



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 2 Meitheamh 2016

Thursday, 2 June 2016

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Order of Business

The Tánaiste: It is proposed to take No. 5e, motion re membership of the Committee on Procedure and Privileges and the Committee of Selection; No. 6 motion re election of Leas-Cheann Comhairle; No. 1, Energy Bill 2016 [*Seanad*] - Second Stage, to be adjourned at 1.30 p.m., if not previously concluded; No. 7a, statements on delivering sustainable full employment; and No. 7, statements on mental health services (resumed).

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that No. 5e shall be decided without debate; that in relation to the election of Leas-Cheann Comhairle, the speech of each proposer shall not exceed five minutes in each case, following which contributions shall be allowed for a period not exceeding 30 minutes, whereupon the question on motions made shall be put in the order in which such motions were received; that the following arrangements shall apply in relation to No. 7a: the statement of a Minister or a Minister of State and the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, AAA-PBP, Independents4Change, Rural Alliance, Social Democrats-Green Party, or a Member nominated in their stead shall not exceed ten minutes in each case and such members may share their time; the statement of each Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case and such Members may share their time; and a Minister or a Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes; and that the Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 8 June 2016.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are four proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 5e, without debate, agreed to?

Deputy Gerry Adams: I know that the Ceann Comhairle is seized of this matter. There has been a big delay, given that it is almost 100 days since the Government came to office, in getting these committees in place. I want to stress the importance of this. This has been put off for another week and the issue needs to be dealt with as speedily as possible.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is why agreeing to the motion will be of enormous help to us

and we want to get on with it speedily. I take it that the proposal is agreed to? Agreed.

Is the proposal for dealing with No. 6 agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for No. 7a agreed to? Agreed. It is the proposal that the Dáil on its rising shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on 8 June 2016 agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In the programme for Government there is a commitment to establish an independent patient advocacy service and another commitment to “ensure appropriate patient care pathways”. Anyone who listened to Ms Jillian McNulty, who has cystic fibrosis, being interviewed on “Morning Ireland” this morning would have heard her outline, in a very articulate way, the extraordinary impact the drug Orkambi had had on her quality of life. Essentially, she has five more weeks supply of the drug and does not know what will happen to her on an individual basis. It seems in the entire debate that the issue of patient advocacy and patient care pathways is not at the highest end of the agenda. The new Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, is adopting a very responsive manner to Deputies who are raising these issues. He has been very fair and open and is genuinely seeking to help patients in these situations in the provision of cancer drugs and so on, an issue we dealt with earlier in the week. However, for people with cystic fibrosis, Orkambi is a life-changing drug. It is a condition that is particular to Ireland and the genetic make-up of Irish people. It is one in respect of which we should be in the foreground in breaking new ground, with new technology and new innovations. I accept that the pharmaceutical companies have responsibilities too and that there are further negotiations which have to take place on Orkambi. However, people like Jillian McNulty who are on the medication should be facilitated in its continuation. The negotiations should be intensified on all sides, given the commitment in the programme for Government to establish an independent patient advocacy service, which is necessary. I do not know what the timeline is for that advocacy service.

The Tánaiste made legislative commitments on the amount of cash a person could have on his or her person which would allow gardaí and the Criminal Assets Bureau to investigate, question and arrest people in connection with the proceeds of crime, particularly as a result of drug sales. Changing the threshold for the freezing and confiscation of property will require legislation, in particular an amendment to the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996. Will the Tánaiste indicate if that legislation will be before us before the summer recess? The seizure of cash threshold might be a matter to be dealt with in secondary legislation and involve the amendment of the relevant statutory instrument. Does the Criminal Assets Bureau’s power to seize property require legislation? Will all three Bills be before the House before the summer?

The Tánaiste: I thank the Deputy for his comments on the approach the Minister for Health has taken to the very sensitive issue of the drugs available to patients. I will come back to him on the matter of patient advocacy development included in the programme for Government. I am sure most Members heard Dr. Barry speak this morning about the assessment process for these drugs and the particular stage Orkambi was at. I also heard the patient who said she had five weeks’ supply left. Obviously, I understand, as the Deputy does, how very difficult the situation is for patients and their families. It is the wish of the Minister for Health and the Government generally to ensure that in the circumstances people will receive the drugs they need. We have a system of assessment and the assessment of Orkambi is at a certain point. The assessment group has stated there are major issues with the assessment. The cost presents a particular difficulty. I welcome the decision taken yesterday by Bristol-Myers Squibb on continuing to provide another drug and making it available in a compassionate way to people at this point. It is critical that drug companies do not hold countries or patients to ransom in pricing.

The real challenge is presented by the very high prices sought by manufacturers for new drugs. Dr. Barry made it clear this morning that in his expert opinion the manufacturers of the product had got it wrong when it came to pricing. Obviously, we want to ensure patients will receive the drugs they need. I have no doubt that there will be intensive discussions about this. The Minister for Health is very conscious of the issue and has already made several announcements on other drugs this week. He is working hard to ensure progress can be made in the supply of Orkambi. The assessment made has raised questions about the efficacy of the drug, although for some patients, it clearly has worked to their benefit.

Some of the necessary criminal justice legislation to which the Deputy referred can be introduced, as he says, by way of regulations. However, provisions in relation to the Criminal Assets Bureau will need legislation. It is being drafted urgently and I hope to be in a position to bring it to the House in the coming weeks. I hope to receive support across the House for its passage in this term.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá trí cheist agam inniu ach beidh mé gasta leo. Baineann ceann amháin acu le cearta an Luchta Siúil, baineann ceann eile leis an reformed and consolidated domestic violence Bill agus baineann an ceann deireanach leis an supplementary budget for health.

The State signed the Istanbul Convention on Domestic Violence last November and the programme for Government states the Government will implement the convention in full. A key component of this is the enactment of the reformed and consolidated domestic violence Bill. The general scheme of the Bill was published last July, almost a year ago, but there was no mention of it in the list of 13 Bills the Taoiseach gave to the Dáil on Tuesday. This is supposed to be a priority matter. As such, when will the domestic violence Bill be published?

The last and current programmes for Government contain commitments to deliver on the principles of social inclusion for the Traveller community. The Government also promised to publish this year a national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy. Can the Tánaiste confirm if it will be in place by the end of the year? She told me two weeks ago that a special working group was to be established to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authority Traveller accommodation plans and consult stakeholders. In the light of the controversy surrounding the decision in January by Louth County Council to evict Travellers, when does the Tánaiste expect the working group to be established. Will the Government consult Traveller advocacy groups and the Traveller community? When does the Tánaiste expect the report of the working group to be published?

At the end of last year the Government said EU fiscal rules prohibited future supplementary budgets for health. At the start of the year it was reported that the HSE was already €100 million short in its 2016 budget in the provision of funding for acute hospitals. On Monday *The Irish Times* quoted informed sources claiming they expected the overspend by the HSE this year to be on a par with last year's figure of €600 million. Can the Tánaiste confirm that the HSE is spending more than was allocated in its 2016 budget and indicate whether she expects a supplementary health budget to be required later this year?

The Tánaiste: The domestic violence Bill continues to be worked on. The programme for Government commits to the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the second national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. In order to commit fully to the Istanbul Convention, we need the domestic violence Bill. A huge amount of work has been

done on the Bill and we expect to publish it towards the end of the year.

Deputy Gerry Adams: What is the reason for the delay?

The Tánaiste: It is a very comprehensive Bill and consolidated legislation. There has been a huge number of issues to deal with, including, for example, how the courts deal with domestic violence. There has been contact with the Courts Service in recent times and extensive queries have been raised with the Department on the Bill by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. We have been dealing with all of these issues and the legislation is well under way. There is a commitment to publish the Bill because we want to commit to the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the end of the year. In fact, every Department has been asked as part of the work being done to outline the pathways they identify for the work they have to do in the implementation of the strategy. The work on the Bill and the strategy goes hand in hand. The social inclusion strategy is being developed and it is intended to have it in place this year. I do not have a timeframe for the working group I mentioned, but I will ask the Minister of State, Deputy David Stanton, to contact Deputy Gerry Adams in that regard. The Minister of State met representatives of the Traveller community this week and has also attended a conference on some of the current inclusion issues.

A process must take place on the Estimates for various Departments. That must happen in the coming weeks. As the Taoiseach stated yesterday on the Order of Business, he expects some revisions to the Estimates that were originally published but that will be a matter for the House in the near future. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will undoubtedly inform the House on the precise timetable.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I asked-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, I am sorry. We need-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Tánaiste did not answer my question. I asked whether she could confirm that the HSE was spending more than was allocated for 2016. Does she expect a need for a supplementary health budget?

An Ceann Comhairle: Very briefly, please.

The Tánaiste: It is clear that there are major demands on the health service. This issue will be addressed in the coming Estimates.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Following up on the issue of the Revised Estimates, I am getting worried that we are half way through the year and have not seen them. In tandem with the Revised Estimate Volume, will we have a revised stability programme update, SPU, as we are required to have under the Stability and Growth Pact? When will the revised SPU be prepared and submitted to the European Commission and will there be an alteration in the expenditure benchmark from the one that was set out in the April SPU that was submitted to and endorsed by the Commission?

Will the Tánaiste join me in calling on the then leadership of the IRA who directed the 1974 Birmingham bombing campaign to co-operate with the inquest that was opened yesterday by the Birmingham coroner?

Deputy John Deasy: The Deputy should ask him himself.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Will the Tánaiste add her voice to that of Ms Julie Hambleton, whose sister Maxine was murdered in the bombings? Yesterday, she stated that those who had any level of humanity or moral compass should come forward. Would this not be the collective will of the House?

The Tánaiste: Let me address the question of the Birmingham bombings first. Obviously, there is an ongoing legal process in another jurisdiction. As Deputies will be aware, the senior coroner has ruled to resume the inquest into the bombings. This is a matter of the most serious and utmost concern for the families of the people killed in the Birmingham bombings in 1974. The reports on the Birmingham pub bombings remind us of the appalling violence inflicted during the Troubles, not just in Northern Ireland. As we heard yesterday, the pain and hurt of the victims' families and the survivors continues to this day. I understand the sentiment behind Deputy Brendan Howlin's comments. We make clear in the new programme for Government our commitment as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement to building on the substantial progress that has already been made and supporting the consolidation of peace in Northern Ireland so as to ensure we never return to the days of violence.

I am aware of the media reports that new information was submitted to the senior coroner during the process of considering whether to resume the Birmingham pub bombings inquest. She has decided to resume the inquest. It is not appropriate for me to comment further on that ongoing process, as it relates to another jurisdiction.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: But we should call on people with information to come forward.

The Tánaiste: Of course. I understand the Deputy's call.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The former director of intelligence was on the news on RTE last night. It was extraordinary to watch.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not getting into a debate on this issue.

The Tánaiste: I understand the sentiment behind what Deputy Brendan Howlin stated. Every Deputy in the House would support it.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will address the issues that Deputy Brendan Howlin raised about the Estimates process. There will be ample opportunity in the House, although the business committee must agree the exact process to be followed in the near future. Yesterday, the Cabinet discussed the report that was due. It will be-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Will there be an altered SPU?

The Tánaiste: That remains to be seen. I am sure that the Ministers for Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance will address that issue in the context of the Revised Estimates.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I welcome the programme for Government's inclusion of the opening of the cystic fibrosis unit in Beaumont Hospital. It has already been built and just needs to be staffed and so on, but the key aim is to try to keep people out of hospital. I refer to the drug Orkambi. Will the Tánaiste share the information on patient advocacy with the Dáil instead of just Deputy Micheál Martin?

The Tánaiste: Yes.

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Deputy Catherine Murphy: Patients attending for appointments are assisted by the HSE with their travel arrangements, but I have been told by my constituents that this service has been stopped on the basis of cost. Is this move universal or local? Could it be remedied via the Estimates-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Time has concluded.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: -----or has a unilateral approach been taken to ceasing the arrangement?

An Ceann Comhairle: I must ask the Tánaiste to correspond with the Deputy to address the question, as we no longer have time remaining.

Deputy Micheál Martin: How much time do we have on Thursdays?

An Ceann Comhairle: We have the time allowed, 20 minutes, and it is-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is that the time available under the 2007 Standing Orders?

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: It will have to be extended.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not write the rules. I simply implement them.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I know that.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: That is because we would never get it in.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will move on to a Private Members’ Bill.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: May I speak before we-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, the Deputy may not.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I want to ask for the Ceann Comhairle’s guidance and assistance.

An Ceann Comhairle: No, please. There is no-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: He is a new Member, in fairness.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am delighted that a new Member wants to raise a matter, but-----

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I want the Ceann Comhairle’s assistance.

An Ceann Comhairle: On what?

Deputy Eugene Murphy: The Ceann Comhairle disallowed a question.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is inappropriate at this point. The Deputy should come and talk to me in my office.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: It is a public health issue relating to a boil water notice in my constituency.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy, please, resume his seat?

Deputy Eugene Murphy: It is a serious issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is very unlike the Deputy to be unruly.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Will the Ceann Comhairle see me in his office?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should come and see me in my office.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not a Mae West.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Twenty lines.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: One hundred lines.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Detention.

Petroleum and Other Minerals Development (Amendment) Bill 2016: First Stage

Deputy Martin Kenny: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act 1960 to ban unconventional gas exploration and extraction, provide for social clauses and public consultation on the granting of leases and ensure greater accountability through initiating an annual review of the lease by an Oireachtas Joint Committee.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Deputy John Deasy: On a point of order, while we are discussing Private Members' Bills, may I raise the issue of Private Members' motions-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No.

Deputy Bríd Smith: That is because the Government lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is not in order.

Deputy John Deasy: ----- or, more specifically, the futility of voting on such motions, as was demonstrated last night, that succeed but are not worth the paper on which they are written?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is absolutely not in order at this stage. Will the Deputy, please, resume his seat?

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Deputy John Deasy: There is no point in voting on them.

An Ceann Comhairle: Fair enough.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Especially if the Government loses.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy John Deasy, please, resume his seat?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: When the House-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Timmy Dooley: That is one more for us.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am quite happy to have a conversation with Deputy John Deasy about that matter.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: A simple majority.

Deputy John Deasy: I am not talking about the substance of the-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: He is being irrelevant.

Deputy John Deasy: It should have some relevance to legislating in Parliament.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy, please, resume his seat?

Question put and agreed to.

Membership of the Committee on Procedure and Privileges and the Committee of Selection: Motion

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): I move:

That--

(1) two members in total may be nominated to the Committee of Selection by the Government (notwithstanding the Order of the Dáil of 31st May 2016, which provided for Fine Gael to appoint one member to the Committee); and

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 107(4) and the Order of the Dáil of 19th May 2016, the Committee on Procedure and Privileges shall consist of the Ceann Comhairle, who *ex officio* shall be Chairman and who shall have only one vote, and 14 other members, of whom four shall be appointed by the Government, three by Fianna Fáil, two by Sinn Féin, one by the Labour Party, one by the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit, one by Independents4Change, one by the Rural Alliance group, and one by the Social Democrats-Green Party group. Six shall constitute a quorum, and the Ceann Comhairle shall announce the names of the members appointed for the information of the Dáil on the first sitting day following their appointment.

Question put and agreed to.

Election of Leas-Cheann Comhairle

An Ceann Comhairle: Four proposals have been received. I call on Deputy Gerry Adams or any Deputy representing Sinn Féin to move motion No. 1, nomination of Deputy Seán Crowe.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I move:

That Deputy Seán Crowe be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Molaim an Teachta Seán Crowe mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé lánsásta go mbeadh Seán in ann dualgais na hoifige sin a chomhlíonadh i ngach slí agus i slí ina mbeadh baill na Dála seo ina iomláine sásta. Tá Seán ina Theachta le deich mbliana anuas agus tá a fhios agam go bhfuil sé lán-ábaltá an jab a dhéanamh.

11 o'clock

Teachta Seán Crowe was first elected to the Dáil in 2002. He has served in the Twenty-ninth, Thirty-first and the Thirty-second Dáileanna, representing the constituency of Dublin South-West. For many years, he was a member of South Dublin County Council. When the peace process was initiated, he was the head of the Sinn Féin mission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin Castle. He represented the party in multi-party negotiations that led up to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Therefore, he is a very experienced Teachta Dála. He has served diligently as our party spokesperson on foreign affairs for a number of years and has contributed positively to numerous Dáil committees, particularly the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

If elected, Deputy Seán Crowe will work to the best of his ability as Leas-Cheann Comhairle to the benefit of all Teachtaí Dála and at all times will act in an impartial and fair manner. He will work with the Ceann Comhairle on the initiatives necessary to drive forward the reform of the Dáil. A Cheann Comhairle, he is a very fine singer and might lighten the darkness of your evenings.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Hard luck, Finian.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The only crow that can sing.

Deputy Micheál Martin: You are coming back, Finian.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Gerry Adams: I recommend Deputy Seán Crowe for the position and call, in particular, on those who have suddenly discovered new politics to demonstrate there really is new politics by electing Seán to represent all of us and assist the Ceann Comhairle in the important work he does.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will proceed to motion No. 2, nomination of Deputy Mattie McGrath. Deputy Michael Collins will move the motion.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: The Ceann Comhairle is looking in the wrong direction. I am moving it.

An Ceann Comhairle: *Mea culpa.*

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I move:

That Deputy Mattie McGrath be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

It gives me great pleasure to nominate Deputy Mattie McGrath from County Tipperary for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. He has vast experience of politics, having been first co-opted to South Tipperary County Council in 1990 and subsequently elected in 1999. He became a Member of this House in 2007. He has served on three Oireachtas committees, covering agriculture, community and natural resources, and health and children. He is still a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

The one thing I want to say about Deputy Mattie McGrath, which everybody in this House knows to be a fact, is that he would be extremely fair, like the Ceann Comhairle. He would bring his experience of politics to the fore in this regard. That is why I ask earnestly that Members see fit to vote for him and support him. He would be an excellent man for the job. In his political career, not only has he proved to be an excellent representative of County Tipperary but he has also been excellent on national issues. For instance, he has been to the fore in highlighting the circumstances of people with distressed mortgages and businesses and farmers being victimised and penalised by banking institutions. The Deputy was to the forefront in highlighting all these kinds of circumstances. His all-round ability has to be recognised, be it in respect of rural crime or the post office network. Such matters are very close to his heart. He is very knowledgeable and he would be an excellent man for the job. He is ably supported by his family. In particular, I have to mention Tríona, Máirín and, of course, his son Edmond, who are of tremendous support to him all the time, as is his wife, Margaret.

