched to glorify 1916. It is shameful that this is taking place, and it shows us that all the children of this nation are not being cherished equally.

Children with disabilities in counties Laois and Offaly are now facing a three-year backlog in services. As a special needs teacher, that is an area I am passionate about and there is no justification for that backlog. These are vulnerable children. They need the supports and I appeal to the Minister in charge of that area now to get his act together and ensure the therapists are put in place in Laois and Offaly as soon as possible. Apparently, the problem is due to a lack of recruitment of psychologists for these children, while the school age team is not yet in operation either. It is disgraceful.

These are the stories about real families and real communities who have been left to suffer while this farce has dragged on for 70 days. I am not in here to play any game other than to represent my constituency.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: And so are all of us.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I will do that, and I will hold the Government to account - Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Deputy going to conclude? If not, she will not leave any time for her colleagues.

Deputy Carol Nolan: That is the real legacy of the failed politics of both Fine Gael and Fi-

6 May 2016

anna Fáil. I very much welcome that this nonsense has come to an end once and for all here tonight after 70 long days and it is to be hoped we can finally get down to the actual business-----

Deputy Simon Harris: Hear, hear.

Deputy Carol Nolan: -----of representing the citizens, and not the banks. The people of Offaly and north Tipperary cannot face another five years of the same policies and harsh cuts. I assure the members of the incoming Government that I will do all in my power to work constructively with them to deliver much-needed change. I want change, and I am prepared to work with anyone who will deliver change. That is needed to address all these pertinent issues and to stop the suffering and hardship endured by the families I have mentioned. However, I assure them that I, along with my Sinn Féin colleagues, will provide a robust opposition, the only opposition that will hold Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil-----

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Come on.

Deputy Carol Nolan: -----to account in delivering on issues that affect our communities, because that is why we are here. We care.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: We are all working for our constituents.

Deputy Carol Nolan: The people of Offaly and north Tipperary deserve no less-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Carol Nolan: -----and I will ensure they get better services than they have been getting to date.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy John Brady who has very little time left.

Deputy John Brady: The grubby little deal cobbled together by what can only be described as parties that make up the new austerity alliance is an agreement which, ultimately, will see no real change and the crisis in housing continue.

As we sit here this evening, we have a situation in Wicklow where two homeless men who were turned away from all services are now locked up in a county council building in Bray. The authorities have effectively locked them in, turned up the heating and stopped any supply of water and food getting to those two men who had no alternative but to lock themselves in that premises. No emergency accommodation was provided for those two individuals.

I appeal to the new Minister for housing, who is not present in the Chamber, to intervene personally in this case. These men are but two of many thousands of homeless people throughout the State, but this shows clearly that people are desperate and will resort to desperate means. I conclude by saying to the Minister, in his absence, that his first port of call should be to pick up the phone, call the authorities in Wicklow and end this scandalous situation that has been ongoing for the past two nights.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I begin by congratulating the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and his Ministers on their election and their preferment as Ministers, particularly the new Ministers. I wish them well. We, as a party, worked very well with the Taoiseach and I share very much what the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, has just said in his contribution on the hard graft that was done to fix the economy, which the Fianna Fáil Party seems to have forgotten it

wrecked, including cutting social welfare by €8, when Deputy O'Dea was a Minister.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Twice.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The people thanked the Labour Party for its efforts.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The hard work that was done in government over the past five years-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: And the Tesco ad.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I wish the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, in particular, well in the onerous job of Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform because he will have to deal with all the varying demands on the public purse - it is the public's money - that will come down the line in this Government that has just been formed. Deputy Rock, who was the very first speaker today, told us we should embrace the politics of the future, but I really can see very little politics of the future in what has been cobbled together in this Government today. We sat here in these benches earlier with empty benches to our left because that Government was still being cobbled together.

We fixed the economy because we wanted a decent, fair society and we were able to do some of that in the previous Government when, for the first time, we had a little bit of money to spare. We started some of the things that now, thankfully, are in the programme for Government. In the area that I was working in, there is a commitment to reduce class sizes, which I very much welcome, but we actually already started that. We have money in the budget for next September to begin reducing class sizes, and that it is important. There is talk about all the important things that need to be done. My worry is that areas like mental health, which is so important, education, which is absolutely crucial to the future of young people in the country, measures to reduce child poverty, which is really important, and child care - I wish Deputy Zappone well in that area - all need money and will have to compete with the demands of all the other bits and pieces that got cobbled together in that deal from various parts of the country. It is interesting to see that the lads who are propping it up are already complaining about money being spent in that deal. The real needs of the country will have to compete with all that and that is why I wish Deputy Donohoe well in the job that he will have to do to spread that money around.

Abraham Lincoln famously put together what became known as the team of rivals. In contrast, the last-minute arrangements we are asked to vote on now can only be described as a team of survival. I have grave doubts especially when I hear the one leg in and one leg out speeches of Deputy O'Dea and Deputy MacSharry who on the one hand are propping up the Government-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: It is quite simple. I will explain it.