Deputy Mattie McGrath is a man of deep faith and was never shy about showing that and standing up for what he believed in. He is a man of conviction, for which I always admired him. The proof is that he managed to get me going to mass at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Not many would have believed I would do this, but the Deputy roped me in. Others have talked about excellent singers. The last thing I would say about Deputy Mattie McGrath is that he possesses all-Ireland medals for dancing. While others can sing, our Deputy can dance.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Dáil has talent.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: The Dáil has talent.

Deputy Finian McGrath: He would be able to dance around Deputy Brendan Howlin.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I sincerely hope people will see that, by electing Deputy Mattie McGrath, they would be electing a completely impartial Leas-Cheann Comhairle who would want to allow Deputies to get the most out of their time. Members all realise how restricted they are in raising matters of importance to their constituencies. Deputy Mattie McGrath would cooperate in a way that only he could in allowing Deputies to have sufficient time to raise matters in the best way they could and represent their constituencies. He would do that excellently. His experience would allow him to do so. I take great pleasure in formally nominating him for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle and hope he will be successful in his endeavours.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I move:

That Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher be elected Leas Cheann-Comhairle.

Is pribhléid an-mhór domsa an Teachta Pat the Cope Gallagher a ainmniú mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Fear cumasach éirimiúil é atá clú agus cáil air ní hamháin ar fud na tíre ach ar fud na hEorpa chomh maith. Is fear é a oibríonn go dian dícheallach, Domhnach is Dálach, ar son a mhuintire féin, a chontae féin agus ar son na tíre seo. Mar is eol do Bhaill na Dála, is é seo an naoú uair ina bhfuil sé tofa mar Theachta Dála. Thosaigh sé sa Dáil in 1981 agus ansin bhí sé ina ball den scoth de Pharlaimint na hEorpa chomh maith. Is léir go bhfuil taithí faoi leith aige maidir le cúrsaí a bhaineann leis an Dáil agus le cúrsaí parlaiminte i gcoitinne.

It is my great privilege to nominate Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. He is an outstanding parliamentarian by any yardstick. He has enjoyed enormous support in election after election to Dáil Éireann and the European Parliament. This is the ninth occasion on which he has been elected to Dáil Éireann. He has extraordinary and very considerable experience of parliamentary work and working with colleagues of all political persuasions and none. That experience is important in a position such as that of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. The Deputy has very considerable European experience. European politics works differently because of the imperative to build consensus and work with people from all political persuasions and backgrounds. The idea, of course, is that one brings people from diverse backgrounds together to work towards a common agenda and conclusion. The Deputy's experience from the European Parliament will stand him in good stead in the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher is a former Minister of State and particularly committed to the marine life of what is an island nation and also to the rural areas he has represented so well. It is noticeable that when he was in the European Parliament, he wore the green jersey. He was an Irish parliamentarian, not just a parliamentarian of one political party. It is fair to say members of other political parties in the European Parliament can testify that it was not the individual political party that mattered to the Deputy but what was best for the country and its people. The Deputy put the country first on many occasions in that regard. His experience, intelligence, sensitivity and commitment to parliamentary life make him a stand-out candidate for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I am nominating him for the position and seeking the broadest possible base of support for him.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I move:

That Deputy Bernard J. Durkan be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

I am honoured to nominate my colleague and fellow Kildare man, Deputy Bernard J. Durkan, for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle, which is more important in this Thirty-second Dáil than it has ever been. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle is charged with the responsibility of protecting, on behalf of the House, the rights of individual Members, and ensuring the business of Parliament is progressed in an orderly and dignified manner. I have no doubt Deputy J. Durkan would perform this role with enthusiasm, collegiality, fairness and responsibility.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan is known to all from his extensive experience in Leinster House, having been a Deputy for almost 35 years. Born outside Swinford, County Mayo, in 1945, he has been well established in County Kildare for more than 50 years. He was first elected to Kildare County Council in 1976 and served as a member until 1994, having been chairman from 1986 to 1987. He was first elected to Dáil Éireann in June 1981 and lost his seat for a brief

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period in February 1982, at which point he served as a Senator until he won back the seat at the subsequent election in November 1982. He has been re-elected in every subsequent election, which is a notable achievement by any measure. He served as Minister of State with responsibility for social welfare from 1994 to 1997 and was the chief whip of the Fine Gael Party from June 2002 until October 2004. During his career, he has held front bench positions in the Fine Gael Party, including health; food; trade and industry; insurance; overseas development aid and human rights; and communications and natural resources.

Married to Hilary, with two sons, Brian and Tim, who is a councillor, Deputy Bernard J. Durkan has the support of a great family network. As the Ceann Comhairle will be aware, he is known on Kildare County Council as the champion of the underdog and, in some cases, the champion of what some would describe as hopeless cases. He always fights for those who need it most. He is passionate about social justice and an advocate for the marginalised. He is known for not backing down from an issue and is feared by most officials in Departments and the county council. His passion is for people and Deputies will be aware from the large number of parliamentary questions he tables that they cover a large geographical area that extends beyond his constituency. The reason I am aware that he represents people beyond his constituency is that when Kildare South did not have a Fine Gael Deputy between 2002 and 2011, as the only Fine Gael Deputy in the county, he assumed responsibility for looking after the southern part of the county. Much to the confusion of local people, he still holds regular clinics in Allenwood, which has not been in the Kildare North constituency for years.

It is important to note that Deputy Bernard J. Durkan believes passionately in the rights of Deputies to have their questions answered and is a strong proponent of the power of Parliament, as distinct from the power of the Government and Executive. Having won and lost a seat, he has held his seat since regaining it 35 years ago. He has served as a Senator, backbench Deputy, Minister of State, party Whip, committee Chairman, member of the Committee of Public Accounts and Front Bench spokesperson. I do not know if he can sing or dance but, by God, he is one of the best orators in the House.

The package of Dáil reforms agreed by Members since the start of the Thirty-second Dáil will strengthen Parliament and help to make its work more efficient and effective. It has been the tradition in the House to strike a balance between the Government and Opposition in respect of the positions of Ceann Comhairle and Leas-Cheann Comhairle. This tradition is well worth keeping. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan would make an excellent Leas-Cheann Comhairle and would serve every Member of the House without fear or favour.

An Ceann Comhairle: We now have a further 30 minutes for additional contributions.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I second the nomination of Deputy Mattie McGrath to fill the vacant position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. It would be fitting if an Independent Deputy were elected to this most important post in view of the widespread power sharing that is taking place in the House. It is equally important that the offices being distributed should not be confined to the main parties but distributed in an impartial manner to others who represent minority points of view. As Deputy Michael Healy-Rae noted, Deputy Mattie McGrath would be fiercely independent in the post of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. He has served this House very well since 2004, during which time he has been a member of the most prominent committees of the House and one of the most active Deputies in introducing Bills, asking questions and contributing to topical issues.

Deputy Mattie McGrath has been controversial in the Dáil, as he was as a member of Tipperary County Council, but he has been constructive. I am proud that he asked me to support him in this particular mission and I ask Deputies, in particular Independents, to consider doing likewise. I also appeal to the main parties to allow a free vote on this issue in order that the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle is not viewed as a position that is distributed as a result of a deal between the larger parties but one on which the House can be inclusive of all those who may have different points of view, including those who contribute from an independent perspective. Independent Deputies have an important role to play in debates and the make-up of the Oireachtas. It would be appropriate that Deputy Mattie McGrath, who has played such a distinguished role in the Dáil, would act as its impartial Chair.

I note from Deputy Mattie McGrath's curriculum vitae that he has a diploma in communications. This does not mean that he speaks at a rate of 1,000 words per minute but that he can, with great impartiality, contribute and communicate with all Members. That he has been in the past and will be in the future such a vigorous and controversial contributor should stand in his stead. We should give him the opportunity to take the post of Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I am pleased to have an opportunity to say a few short words in support of the nomination of my colleague, Deputy Mattie McGrath, for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. As previously stated, Deputy Mattie McGrath has been a Member of the House for the past nine years and has served with distinction on a number of committees, specifically the Joint Committees on Health and Children and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He was also a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Association for five years.

Deputy Mattie McGrath is well known for taking a stand on issues of conscience and fighting for what he believes in. He has introduced five Private Members' Bills across a wide range of legislative areas. He would make an excellent Leas-Cheann Comhairle and would be fair to all Deputies. He is without doubt committed to protecting and strengthening the rights of all Deputies based on a clear vision.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Is onóir é dom tacaíocht a thabhairt agus a lorg le haghaidh mo chara agus mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Pat The Cope Ó Gallachóir. It is a pleasure and an honour to second the nomination of Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. He would bring considerable experience of the Oireachtas, European Parliament and ministerial office to the job. More important, he would bring a passion for democracy and the rights of Members and a work ethic that few could expect to match.

Not many Deputies are known positively by a nickname. "The Cope" is known all over the country and throughout Europe as someone who works hard and fights for various groups, including fishing and regional communities. He would bring this spirit to the office of Leas-Cheann Comhairle and fight on behalf of Deputies and the rights of the House. In a Dáil that will be considerably changed from previous Dáileanna, his experience in the European Parliament, as a former chairman of an EU-EEA delegation, and as a former Minister will be essential in negotiating and implementing this change. Deputies of all parties and none need not worry if he becomes Leas-Cheann Comhairle because he will defend Members before parties and fight for their rights and the interests of those they represent.

Deputy Michael Collins: I am honoured to support the nomination of Deputy Mattie McGrath to the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. First elected to Dáil Éireann in 2007, Deputy Mattie McGrath has been a champion of ordinary people. His involvement in organisations

such as Muintir na Tíre tells us what type of person he is. He supports the principles of care, neighbourliness, self-help and self-reliance. He has supported the concept of active community participation and championed the idea of community development. Since his election to the Dáil, he has fought for ordinary men and women and I am pleased to play my part in supporting him. I ask my fellow Deputies to support him for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Cuireann sé áthas orm tacú leis an mholadh go gceapfaí an Teachta Pat The Cope Gallagher mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle ar an Dáil seo. Nuair atáimid ag breathnú ar an bpost seo, caithimid breathnú ar na cáilíochtaí a theastódh ó dhuine a bheadh sa phost. Orthu sin tá taithí, críonnacht agus, ar ndóigh, eolas ar an dá theanga oifigiúil sa Stát seo. Chomh maith le sin, teastaíonn duine a bheadh údarásach sa Chathaoir.

I support the nomination of Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle and to recommend that he be appointed. When we consider this position, we need someone with experience. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher has long experience, both here and in the European Parliament, which gives him a good perspective on how a well-run parliament should operate. The second requirement is wisdom. I suggest that like good referees, the Leas-Cheann Comhairle should be conspicuous by being able to impose his will on the Dáil in terms of order, without having to cause controversy in doing so. The national and international experience of Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher would add greatly to his contribution to this job. I believe it would be a great advantage that, like the Ceann Comhairle, Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher as Leas-Cheann Comhairle would be fluent in both official languages of this State, as it is the right of Members to conduct their business in both those languages. It is an advantage when the Chair is competent to deal with the business of the House in either language with equal facility, which I know Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher can do.

I compliment all the other candidates for the position, who are very good candidates, but for me the stand-out candidate is Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I support the nomination of Deputy Bernard J. Durkan. He is one of the most principled Deputies in this House and has been for many years. He understands the procedures of the House, having been a Member for so many years. One quality I admire in him is that when a new Deputy is elected, particularly a Fine Gael Deputy, he takes that person under his wing and introduces him or her to House procedures and explains how the House works. He always looks out for that new Deputy, as he did when I was first elected in 2002. I admire him for that and I have seen since that he has treated every new Member in the same way.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan has significant experience as he has been Opposition Whip, a committee Chairman and a Minister of State in his time in the House. I concur with Deputy Martin Heydon that Deputy Bernard J. Durkan will defend the rights of every Member of the House. Whether a Member is from the Opposition or the Government side, he will not be deterred from defending him or her. For that reason, I support his nomination as Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I support the nomination of Deputy Bernard J. Durkan for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I support this nomination because I believe strongly that it is important that the positions of Ceann Comhairle and Leas-Cheann Comhairle should come from different groupings in the House, as in the last Dáil when Deputy Sean Barrett and former Deputy, Mi-

chael Kitt, carried out their roles with dignity and brought significant respect to the Chamber. It would establish a bad precedent to elect both Ceann Comhairle and the Leas-Cheann Comhairle from the same party or grouping in the House. That would not lead to good politics, particularly in an era of new politics in the House. While some Members might disagree with me on this, that is my view.

Few people in this House command the same respect as Deputy Bernard J. Durkan. He has served both the people of Kildare and the broader area in his role as a Deputy for a number of years and in the House he is a strong advocate and defender of parliamentary procedure. He is a particularly strong defender and advocate of parliamentary questions, which provide Members with their strongest ability to hold the Government to account. Above anybody else, he has shown the capability to do this. In the past few years, he has acted as an Acting Chairman in the House and as anybody who has participated in debate when he has been in the Chair would say, he commands respect and treats people, be they from the Government or Opposition benches, with respect. He always treats Members fairly and carries out the role with dignity.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan is an excellent parliamentarian. As the Minister of State, Deputy Paul Kehoe, said, as a new young Deputy in the last Dáil, Deputy Bernard J. Durkan was, and continues to be, a huge support to me. If any Member, regardless of the group or party he or she belongs to, asks him for his advice or opinion on an issue, he will always treat him or her with respect and provide the best advice he has from his experience in the long time he has served the people of County Kildare in this House. I add my support to his nomination for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: As a new Deputy, I echo the sentiments expressed by Deputies Martin Heydon and Patrick O'Donovan in regard to Deputy Bernard J. Durkan being an excellent facilitator for new Deputies through his knowledge of the procedures of this House and helping new Deputies learning the mechanisms of the Oireachtas. He does this on a cross-party basis. We need a Leas-Cheann Comhairle who will be generous with his time and who will include everybody.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan has a wealth of experience and we must all agree that he would bring his own individual style and personality to the House. He has an authoritative grasp of Standing Orders that would stand him in good stead in the Chair and ensure the smooth running of the House. He will be impartial and fair and I would like to see him as Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Ba mhaith liom tacú le hainmniúcháin an Teachta Seán Crowe mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle mar cheapaim go dtabharfaidh sé fuinneamh breise chuig an ról sin. Tuigfidh éinne a bhfuil aithne aige nó aici ar an Teachta Crowe thar na blianta sa Teach seo gur parlaiminteoir an-chothrom é agus go dtabharfaidh sé faoin obair go díchealleach, mar a rinne sé thar na blianta. Bheadh sé an-ábailta sa phost lárnach mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Mar a luaigh an Teachta Adams, tá an Teachta Crowe tar éis a bheith gafa thar na blianta le nithe móra sa pholaitíocht, go háirithe ina ról lárnach i bpróiseas na síochána sna 1990í. Tuigfidh éinne a bhfuil cuimhne acu ar na laethanta nua sin, go raibh ról lárnach aige ag déanamh iarrachta teacht timpeall ar choscanna a chuir an Stát i gcoinne Shinn Féin chun a dhéanamh cinnte de go mbeadh deis againn an próiseas síochána sin a phlé. D'eagraigh sé ardfheis speisiúil ina cheantar fein, i dTamhlacht, a rinne plé ar dhoiciméad rí-thábhachtach ag an am agus ó shin a leag an bhunchloch don phróiseas a tháinig ina dhiaidh agus bunchloch do Chomhaontas

Aoine an Chéasta.

Bheadh an Teachta Crowe an-mhaith mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Féach ar an stair atá aige sa Teach seo ó thoghadh ar dtús é i 2002 agus ó 2011 ar aghaidh. Bhí cur chuige an-mhaith agus an-dícheallach aige sa Teach agus ar na coistí ina ról mar pharlaiminteoir. Ghlac sé ról tábhachtach i bpáirtí Shinn Féin mar urlabhraí ar ghnónna éagsúla, go háirithe mar ionadaí coistí éagsúla thar lear thar cheann na Parlaiminte ar fad agus thar ceann na Dála. Duine é atá tar éis dul i dtaithe ar an áit seo agus tá an taithí cuí aige a bheadh mar bhuntáiste dúinn dá mbeadh sé mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle, ní dúinne mar Shinn Féin ach do na Teachtaí Dála ar fad sa Teach.

Molaim an t-ainmniúchán seo agus tá súil agam go mbeidh daoine in ann teacht salach ar na difríochtaí parlaiminte atá i gceist agus go mbeidh siad in ann vóta a chaitheamh leis an Teachta Seán Crowe.

Deputy Charlie McConologue: I join colleagues in recommending Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. His record goes before him and is well known by many Deputies. His experience is not only in the domestic Parliament; he also has served in the European Parliament where he gained tremendous experience of European affairs. He has distinguished himself in all of these roles and was previously chairperson of Donegal County Council, which role gives a good grounding for the position of Leas-Cheann Comhairle in the Dáil. I, therefore, highly recommend him as the Ceann Comhairle's assistant and to work with him to lead this Parliament. He will carry out the role to the best of his ability and to great effect if he is chosen by the House. I urge all Members to choose him.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I advocate support for Deputy Seán Crowe who has all the abilities to be a very good Leas-Cheann Comhairle. He is a human rights advocate, both nationally and internationally. I first met him in the late 1970s at the beginning of the drugs epidemic in this city and the emergence of drug barons. He stood with communities, addicts and parents to defend them against the scourge which was taking over the city at the time. He was also a very high profile activist in the H-Block-Armagh Prison protests in 1980-81, standing with the prisoners in their quest for justice. Internationally, he has been very supportive of human rights for the Palestinian people, both in the West Bank and Gaza, and has visited both places to promote human rights and propose a settlement. He has also been very helpful in the Basque territory where people were discriminated against in their quest for national recognition and rights. He served on the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, of which I was also part, and travelled into loyalist and Unionist areas of the Six Counties where he negotiated with communities to promote the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement for the benefit of all. I support him wholeheartedly as he would make a wonderful Leas-Cheann Comhairle. As a human rights activist, he has the ability to fill the post.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): I join my colleagues in supporting Deputy Bernard J. Durkan's nomination. A common theme in the House today is that there are many Members who are new and have only come into the House in the past few years. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan is a font of wisdom and there is very little of what goes on in the House with regard to public policy about which he does not know. He has been very gregarious and kind to all of us and has shared his knowledge of things we did not understand when we first came into the House. There is probably not a position to which he has not taken with gusto in his 25 or 27 years in the House and it would be fitting to see him in the role as he has chaired many sessions in the past few years.