An Ceann Comhairle: One speaker at a time, please.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: -----and on the other hand are having a fine go at Opposition. There are internal weaknesses that I am really concerned about. The Minister, Deputy Brendan Howlin, spoke earlier today about lack of trust and lack of stability. I fear that is the fate of the Government. I am not judging any individual members of Government. I know there is commitment and I wish them all well. I am really concerned at the manner in which the Government was put together. From what I heard about the horse trading that was going on in the past

6 May 2016

24 hours, it would rival the fair of Spencil Hill in the amount of horse trading that was going on.

I wish the Minister, Deputy Bruton, well in particular, because he goes into the Department of Education and Skills where I have been working for the past couple of years. It has been a fantastic honour to serve as Minister for Education and Skills. My predecessor, the former Minister Ruairí Quinn, and I achieved quite a lot, considering that we were constrained by money, by increasing the number of teachers and SNAs, in beginning to reduce class sizes and in building schools when there was no money and cuts in Departments. We were still able to build high quality schools and get rid of prefabs. That was an extraordinary achievement in the times that were in it.

I know the Minister, Deputy Bruton, will have an interest in one particular area where we made progress and that is apprenticeships. We are offering for the first time opportunities for apprenticeship not just in the traditional construction areas but in many other areas of the economy. We have got that operational now and I am sure the Minister, Deputy Bruton, will continue with that work. It gives real opportunity to young people who do not have a bent to go on to third level but have real skill and the strength to go on to positive careers. That is an important one of which I am very proud.

I was a bit amused that one of the big wins mentioned with regard to education was that no small school would be forced to close. I actually announced in February 2015 that no small school would be forced to close and that it would be around consultation. So, thanks for stealing our clothes, but well done anyway.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: The Deputy closed one in Carlow.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I turn to the area of child care and I wish the Minister, Deputy Zappone, very well. I hope she will not use the concept of a tax credit as a way of supporting child care. I know that is being floated. I am not sure which party floated it. I do not think that is a model that will work and I hope it is not the model the Minister will choose. We need investment directly in the services on the guarantee that savings are passed on to families. We also desperately need decent pay in the sector because child care has been neglected by this State for a long time. The Labour Party will be fully supportive. Our manifesto had a detailed proposal and we will fully support child care. I ask the Minister not to choose the tax break model because that is not the way to go.

How things are made often dictates how things work and I have a very real concern that in the face of every issue, every demand, every claim by an interest group, the same approach of buying off trouble one by one will take hold. We have seen evidence of it in recent days. This will have a serious impact on our capacity to take the mature, strategic decisions that are needed over the coming years. While we can buy political peace within and without government from week to week, the price may well be the vital policy goals of, for example, reducing primary class sizes, reducing child care costs for families or properly funding our mental health supports being put on the long finger.

I have very real fears about the viability, coherence and capacity of this governing arrangement. I wish no one, either a member or a supporter of the Government, any ill will. However, at a time when vision, courage and tenacity is needed within government, I fear we now have an Administration that will be crippled by procrastination, weakness and division.

I, along with my colleagues in the Labour Party, will offer constructive opposition. We

mean that. Given the events earlier today, I for one have had enough of grandstanding, brinkmanship and spin. I look forward to moving on from that and advocating, supporting and advancing progressive policy choices that will make our country a fairer, more equal Republic for all its children.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Some people outside were saying this was a great day for those who are being elected, the Taoiseach and the new Ministers who have been appointed. I am sure individually and personally it is a great day for people who feel they have made some kind of progress in political life. However, I want to look at things holistically.

I think this day will be remembered not for the election of the Taoiseach but for the election of Gerry Carroll of People Before Profit in west Belfast where he topped the poll and the imminent election of Eamonn McCann in Derry. I say that because I think that will be the big news of the day. When we talk about new politics, we have to look at what is going on in this country. Politics is happening inside Chambers like this, but is also significantly happening outside. The election of People Before Profit candidates in the North, just like the election of Anti-Austerity Alliance and People Before Profit candidates and others on this side to this House represents the interests of politics on the outside, the interests of people power against austerity. The election of Gerry Carroll and Eamonn McCann represents the fight against austerity, North and South, as committed to by ordinary people.

I want to talk about politics both inside and outside the Chamber, but I also want to give the Taoiseach and his Ministers a surprise by telling them - I am not sure I have the English right on this - that, should they do certain things, we will be voting for them. I want to run through those things very quickly. If they are willing to make a massive investment in public housing and build tens of thousands of public houses - not private, not for developers and not for landlords' enhancement - over the next five years that will deal with the housing and homelessness crisis, we will vote for that measure. If they will urgently employ the doctors and at least 5,000 nurses required to end the trolley crisis in this country, we will vote with them for that measure. If they deliver a public health service that is available to people at the point of need and not according to the size of their wallets, we will vote for the Government with that measure. If they will, in the beginning, try to do something with Irish Water by actually fixing the leaks and dealing with the sewage problem, investing at least €1 billion per year that is brought in through progressive taxation, ending the scourge of metering and the waste that metering and billing have become, and putting Irish Water into the dustbin of history, we will vote with them on that measure. If they are prepared to treat public sector pay in a serious way, to restore the pay cuts the people who work in this Chamber have suffered, to end the ridiculous pension-related deduction that is imposed on all public service workers and to begin to outlaw - not reform, but outlaw - the FEMPI legislation, we will vote with the Government on that measure.