Deputy Maria Bailey: I support the nomination of Deputy Bernard J. Durkan for numerous reasons. His vast experience has been mentioned, but I support him as a new Deputy. It can be quite daunting to come through the doors of Leinster House, but Deputy Bernard J. Durkan's door is always open if one needs advice or guidance. We were neighbours for my first couple of weeks in Leinster House and, while people often jokingly say they will give someone a cup of sugar if they call in, Deputy Bernard J. Durkan would give them a bag of sugar. As politicians, we are very precious about our own seats, but he has given me his seat many times. He is always magnanimous and hugely helpful to Deputies of all parties. He is also very respectful of the role of politicians. It is, therefore, with great pride and humility that I support him today. He has been a politician for longer than I have been alive and his wealth of experience and knowledge has been very helpful to many in this Chamber of all parties.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I wish all candidates the very best. I am not sure how many swing voters there are in the Chamber because from listening to the contributions made it seems everyone is more or less committed. Last night I was going to suggest a last-minute leaflet drop around Leinster House to see if we could swing the adequate numbers required.

I express my support for Deputy Bernard J. Durkan. I came into the House as a fresh-faced, young, inexperienced Deputy in 2011 and there was a big gang of us at the time, but Deputy Bernard J. Durkan was brilliant with all of us. He showed us around and advised us and was always generous with his time. More importantly, he sees the Parliament as being at the very centre of everything we do as Deputies and holds it above all else in the performance of our duties. He is a man who would do an excellent job as Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I agree with the sentiments expressed on the importance of there being a balance between the Government and the Opposition in the positions of Ceann Comhairle and Leas-Cheann Comhairle. For these reasons, I believe Deputy Bernard J. Durkan is the best candidate for the job. If there is deadlock at the end of the vote, agreement should be reached on the way forward.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: One would think all of the new Deputies were on one side of the floor, but there are some new Deputies on this side of the House, too. It is with great honour that I support my colleague, Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher, in his nomination to be Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I wish all those who have put their names forward the best of luck, but I support my gentleman, Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher, who has given of his time in directing me and my newly elected colleagues on the workings of the Dáil. I find him to be fair and a person needs to be fair to take the hot seat. He needs to be able to listen in conducting our business. We are not always the most orderly of people, but the chair has to be impartial and fair to all those who contribute. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher is best positioned to do this.

Question put: "That Deputy Seán Crowe be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 33; Níl, 106.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>

<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>
<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>
	<i>English, Damien.</i>
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>
	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>
	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>

	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>
	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
	<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>

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	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Carol Nolan and Aengus Ó Snodaigh; Níl, Deputies Regina Doherty and Michael Moynihan.

Question declared lost.

Question put: "That Deputy Mattie McGrath be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 20; Níl, 117.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>
<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>
<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>
<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>

<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>
	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
	<i>Curran, John.</i>
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>
	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>
	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
	<i>English, Damien.</i>
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>
	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>
	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
	<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>

	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>
	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>
	<i>O'Keefe, Kevin.</i>
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>

Dáil Éireann

	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Michael Collins and Michael Healy-Rae; Níl, Deputies Jim Daly and Regina Doherty.

Question declared lost.

Question put: “That Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 52; Níl, 83.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>

<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>
<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>
<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>
	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>

Dáil Éireann

	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Michael Moynihan and Fiona O'Loughlin; Níl, Deputies Jim Daly and Regina Doherty.

Question declared lost.

Question put: "That Bernard J. Durkan be elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 49; Níl, 89.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>

<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>

<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>

30 January 2008

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Jim Daly and Regina Doherty; Níl, Deputies Michael Moynihan and Fiona O'Loughlin.

Question declared lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: That means we have failed to elect a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I suggest it is perhaps now a matter for the party Whips to discuss how we move forward. There has been a very significant delay to date in electing a Leas-Cheann Comhairle and I express the personal hope that the matter could be attended to by the interested parties as a matter of some urgency.

Energy Bill 2016 [Seanad]: Second Stage

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I commend the Energy Bill 2016 to the House. On my first occasion addressing the energy part of my portfolio in this House, I am pleased to have this opportunity to present the Energy Bill 2016. Today, as everyone is aware, we will have the Second Stage debate on the Bill. This is the time to have a general discussion about the Bill and its various individual elements which I will set out later.

I will open the debate by describing the sections of the Bill in detail and regarding its main provisions set out some background and why they are needed. Given that there are quite a number of sections and that many of them are quite technical legislative updates, I hope my approach will help us all focus on the Bill's new and important elements.

Since this is my first time addressing an energy issue in the House, I first intend to take the opportunity to refer to the energy and climate change aspects of the programme for Government. I, as Minister, and the newly-framed Department face into a very challenging period as our remit will expand to include what is arguably one of the biggest global issues, that of climate change. Our programme states that "climate change is the global challenge of our generation, and requires radical and ambitious thinking to respond to a changing environment." The policy context is both domestic and international. Domestically, our climate change and energy policy frameworks have been set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act and the White Paper on energy. The programme for Government sets out the key sectoral and cross-government priorities that will drive the Department's agenda for the period ahead. As we implement the programme for Government and the White Paper, balancing the three pillars of energy policy - sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness - will continue to be the key challenge in the energy sector and for all of us as policy-makers. In the coming years, Ireland's energy system will be driven by the need to decarbonise towards a more sustainable future, thus addressing climate change challenges.

Having reiterated our energy and climate policy challenges and noting that the Bill does not deal with these big picture issues, I will devote my remarks to the Bill's subject matter. The Bill was on the previous Government's legislative programme from summer 2014 when it was

entitled the Energy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. Its subject matter is in the public domain since then. It is designed to revise, consolidate, update and expand energy legislation in a number of certain, specific and well defined areas. Given that intention, it should be clear that the Bill does not set out to revise or recast the energy regulatory framework in an all-embracing or comprehensive way. Whether such wider and more comprehensive reform is required will be addressed by the review of the legal and institutional framework for the regulation of electricity and natural gas markets, including the Commission for Energy Regulation's mandate. The review is a specific commitment in the White Paper.

The Bill is important in its own right and in the overall context of the further development of Ireland's energy regulatory sector. The provisions on administrative sanctions and on the wholesale electricity market are major and significant elements, as I will explain later. There are many sections in the Bill. There are four elements in it that perhaps we need to focus on, namely, a new administrative sanctions regime for the Commission of Energy Regulation, CER; a change to the legal definition of an all-Ireland wholesale electricity market, the single electricity market, known as SEM; a provision for access rights along the route of the Galway-Mayo telecommunications duct; and the Commission for Energy Regulation's renaming as the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities, CRU. As Members will note, there are plenty of acronyms involved in this portfolio, particularly in the energy area. The Bill also contains amendments to specific provisions of existing energy legislation to make enforcement more robust and to restate in primary legislation provisions currently in secondary legislation.

Before I proceed to outline the detail of the Bill, section by section, I will spend some time explaining the background to the four elements I listed, namely, the administrative sanctions regime, the CER's renaming, the change in the statutory definition of SEM and the provision for access rights along the Galway-Mayo telecommunications duct. I will start with the proposed administrative sanctions regime for the CER. The CER's role has expanded considerably since its establishment in 1999. For a regulator to be effective in the performance of its duties it should have available to it sufficient powers to ensure that its decisions, properly taken in accordance with the law and the objectives of EU and national energy legislation, are implemented. The International Energy Agency, in its most recent review of Ireland's energy policy in 2012, stated that Ireland should ensure that the CER's powers are enhanced as necessary in order to ensure that market and competition rules are strictly adhered to and that the interests of consumers are protected. The 2013 Forfás report on sectoral regulation stated that regulatory sanctions are an essential feature of a regulatory enforcement toolkit and are central to achieving compliance.

1 o'clock

Currently, the CER possesses a range of enforcement powers, including powers to issue directions, determinations, fines in certain limited circumstances and to revoke licences. However, it is missing an effective range of administrative sanctions below the ultimate measure of licence revocation. The Bill provides the CER with enhanced powers of investigation and specifically permits the imposition of administrative sanctions, including financial penalties, in respect of defined "improper conduct" by energy undertakings. It sets out a defined and structured process, both for the investigation of such improper conduct and for the imposition of sanctions. I will elaborate on this regime further when setting out the provisions of the Bill section by section.

The second main element of the Bill is the change to the existing statutory definition of the

all-island wholesale electricity market, also known as the single electricity market or SEM. This change will facilitate the North-South regulators' market re-design project which will bring the SEM into full EU compliance. Compliance with the new EU cross-border trading electricity codes to enable closer integration with European electricity markets is the responsibility of the Governments of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. As current SEM rules are not compatible with the new EU trading codes, both Governments have tasked the SEM committee with developing new market arrangements for the single electricity market. The I-SEM project is well under way and the new market is expected to be completed by the end of 2017.

The third main element of the Bill concerns provisions to ensure the requisite legal certainty in respect of rights of access along the route of the telecommunications duct alongside the Galway-Mayo gas pipeline. The Department funded the installation of a telecommunications duct alongside the Galway-Mayo gas pipeline and the intention is to place fibre optic cable in the duct to bring broadband infrastructure to the west. Gas Networks Ireland has taken grants of easement by deeds executed by landowners on the route. The Bill includes provision to ensure the requisite legal certainty in respect of rights of access along the route of the telecommunications duct. Additional legislation in respect of the telecommunications duct is being drafted and will be introduced on Committee Stage. During the briefing on the Bill, we explained to the Members opposite the need for that. I do not have the amendments as of yet, but we are quite happy to update Members on progress if they require it. As soon as we have the amendments, we will let the Members opposite have copies.

The fourth and last element of the Bill is the proposed change of name of the CER. As its remit now includes the economic regulation of water, it is appropriate and timely to change its name from the Commission for Energy Regulation to the commission for the regulation of utilities, or the CRU.

I propose now to outline the provisions of the Bill. The Bill consists of 31 sections. Section 1 of Part 1 contains standard provisions concerning the Short Title and commencement. Section 2 is also a standard provision which provides for a number of definitions for ease of reference. Section 3 provides for the repeal of a small number of redundant legislative provisions including the repeal of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1946, which is now obsolete. Section 3 also provides for the repeal of section 27 of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 and section 13(5) of the Gas Act 2002, which provisions are deemed obsolete. Section 4 of Part 2 provides for the renaming of the CER as previously explained.

Section 5 of Part 3 amends the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 to allow for the imposition of administrative sanctions on energy undertakings for improper conduct as follows. A new section 55 provides for a range of definitions including a definition of "improper conduct". A new section 56 provides for the appointment of inspectors to carry out investigations on behalf of the CER. A new section 57 provides that the CER can carry out an investigation for the purpose of the performance of any of the functions conferred on it by the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 Act or by any other Act of the Oireachtas. The commission may cause such investigations as it thinks fit to be carried out in order to identify any improper conduct by an energy undertaking. It also provides for the terms of the appointment of an inspector to carry out any such investigation. A new section 58 sets out the powers of an inspector to enter and search premises and vehicles, carry out examinations or inquiries and require the production of documents. If necessary, an inspector may be accompanied by a garda and seek a warrant from the District Court to enable entry to a relevant premises or private dwelling. An inspector may conduct an oral hearing on his or her own initiative or if requested to do so by the energy undertaking.

A new section 59 sets out the actions to be taken by an inspector on completion of an investigation, including the drafting of a report. An inspector cannot make any recommendation as to any sanction to be imposed. A new section 60 sets out the actions to be taken by the commission on receipt of the inspector's final report into the relevant improper conduct. The commission must review and evaluate the report and the level of sanction to be imposed is a matter for the commission not the inspector. If it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that improper conduct is occurring or has occurred, the commission may impose either a major or a minor sanction. It may also request the inspector either to carry out a further investigation or to take no further action. Before making a decision, the commission may conduct an oral hearing or invite the energy undertaking to make submissions on the report.

Any financial penalty imposed by the commission is subject to confirmation by the High Court, which can confirm it, reject it or impose a different sanction. Sections 61 to 65, inclusive, deal with court procedures in respect of sanctions imposed by the commission. A new section 61 provides that a decision by the commission to impose a major sanction will not take effect unless the decision is confirmed by the High Court. Section 62 provides that a specified body may appeal a major sanction to the High Court which may confirm or cancel the commission's decision or replace it with such decision as it considers appropriate. Section 63 provides that if the specified body does not appeal the decision of the commission to impose a sanction within the period allowed for such appeal, the commission must apply to the High Court to have its decision confirmed. Section 64 provides for an appeal by the commission or the specified body to the Court of Appeal on a point of law and sets out that any financial penalties shall be paid into or disposed of for the benefit of the Exchequer. The commission may recover its costs as a simple contract debt in any court. Section 65 includes a list of matters that must be considered by the commission or the court prior to the confirmation of a major sanction. Section 66 provides that the commission's power to impose administrative sanctions is without prejudice to any other powers of the commission under this or any other Act. Section 67 sets out the provisions relating to the holding of oral hearings by both an inspector and the commission.

Part 4 provides for further amendments to the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 in relation to the SEM element I have previously explained. The SEM is the single electricity market with which sections 7 and 8 of Part 4 deal. These sections refer to the arrangements in this State and in Northern Ireland, signed by both Governments in 2006, relating to the establishment and operation of a single, competitive wholesale electricity market. This is referred to as the "gross mandatory pool". Sections 7 and 8 provide for an amendment to the existing definition of the wholesale electricity arrangements in section 2 of the 1999 Act.

They also include a transitional provision to allow the regulators to continue operating under the current SEM definition while developing the new EU-compliant market rules in preparation for the going live of the new I-SEM market in late 2017.

Sections 9 to 16, inclusive, provide for various amendments to provisions in the 1999 Act. Section 9 provides for the service of notices by electronic means or fax. Section 10 provides for timelines for the prosecution of offences under section 6 of the 1999 Act. Section 11 provides for a clarification that reference to "final customer" is inclusive of electricity and natural gas. Section 12 replaces the reference to a monetary amount in the 1999 Act with a reference to a class A fine in line with the Fines Act 2010 and increases the existing penalty provisions for offences in respect of unregistered gas installers and electrical contractors. Section 13 makes minor amendments regarding the terms and duration of the appointment of authorised officers by the commission and provides for the replacement of a penalty provision of £1,500 and up to

12 months of imprisonment with a reference to a class A fine.

Section 14 provides that the commission may specify in a licence to supply electricity such standards of performance and quality as it determines ought to be achieved by the licenceholder. This places a statutory obligation on the licenceholder to achieve and comply with those standards of performance. Failure to comply comes under the definition of “improper conduct” and is, therefore, open to investigation and application of a sanction by the commission.

Section 15 provides for the formal closure of the carbon levy account. This addresses the Comptroller and Auditor General’s concern that the existing text of the Bill did not appear to provide for the formal closure of the account. Section 16 places a statutory obligation on the CER to produce an energy strategy statement in respect of its energy remit.

Part 5 relates to amendments to the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002. Sections 17 and 18 are technical amendments. Section 17 provides that “the Act of 2002” is a reference to the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002. Section 18 corrects a typographical error in section 13(1) of the 2002 Act.

Section 19 amends the text of section 16 of the 2002 Act in respect of licences for natural gas in order to enable the commission to specify in licences such standards of performance and quality as it determines ought to be achieved. This places a statutory obligation on the relevant licenceholder to achieve and comply with those standards of performance, with failure to comply coming under the definition of “improper conduct”.

Part 6 relates to the restatement of Regulation of Energy Market Integrity and Transparency, REMIT, penalties. Penalties for breaches of REMIT are currently provided by way of secondary legislation, namely, SI 480 of 2014, which provides for penalties on conviction of €50,000 for an individual and €500,000 for a body corporate, the maximum limit that may be imposed under secondary legislation. This should be replaced by a more robust and appropriate sanctions model on a par with penalties in neighbouring jurisdictions. Section 20 now allows for increased penalties of up to €250,000 for an individual and up to 10% of turnover for a body corporate.

Part 7 amends the Sustainable Energy Act 2002. Section 21 provides that any reference in this Part to the “Act of 2002” is to be read as a reference to the Sustainable Energy Act 2002. Section 22 amends that Act in respect of Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, board appointments. It removes the requirement that each year on 1 May, the three longest-serving members must retire. Instead, it provides that members may be appointed for a period not exceeding five years, subject to a maximum of ten years. Section 23 obliges the authority to submit its annual report to the Minister within six months of the end of the financial year.

Part 8 amends the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007 to provide for greater flexibility by the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA, in the administration of the biofuels obligation scheme. Section 24 provides that a reference to the “Act of 2007” is to be read as a reference to the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007. Section 25 amends that Act by inserting into it a new subsection 43A to provide arrangements regarding the exchange of oil data, which will enable the Department to cross-check data received by it and thereby ensure that all oil importing companies are correctly paying the NORA levy.

Section 26 provides for a definition of the term “reporting period” in the NORA Act. Section 27 enables NORA to make a determination as to the deadlines to apply to biofuel obligation

account holders for submitting the relevant information; the closing date for receipt of applications for biofuel obligation certificates for an obligation period; and the timing and dates within an obligation period for biofuel obligation account holders to apply for certificates.

Section 28 removes the specified deadlines for NORA to issue notices and provides that NORA shall make a determination specifying the date by which it will issue a statement on any revised deadline and that this shall be published on its website. Section 29 amends the 2007 Act to increase the deadline under section 44 from 35 to 75 days.

The final Part of the Bill is Part 9, which provides for miscellaneous amendments to existing legislation. Section 30 amends subsection 72(4)(b) of the Registration of Title Act 1964 to clarify that existing telecommunications deeds of easement shall have the same legal effect that section 72 of the Act already confers on deeds of easement for gas pipelines. Section 31 provides for the correction of a typographical error in section 6 of the Continental Shelf Act 1968.