People will ask how we can provide for all that, and clearly we do need tax justice in this country. The Government's document is so scarce on any form of tax justice that it is outrageous. Given the recent publication of the Panama papers, the Government should be ashamed of itself for treating that so lightly. This is a scandal of global proportions. What we need in this country is a commitment from the Government that it will bring in measures to make sure that the corporations pay the effective rate of tax at 12.5% - not the 4% and 6% they currently pay, but an effective rate of 12.5%. Everybody seems to run scared of that, as though the corporations will flee the country, but the world is narrowing for people who want to avoid tax on that level. It is narrowing because of the revelations of the Panama papers and the commitment made by other governments to end the tax havens that exist around the world. We have to start

6 May 2016

by looking at that and at introducing a financial transaction tax on all the transactions that go through the IFSC, and we will begin to see billions brought in through taxing the rich and more tax justice achieved in this country. We will vote with the Government on that measure.

Equality for women is a huge issue. Some of the document tries to address it, but it is hilarious that on the one hand the Government talks about setting up a commission to look at the question of repealing the eighth amendment - when poll after poll shows that the vast majority in this country want to see a referendum on repealing the eighth amendment, not a commission dominated by right-wing politicians who are actually against abortion - while on the other hand it advocates creating more jobs in the Army for women. Great. We will not give women the right to control their own bodies, but we will send them into the military to show that we favour equality.

Last but not least, I want to talk about other equality issues, such as refugees. How are we going to deal with them? We have promised to take in 4,000 and we have taken in less than 500. Then we have the Tánaiste telling us they do not want to come to Ireland because they all want to go to Germany or Sweden. They have never heard of us. They have never been asked whether they would like to go to a very green, pleasant island on the edge of the Atlantic, if there were equality so that they might be treated well.

We need to get the US troops out of Shannon Airport. If the Government were to put that measure before us, we would vote for it, but that is not going to happen inside this House unless the new politics outside this House puts pressure on everybody in here. That is why I want to end by saying that the election success of Gerry Carroll and Eamonn McCann today is the news of the day, not because of the individuals involved, but because it represents a trend across the world. We have seen it with Bernie Sanders; we have seen it in Britain, with the election of the new leader of the UK Labour Party; we have seen it through the emergence of strong left parties in Greece, South America and Spain; and now we are seeing it again in the rise of the movement of people power in this country, North and South of the Border, against austerity, regardless of who is implementing that austerity. It is not working, it is destroying our economy, it is destroying our people, it is destroying public services and we want to see that ended.

Deputy Joan Collins: I remember distinctly my first day in the Dáil in 2011 and the Taoiseach made the point that we had seen a democratic revolution and he would keep his ear close to the ground. We did not have a democratic revolution. What we had was five years of severe austerity that has impacted so much on people's lives in how they live, how they work or do not work, how they raise their families, how they access services and how they get about their daily lives in a way that they are proud they have the ability to do it and that they have a future and hope. That was taken away from them in the past five years, with the help and support of the Labour Party.

After today, many people will wonder how come a party like Fine Gael - the dominant party in what was an extremely unpopular Government which sought re-election on the basis of its record and was decisively rejected by the people in a popular vote - is now the dominant party in a new Government. The people are just asking how the hell that happened. They are also asking how come Deputy Enda Kenny, whom a clear majority do not want as Taoiseach, has been re-elected as Taoiseach. They are wondering how the losers became the winners, which is what has happened today in the Dáil. The answer to this question of course is the role played by Fianna Fáil. In everything but name this is a Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael coalition. No, they could not-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Joan Collins: -----nakedly go into government and look for ministerial positions. They could not nakedly do it but they are doing it from the back and through a silent group within that coalition. A ten-week charade was played out to deliver this sleight of hand-----

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: We did not sleight our hands.

Deputy Joan Collins: -----and the nine Independents are just the extras in the movie, the fall guys who deserve what is going to come to them, because it will come to them.

The talk of new politics from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is laughable. There is nothing new here. This is a continuation of rule by two parties who have ruled on behalf of the elite since the foundation of this State. They have usurped the will of the people in the general election on 26 February. They have usurped that will. Usurp means to do so without authority or right of the people. I am reminded of the novel, *The Leopard*, by the Italian writer Lampedusa, in which the landed gentry of Sicily are discussing whether or not to support Garibaldi. One of the characters utters the famous words, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change". This is exactly what we are hearing in this Dáil, that we have to change so things will stay the same.

I wish to comment briefly on the amazing statement by the Labour Party leader, Deputy Joan Burton, that the Labour Party is proud of its role in the previous Government.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: She saved the country.

Deputy Joan Collins: For me the legacy of the Labour Party's five years in Government can be summed up with one fact: the doubling of child poverty in this country over recent years.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Rubbish.

Deputy Joan Collins: That is the Labour Party's legacy.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That is rubbish.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Behaviour please, Deputies.