I ask the House to note that I intend to table a number of amendments on Committee Stage to include further amendments to the Registration of Title Act 1964 and some minor amendments to the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 and the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002. These amendments relate to the Galway-Mayo pipeline.

I have outlined the main provisions of the Bill and provided additional detail on the sections. I hope that this level of detail and my description of the background to the four particular elements of the Bill will be of some assistance to Deputies in drafting amendments to its provisions. Even reading out the various sections shows that this is complex legislation. As I have told Members privately, my officials are available to them to assist in drafting whatever amendments they may wish to introduce on Committee Stage. I look forward to an informed and meaningful debate and to working constructively with Deputies from all sides of the House. Their input will help in advancing and improving the Bill's individual provisions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): Deputy Dooley has approximately ten minutes but I understand that he will be sharing time. What does he propose to do with it?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: My intention is to pass on to the next Deputy, if I do not use all of the ten minutes.

I thank the Minister for introducing the Bill, the main provisions of which Fianna Fáil supports. It entails amendments to the energy Acts and a strengthening of secondary legislation. We welcome this. The Minister stated that this Bill was just a broad outline of how to address climate change but I hope that the House has an opportunity in the near future to address that important issue. A consensus is emerging among the State's citizens of the importance of reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. It falls to us to be radical in the approach we take. We must work very hard in this area. While there was much informed debate by previous Governments and Parliaments and much good work done, the targets now in place and the deadline we are ticking towards are such that we will really have to involve ourselves in a programme of action to ensure we meet our commitments. We can do that if we get the same kind of buy-in across the House.

The proposed legislation gives greater enforcement and sanctioning powers to the CER regarding wholesale electricity and gas market abuse, largely as a result of the 2011 remit regulation. As the Minister knows, the remit relates to wholesale energy products that introduce a market-monitoring framework to detect and prevent market abuse. If properly implemented, it

will ensure that the consumer is ultimately better served and has access to the cheapest electricity at a given time.

The all-island single electricity market, referred to by the Minister as the SEM, has existed since 2007. The interconnection between Ireland and Northern Ireland is particularly important from a Northern Ireland perspective. The North relies on electricity imports from the Twenty-six Counties to make up for its insufficient local electricity-generation capacity.

The Bill provides for an extended legal definition of the existing SEM in the Electricity Regulation Act 1999. This will enable decisions of both regulators, in the North and South, to develop new market rules for the SEM, known as the integrated SEM. We certainly have no shortage of acronyms. This development requires compliance with the new EU internal energy market rules, with an approaching enactment deadline. Obviously, therefore, it is important that the Bill be passed relatively quickly. Meanwhile, the integrated SEM will replace the existing SEM. This needs to happen by the end of 2017 owing to changes in the EU legislation designed to harmonise cross-border trading arrangements across all European electricity markets. While we do not have the single market across the Union just yet, obviously the passage of this legislation and other efforts will ensure we have a more open market for the trading of electricity, which, as I stated, can only benefit all the consumers in this State. As the Minister well knows, our energy costs in this country are quite high. This inhibits the attraction of foreign investment. Notwithstanding how well we have done, it certainly causes difficulties.

The potential for Brexit is a further complication. It may or may not transpire later this month following the referendum in the United Kingdom. The ESRI indicated in a recent report that the electricity market in Britain would remain independent of that of the rest of Europe in the event of an exit. It stated interconnection with Britain would leave Ireland vulnerable to any problems that might exist in terms of capacity within the British market. This would be of concern to the Government and those of us on this side of the House. Under these circumstances, the enhanced interconnection between Ireland and the rest of the European Union could be extremely costly from Ireland's perspective.

There are still some questions that remain for me. First, would the regulator have sufficient resources to carry out the investigations and impose the administrative sanctions, were they to arise as a result of the passage of this legislation? It would be interesting to know what increased resources the regulator has envisaged. Will they mean a cost to the State? Will the regulator generate them from existing revenue-generating capacity? Second, issues arise surrounding whether there will be a sufficient independent appeals mechanism in place to deal with the new powers afforded to the regulator. I am open to correction in saying that, under this Bill, any penalties subject to High Court confirmation can be appealed only by way of access to the courts. I would like some clarification on that. Has any consideration been given to an appeals mechanism within the existing structure, which mechanism would be applicable prior to recourse to the courts? As I understand it, different countries have different approaches in this regard. Should it also be possible to appeal against certain decisions without having to engage in a judicial review process?

My party is very concerned over the current high level of retail energy prices footed by consumers despite the collapse in the wholesale gas price regime. While there is some recovery in wholesale gas prices, we are still a long way from the peak we are all familiar with. There is clearly not an appropriate drop from the consumer's point of view. Customers are not seeing retail operators make the equivalent cuts in electricity and gas bills. Wholesale gas prices

decreased by 29% in 2015 but the retail equivalent was only 5%, amounting to a reduction in bills of approximately €50.

Retail electricity and gas prices still remain excessively higher than average energy prices across the European Union according to EUROSTAT. Ireland has the third highest prices among the 28 EU member states. This has an impact on our competitiveness and ability to attract foreign investment and retain our own small to medium enterprises, which depend so much on competitive energy costs to compete with other operators within the Union.

Any planned retail energy bill decreases will be negated by the planned PSO levy increase of more than 30% this October. This will see electricity bills go up even more. For consumers, it now costs approximately €200 more for a typical household electricity bill than five years ago. There has been a 21% increase in this particular period. Given the wholesale energy price trends, it is hard to fathom the extent to which the consumer is being fleeced here.

Large wholesale gas price reductions are not being passed on to the consumer. Wholesale gas prices are at a six-year low, driven by an abundant supply and a strong euro. Energy companies have failed to pass on decent reductions in wholesale energy costs to retail customers. Household gas and electricity retail prices fell by only 5% in 2015, as I stated.

The 2015 White Paper on energy states that CER has statutory responsibility to protect the interests of consumers and ensure prices are fair and reasonable. We would like to see greater involvement by the regulator in dealing with that. As one knows, the White Paper also states it would enhance consumer protection and market monitoring, ensure the competitive markets are delivering for all customers and ensure that energy suppliers include additional information on their customer bills, including information on energy usage and how it compares to that of other customers. The litmus test of this rhetoric will be to see the plight of consumers addressed with real action.

The regulatory regime must be reformed and empowered to take account of the impact of current retail prices being foisted by energy providers on consumers, thus affecting competitiveness. Key reforms include permitting CER to investigate competitive practices in the energy sector and allowing for sanctions against energy companies where they are shown to be engaging in what can only be described as anti-competitive practices. The ultimate litmus test of this legislation is whether the regulator's enhanced powers will enable it to tackle wholesale market abuse. Energy companies need to be brought to account over prices charged, particularly those charged to the household customer.

In 2014 in the United Kingdom, the energy regulator wrote to the largest power suppliers in Britain seeking an explanation for customers as to why a decline in wholesale gas and electricity prices had not led to lower fuel bills. The question must be asked as to why this has not happened in this jurisdiction. One must ask what the energy regulator is doing about the insufficient price decrease. Perhaps it would be helpful if the Minister engaged in this process and reported back to us in due course. No credible reason has been given.

I look forward to discussing the main provisions of the Bill on Committee Stage. I thank the Minister for his offer to engage fully with spokespersons and Members on the other side of the House to ensure any amendments will be dealt with in a less adversarial way than might have been the case heretofore.

Debate adjourned.

Adjournment Debate Matters

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 23(3) and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy David Cullinane - an urgent and targeted response to the Central Statistics Office's quarterly household survey for the first quarter of 2016, which shows unemployment in the south east at 12.5%; (2) Deputy James Browne - issues recently raised by the Mental Health Commission in inspection reports; (3) Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoiláin - resourcing and providing personnel to the Cavan-Monaghan drug and alcohol awareness services; (4) Deputy Joan Collins - the number of beds available in the Brú Aimsir hostel in County Dublin and when more will be provided; (5) Deputy Carol Nolan - the need for a Gaelscoil in north County Dublin; (6) Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív - the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the delay in upgrading the N59 from Galway to Clifden and resolving the issues with the Oughterard-Maam Cross and the Maam Cross-Clifden sections of the road; (7) Deputy Michael Harty - concerns over the curtailment of home health hours and home care packages and resulting increased costs elsewhere due to increased hospital admissions and nursing home placements; (8) Deputy Dessie Ellis - funding for the youngballymun project; (9) Deputy Mick Wallace - commencement of the construction of a 36 m building beside Saint Mary's church on City Quay, Dublin 2, and its impact; (10) Deputy Clare Daly - the crisis in the maternity services, given recent maternal and baby deaths; (11) Deputy Bríd Smith - curbing excessive profiteering by waste management companies, given plans to increase charges by 300% plus; (12) Deputy Ruth Coppinger - the decision by the Health Service Executive not to provide the Orkambi drug to cystic fibrosis sufferers on cost grounds; (13) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett - the availability of necessary drugs on the basis of price under the drug payment scheme and the medical card scheme; (14) Deputy Maurice Quinlivan - to ask the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide an explanation as to why the Citizens Information Board has suspended funding to MABS in Limerick with the result that staff may not receive their wages, and if he will give an undertaking to ensure funding for the service is maintained and that staff will continue to be paid; and (15) Deputy Hildegarde Naughton - the continued operation of the dual energy X-ray absorptiometry scanning unit at Galway University Hospital in Merlin Park and the plan to ensure persons in the west will benefit from this service. The matters raised by Deputies Maurice Quinlivan, Richard Boyd Barrett, Hildegarde Naughton and James Browne have been selected for discussion.

Delivering Sustainable Full Employment: Statements

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I welcome the opportunity to address the House on the important issue of delivering sustainable full employment and getting people back to work. A Programme for a Partnership Government is ambitious and it is our ambition to help to create 200,000 additional jobs by 2020, including 135,000 jobs outside Dublin. We also want to reduce the unemployment rate to 6% and our target this year is to add 50,000 new jobs. We have made a good start, with more than 15,000 new jobs being created in the first three months of 2016.

In early 2012 the first Action Plan for Jobs was launched. At the time the unemployment rate was above 15%. In May this year it fell to 7.8%. Some 155,000 more people are in employment today than in 2012. This surpasses the original target of having an extra 100,000

people at work by the end of 2016. The Government is committed to sustaining this rate of job creation and delivering sustainable full employment by 2020.

I propose to address the Action Plan for Jobs, one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The objective has been to rebuild the economy based on enterprise, talent, innovation and exports. The Action Plan for Jobs is working and employment continues to grow strongly. In the year to the end of March 2016 it grew in 12 of the 14 economic sectors, with the largest employment increases recorded in the tourism and hospitality sectors, where it increased by 10,500 jobs; construction where it increased by 9,500 jobs; and administrative and support service activities, where it increased by 6,400 jobs. These sectors were hard hit by the recession and the new jobs being created are across all skill and qualification levels.

The enterprise agencies of my Department, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the local enterprise offices or LEOs, have been pivotal in addressing the jobs challenge in recent years. Employment in agency-supported companies increased by 22,000 in 2015 and 192,000 people are now employed directly in Enterprise Ireland-supported companies. Enterprise Ireland also supports approximately 200,000 indirect jobs in the wider economy. These jobs are supported by purchases of raw materials and services in the local economy by exporting firms. Total direct and indirect employment in Enterprise Ireland-supported companies accounts for one in every five jobs in Ireland. IDA Ireland secured 213 new investments in 2015 and more than 187,000 people are now directly employed by client companies.

As I indicated, the numbers of people out of work have declined considerably since the peak in 2012. However, unemployment remains too high, particularly among young people. In May 2016 the rate of youth unemployment stood at 15%, down from 20.8% in 2015. This figure remains too high and the Government will focus on reducing it further.

The number of people who are long-term unemployed also declined in the past year, from 127,000 to 100,000, although this is still 100,000 too many. While the reduction of 27,000 is welcome, I am conscious that we must continue to focus our efforts on reducing the rate of long-term unemployment further.

Women are more likely to work part time than men, with women accounting for two thirds of part-time workers. In some cases, working part time is by choice and it is positive that these flexible opportunities are available. There are also people working part time who would work additional hours if available. Overall, part-time under-employment is falling, having declined by 13.7% in the year to March 2016. Under-employment among women fell by 15.1% in the past year. A further challenge is ensuring more women participate in the labour market. The overall participation rate in the labour force is 60%. For men, it is 67% and for women, 53%.

Stimulating regional growth is vital. In 2015 we developed eight regional action plans for jobs to ensure the recovery would be felt in every region. We set up a regional implementation committee to oversee and drive each plan. Membership is drawn from industry, local authorities, the enterprise agencies, the education sector and other key local and regional stakeholders. The overall target is to increase employment in each region by between 10% and 15% by 2020. We also want to reduce each region's unemployment rate to within 1% of the State average. Unemployment has declined significantly in all regions since 2012. According to the latest data from the Central Statistics Office, the mid-east region had the lowest unemployment rate, at 5.9%. The fastest growing regions in terms of employment in the past year were Dublin, the mid-west and the midlands.

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In 2015 almost two thirds of the new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland clients and more than half of the jobs in IDA Ireland-supported companies were outside Dublin. I want to give the message loud and clear that 20,000 jobs created in the past year were outside Dublin. Enterprise Ireland-supported companies created an additional 6,500 jobs outside Dublin last year. In 2015 the local enterprise offices delivered another strong performance, supporting the creation of over 3,500 new jobs. They also provided mentoring for 8,000 participants and training courses for 27,000 participants.

Initiatives such as the regional Action Plans for Jobs, the 2016 action plan and the ongoing work of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and local enterprise offices are an important part of our efforts to create jobs across the country. I will continue to roll out competitive regional funding initiatives that will deliver on the potential of local and regional strengths. The first progress reports on the implementation of the regional action plans will be completed and published in the second half of the year.

Innovation is at the heart of Government policy on enterprise. It plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining employment and attracting, developing and nurturing business. Our strategy, Innovation 2020, sets out our vision to become a global innovation leader. We want to see greater numbers of enterprises engaging in research and development and more enterprises progressing to a point where innovation is embedded as a key part of their business model. I will work with the Minister of State, Deputy John Halligan, to ensure that the Department's investments in research and development, through Science Foundation Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, are central to delivering jobs. SFI invests €160 million each year.

Getting people back to work is a key priority. The Action Plan for Jobs complements the Government's Pathways to Work strategy. The pathways strategy sets out actions to be taken in support of those who are currently unemployed. My Department and its agencies work primarily to create jobs but also to combat and reduce unemployment. The enterprise agencies protocol, overseen by my Department, ensures Government offices at local and regional level work together to maximise live register recruitment into enterprise agency client companies. This means that if there is a jobs announcement, the IDA representative, for example, will be the contact for the local Intreo office. They will work together to connect clients from the live register with job opportunities. Local enterprise offices, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta are all connected through this protocol, sharing best practices in a joined-up approach to job placement.

We will continue to work with colleagues across Government to ensure that all of those who want a job are equipped with the skills required. We will continue to focus on initiatives to help our young people to meet their potential. We will provide a diverse range of choices on leaving secondary education, a strategy that is regarded as a key success factor in countries with low levels of youth unemployment. Countries such as Austria and Germany provide a wide range of options from conventional higher education routes to high quality apprenticeships. The new apprenticeship programme provides new opportunities for our young people to find rewarding careers. It covers a wide range of sectors, such as manufacturing and engineering, tourism and sport, financial services, transport distribution and logistics.

The Action Plan for Jobs is working and we are making good progress towards our goal of deliverable, sustainable full employment. However, we cannot be complacent. We remain vulnerable to external shocks, such as Brexit, increases in oil prices and exchange rate movement. We must continue to work towards building a sustainable economy with sustainable jobs. This

is essential to generate the resources we need to provide better public services. Urban and rural communities that have not yet felt the benefits of our strengthening economy will be prioritised and enabled to realise their potential.

I have asked my Department to initiate the process to develop the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs. This will start in June. We will consult widely with external stakeholders over the coming months to gather the best ideas for job creation. I ask colleagues across the Chamber to bring any plans or good ideas from their local areas to me. While significant progress has been made, we will maintain our focus on getting people back to work. My priority is to deliver a business environment which enhances our competitiveness and supports sustainable enterprise and employment growth in all regions of Ireland.

Deputy Niall Collins: I welcome the opportunity to make a statement on jobs - an issue that is relevant to everybody in the country, employed or unemployed, business people and people trying to promote business.

The narrative in regard to job creation must change a little. We hear a lot of spin from government and claims about job creation but we must ensure the narrative around the issue recognises that jobs are created by entrepreneurs and business people, not the Government. The Government however does create the conditions that allow job creation to happen. It is wrong of the Government to take ownership of actions in terms of job creation when it is the people who take the risk in expanding their businesses who create the jobs and pay the wages of employees.

I welcome the fact that our economy is improving and that the trend is in the right direction but there are still more than 300,000 people on the live register and there is little comfort for the Government in that. The perfect economic storm we experienced must be seen as the backdrop to this issue. The economy has benefited from low interest rates, a favourable euro currency exchange rate with sterling and the dollar and historically low energy importation costs. However, we face stark challenges in regard to retaining existing jobs and attracting the establishment of businesses in the future. These challenges range from Brexit, declining competitiveness, infrastructure deficits, rising business costs, failed activation schemes, for example, JobBridge, to skills shortages. Previous governments have neglected job creation in the regions. We know that and the figures prove it. I represent the mid-west region and one only needs to talk to people in my neck of the woods to be made aware of the position. The figures issued by the CSO in recent days show this to be true.

The two-tier recovery has taken hold and has concentrated growth disproportionately. Fianna Fáil believes in a country where decent, hard working people can thrive, not just survive. We must recognise that people who are working must be able to thrive rather than just work to get by. While the latest CSO job figures are welcome, with unemployment under 8% nationally, challenges still exist regarding the type of jobs we have. We had debate in this House over the past two nights on many of the challenges that exist - zero-hour contracts, minimum wage and an acceptable living wage. It is unacceptable that more than a fifth, 21%, of Irish people live in jobless households. In some households, there is generational joblessness. The number of jobless households is almost double the EU average. The underlying precariousness of work must be addressed to deliver decent jobs with decent pay to enable workers to meet weekly financial commitments. This need too was underlined in debate over the past nights. People on zero-hour contracts cannot make any life plans and cannot enter any financial commitments.

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Fianna Fáil has consistently put forward a suite of measures to encourage entrepreneurship and domestic job creation, including a proposal for the most competitive entrepreneur CGT rate of any party and a proposal to end the tax inequity faced by the self-employed. SMEs continue to be choked for credit and there is a serious problem in that regard. Fianna Fáil has been relentless in advocating the creation of a State enterprise bank, by licensing the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to lend directly to businesses. That is something we will continue to pursue.

I want to mention the CSO quarterly national household survey, because it has some very stark figures. In the year to Q1 of 2016 there was a broad jobless rate of about 17% of the Irish work force, which includes the official number of unemployed at 179,500, in addition to the almost 80,000 persons on public activation schemes and 99,000 part-time workers who would like to have full-time work and who are categorised as underemployed. This brings the jobless rate up to 17%, a very high number which we need to keep in mind.

There is a two-tier recovery, with differences between the greater Dublin area and the east coast by comparison with the other regions. There has been a clear failure of Government policy in the context of trying to strike a balance between regions. Some 50% of all jobs created in the 12 months to Q4 of 2015 were in Dublin and it is worrying that three regions out of eight nationally, namely, the midlands, the south east and the south west, saw their unemployment rate increase in Q1 of 2016 compared to the previous quarter. While unemployment rates are lowest in the capital and the greater Dublin area, hovering between 6% and 7%, the rate is significantly higher in other regions, at 11.6% in the midlands, 12.5% in the south east and 12.2% in the west.

Some 50% of all IDA site visits from 2012-15 were in Dublin and 48.7% of total IDA jobs in 2014 were in Dublin and the eastern region. The midlands, north east and north west have been almost ignored, with the number of IDA jobs there accounting for just 2.3%, 2.5% and 3% of the total. The two-tier recovery is impacted by a lack of proper visits to those areas. Some 43% of Irish GDP is generated in Dublin. London can be compared to Dublin, being a capital city, but it accounts for 20% of the UK's total GDP. The Irish concentration on our capital is double this figure.

The long-term unemployed are a huge challenge. When we had full employment in this country there was still a significant cohort of people who were long-term unemployed. Some 100,600 citizens remain long-term unemployed, amounting to 54% of total unemployment, which is a huge challenge that has to be met.

A huge challenge is also coming our way in the shape of Brexit and we need a more active campaign to encourage Irish people living in Britain and British people living in this country to register to vote, which they can do before 7 June in time for the polling date of 23 June. The potential downside of Brexit is enormous. A report from George Lee yesterday dealt with the impact on farming and I am hearing this in my clinics, as we all are. Some people are trying to spin the idea that Ireland can benefit from more foreign direct investment and relocations from the city of London into this country but this is not supported by the ESRI and others. We have a high FDI concentration in this country but it does not flow into the studies relating to this issue. We can only lose if Brexit happens and the consequences for our farming and export industries are enormous.

We have an infrastructure deficit. The previous Government announced a capital invest-

ment programme which was largely inadequate in certain regions. In my own region and in my constituency, for example, a motorway from Limerick to Cork is hugely necessary and a motorway from Limerick to Waterford, to connect the mid-west region to Waterford and on to Rosslare, is also hugely important. There are many examples of deficits in our infrastructure which will severely hamper job creation.

I want to refer finally about activation schemes. The JobBridge scheme is to be scrapped and Fianna Fáil believes it should be replaced with a new model, which would offer better terms and conditions for interns seeking experience in the workplace. JobBridge has been exploitative and has been abused by too many. Whatever scheme is introduced it will have to take account of the downside experiences of the JobBridge scheme so that people are given the opportunity to get on the jobs ladder and better themselves.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I welcome the opportunity to participate in what I hope will be the first of many debates on jobs, and particularly sustainable jobs. Any discussion about sustainable jobs must include a discussion of what constitutes a sustainable labour market. We know the labour market is crucial in terms of creating sustainable communities and in terms of the economic, social, and cultural well being of the wider society.

According to data from the most recent quarterly national household survey for 2016, employment has increased by 2.4% in the year to the first quarter for 2016, which is welcome. This was an increase in total employment of almost 47,000 jobs, 31,000 of which were full-time and 16,300 part-time. This is an increase of 2.1% in full-time employment and of almost 4% of those in part-time jobs. While I welcome the increase in the numbers of people at work I do so cautiously. The Irish labour market is characterised by major problems with low pay, the proliferation of precarious work and increasing industrial unrest. Ireland now has the dubious distinction of having the second highest number of low-paid workers in the OECD. Contrary to the Government spin on the figures quoted, I find the high rate of increase in part-time jobs very worrying. I say this because all of the research shows that part-time workers make up a high percentage of those who are concentrated in low-paid employment sectors. They are also more vulnerable to exploitation, precariousness, low pay and what are termed “if and when” contracts.

Low pay and a weak architecture in respect of workers’ rights are bad for workers, bad for the economy, bad for communities and bad for society. Low pay puts enormous pressure on the State in terms of social transfers with the result that the State ends up supplementing the pay of vulnerable workers. In 2015 alone, the State spent a record €350 million on subsidising the income of thousands of families in low-paid work. The rapid rise in workers in receipt of family income supplement and other social transfers, at approximately 60% in recent years, is essentially topping up employers’ profit margins and highlights the extent to which workers and their families are at risk of poverty. This transfer of wealth from the State is in essence reproducing, year in and year out, huge profits for large companies who see nothing wrong with bullying and exploiting their workforces. In the retail sector Dunnes Stores tops the league table for the company with the highest number of workers in receipt of FIS. Unsurprisingly, Tesco, which is currently trying its best to rid itself of trade unions, is close behind in third position. Both companies are hugely profitable and could well afford to pay all their workers a decent wage.

Likewise in the hospitality sector, which avails of the Government’s 9% rate of VAT, we have a workforce that is overwhelmingly low paid and exposed to exploitation. This sector is now showing a significant increase in profits while the reduced VAT rate continues to cost the

Exchequer hundreds of millions of euro in lost revenue each year, yet employer representatives from this sector have repeatedly refused to engage with trade unions representing workers or with the WRC around the reinstatement of employment contract orders. Surely, in light of the reduced rate of VAT gifted to the sector, the Government has a responsibility to make the ongoing receipt of this rate conditional on the sector engaging with the WRC. Workers in the sector are entitled to decent pay and working conditions and I urge the Minister to raise this issue at Cabinet discussions on the forthcoming budget.

2 o'clock

When we talk about low pay, we must note the gender pay gap. Women represent 60% of those in low-paid employment, by which I mean employees who fall below an hourly threshold of €11.45. Research shows that women employees carry a 30% risk of low pay. This means that three in ten female employees are low paid. We know that low-paid female workers feature across all age groups but are more concentrated under the age of 40 years. The vast majority of women on low pay - 60% - are concentrated in just three sectors of employment: retail, which accounts for 24% of low-paid women; the accommodation and food sector, which accounts for 20%; and the health and social work sector, which accounts for 18%. It is interesting to note that the risk of being on low hourly pay rates declines as an employee's weekly hours increase. For example, just over half - 53% - of women working between one and 19 hours per week earn less than €11.45 per hour. One in two female employees on a temporary contract is on low pay, whereas just one in four women on a permanent contract is on low pay. This issue is highly important, given that the most recent data show the average earnings of low-paid female employees represent 55% of their household income. Overall, 34% of low-paid women provide the total earnings of their households, while 28% provide less than one quarter of household income. The concentration of low-paid female main earners in the bottom half of the income distribution ladder is of particular concern from a household income and living standards perspective. It has been noted that when public policy objectives in the labour market regulation area are extended beyond hourly rates of pay to include workers' living standards, the results point towards roles for various policy levers, including earnings but also, most importantly, access to decent public services, especially in the areas of health care, housing, affordable public transport and publicly supported child care.

I remind the Minister, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, the first female Minister for jobs since the foundation of the State, that as we celebrate the centenary of the 1916 Rising this year, she is following in the footsteps of Constance Markievicz who served as Minister for Labour. I would like to know what measures the Minister intends to introduce to deal with the issue of low pay among women and the gender pay gap. If low wages, low tax rates and low levels of labour protection were central to competitiveness, as is often claimed, Ireland would be leading the competitiveness league. Instead, we are well behind other small open economies such as Austria, Belgium and Finland which have far higher levels of wages, tax and robust protections for workers. Almost half of the workers in Ireland's indigenous economy work in low-wage sectors with high levels of precariousness such as the hospitality and retail sectors. This is well above the European average. At the same time, indigenous employment in the Irish manufacturing sector is approximately half what it is in comparable European economies. This means that we simply cannot generate the same levels of wages and wealth as those economies. As well as encouraging Irish businesses to move into high-wage and high-value sectors, we need to tackle Ireland's high levels of inequality, poverty and social exclusion which are hindering economic growth. I noted that our goal as legislators had to be the creation of sustainable jobs,

sustainable communities and a decent society. In this respect, the manner in which the labour market functions is of critical importance. Ongoing labour market restructuring is dramatically altering the life chances of a significant proportion of the population. This is having a direct impact on the standard of living of households. Therefore, I urge the Minister to look afresh at the many issues that contribute to the sustainability of the labour market as she begins work in her new portfolio.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Quinlivan, as ucht spás a thabhairt dom. It is important that we are accurate in our analysis of this issue. Obviously, there has been an increase in employment in recent years. We welcome this. It is also important to realise that 350,000 people remain on the live register, that 81,000 people are on job activation schemes and that during the term of the Fine Gael-Labour Party Government, a net total of 147,000 people emigrated. The number of people to whom such collateral damage has been caused is far greater than the number of jobs created in recent times.

The focus of the debate is on the delivery of full employment. Economically speaking, full employment is generally deemed to have been attained when the unemployment rate is between 3% and 4%. The lowest rate of unemployment recorded in this country was 3.7%. Fine Gael has set the bar for full employment at 6.4%. It seems that if one moves the goalposts, it is easier to win the game.

It is important to talk about economic sustainability in this context. Obviously, sustainability is about having balance within the economy. The economy crashed because so much of it was sucked up in construction, property development and finance. It is important to mention that 90% of exports from this economy come from foreign direct investment companies. The majority of corporation taxes come from a handful of foreign direct investment companies. We are not achieving the necessary balance between foreign direct investment and indigenous business such as that typically achieved in countries such as Denmark and Austria.

In recent years the vast proportion of inward investment - 70% in some years - was in Dublin and Cork at the expense of other regions. While there has been an improvement, to a large extent, it has been because there is very little space left in Dublin where rental prices are going through the roof. It is not necessarily the case that the Government is steering investment into the regions. I suggest investment is now taking place in the regions because the Dublin economy is grinding to a halt as far as opportunities for further growth are concerned.

The retail sector is a good barometer of how indigenous business is functioning. In Cork, Sligo and Athlone one fifth of all prime retail spots are vacant. The level of vacant retail space is 15% in Sligo, 10% in Cork and 18% in Athlone. Obviously, the use of retail space is nearly at capacity in Dublin. This is another example of the disparity between Dublin and the regions. Some 68,000 jobs have been created since the low point.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I appreciate that my time is up, but I remind the Chair that the Minister was given an additional seven minutes. I would greatly appreciate it if I could be given one more minute.

Approximately 68,000 jobs have been created in Dublin since 2011. In the same period some 8,000 jobs were created in the mid-west, while just 1,600 were created in the west. We

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have an economy that is phenomenally lopsided. It is really important for the Government to get to grips with the need to achieve a balance in that regard. No part of the State has reached peak levels of employment. Employment in Dublin is approximately 4% short of peak levels. Employment in the mid-west, the Border region and the west is approximately 12% lower than it was in 2007. I mention this to point to the massive difference.

I will conclude by speaking about the improvements that need to be made. I ask the Government to prioritise investment, the level of which fell from €9 billion to approximately €3 billion during the tenure of Fine Gael and the Labour Party. Investment is really important if we are to rebalance the economy. We also need to make sure we have public banking systems that are empowered to deliver credit to small businesses around the country. This includes the credit unions which have a better geographical footprint than the banks.

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Chathaoirleach, as ucht am breise a thabhairt dom.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: If Deputy Peadar Tóibín had not spoken, the Minister might have been thinking that the Limerick Deputies were ganging up on her. This is the third contribution to be made by a Deputy who represents a Limerick constituency.

I am pleased to participate in the debate on this important subject. I welcome the reduction in the rate of unemployment, which stood at 15% when my party joined the last Government but now stands at less than 8%. In addition to focusing on the decrease in the rate of unemployment which is a very positive development, it is important to say there has been a significant increase in the number of actual jobs. The figures for areas outside Dublin mentioned by the Minister are also to be welcomed because they show that there is some balance in the growth, despite the point made by Deputies Peadar Tóibín and Niall Collins that some regions still need support. It is important that we maintain a strong focus on ensuring development is balanced. For that reason, I was delighted to be present at the launch of the mid-west jobs action plan a couple of months ago. The regional jobs action plans are really important. They need to be implemented and the targets set in them need to be reached. It is important that the specific targets for each region are built on their strengths. When the Minister is responding at the end of the debate, she might talk about how these aspects are being monitored to ensure the individual regional jobs action plans are being delivered on. That is really important and is something that needs to be monitored.

One of the reasons my region in particular has had strong growth is because of the interaction between the educational institutions and the job creation targets. In Limerick, we have the University of Limerick, Limerick IT, Mary Immaculate College and the colleges of the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. There has been a very strong connection between opportunities for employment growth and the educational institutions. That is a vital factor. I pay tribute to Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and the local enterprise offices because there has been a strong sense of working together to anticipate need, such as putting on specific courses designed to support new jobs coming into the region. That is certainly my experience in my region.

There are programmes such as Springboard, which was under my Department when I was the Minister for Education and Skills. It means people who have a skill which no longer has job opportunities can be retrained. They can be retrained in areas such, as IT or wherever there are job opportunities. That is a very good programme which has a high record of employment for the people who participate in it.

Concentrating on sectors has been positive. Tourism, for example, with the reduction in the VAT rate, has been an area of strong growth. However, I support the point made by Sinn Féin Deputies that there are still many on low wages in the tourism sector and in other sectors. Continuing to increase the minimum wage is going to help in that regard. I am not going to rehearse last night's debate but we increased the minimum wage twice during the lifetime of the last Government and that progress needs to continue. It also needs to continue in the context of the high rate of low pay among female workers which was an issue raised by the Minister and by Deputy Quinlivan. All of those areas are ones in which we need constant improvement, particularly with regard to the minimum wage.

I wish to focus on people who are at risk of unemployment. I am talking about people in situations of intergenerational unemployment or people who do not aspire to go to a college but who need opportunities. I am very proud of the fact that we were able to set up the Apprenticeship Council and start the beginnings of new apprenticeships. I have the report of the Apprenticeship Council here. Some 86 areas were identified as possibilities for new apprenticeships and 25 of those were prioritised to be rolled out over the next year in areas such as manufacturing and engineering, tourism and sport, financial services, IT, transport, distribution and logistics and business administration and management. That is under way now and will provide real opportunities for choice for young people. The Minister mentioned the educational options available in Germany, Austria and so on. We need those kinds of options.

We also need to continue to increase the number of apprenticeships in the traditional construction area. That went up by approximately 40% last year. It needs to continue to go up because, as the economy recovers, we need tradesmen and tradeswomen in our economy. We also need to encourage people who have gone abroad to come back to Ireland to work. There are many people with construction experience and trades who are working abroad who can, and should, come back to Ireland.

I contrast that with a time when the economy was beginning to grow and we were getting close to what was described as full employment, although I take the point that was made that it is not actually full employment. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment at the time was Mary Harney of the Progressive Democrats. I remember her going off to countries thousands of miles away to try to attract workers to come to work in Ireland. At the same time, there were young people living in my constituency who had dropped out of school early and were simply being paid the dole, without any effort to retrain them or give them the skills that would give them opportunities of jobs. As the economy grows again, we must not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of going off to look for workers in other parts of the world, apart from the Irish people we want to bring home. I am not saying that people should not have free movement and come here if they have special skills. I am talking about educating and training young people in Ireland to be able to take jobs in their own country. That is why the turnaround in the Department of Social Protection led by Deputy Joan Burton was very important because she turned it into a Department that was not just paying out money but was actually giving people opportunities to go on training or education schemes or get in to work. That is why the Intreo offices are really important.

Training programmes have played a part. Even in our own manifesto, we said that we would phase out JobBridge. I know that it has been the subject of criticism from various sides of the House. There are other schemes such as community employment schemes and so on that have given real opportunity to people to get training in their own communities and to support community organisations and we need to acknowledge the importance of those schemes. Deputy

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Quinlivan will know very well St. Munchin's Community Centre, King's Island Community Centre, Moyross Community Centre, Southill Area Centre and Our Lady of Lourdes Community Services Group, in which people are working. In St. Munchin's, for example, which Deputy Quinlivan would be very familiar with, people are able to move on to real jobs in the social economy and set up their own small businesses as a result of what happens in the centre. We need to build on that and support our communities through supporting these centres. There are problems with some of the schemes but there have certainly been positive opportunities. I have seen people go from no hope of employment to getting a real job or a self-employed job as a result of these opportunities.

There are a number of opportunities in other sectors, such as the arts. I know that there has been a response to the fact that the arts has not got a junior Minister and is in a very big Department. There are very good job opportunities in the area of the arts that we need to develop.

Over the last two evenings, we have had the opportunity to speak about workers' rights and ensuring people are protected from low pay and exploitation. I do not wish to go back over what I said on that but it is really important that, as the number of jobs grows, there are properly paid jobs and people are treated properly. The Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Pat Breen, said in his speech on Tuesday that the latest CSO figures show that the number of casual and part-time workers is continuing to fall and that in the year to April 2016, the number of such workers fell by 8.3%, or, in real figures, 5,798. He also mentioned that figures for part-time under-employment were down. We need to focus on those areas as well so that people have the opportunity to have full-time jobs where they are available for full-time jobs. There are many casual jobs now in the economy and we need to ensure we continue to make progress in that area as well.

I am glad of the opportunity to participate in this debate. I believe there are many opportunities to continue to develop the economy and job opportunities. My main point is that we want that to be inclusive. We do not want to have a sector in our society and in our communities that is left out of opportunities for employment. We need to bring all of the strands together, including education, training, job opportunities and all of the support structures to ensure that those people are included in a growing economy and a developing society.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): I call Deputy Bríd Smith. You have ten minutes. Are you sharing your time?