Deputy Joan Collins: There is nothing to be proud of when one in nine children lives in poverty. It is an enormous shame that the tradition of the Labour Party has been frittered away by a succession of leaders and career politicians who consistently put the spoils of office before their responsibility to build a mass alternative to change society. That was the ideal of Connolly and Larkin, to build a mass movement to change society.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: And to claim free legal aid.

Deputy Joan Collins: That was what they had in mind, not where we are today and the fact that the Labour Party frittered away any support it had before. Those of us who now have the honour of carrying out that task will not squander that opportunity. We will play our role in building that alternative.

People who went out and voted on 26 February have the right to change, not the change we have seen in this Dáil, which is of more of the same. They want real change. We will build it, we will change it, we will have meaningful change and meaningful change is on the way. I will

6 May 2016

use every sinew and bone in my body and work with people who are progressive on the left to make that change and to vindicate the right to change, here in this bubble and in their homes, in the streets, in their communities and in their workplaces.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is Deputy Catherine Martin offering? No. I call Deputy Zappone.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I begin by expressing my great gratitude to be able to sit in this seat. I appreciate the Taoiseach nominating me to be Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I express gratitude to my constituents in Dublin South-West who elected me what seems like a long time ago now, but I suppose it is just a few short months. I also express my gratitude to all of the speakers, my colleague parliamentarians. I have been listening carefully to what they have said, taken notes and appreciate their comments.

I want to begin with some optimism and hope for the Irish people. I have an ethical obligation to do so, as the new Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, so that we can, in the words of our Sinn Féin colleague, Deputy Martin Kenny, “allow our children to raise our grandchildren”, or so that we can find, in the words of Deputy Micheál Martin, “a new direction” for the way of conducting our country’s business, or so that all of our children can grow up in a country that supports, in the words of our Taoiseach, their “psychological and emotional well-being”, as he has pledged.

One of our collective tasks is to end child poverty. Several colleagues have identified and spoken about this as a critical task for us all to engage in. If the programme for Government in its current form does not have enough on that - only the seeds of it perhaps - I ask them to work with me and other colleagues to do that once and for all. I know a little about attempting to end child poverty. It comes from the ideology that I carry. For want of a better word, I use the word “progressive” too. Some of the people who have informed that thinking may be political theorists such as Jürgen Habermas or radical educators such as Paulo Freire. It has also been informed by the practice of my work as a community educator in Jobstown, west Tallaght and the wider Tallaght area. There, my spouse, Ann Louise, who is still with us in the Visitors Gallery, and I set up one of the first crèches in Jobstown community centre 30 years ago. We invited 12 women from the Jobstown community to come to our home. That is where we started our educational project. We invited them to take the brave step to get back on to the learning path so that eventually they would become either leaders in their own communities or get jobs. If the jobs were not good for them, eventually their children would get good jobs, because their children were well-educated. This is a little of the practice and experience that I pledge to bring to bear on the leadership of my new Ministry.

This is just one of the many collective tasks we must engage in so that we, in 2016, can garner all of our efforts, our imagination and our skilful use of our resources to cherish all of our children equally and provide every child with “an equal start” in life. This is what I called a set of policies I developed when I was a Senator and included identifying the care, education, parental support and preventative and early intervention supports that should be delivered in one place for the child and his or her parents.

I, therefore, begin with that hope and identification of a couple of key collective tasks. However, how will we be effective in the delivery of these and other collective tasks? Several colleagues have referred to the very difficult birth of this minority-led Government. I agree. It is not perfect. It was far too slow, especially, as many Deputies have identified, as was exemplified by this morning. It is true that we must get better at this. It is true that more trust needs

to be built. It is equally true that constructive opposition, radical left opposition, left opposition, Sinn Féin opposition, Labour Party opposition, Green Party opposition, Social Democrats opposition, indeed, all of this opposition, is required to stop us when we are not doing what is required to cherish all of our children equally or to transform opposition to creative proposals that all of us would welcome for our people.

How is it that we will be effective? Each one of us has to ask that question for ourselves. I imagine other Deputies have done so, as have I. How will we use our power? I define power as the ability to get things done. How will Deputies use their power in opposition? I respect their choice, whether party or non-party. The same applies to party, non-party and Independent Deputies in government. Clearly, I have made my choice. I have discerned after much reflection that I will attempt to get things done over here rather than over there. I believe I bring to the table my progressive approach, my practice and experience with the people of Tallaght, along with my practice and experience as a feminist, educator, former chief executive of the National Women's Council of Ireland, human rights advocate and marriage equality leader. Therefore, I know what people power is like and what it means to mobilise the people to get things done and to bring about effective change. Moreover, I know how long it takes to do that. Some of this was brought into this programme for Government. It is not perfect or complete. It is simply a guide for the action plans, strategies and budgets that we will and must create together.

Deputy Michael Harty: It has been 70 days now since our election, although to me it has felt far longer. In those 70 days it has been my privilege to meet many Deputies who have been intently constructive in exploring government formation. Although they may have had divergent views, they came together to have us in the Chamber today. I welcome that we finally have a Government, as do the people, I imagine. I welcome that we can now start to address our problems of housing, homelessness, health, agriculture and regional peripheral decline. This minority Government represents a new style of administration, and may well be the norm in future. It will have to be more inclusive of ideas from all sides of the House and will require a constructive response from its supporting Opposition. Railroading legislation through the House will be a thing of the past. We need to have constructive rather than destructive debate. We must have compromise, communication, consultation and accommodation. This can only be good for a new style of democracy.

Balanced regional development and rural viability and sustainability are essential if we are to be inclusive in our economic revival. Compassion and dignity need to be foremost in our minds when addressing housing, homelessness and our health problems.

There has been criticism from the Opposition benches of the role of Independents in this Dáil. However, it was Independents who initiated talks on government formation seven weeks ago because established large and small parties opted out of the process for political reasons - a type of political abstention. Independent Deputies also have a mandate from their electorate. Those who criticise and denigrate Independent Deputies also criticise and denigrate those who voted for them. There should be equal respect for our mandate in this democracy and an equal respect for our right to represent our constituencies.

I wish the new Ministers well and good luck in their difficult task of governing this expectant country of ours. I believe we can build on the new political relationship forged during the past ten weeks and start to overcome many of our social and economic challenges.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I too am glad to speak this evening on the Cabinet posts. I want

6 May 2016

to sa chéad dul síos mo chomhghairdeas a ghabháil le gach éinne. I congratulate the new Cabinet and the new appointees from the Independent ranks and wish them and their families well. It is a big honour and an enjoyable day for them. It will also be a very difficult and challenging role.

As regards the talks, I fully agree with Deputy Harty. We could all have sat on our hands and done nothing. I engaged with other Independents and everybody else who was interested in seeking out a stable government if we could. We had to deal with the result that the people threw up. I am very thankful to the people of Tipperary for sending me back here for another term, however long it might be. I felt it was incumbent on me to get involved and try to support a positive outcome. The people and the country needed a government and we have got one.

Although I have been critical of the Taoiseach in the past and I did not vote for him today for that reason, I compliment him and his team, especially Deputies Coveney, Bruton, Noonan and Harris, on the way they engaged with us, seriously, meaningfully and respectfully. It was a very interesting process. I learnt a lot from it and got an insight into how we can achieve change on many items I was angry about, and frustrated with, during the last Dáil. Politics is the art of the possible. This document that we worked long and hard on, with the Government and the officials and facilitators - I thank them as well – was a decent effort at a providing road-map. I thank Fianna Fáil too for providing a roadmap to show how Independents could support a government. We could have gone back to the people, but what would that have solved? I do not think we would have been thanked for it. There are many other areas in which the cost of another election - €40 million plus - could be spent. There is so much in this document that I am pleased is in there. There were many long and late nights, including last night, spent trying to get different formulas, sentiments, sentences and statements of intent in the programme for Government.

I am pleased with the reception we got. Obviously there were compromises and disappointments, but there is much in it that we can try to work with. I gave a commitment to be constructive but also to hold the Taoiseach and all the Ministers to account for the issues and for the timeframes. There are aspirations too. I know everything will not be met. There has to be full engagement and I hope there will be, as promised by the Taoiseach the first time we met, in the new type of parliament we have now with different arrangements.

Am I all right for time?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is fine.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I thought the Ceann Comhairle was going to stop me.

An Ceann Comhairle: I would not dare.

Deputy Alan Farrell: There is a new Dáil.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I hope that engagement will be there. The Taoiseach also promised us that there would be a sea change in the public and civil servants backing up the Government. That is vital because we have to change and adapt. I look forward to the new committee structures and the new debates. I look forward to the Government losing votes.

As a Member who introduced five Private Members' Bills in the last Dáil, I saw how such Bills were rejected because of the person who introduced them. I never suggested that the Bills

I introduced were perfect or anything like that, but I would like to have had them considered. I am delighted that two of them are now included in the programme for Government with an aspiration and wish that they be implemented. Some are badly needed, especially the precious and scrap metals Bill, because we are trying to keep people in their homes but they are being pilloried in their homes and are trying to eke out a living for themselves daily.

I look forward to waving this book at the Taoiseach in the mornings and asking him about items in it. He asked me a few times in the last Dáil what book I was talking about, but I know what book I have this time, because I was part of its make-up, so I will be accurate this time at all times. I remember the Taoiseach turning once or twice to ask his officials what book I was talking about. I had got it from the Office of the Chief Whip. We have it all here. I am going to bring it home and frame it and maybe have short segments of it for different topics.

A Deputy: Like the Bible.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Bible indeed.

I will bring it home and frame it.

Deputy Alan Farrell: The Deputy should try reading it before he frames it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I will have short segments of it for the different topics. Anyway, it was a meaningful and enjoyable experience, and I salute and thank all the Independent Deputies who got involved in it. We could all sit back and do nothing but that is not the answer to anything.

10 o'clock

That said, I wish the Ministers well, especially the new Minister for Health, Deputy Harris. There is a huge job to be done in health. The former Taoiseach, former Deputy Brian Cowen, called that Department “Angola”. Deputy Harris hails from Wicklow, which is nothing like Angola, but I believe he is up to the job. There is a huge job of work to be done in that Department, in my local hospital in Tipperary, as I discussed with the Taoiseach, and throughout the country. There are also the medical card and other issues.