Deputy Bríd Smith: Deputy Mick Barry is going ahead of me.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): That is not a problem. Are you taking five minutes each?

Deputy Mick Barry: That is correct. Yesterday one of the largest trade unions in the State published a very significant report on the issue of wage levels in this country. The report found that Ireland is now a low-wage economy. It found that there is a disproportionate percentage of people working in low-paying jobs. In effect, Ireland is now competing with Portugal to be the low-pay capital of Europe. We want to move away from a model of a low-pay economy to a model of a highly skilled economy with a well-educated and qualified workforce and good quality, well-paid jobs.

An absolute key to this is education. "Education, education education" needs to be the slogan. All barriers to education must be removed. Last Saturday, *The Irish Times* reported

on a recommendation to increase college and university fees to €4,000 a year, which will be contained in the as yet unfinished Cassells report into third level funding. The newspaper went further and said that a Department of Public Expenditure and Reform briefing paper for the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, states that €4,000 is not enough and needs to be increased to an even higher level. The report did not tell us what level, if any, the briefing paper suggested fees might be raised to. It could be €5,000, €6,000 or €7,000 but we do not know. That briefing paper should be published immediately and the Cassells report, when complete, should also be published immediately.

There cannot be a discussion on the jobs of the future without discussing the educational qualifications of the workforce. I believe civil servants and those Deputies on the Government benches are planning to rig the system even further in favour of their kids, the kids from the middle classes and the higher income sections of society. They will get the good education and, as those on the other side of the House hope, they will get the good jobs. Meanwhile, our kids, the kids from the working class homes, will get the educational scraps and the McJobs, in a full employment society which is stuffed to the gills with the working poor.

To add salt to the wounds, Cassells is reported to be on the verge of recommending the introduction of a student loan scheme. Do Government Deputies not realise that these schemes have proved to be a disaster in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere where they have been introduced? While we might have what, in capitalist terms, is deemed to be full employment - that is, unemployment of 5%, 6% or 7% - we will have hundreds of thousands of graduates, and those who do not get as far as being graduates, saddled with a mountain of debt running into tens of thousands of euro. These graduates, by the way, often get caught in a pincer movement. On the one hand, they end up in low-paid, precarious employment while on the other, they are saddled with massive debts.

There are 160,000 persons or more in full-time third level education in this State. I am appealing to those 160,000 people and, by the way, to the school students of this country, to watch this debate very carefully. We are not today or this week calling on 160,000 young people to come out onto the streets in opposition to the student fees and to the threat of a student loan scheme but it may very well take 160,000 young people coming out onto the streets to put an end to this class bias and this madness. Watch this space on this issue.

Deputy Bríd Smith: One of the Sinn Féin Deputies said something that causes the imagination to stretch a lot. He said the Minister may well be following in the footsteps of Countess Markievicz. I am sorry but I do not think there is any comparison. She may be Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation but there is no comparison between the two ladies.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I said she was the second Minister in this area.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Footsteps is a different matter. Countess Markievicz was a revolutionary and, clearly, the Minister is not a revolutionary.

Deputy Niall Collins: Will the Deputy not give her a chance?

Deputy Bríd Smith: With regard to what she said today, it is welcome to see an increase in the number of jobs but I argue that we have to put an emphasis on the type of jobs. The first thing to point out is the disparity between what the live register says about employment figures and what the unemployment figures say. While the Minister acknowledges this, it is important to re-emphasise there were 315,600 people on the live register for the first quarter this year

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whereas the unemployment figure was 169,700. Given the difference of nearly 150,000, it is an important figure to acknowledge. This means there is a huge tranche of people who are probably in very low paid, part-time work. Many are still on job activation schemes, which remain hugely controversial, such as JobBridge, Gateway in the local authorities and the initiatives for graduates, which are not paid at all - lip-service is all that is paid to them as workers. There is a huge tranche of working people who are still being very badly exploited.

Other speakers referred to the figures on the low wage economy that is Ireland. The figures Unite published yesterday show that our wages are 6% below the European average but if we are compared to northern and central Europe, which is probably more of a realistic comparison and which takes in the Nordic countries and countries such as France, Germany and Belgium, we are 18% below the average. One of the reasons for this is that most of the work that is carried out, apart from it being part-time and low paid, is in wholesale, retail and hospitality. If we sought to bring those workers up to the European average for those sectors alone, we would be talking about a pay increase of between 23% and 25%.

The Luas drivers came in for a lot of criticism for looking for increases of this nature and they were on much higher pay than people in the retail industry. Nevertheless, had they won those increases, they would today be setting a trend and pulling up by the bootstraps those who are disadvantaged in this country. This is one of the reasons we supported them. We knew that had they won that struggle, it would help to raise everybody's boats - not the yachts, but the boats.

In the past five years, workers have had a pay increase of approximately 1% while managerial and professional grades have had pay increases of about 11%. There is huge inequality in terms of work, pay and the nature of work. Most work done by low paid workers in this country is in finance, call centres, restaurants and hospitality.

Ireland is held up globally as a great example of how the free market works, with free market policies of little or no regulation and the move to privatising public services, leaving everything to the market because it will solve all our problems. We have to rethink that and look at how we will solve both the problems of workers and of the wider society in terms of creating our own indigenous industry. There are many indigenous, sustainable industries we could focus on. I appeal to the Minister to think about this in the coming period.

We should start with renewable energy, which could be developed greatly. We need to look at how to do that, given it would help the green economy and our carbon footprint and it would also help to create and sustain skilled, long-term and properly paid jobs. Dealing with the housing crisis would also do this. We need to build social housing. Why not create a State-funded social housing enterprise that can take bricklayers, plumbers and carpenters off the dole and also provide education for future skilled workers of this nature through apprenticeships? We could thereby begin to solve the housing crisis but this would have to be public and social housing, not from the private market.

We also need to look at water conservation. A big row in the Dáil and across society for the past five years has been about water and the fight against privatising water. Conserving water could be dealt with by creating well-sustained, well-paid public jobs in dealing with leaks and retrofitting homes with brown and green water methods and with dual-flush loos. We need to really look at providing decent sustainable jobs on the one hand while on the other, dealing with the real challenges that face us in regard to public services.

I want to put that argument. Others will ask how I and my group propose to pay for it so I will repeat the old mantra. Look at our taxation system and corporation tax, look at what the very wealthy get away with and begin to look at progressive taxation as a way of creating sustainable jobs and, at the same time, deal with hard-pressed public services.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Deputies Tommy Broughan and Catherine Connolly are sharing time. I call Deputy Broughan.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the topic of delivering full employment. I congratulate the new Minister on her appointment. I welcome the CSO's report which states the rate of unemployment continues to fall and now stands at approximately 7.8%, amounting to fewer than 170,000 people last month, which marks a decrease of approximately 40,000. The news that the unemployment rate is at its lowest since the end of 2008 must be welcomed. We have had many devastating years of employment contraction. The outgoing Government which the Minister strongly supported was responsible for many of the job losses because it took more than 30,000 jobs out of the public sector, the multiplier effect of which was devastating. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, in particular, have a huge responsibility for the employment losses. We had just reached the 2 million mark for the number of people in employment at the time of the onset of the crash and have been struggling for the past four or five years to increase the number in employment.

The Minister mentioned, in particular, the tourism, hospitality and construction sector, as well as administrative and support service activities. Several years ago the then Minister, Deputy Brendan Howlin, announced that there would be social clauses in public construction contracts, particularly for school project bundles, in order that if, for example, one was building on the north side of Dublin, unemployed building workers in the area would be directly employed during construction. By and large, this has not happened. The debate we had this week on the Private Members' motion which had been initiated by Deputy Brendan Howlin had a surreal *Alice in Wonderland* atmosphere. Deputy Brendan Howlin and his colleagues had an opportunity for five years, with Fine Gael, to do all of the things they spoke about doing but did not do. Suddenly, they have had an incredible transformation after a few weeks out of government. It has been a road to Damascus conversion for Deputy Brendan Howlin and the Labour Party. We have not seen social clauses, but it is welcome that construction is beginning to start at long last. Pompey told the Roman Senate at one stage that "Rome must build, build, build." A clear objective of the Government and the Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, must be that we "build, build, build," but we also need to ensure unemployed building workers from deprived communities get a chance to find a job in the schemes which are going ahead such as those in my constituency across the north fringe.

Youth unemployment remains far too high, at 15%, although there has been a welcome decrease since the height of the recession. The numbers I received last week, in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland, in a parliamentary reply from the Minister showed that several months ago the number of people under the age of 26 years in receipt of jobseeker's allowance was more than 35,000, with 7,000 in receipt of the full rate, 4,500 in receipt of the €144 payment and 23,000 in receipt of the lowest rate of €100 per week. There are many areas where the level of unemployment is significantly higher such as some of the areas I represent. The length of time the young people concerned experience unemployment is worrying. The Minister told me that, on 30 April, more than 26,000 people had been in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's benefit and credits for six months or more. Many young people are becoming endemically unemployed. This relates to the speech made by Deputy Mick Barry.

We need to provide opportunities in these districts, in particular, to avail of third level education and apprenticeships. The apprenticeship system seemed to fall apart during the crash. We could not find sponsors for young people who wanted to become carpenters or electricians or enter any of the other skilled trades. This is something to which the Minister should give her absolute attention immediately.

Female workers were damaged during the recession. Their wages were damaged severely. The Minister could do something - I hope she will - for women returners, as we called them in our northside community work projects. They should have access to community employment. They do not because they do not have a social welfare record. The former Minister, Deputy Joan Burton, had five years in which to do something about this, but she did nothing. I ask the Minister to take it up.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Aire nua agus guím gach rath uirthi. Tá súil agam go mbeidh muid in ann obair as lámha a chéile. I congratulate the new Minister. I welcome the invitation to work with her and share good ideas that we have.

Like other speakers, I also welcome the drop in the unemployment rate. To analyse the effects of this, one must put it in context. Only two speakers referred to the damning report issued yesterday by Unite. Will the Minister read the report and come back to us with her response? As has been pointed out, the truth about Irish wage levels reveals that the highest paid private sector workers earn almost four times as much as the lowest paid employees. It also reveals that, taking wages into account, PRSI payments were 6% below the EU average. Ireland has the second highest level of wage inequality - the most damning part of the report - with regard to the difference in wages from top to bottom.

There are many good ideas in A Programme for a Partnership Government, which I have read, on job creation and rural development. It is welcome that we now have a Minister with responsibility for regional development and rural affairs. That is extremely important. What Mr. John Moran said lately, that we could not afford to look after rural Ireland and that we should move towards development in cities, was appalling. Ireland's population is one of the most rural in the European Union, with 42% of Irish people living in rural areas compared to the EU average of 27%. I did not know this. More than one third, or 35%, of Ireland's population live in cities, while one quarter live in towns and suburbs. People living in towns and suburbs are also at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion.

If we place the Minister's speech and A Programme for a Partnership Government with regard to jobs and rural development in context, we must look at what has happened in the casualisation of work. We are all aware of the unpredictability of income and jobs. This is intimately and integrally tied up with housing and the difficulty in accessing affordable rents or mortgages. With insecure jobs we have insecure lives, which leads to difficulties with health and housing. Everything is interrelated.

I welcome the positive aspects, but we cannot wait all of the time for the economy to pick up. It must be driven by sustainable jobs. I see this in reverse to the Minister, but perhaps we are not that far apart. Sustainable jobs should lead the economic recovery. There are many good ideas on pages 43 to 54 of A Programme for a Partnership Government with regard to village and town renewal and capital investment, but there are also absences. The commission for economic development in rural areas came up with many good ideas, but it is not mentioned. Will the Minister specifically address it and its recommendations? The University of Limerick

study is not mentioned either. It was a study of the prevalence of zero-hour contracts, if-and-when contracts and the appalling situation in which employees found themselves. It made 14 recommendations, but it is not mentioned. I know that it is difficult and that the Minister did not have time, but it must be addressed and we must have timeframes.

With regard to sustainable development, Deputy Bríd Smith mentioned indigenous industry and I fully support her. It should be the driving force for economic development. There are many opportunities in alternative energies, as she pointed out, and the seaweed industry, on which we are awaiting a report. It could create many sustainable jobs. I was at a conference in Trinity College Dublin recently, at which a farmer businessman from Quilty, County Clare, pointed out that 18 jobs had been created in the production of seaweed products which were keeping people in the local area. The fishing industry has not been mentioned. The quota system has left fishermen without sustainable jobs from County Donegal to County Kerry on the west coast. This issue must be examined. These are simple matters.

If we go back to youth unemployment, which Deputy Broughan has mentioned, it is at 15%. Apprenticeships are vital, and I would like to see a review report on them as to where they are going. To be parochial again, but also to make a general point, I live in Galway, where the city council has seen its staff drastically cut back. There are no summer jobs for young people. If we were seriously interested in young people, we would have summer schemes so that they can remain at work.

Any rise in employment figures is positive but must be seen in the context of emigration figures, which are still appallingly high. Last year alone 35,000 Irish people left this country. The figure for the last five years is, I think, more than 250,000, so any improvement must be seen in this overall context.

Finally, I must mention the Leader programme, which is something about which I would like to come back to the Minister. FORUM Connemara, which has 25 years' experience and expertise on the ground, is finding itself being removed from the programme.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I suggest that Deputy Connolly submit a parliamentary question on that matter.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: If we are to have full sustainable employment in Ireland, I suggest to the Minister that we need to do the following in this Dáil term. First, we need to increase investment in business-critical infrastructure, particularly broadband and transport. Second, we need to increase investment in our education system, coupled with serious reforms at secondary and tertiary levels. Third, we need to increase investment in basic scientific research, something that has been cut to shreds in recent years. Finally, we need to systematically reduce the costs of doing business, including in such areas as interest payments, compliance, energy, insurance and legal duties.

We need to be just as ambitious and provide just as much support for our small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, as we do for the multinationals. This includes cutting red tape, supporting innovation, getting credit flowing, equalising taxation and social protection for the self-employed and making it easier for people to go to work, for example, by making child care affordable. All of these things are possible but they require a clear focus and determination by the State in the coming years. This includes us in the Oireachtas, local government, the Civil Service and a range of other State agencies.

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The Minister probably does not agree, but I would posit that the previous Government got many things wrong. However, it is important to give credit where credit is due, and nobody can deny the job growth that we have seen and continue to see. Approximately 135,000 jobs were created during the term of the last Government. Unemployment is now thankfully below 8% and continues to fall, and we continue to lead the world in attracting high-value foreign direct investment, FDI, to Ireland, which is something for which IDA Ireland and the former Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, deserve great credit. Interestingly, in the first quarter of this year tech firms in Ireland raised €237 million in venture capital. That is twice what was raised in VC for tech firms last year, so there are some very encouraging signs this year in the marketplace.

However, I think we would all agree that job creation has been very unbalanced. One of the largest failures and areas for focus to date is youth unemployment, which is still nearly 20%. The research by the World Bank shows, sadly, that in terms of economic and social indicators, this high level of unemployment will stay with and affect that generation until retirement.

Business in rural Ireland has been decimated. I travelled last weekend around towns and villages in Mayo and I would say there were some where one in every three shopfronts was closed and others where two in every three were closed. Entire towns and villages are becoming ghost towns, which clearly needs to be addressed. In Wicklow, my constituency, vacancy rates in commercial property are still at 13%. I am sure the Minister is talking to business owners around the country, as I certainly am, many of whom are still hanging on by their fingernails.

Sadly, of course, the greatest reduction in unemployment over the last five years has been due to emigration. A total of 35,000 people emigrated last year alone and - I was shocked when I read this figure this morning - 220,000 people under the age of 25 have left the country since the economic crisis began. That is a huge number of people for the size of our population.

The question we are addressing today is how to turn a fragile and uneven jobs recovery into a sustainable and full one. I would like to suggest a range of different measures to consider. We must utilise much more fully the multinationals that are here. Long may these companies continue to come and long may they stay, but we must start linking indigenous industry much better to the multinationals. The original FDI strategy, if one looks back a few decades, was that the multinationals would come and Irish indigenous industry would become the supply chain to them. However, that has not happened. The multinational base in Ireland is becoming more productive, but the data show that the gap in productivity between the multinationals and the indigenous sector is growing. Dr. Catherine Mann of the OECD stated recently at a conference, "The assets are here [that is, in Ireland], but they're not being linked in to the domestic economy. They're not being levered up by domestic firms, and they're not being married to domestic workers". Enterprise Ireland is tasked with creating these linkages but it is operating on a very small scale. There needs to be a lot more investment and Enterprise Ireland's team needs to grow. This is a huge area of potential for the indigenous sector.

We also must get much more serious about helping our SMEs access not just credit, but affordable credit. The ECB's latest statistics show that Irish companies are paying on average 5.8% interest on loans under €250,000. In France the average rate is 2.4%; in Austria it is 2.2%. Our firms are therefore paying between 60% and 100% more for their credit. We need our firms to be internationally competitive but they will only become competitive if they can borrow at the same rates as the international firms - the French, Austrian and American firms - with which they are competing.

There are many things we can do here. We can work with the banks to find ways of reducing their average cost of capital. We can establish a community banking system. The credit unions alone have about €8 billion on deposit that they are waiting to use and lend out but because of the current legislation, the Central Bank rules, they are not able to do so. We need to make firms much more aware of the Credit Review Office. When firms go to the Credit Review Office they are getting very positive responses. If one does a straw poll of the firms, however, to ask them whether they are aware of the Credit Review Office and the other supports around, be it the local enterprise offices, LEOs, or other areas, the level of awareness is not that good. There is therefore very important work to be done to reach out to the SME sector and educate SMEs as to what is already available.

Ireland's investment in infrastructure needs to be increased. This is critical. IBEC, ISME and everybody else are calling for it. I understand investment levels are about half of the OECD average at the moment, at about 2.2% of GDP. We must get the national broadband plan back on track. The dates that are now being used have been pushed in some cases by two years so far. It is already slipping a lot, and my fear is that it will continue to slip. It is probably the single most important piece of strategic infrastructure required for job creation in the country at the moment.