I tried to have many other issues included. I am disappointed with the outcome as regards dealing with the dispirited, mean and nasty industry of repossessions. I would start with the courts, the county registrars, sheriffs, the repossession companies and the entire system of nasty businesses growing up around that industry. Much of it accelerated in the interregnum between the election and tonight, because people felt they had no Government. That must be stopped. That train must be derailed and people must be supported. There are some items, including the new courts, to help families but more meaningful help is needed. The Government must put some manners on and respect in the banks. People are suffering as a result of the bailout of the banks. I voted for it and I regret it. However, I did it at the time. A gun was put to our heads as well on the night of the bank guarantee. That must be derailed.

We must have a Courts Service that will respect the rights of the families. The judges should have a record of interests, as we have, with a return of their financial transactions every year to the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO. They are not a protected species. I salute them and they have a very important job. I realise there is a separation between the courts and the Oireachtas, but we must have that record of interests. We cannot have cases such as a

6 May 2016

few I have seen where justice has to be forced out of the courts by lay litigants. We must have respect for lay litigants. It should not have to be tied up with a gravy train for barristers. People cannot afford that and they are intimidated by the system. There must be meaningful respect in this regard.

I am also critical of the fact that more than 70% of Ministers are from the greater Dublin area. I worry about that even though there is a Minister for rural affairs and regional development. Parts of the west and south east are scantily represented. There will also be Ministers of State, but we must reflect rural Ireland. We cannot give it lip service and talk about aspirations. We must reflect at all times how we will save rural Ireland. Its saving is needed. There is much in the document-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to conclude.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I will. It is late and we all wish to get home.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The Deputy could have been a Minister.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do not be provocative.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I did not seek any perks. I will hold the people who are there to account. The Mercs and perks are for other people. The Government forced three or four of our colleagues to take a single car. I do not know where they will sit. I hope it is not hybrid or the like and that they will have room.

Deputy Alan Farrell: The Deputy had the world at his feet and threw it away.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I wish them well but I will hold them to account.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: First, I congratulate my colleagues on their nominations. I particularly congratulate Deputy Frances Fitzgerald as the newly appointed Tánaiste and the new members joining the Cabinet, Deputies Katherine Zappone, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, Simon Harris, Michael Creed, Shane Ross and Denis Naughten.

I thank my former officials and staff in the Department of Health who were behind me and worked so hard for so many years. It is with mixed feelings and some regret that I am moving from that Department. It was a tough job, probably one of the toughest in politics, but it is one in which one can make a real difference. Certainly, I and my Government colleagues were delighted last week to reach the point of securing planning permission and funding for the new children's hospital after 20 years of effort. The new Minister, Deputy Harris, will carry out the sod turning for that in a few months and I will be delighted to see it. We were also able to take the first steps towards free GP care by providing it to everybody under six and over 70 years of age, regardless of income. That will continue and be extended to all children under 18 years of age as the programme for Government states. There was also the publication of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill that will save lives. I am sure, and I sincerely hope, it will get through the Dáil and the Seanad without too much dispute. Getting legislation through this new Dáil will be difficult but I hope when it comes to issues such as that, legislation which should have the broad support of both Houses will get through quickly.

I thank the Taoiseach for nominating me to head up the Department of Social Protection. It is a Department with a very large budget, one which has an enormous impact on people's lives - pensioners, carers, people with disabilities, jobseekers and many others. I am conscious that

I am the first Fine Gael Minister to hold that office in 30 years, which is of significance. It is a long time since my party held the Department of Education and Science and Deputy Richard Bruton is there now, and it is a long time since my party had the opportunity to hold office in the Department of Social Protection and I think that is going to be very significant.

I wish to recognise the outgoing Minister, Deputy Joan Burton, who I think was a real reforming and successful Minister in that Department in a very difficult time. During that period she transformed the Department from one that made payments to one that was much more about activation and helping people to move into the workforce. I hope I can build on some of the work she did in that particular role.

I wish to push forward Fine Gael's policy of introducing a working family payment, one that will support families in a much better way than the family income supplement, FIS, does currently, removing poverty traps and making sure that work always pays, because for some families in this State it is not worth entering the workforce and that is something that should change, not in a punitive way but by providing a different system of assisting families to move into work. That could be a really big change, not just in terms of reducing poverty but also activating more people and allowing them to get into the labour market and to work with all the non-economic, social benefits and health benefits that come from work.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That sounds extremely ominous.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I would particularly like to do something for the self employed. We all know that for a long time people who are self employed do not receive many PRSI benefits. I know it is not straightforward. I have read the Mangan report, but perhaps we can at least start to do something to give self-employed people a better deal when it comes to social insurance.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I would also like to see us develop an entirely new social insurance system. Social insurance works so much better in other European countries. Employers and employees pay in and they get much more back in return for that than we do in this country. I would especially like to see the return of dental benefits, but also other benefits. When people in other European countries lose their job they get a much higher benefit initially in the first few weeks and months. That was in our manifesto and I very much want to bring that forward.