Some very critical transportation links also need to be completed. A high-quality connection between Cork, Limerick and Galway is one and the ring road in Galway for the multinationals is another. The latter has become a car park. It has become so bad that many people are saying they cannot get to and from work, so very serious investment is needed.

We probably agree on the need for investment. Where we may disagree - I ask the Minister to have a very serious think about this - is that if we are to be serious about having the money to invest, then a tax erosion policy is not the way to go. We are a fairly low-tax economy, so I ask the Minister to consider that if we are to have the money to invest, further erosion of the revenue base is not the way to proceed.

We must also invest in education. The Minister has a serious background in education. Class sizes are still far too high. Per-student investment in third level has fallen off a cliff in the last eight years. It is at about 50% of what it used to be. Funding to basic scientific research has been cut by about 60%. That may save a few euro today, and maybe it was necessary in the recession, but it is cutting off a pipeline of innovation and high-calibre scientific research for decades to come, something that must be addressed.

There are also many ways of making business easier in Ireland. We can reform the commercial rates regime, not to just take into account the theoretical value of the property, but also to perhaps take into account turnover. Perhaps we should also consider the number of people employed so that we do not disadvantage small firms competing with bigger firms or higher-turnover ones, such as some of the supermarkets. They have the same footprint as smaller firms but a huge turnover and therefore pay much less tax as a percentage of revenue or profit. We can simplify compliance for small businesses all over the place. We can implement a user-friendly web portal. The Norwegians did this very successfully in 2003. It is called Altinn and we should examine it. It was established for tax compliance and is used for a range of services in Norway. We need something similar here.

The Commission for Energy Regulation, ComReg, urgently needs to be tasked with examining energy prices. They are far too high for households and businesses. It must be systemati-

cally addressed. There are many ways we can make it easier for people to go to work. Child care is a major trap for people returning to work. New apprenticeship programmes, including advanced qualifications would be very useful, as would equalisation of tax credits for the self-employed and social protection. Making research and development tax credits much easier for small firms to access would be very useful. I would love if innovation were taught as part of our educational curriculum in some way.

Ireland is a very small country competing in a highly competitive and increasingly globalised world. It is not enough for us to be successful in attracting foreign direct investment and multinationals which can leave just as quickly as they arrive. We must back our own businesses as much as we do the multinationals, and we can. The Social Democrats have laid out a wide range of ideas and I would be delighted to sit down with the Minister, her team and officials and go through them. Now is the time for significant investment and to systematically reduce costs, remove barriers for people returning to work, back our indigenous sector and be just as ambitious for our indigenous sector as we are and should be for the multinationals.

Deputy Peter Burke: I wish the Minister, Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor, and the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Breen, every success in their respective briefs. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic in light of the new unemployment rate published this week, of 7.8%, which is the lowest since October 2008. Although the outgoing Government did not do everything right and mistakes were made, the Action Plan for Jobs was a very positive initiative and has been a huge contributor to the growing economy that we are now experiencing.

I will critically evaluate the road we travelled during the past five years. In 2010, Government spending was running 50% ahead of income, our unemployment rate was 15% and 300,000 jobs had leaked from the economy. The then Government's priority was initially to create 100,000 jobs. It exceeded expectations, creating 135,000 jobs. There was a reduction in part-time working, meaning all jobs created were full-time jobs and 95% of jobs were not on schemes. Additional jobs are estimated to be putting €13 billion back into the Exchequer and €6 billion back into communities.

We constantly hear, including in the Chamber, that Ireland is benefiting from international factors. Let us review this. A review of EUROSTAT data for our EU counterparts shows unemployment rates in Greece of 26.5%; Spain, 22%; Portugal, 14%; and Italy, 13%. This clearly shows the policies pursued by the Government are working. We still have a long road to travel and we now need to prioritise our rural areas and provincial towns. I welcome the strategic investment fund supporting 18,000 jobs, of which 60% are outside of Dublin. The report on this was issued today. In my constituency, Longford-Westmeath, employment levels have been lagging behind the national average. However, although 1,594 jobs in Industrial Development Agency, IDA, and Enterprise Ireland companies were lost from 2008 to 2010, in just three years, we have won back 1,145. Major progress has been made.

I have suggestions which will support sustainable employment in the midlands region and I encourage a co-ordinated approach across all Departments. We await the deliberations of An Bord Pleanála on Center Parcs, a €250 million project at Newcastle Wood, Ballymahon. Some 750 jobs will be created during the construction stage with a capacity to create 1,000 permanent jobs when the business is up and running. Center Parcs has the capacity to increase our GDP by €32 million, €1 billion over the next 20 years. However, we need to plan to encourage local sustainable employment now. We must run courses and provide training for Center Parcs to ensure maximum benefit by way of local sustainable jobs. Athlone IT and the enterprise

and training boards must urgently introduce and prioritise tailor-made courses to support the project. We must focus on skills development to support the project with a start date of next September. A year later will be too late.

We must focus on our strengths in rural areas and invest in sustainable and community-friendly renewable energy projects. We must promote biomass production as an alternative energy. We must advance projects such as anaerobic digestion plants and work on getting the renewable heat incentive finalised to ensure such projects are sustainable.

I welcome the review of JobBridge under the commitment given in Pathways to Work. Two out of three participants were still in employment five months after completing the scheme. There are problems in this area, for example, 400 HSE staff could be on internships at any given time. The core principal of any internship is that career progression routes are clearly identified and set out. However, under the recruitment moratorium there was no opportunity to issue contracts on completion of internships and people on schemes were replaced by other participants. This must be amended in the review and I encourage cross-party thinking on it.

The IDA needs to up its game regarding marketing the individual regions. There is a 70 acre fully serviced IDA site in Mullingar and we must attract sustainable employment into the site to ensure a balanced, sustainable employment. A well-established company, Patterson Pump Ireland, has committed to creating an additional 32 jobs on the site and there have been good news stories in the region. The Government has a plan in place to increase and build on the progress made and with greater resources than we had in 2011, we should be in a position to make real progress and reach full employment if given the chance.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I join Deputy Peter Burke in congratulating the Minister, Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor, and the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Breen, on their respective portfolios and I wish them all the best. As we know, our economic recovery rests on our people and their ability to find work. Creating the conditions that facilitate people to return to and remain in work will be of paramount importance and is a core function of our economy. Only by supporting people at work can we pay for the services needed by everybody. Investment in health, housing and public projects needs a growing work base.

By 2011, the year the Fianna Fáil and Green Party Government ended, our national debt had increased from €47 billion in 2007 to €189 billion. The figure is very stark and we will have to deal with this economic reality for decades. Unfortunately, many of the improvements I would like to happen have been radically downgraded because of it. Goals, such as treating self-employed people fairly and helping working parents with child care, have been diminished as a result of it. We must be mindful of this. However, I am hopeful for the future. I am confident that with our programme for Government, which sets out a very ambitious plan, we will be able to achieve some of this trajectory into a better action plan for jobs and avoid some of the mistakes that were made in the past.

Is one's work one's worth? It is a rhetorical question. Our work gives us a sense of purpose and place in the world. It connects us to society and gives us a routine. When a person loses his or her job, it is a very personal blow and creates great pressures for him or her both economically and personally. The previous Fine Gael-led Government's record on job creation is its proudest achievement. Enormous progress has been made in reducing unemployment, as Deputy Peter Burke said. We have reached a very encouraging 7.8% and I hope the downward trajectory continues. It is a very positive improvement from 15.1%. Many people make

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enormous contributions and sacrifices in their workplaces and they must be looked after. While we must look after people in receipt of social welfare, we must also look after people who are working.

I have a particular interest in the self-employed. I have been self-employed for 20 years as a businesswoman. I employ people and I have kept them on through the recession of recent years, which was not easy. I am glad to see that by 2018, we will have increased the earned income tax credit from €550 to €1,650 for the self-employed, which will match the PAYE credit.

3 o'clock

We will also seek to introduce a PRSI scheme for the self-employed and provide a supportive tax regime for entrepreneurs and the self-employed. This is a start, and I very much welcome it. However, I want to see the equalisation of treatment between PAYE workers and the self-employed take place as expeditiously as possible.

It is of concern to me that there are 300,000 self-employed in this country, a large number of whom live in my constituency. We do not rely on the State for anything. There is no real safety net, if somebody is ill. Even though I have two sons I went back to work after eight weeks as there was no advantage to me in taking an extended maternity leave in those circumstances. That has an impact on women and locks them out of the labour force on returning to work. We need to take a more in-depth look at that. While I welcome what Fine Gael is doing in the programme for Government and in regard to the self-employed, we need to do more in the future.

I believe that fostering a culture of the benefits of work in our young people is vital. The Minister, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, with her background, will be aware that the primary schools have introduced the early entrepreneurial programmes that teach pupils in a hands-on manner how to write a business plan, apply for a loan and bring the project to fruition resulting in a profit or loss - the very core of the business experience. For these children from generational unemployed families, it shows that work is empowering and opens many doors as opposed to living on welfare all of the time.

We have achieved much and will achieve more in the future. I am optimistic about that. The Minister can rest assured I will do all I can to help create more jobs through the Fine Gael Party, in particular, to look after the self-employed and working parents who also have children.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The next speakers are Deputies Troy and Cahill. The Deputies are sharing a ten-minute slot. I assume they will take five minutes each.

Deputy Robert Troy: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate as it is important that we have statements on a crucial issue such as sustainable employment. I welcome the opportunity to wish well to both the Minister, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, and the Minister of State, Deputy Breen, in their new roles.

I was heartened by the Minister's speech last week in Longford where she stated that the regions will not be forgotten. Whether we like it or not, they were forgotten by the last Administration and that has to be acknowledged. Sometimes I am disappointed and infuriated by what I hear. No Government creates jobs. Entrepreneurs and captains of industry create them. The men and women who take the risk, who invest their own money and who take the chances are the ones who create them. No Government does. What a Government can do, however, is

create an environment which will support job creation.

As a country, we are overly bureaucratic. We have not done enough to ensure that there is available credit for the captains of industry. When a person looks to start a business at present, the first burden we impose on him or her is rates from the local authority, which is a disincentive. Then we start looking at charging them commercial rates which take no account of a person's ability to pay. Our energy costs are among the highest in Europe despite the fact that these costs are falling. While it is welcome that there has been improvement in terms of job creation, the 300,000 people who are unemployed today can take little comfort from that. We have seen in the first quarter of this year where the number of long-term unemployed has increased to over 100,000. We need to focus on how we can address that.

The Minister's speech in Longford last week in terms of the regions was welcome because over the past five years of the previous Government, only 2.3% of the IDA Ireland visits were in the midlands. My constituency colleague rightly identified Marlinstown IDA park in Mullingar. It received no visits over that period of time. The business park was constructed and funded during the last time Fianna Fáil was in government and Patterson Pump Ireland is the only factory in it. I am glad to say I played a leading role. At the time I had to argue with IDA Ireland to let that company into the park because I suppose it was not the authority's preferred business for it. Having got agreement to sell a site there, the first thing that happened was that company was burdened with significant levies and charges by Westmeath County Council. This was not the fault of the local authority as it was merely implementing national policy. It is something we must look at if we are to support indigenous businesses.

The Minister visited Longford last week. It was a welcome development to see a family business that started from nothing create 50 new jobs, but we, as a State, are giving that business minimal supports. We are only putting in a fraction of the capital investment in it. That is not fair, it is not right and it is something the Department needs to address. Indigenous Irish business, when making significant investment and creating numerous jobs, should be supported.

I also wish to raise an issue regarding community groups that come together. We have a community group in Athlone, of which my colleague will be aware, called Opportunity in a Million where a number of professionals came together. They offer up their services free of charge from a mentoring point of view. They have gathered sponsorship from local companies so that they can pass it out to young people who wish to start up a business and in the past two years they have supported the creation of 77 jobs. It may not seem a lot in the general scheme of things, but it is a lot in the town of Athlone. Last year, they wrote to 12 Departments and Government agencies seeking support and not one of those supported them. That is not right and again, it is not fair. I would like to elaborate but I do not want to encroach on my colleague's time. It is an issue I will send over to the Department as we should look at supporting it in the future.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: I also wish both the Minister and the Minister of State the best of luck in their new portfolios.

Like Deputy Troy, I will be parochial in my comments and I will make no apology for it. My constituency - I represent Tipperary - has been seriously neglected over a number of years. The figure for unemployment in the south east is 11.9% and I guarantee that for south Tipperary it is higher. There are 7,193 people on the live register in south Tipperary. In north Tipperary, the corresponding figure is 6,475, which is an increase of 163 since January.

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I will make a number of points, the first of which is on the IDA Ireland structure in Tipperary, which is split with two management levels, one in south Tipperary and one in north Tipperary. This does not make for efficient operation of the agency. Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland have not focused enough on my county. In 2015, in north Tipperary, we had only five visits from IDA Ireland. Unfortunately, we have had a considerable number of factory closures in Tipperary in the recent years. It is far easier to name off the closures than to talk about the success stories in Tipperary. We have had factory closures in the past couple of months in Cashel, we had CandC in Borrissoleigh closing and only last week we had Suir Pharma in Clonmel being closed. In my own town of Thurles, in the past 25 years we have had 20 factories close, with only two replacements and not anything like the number of jobs that we have lost being replaced. Our urban centres all through the county are dying a death because of the lack of jobs in our towns. As Deputy Troy mentioned, rates is a significant issue. We seem to be putting obstacles before companies rather than trying to help them to start up businesses.

In the past couple of weeks, I had one of the major employers in Nenagh looking to get in 3-phase electricity for his plant after successfully winning a contract in Canada. However, two State agencies, ESB and Iarnród Éireann, kept putting obstacles in the way of getting it done in an efficient manner. It took numerous calls and interventions to have it completed. Those are the kind of difficulties that should not arise. Where we have a company that is going well, everything should be done to make it easy and efficient for it to progress and create more employment.

A savage cut was made to Leader funding under the previous Administration. County Tipperary will receive only 34% of the Leader funding previously available to it, which is a hammer blow. In light of the fact that 66% of the population of the county is rural based, it is hugely dependent on such funding.

The way rates are applied to businesses must be re-examined. Many businesses have closed, with the application of rates having been the straw that broke the camel's back. We need to re-examine the position with a view to ensuring rates are a modern tax based on the profitability of a premises, not its size.

The way IDA Ireland is structured in my county needs to be addressed. It does not help that the county is split into two regions. Another issue is the lack of support for the self-employed and for small business enterprises. All self-employed persons pay PRSI but get virtually no benefits for doing so. That matter must be examined and changes will need to be made.

The lack of profitability in the agrifood sector, particularly for primary producers, will put further pressure on rural economies in 2016 and on businesses in the sector. We must put incentives in place and make sure that, in particular, agricultural merchants who deal with primary producers will be able to withstand the huge pressure there will be in terms of cash flow. That issue must be given serious consideration to ensure there will not be casualties. A lack of cash flow is a temporary hiccup in the agrifood sector. I hope the Government will give this matter serious consideration.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: In recent years the previous Government trumpeted what it saw as its success in creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. The Government is continuing to do this. There is no doubt that jobs have been created and that economic growth has occurred but is the jobs and growth strategy, as the title of this debate suggests, sustainable at all levels? Is it sustainable in the sense that it could be vulnerable to significant changes, ex-

ternal or internal, that could allow the jobs and growth to dissolve overnight, as they did during the Celtic tiger period because of a massive over-reliance on particular sectors and an enormous over-dependence on the whims and profitability of the market? Is it sustainable in the sense that the jobs contribute to a better standard of living for those who are working and for society as a whole or are they jobs that exacerbate social divisions, poverty, stress, mental health issues and make people's quality of life worse rather than better? Will the strategy for jobs and growth help the indigenous small and medium enterprise sector or will it damage it? It is quite possible to create jobs that have these adverse effects, damaging other sectors of the economy and worsening the quality of life for people.

Job creation and growth can also be completely environmentally unsustainable in the sense that they run counter to the environmental objectives which we have no choice but to meet because of the possibility of runaway climate change and the very severe dangers and economic costs it is causing and could cause in the future. Those are the indices against which we have to measure the sustainability of the current jobs strategy or any jobs strategy. In that regard, the jobs and growth strategy of the previous Government in the past five years and of the current Government, in so far as it continues to articulate that strategy, is not sustainable.

When I hear about record growth rates, I shiver. Anybody who does not have the memory of a goldfish should shiver. That is what we heard for five or six years prior to the biggest economic crash in the history of the State. We were told we would have a soft landing and that the fundamentals of the economy were strong. However, there were some people - we were mostly on the left and considered to be complete contrarians, fringe politicians and so on who did not understand economics - who, strangely, were the only ones who said the level of growth at the time was unsustainable when the mainstream members of the political establishment who apparently know about economics were saying it would be fine. The crash came and it was proved who was right. Frankly, because there was an over-reliance on a couple of sectors, most notably the housing sector, the members of the political establishment were hostages captured by the people at the top of that industry and the banking industry. There is no doubt about it. This matter is not about the individuals now facing possible jail sentences or, for that matter, those who got away with what they did. It was blatantly obvious that the political system had been captured by the bankers and the developers and was nodding at any suggestions the latter made. That led us into a massive crash.

Are we guilty of doing the same thing again? I put it to the Minister that we are because we are doing precisely what was done in the run-up to the previous crash, namely, that there is an over-reliance on essentially two sectors. The first of these is the multinational sector. The Minister should not get me wrong. The multinational sector continues to make a contribution to this economy. However, are we making the companies that operate in the sector pay their taxes or learning from what they do in order to develop the skills base and knowledge to begin to build up our own indigenous industrial capacity? We self-evidently are not doing so. I will raise the issue of drugs and medicine on the Adjournment later today. We have the capacity now to develop our own industry in the area of medicine and drugs, which could save the State and the health service in particular an enormous amount of money. We are paying multiples of the price for basic drugs from the multinational companies to which I refer at huge cost to our citizens and our health service. However, there has been no attempt to build up our indigenous capacity within the State to do it on a not-for-profit basis to the benefit of the entire economy, with the effect of creating sustainable jobs in the long term.