Deputy Bríd Smith: It helps when corporation tax is paid.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I would also like to restore some of the cutbacks that occurred to social welfare payments in the years when that had to be done because of the economic crisis that we faced. In recognising the very strong emphasis on rural areas in the programme for Government, we could do much to develop the rural social schemes in particular. I look forward to visiting some of those schemes and getting to know that aspect of the Department and the country much better.

In addition, I have a particular interest in developing a universal pension scheme because so many people in this country have no pension at all. Those of us in this House benefit from a very generous pension, as do many other people, but there are some people in this State who have no pension at all, other than the State pension, in particular young workers, the self employed, contractors and low-paid people in the private sector who often get no pension other

6 May 2016

than the State pension. It is a very difficult and tricky area. I remember a long time ago as an Opposition spokesperson reading the Green Paper on pensions produced by Fianna Fáil when it was last in office. Things could not be done in the difficult years but perhaps things can be done in the years ahead in order that younger people in their 20s and 30s can start paying into their pension funds right away so that they can have a much better retirement.

I wish to reflect briefly on the past few months. As somebody who spent a lot of time on doorsteps in my constituency and in other constituencies, it occurs to me - perhaps we should all know this - that we now have a very fragmented society, one that is much more fragmented than I have ever seen in the past. That was an inevitable consequence of the recession and the difficult times that affected people during the worst recession in a generation. I wrongly believed that a recovery would lift all boats. It did not.

Deputy Bríd Smith: It lifted all yachts.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: In fact, because we had a recovery for some and because some people are back in work and have seen their incomes restored, those who are not in that position feel more left behind than they ever were before. That presents a significant opportunity for this Government. It is a Government that may have emerged as it did today but it is not one that was elected in the same manner as were Governments in the past. It will be a different Government because Fine Gael understands that the election was no coronation and that the party lost a lot of seats and was obliged to form a different type of government today. However, it presents us with an opportunity to learn from that election and to learn from what people said. It offers an opportunity to try to bring together this highly fragmented society, to make sure economic recovery is not just about GDP, bond yields or getting down the debt but is about starting to heal some of the fractures in society and starting to reverse income inequality and many things that have occurred in the past decades. If the Government does that, it will make the country a better place, and it might be the secret ingredient that sees the Government and my party receiving a third term in office.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I thank the Minister for allowing me two minutes of his time, as I could not let the evening go by without saying a few brief words. First, I congratulate the Taoiseach and those who have been appointed as Ministers, including the women who will be in the Cabinet. I welcome the nomination to their positions of Deputies Frances Fitzgerald, Katherine Zappone, Mary Mitchell O'Connor and Heather Humphreys. It is important that women are to be found in all walks of life and in all work across the board. The real reason I wanted to speak was to take the opportunity to thank the Labour Party and to thank the outgoing Ministers, including Deputies Joan Burton and Brendan Howlin, and all the other colleagues with whom my party has worked over the past five years. It was an extraordinary time in my life and in the life of the country. I wish to thank Deputy Joan Burton personally for all the hard work she did in her time as Minister for Social Protection. I do not believe people realise the amount of effort and time she put into the job. She did a wonderful job, and I did not take those words from the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, as I already had them in my notes. I thank her because I believe sincerely that many good people in the Labour Party lost their seats who should not have.

Deputy Alan Farrell: Hear, hear.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I am sorry they are not present this evening.

If I may, I also will mention what lies ahead of Members in the coming months in trying

to hold the Government together. As I believe Deputy Katherine Zappone has already stated, the programme for Government is not perfect and no Member can fool himself or herself by stating otherwise. However, I believe that if we work together - as Fine Gael did previously with the Labour Party - with the Independents and with the support of Fianna Fáil, there will be every opportunity to fulfil some of the programme's objectives. I also wish to say a few words to my constituency colleagues, namely, Deputies Ó Snodaigh, Joan Collins and Bríd Smith. I acknowledge that it has been difficult at times in our constituency, because it is a difficult one and we may have had opposing views on issues. However, I hope that over the coming months and years we can work together to fix the problems of child poverty and housing and, above all, to work for the people who elected us. I believe we are all present this evening because of them.

I will conclude with a small quote I have used many times, on which all Members should reflect. While this is not a day for quotes, others have thrown in a few and I may as well throw in one.

An Ceann Comhairle: Why not?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: It comes from the founder of the Oblate Fathers, who have a parish in Inchicore, which Deputy Joan Collins knows well. The order was founded by Saint Eugène de Mazenod, who said, "What we dream alone will remain always just a dream, but what we dream with others can become reality." The reality is that Members have an opportunity not to dream any more but to make real what they do in the future.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. It is a good and important day for the people, having voted 70 days ago, to have a Government coming into place this evening. While people have spoken of the 70 days since the last election, I genuinely believe the country has not had an active Government for six months. If one thinks back to last November, there was talk of an election at the time and most of the Cabinet members were on an election footing. It did not happen and we continued on into the Christmas period. Since January, however, all Ministers have been involved in preparing for elections, running election campaigns or dealing with the aftermath of the election. Ministers have not been active in their jobs to the extent that they normally would over the past six months. Consequently, when the Ministers take up their posts and arrive at their desks at 8 a.m. tomorrow, or next Monday morning or whenever, there will be a considerable number of issues to be dealt with, and I believe this will emerge soon. My main concern is that this Government has the potential to be the most right-wing Government Ireland has ever seen in my lifetime. It is a Fine Gael Government and most of the Independents are former members of Fine Gael or were appointed to the Seanad by a Fine Gael Taoiseach. It is therefore substantially a Fine Gael-type Government. We know the difference between Fine Gael and the rest of us - they are a more right-wing party and they want tax cuts.

Fianna Fáil's short document was not a programme for government. We have seen the Government's big document circulating here today, which is a programme for Government. We are not a Government party or a party to the Government.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: You are on the same side.

Deputy Sean Fleming: It boils down to one issue, which is the single biggest issue facing this Dáil. We insisted that where there are available resources, the split should be two to one in favour of additional Government expenditure. That runs counter to where Fine Gael has been

6 May 2016

for most of its existence. It means it will not be able to give tax cuts to high earners, as its members would like to do. That agreement with us has prevented this Government from operating in the right-wing manner it would be inclined to, based on its members' own DNA. The two-to-one rule will protect public services. Everything that has been mentioned by the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, about what he intends to do in social welfare and what other Ministers want to do in health can happen only because Fianna Fáil put that in there. That was in our manifesto and that is the bit that is underpinning the Government.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Who are you kidding?

Deputy Sean Fleming: Everything else, including extra expenditure on public services, will flow from our short document. It is important to recognise that.

The most important issue in terms of whether this Government will be a successful one is the attitude of the Taoiseach and his Ministers. I hope it is conducive to working with the Oireachtas while not trying to bounce it into urgent decisions without proper consultation. We saw it in the talks with ourselves and the Independents. I caution the Taoiseach not to try to bounce people into things too quickly. Sometimes it is better to go a bit more slowly and carefully.

As regards the operation of this Government, all the Taoiseach needs to have is 58 votes. That is because we will abstain if the Government is behaving in accordance with the agreement we set out. We have said we will support the Taoiseach on key issues such as budget decisions and will not oppose him in votes of confidence. We will facilitate it in going ahead, but the onus will be on the Government to have those 58 votes. With Fianna Fáil abstaining, the Government will not have a majority in the House unless it has 58 votes. The numbers are very light, so it is important that the Taoiseach keeps to that.

I congratulate my county colleague Deputy Charles Flanagan on retaining his position in the Cabinet. That will be welcome in our area, and I wish him every success in his post. Most people extend goodwill to their constituency colleagues, and I am certainly in that category.

The biggest challenges now facing this Government are health and housing. Therefore, Deputy Coveney and Deputy Harris will hold two central portfolios. The Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, will have a difficult job, and we already know about the HSE budget overruns. It is probably due to the fact that most Departments have been freewheeling without active Ministers for a number of months. In the last three or four years there has never been an honest health Estimate presented in this House. It was always €600 million or €700 million short of what people knew was needed. It always required a supplementary Estimate. As part of the new budgetary process, I would like to see an honest health Estimate to meet the requirements, instead of a phoney Estimate being put through on budget day. That will be important so that we can have a realistic health service plan.

Housing will be the biggest test of this Government's ability to get things moving. There are a lot of empty houses and sites with planning permission. The Government will therefore have to examine serious measures to bring them back into the housing market. That is the most important thing to do in the couple of years immediately ahead.

I hope the Government side will be able to keep its numbers at 58 and above. We have given a commitment to support three budgets, which we will do on the basis that the Government meets the two-to-one expenditure-taxation split, which will help to improve and restore

public services.

I expect a vote tonight. We did not vote for the Taoiseach, so I want it to go on the public record that Fianna Fáil is not part of this Government.

A Deputy: Surprise.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Fianna Fáil is not voting to support this Government. It is abstaining. Fianna Fáil will lead and be the strongest party of the Opposition.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: Will the Deputy sit back down on his hands?

(Interruptions).

Deputy Sean Fleming: Sinn Féin Deputies are trying to shout us down because they know, given time, that our 43 Members on this side of the House will be the strongest Opposition to the Government. They will be on our coat-tails. There will be strong effective opposition from us on this side of the House.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: Abstaining is not opposition.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Codology.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I look forward to Fianna Fáil being vigorous in opposition in the months ahead.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I am now required to put the following question in accordance with the resolution of the Dáil today: "That Dáil Éireann approves the nominations by the Taoiseach for the appointment by the President to be members of the Government."

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 59; Níl, 36.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>

6 May 2016

<i>D’Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>O’Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O’Reilly, Louise.</i>
<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>O’Sullivan, Jan.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O’Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
<i>O’Connell, Kate.</i>	
<i>O’Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>O’Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	

<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Marcella Corcoran Kennedy and Regina Doherty; Níl, Deputies Mick Barry and Jonathan O'Brien.

Question declared carried.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.40 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 May 2016.