Incredibly, we are again seeing an over-reliance on a market which is failing badly in the

area of providing housing. It is extraordinary that for the past five years we have essentially been praying that those in the market would eventually get around to building houses. They will not because they do not consider it profitable enough to do so. I then hear from the Government and, disappointingly, Fianna Fáil the mantra that the Government does not create jobs. Sorry, but what are the jobs in the health service? Are they Government jobs? I believe they are. Who created the jobs in local authorities for those who used to build local authority housing? Unless I am mistaken, I believe it was the State that created them. That was done in a range of other areas, including that of forestry. We are massively underperforming in the latter - an area in which we could excel, particularly as Ireland has the best conditions for growing trees in Europe. While the latter may be the case, this country has the lowest level of forest cover anywhere in Europe. It is quite extraordinary.

As a motion I put to the Dáil a few years ago explained, the Irish Forestry and Forest Products Association, IFFPA, indicates that 490 jobs can be created for every 15,000 ha of forest planted. Currently, we have 12,000 people working directly in the forestry sector and 11% forest coverage. If we got to 22%, we would create a further 5,000 direct jobs as well as all the spin-off industry. If we reached the 30% target to which we signed up, we would create 8,000 to 10,000 sustainable jobs in a growth area. It is also an environmentally sustainable area and less vulnerable to the whims of the international market. However, we do not do it because of the complete over-reliance on the private market and EU rules which prevent Coillte, the State forestry company which was established to increase forest coverage, from planting trees and creating the jobs that would be so environmentally and otherwise beneficial to rural Ireland, which is in serious trouble. That planting would generate a series of knock-on industries and would be environmentally very positive in terms of meeting our climate change objectives.

The arts is another area in respect of which the State absolutely has a job creation role. People pay lip service to the arts, but we have the lowest levels of public expenditure on the arts anywhere in Europe. This is extraordinary for a country whose international reputation depends largely on how we have excelled in the arts. In our pre-budget submission, we were the only party - notwithstanding the lip service paid by everyone else - to argue that we should get up to the 0.6% expenditure level for public investment in the arts and create a scheme of public employment for artists to work in communities, directly in the arts, in health, education and all sorts of areas. We could create real, sustainable jobs that would contribute socially and economically and would be sustainable economically over the long term. There are many more examples.

We are massively over-reliant still on the market principles and multinationals that led us into trouble in the first instance. We must move away from the ideological aversion to public industry, which has served us well at various times historically. Why the Government wants to move away from and abandon it escapes me. It can only be because of ideological blindness.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on the topic of delivering sustainable full employment. When I entered politics in 2011, the country was in the financial mess left behind by the previous Fianna Fáil Government. Unemployment was at an all-time high, with almost 18,000 men and women unemployed in County Louth alone. In the final three years of that Fianna Fáil Government's term of office, almost 2,000 jobs in Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland companies in Louth were lost. Our brightest young men and women were emigrating daily at an alarming rate. I remind the House, particularly those on the Opposition benches, that this was only five years ago. While it was only five years ago, I wonder if those on the Opposition benches have developed a convenient form of memory loss

as they seem to forget, and at times even deny, the mess they left behind. Other Opposition parties want, if given the opportunity, to return us to the boom-and-bust policies that got us in the mess in the first instance. They must believe it is possible to provide world-class public services without having any credible way to pay for them. It is time that these parties got real and started to develop policies that provide real solutions to the problems we face. Simply making noise will never provide a solution.

Let us examine some of the real solutions the previous Fine Gael Government introduced. As I have already mentioned, almost 18,000 men and women were unemployed in County Louth when we took over in 2011. In November 2015, the number of men and women unemployed in County Louth stood at just over 12,500, which was a drop of just under 6,000 or 30%. In the space of just five years, the Fine Gael Government reduced unemployment in County Louth by 30%. That is a real solution to a real problem. Over the past three years, new jobs have been created in County Louth by the many small and medium-sized businesses which have started to benefit from the economic recovery put in place by Fine Gael. Louth has also benefited from foreign direct investment, with one in ten jobs created in the past three years arising in that sector. Companies such as PayPal, eBay, National Pen, SalesSense, East Coast Bakehouse, Prometric and Moorehill Lodge are just some of the larger entities in Louth that have been instrumental in creating jobs alongside our many SMEs. I mentioned the 2,000 Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland jobs lost by the last Fianna Fáil Government. We have replaced those jobs in the past three years. In 2014 alone, an extra 101 permanent IDA Ireland jobs and 461 Enterprise Ireland full-time jobs were created in County Louth.

While there is no doubt that the Fine Gael-led Government has done exceptionally well in fixing the mess left behind by Fianna Fáil, we should not think that our work is complete. While overall unemployment figures have dropped below 8% in just the last week, we must continue to work towards full employment. The Action Plan for Jobs, which was introduced in 2012, has been a great success. A new strategy for 2016 to 2020 is firmly in place and we are committed to creating an additional 200,000 jobs in that period. Of those, 135,000 will be created outside Dublin. We are also committing to reducing unemployment to 6% by 2020, although I take the view that we will surpass this figure before that deadline. The jobs target for 2016 was 50,000 jobs but in the first three months of the year alone, almost 16,000 new jobs were created. There are those opposite who say jobs are only being created in Dublin and then only in certain sectors, but the fact is that all regions are experiencing an increase in jobs and new jobs have been created in 12 of the 14 economic sectors. In my own constituency of Louth, almost 6,000 more men and women are in employment than was the case in the disastrous period of the last Fianna Fáil Government.

We must never forget the mess in which that Fianna Fáil Government left the country. The country was financially destroyed and was losing its young people to emigration. We had to rely on financial assistance from others just to pay our bills. In other words, Ireland was a basket case. No matter on what side of the House one sits, one must acknowledge that the previous Fine Gael-led Government saved the country from financial ruin. We are now entering a new phase and I am sure the policies defined in the partnership programme for Government will continue to create the jobs which, in turn, will fund the public services we all strive to provide.

Debate adjourned.

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Ceisteanna - Questions

Priority Questions

Care of the Elderly Provision

1. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of new nursing home places, home care packages and home help hours he will introduce under the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14118/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank the Deputy for his question. As the Minister of State with responsibility for older people, I am sure that every Deputy's priority is to ensure that people live active, healthy, happy and fit lives in their communities as they get older and that they participate in their communities for as long as possible. Where people need support, we must be able to provide it.

The Government is committed to enhancing the quality of life of older people, supporting them in their homes and communities for as long as possible and, when required, providing access to quality long-term residential care. We are all living longer. The CSO figures predict that, in the next 30 years, the number of people aged 65 years or over will double and the number living into their 80s will quadruple. There will be a considerable increase in the demands placed on our services.

In 2016, the HSE has a core provision of €324 million for home support. An additional €20 million has been allocated to maintain the 2015 increase in service levels to 10.4 million home help hours, 15,450 home care packages, including 130 intensive home care packages, and 313 transitional care beds. A further 60 clients with dementia will be supported with co-funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies under the national dementia strategy. From working with the Meath Alzheimer's association, I know that there will be a significant increase in demand in this regard. The programme for a partnership Government commits to increasing funding for home care packages and home help year on year.

The nursing homes support scheme, with a net budget of €940 million, is expected to support 23,450 clients on average per week, representing an increase of 649 clients per week on last year's figures. The programme for Government commits to increasing resources in order to maintain current waiting times for funding approval. This year, that waiting time will not exceed four weeks compared with early last year when it was almost 11 weeks.

I am confident that, with continued economic growth, we will be able to expand services for older people based on the effective use of existing resources and additional funding.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I wish the Minister of State well and congratulate her on her appointment. We are embarking on a new era in terms of the challenge facing the Parliament, in that we must now reach a cross-party consensus when what we often did was take a partisan approach to issues. In the new dispensation in Irish politics following the general election, it is incumbent on us all not only to raise problems, but to find solutions.

Long-term residential care and the provision of home care packages and home help hours

present a major challenge. If we are to face the demographic challenges of the years ahead that the Minister of State outlined, we must accept that residential care, home care packages and the bolstering of community services will comprise a critical component.

Under the programme for Government, there is a requirement to increase home help hours by approximately 2.2 million, the number of home care packages by 3,500 and the number of intensive home care packages, which are provided to people, in particular young people, who suffer from dementia. A commitment from the Government and all other sides is needed if we are to ensure that resources are prioritised for these key areas.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Is that it?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I am afraid so, but the Deputy can revert with a supplementary question.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I prepared long and hard for this question.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I have no doubt of that.

Deputy Helen McEntee: We will have plenty of opportunity to discuss everything that Deputy Kelleher has prepared. In the new era of cross-party consensus, we are all on the same page, in that we want to ensure that older people and those who deserve support at home get it.

We are trying to deal with a number of issues. For example, delayed discharges is a major one. In order to move people on from emergency departments who should not be there, people are being sent home with more complex needs, which costs more and places additional pressure on the system. We must manage our limited resources and examine where there are peaks and troughs in the system. For example, demand reduces as we approach summer. As we approach winter and demand increases again, we must manage funding so that it is available for those who need it. There is a commitment to increase funding where possible, although I cannot give the Deputy the exact figures. As the economy improves and more people return to work, which is already happening, I hope that further funding will be available for these badly needed resources.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I will diverge slightly. Those opposite held a meeting on the winter readiness of the country's emergency departments, but I assume that one of the key aims is to ensure that people, in particular the elderly, do not end up in emergency departments in the first instance. Home care packages, home help hours and bolstering primary and community care services form a critical component in that regard.

In the past 30 years, we have consistently referred to primary and community care as the way forward in addressing the challenges facing us. For a long time, though, we have been lacklustre in ensuring that people have as much support at home as they need. I hope that the Minister of State can give a commitment to the House that a strong emphasis will be placed on home help hours, home care packages and primary and community services in next year's Estimates and the budgetary preparations.

Deputy Helen McEntee: Yesterday, the House debated our intention to effect a ten-year plan for the health system. For a long time, we have been playing catch-up and going from year to year. As Deputy Kelleher rightly pointed out, of most importance is preventing people

from reaching the stage at which they need to attend emergency departments at two, three or four times the cost to the State of providing a service at home. The financing that has been available to us in recent years has not met the increasing level of demand. If we can increase funding where it is needed as soon as possible, prevention will be better than cure. That is our commitment to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service

2. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he accepts the capacity review of the National Ambulance Service and its recommendations; if he will create a specific stand-alone yearly budget to implement it; when he will implement the recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14020/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I thank Deputy O'Reilly for her question and I wish her well in her appointment as her party's spokesperson on health. I look forward to the debates that we will have in the Chamber. I hope that we will be able to build on yesterday's establishment of a cross-party committee to devise a singular vision for the health service and work together.

Last month, at my request the HSE published the National Ambulance Service capacity review with an action plan for implementation that incorporated the recommendations of the capacity review and the 2014 Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, report on the National Ambulance Service. The capacity review makes it clear that we will need a significant programme of investment in our ambulance services. In this context, a planned investment in a multi-annual programme involving manpower, vehicles and technology is required. Additional funding of €7.2 million has been provided for the National Ambulance Service in 2016. As the Deputy will be aware, the programme for a partnership Government commits to an additional annual investment in terms of ambulance personnel and vehicles.

It should be noted regarding the action plan that a number of the reviews' key recommendations are already being undertaken as part of a significant programme of reform and modernisation of the National Ambulance Service that has been under way for several years. The programme has achieved many of its key targets, including the establishment of the national emergency operations centre and the creation of an integrated deployment platform that allows our ambulance service to operate as a national fleet rather than as regional divisions, the continued delivery of improved technology to improve response times, and the expansion of the community first responder scheme.

There is much more to do and the capacity review is a good roadmap, as is the action plan. My Department continues to engage with the National Ambulance Service regarding the latter's requirements and performance and I will do all that I can to ensure that the action plan is implemented.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I welcome the three newly appointed Members opposite and congratulate them and wish them well in their new roles. My question was specific and referred to the creation of a stand-alone budget. In light of what was done to the mental health services budget, no one will dispute that a stand-alone budget is necessary to ensure that these measures are implemented. The Minister and I may not agree on everything but we do agree there is a lot to be done with our ambulance services. Is there a plan and ring-fenced funding? Intending to

do something is not the same as saying money has been put aside and that the Government fully intends to resource the service.

The Minister will be aware that the media are reporting that a woman who made a 999 call waited for 84 minutes for an ambulance to come to her in Cavan, which resulted in very serious outcomes. I am not for a moment making an assumption pending the investigation but I am suggesting 84 minutes is not acceptable. People cannot wait. They need to have confidence in the National Ambulance Service. Regrettably, they do not at present. We need to hear from the Minister that there is a specific, detailed plan and money to ensure that it can be implemented.

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy makes a number of very fair points. She is correct that it is more than a question of generalities and is about what specifically we will do. I can tell the Deputy very clearly today that the programme for Government, which outlines my mandate and what I need to implement along with my colleagues in the Department of Health, commits the Government to increasing the number of staff working in the National Ambulance Service and the number of vehicles available to that service. I am happy to be judged on that in regard to the implementation of the programme for Government. Obviously, when the Deputy starts to see concrete details on the delivery in this regard, it will be in the run-up to the Estimates process and budget, at which time I will have to show the commitment we need to make regarding the National Ambulance Service. It will be a multi-annual process and it will take a number of years. The report is very clear about the challenges that face the service. The report is also very clear about the fact that even if we put all the resources together and could deal with all the recruitment issues, based on the difficulty at times in finding the appropriate staff, worldwide and not only in Ireland, there would still be a number of issues in rural areas in respect of which new solutions would have to be found.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: To be honest with the Minister, I was looking for something a little more specific than the answer he was prepared to give me. I understand a significant increase in the number of personnel will be involved and that the trade unions representing the workers in Dublin Fire Brigade and the National Ambulance Service have sought a meeting with the Minister. Will he accede to the request for a meeting and advise the House on the result?

No one has a lack of confidence in the personnel in the National Ambulance Service. Everybody knows they do a fantastic job but we will need to see specific targets and figures. Unless and until we see them, people will not be confident that the capacity review's recommendations will be implemented in any meaningful way.

Deputy Simon Harris: Let me be very specific. I have four specific points to make. First, there is €7.2 million for the ambulance service this year, as I have outlined. It will enable the creation of new developments within the service.

Second, within a week of my appointment as Minister for Health, I went to the Cabinet and got this report published. It was long overdue and needed to be published.

Third, with regard to the request for a meeting, I would be delighted to have one. I have already had an initial engagement with SIPTU on this. However, I would be very happy to have a specific meeting. If the Deputy wants to contact my office, we can certainly arrange that. I will update the House on that.

Fourth, I do not want anybody to believe these are all vague aspirations. The action plan

available on the HSE's website is very specific. For example, on foot of the Lightfoot review, the external capacity review of the ambulance service, 60 actions were identified. Of those actions, 28% are deemed complete, 45% are ongoing and 27% have yet to start. With regard to the HIQA action plan, there were 54 actions, 35% of which are complete, 52% of which are ongoing and 13% of which have yet to start. The document is very detailed in respect of the timeline for commencement and delivery. It is the document with the roadmap for a national ambulance service.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: It will cost money. We need to know.

Deputy Simon Harris: Absolutely, it will cost money. The Government is absolutely committed to continuing to increase investment in the National Ambulance Service. We began this process with the last budget under the last Government, and we will continue under this Government.

Mental Health Services Funding

3. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his priorities for mental health services under the new programme for Government; why there is no funding commitment on mental health services as there was in the programme for Government for the period 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14119/16]

Deputy Helen McEntee: I thank the Deputy for his question and look forward to working with him in his capacity as spokesperson on mental health. As we all know, there has been a debate ongoing for a number of weeks on the key priorities of the Government in the area of mental health. The Deputy and many others have contributed to it. The Deputy put forward his own priorities and wishes and outlined what he feels needs to happen within this sphere. The Government has set out priorities and I have my own goals that I want to see achieved.

A Programme for a Partnership Government confirms the Government's commitment to further developing and improving our mental health services in line with existing policy, as set out in A Vision for Change. We recognise the importance of fully implementing this long-standing policy in a manner that recognises both geographic problems and that will allow primary care teams, in particular, to provide or access a much greater range of care services. However, since A Vision for Change is ten years old this year the Government is committed to conducting an evidence-based expert review of progress on its implementation and the improvement of mental health services. The review will take account of international best practice and will inform the next steps in the development of our mental health policy, having regard to both human rights and health and well-being objectives.

There needs to be a constant review and consistent implementation following on from the report. We must consult continually on international and European best practice.

A Programme for a Partnership Government gives a clear commitment to increasing the mental health budget annually — I will stand over that commitment — so that we can build capacity in existing services and develop services that badly need to be developed. For example, we aim to extend counselling services in primary care to people on low incomes and to extend support for organisations that offer free counselling and psychological services. In addition, we will work to ensure every emergency department has a clinical nurse specialist in psychiatry on

its team, with greater linkages to primary care. We acknowledge staffing is a problem, and I am committed to working on that. Maintaining the link with our communities and making services more accessible are key priorities.

Deputy James Browne: I acknowledge that the Minister of State might not have been involved in the writing of the programme for Government, but many interested parties, including mental health groups, were struck by the fact that there was no specific funding committed in the programme, as there was in the programme for 2011 to 2016. Perhaps that commitment was not always honoured but at least it could be specifically pointed to in the programme. In 2014, some €20 million was allocated instead of the €35 million that was then promised. This year, €12 million was siphoned off.

My predecessor, former Deputy Colm Keaveney, highlighted concerns about these cuts when the service plan was published in December. Unfortunately, his predictions at the time were borne out with the mental health budget being seen as a soft target. Although the new programme for Government specifically states the mental health budget will be increased annually, which must be acknowledged, can the Minister of State be more specific? How much will be provided in budget 2017 for mental health services?

Deputy Helen McEntee: Some €115 million in additional funding for mental health services was made available at a time when other budgets across the spectrum were cut. That increase was made by the previous Government so there is no reason to fear no commitment to increasing funding on the part of the current Government. We have committed to an increase year upon year. Obviously, we would like to see the funding increased as much as possible. Our programme for partnership Government outlines clearly that we want to tackle this problem adopting a cross-party, cross-departmental approach and take on board the various issues more specifically.

I am committed to developing youth mental health services, as is the Government with its announcement of a youth mental health task force. That will require funding but the commitment has been made. We will increase funding year upon year but I cannot give the Deputy an exact figure.

Deputy James Browne: The programme for Government outlines that the new Government is committed to meeting the recommendations of A Vision for Change. The confidence and supply agreement between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael also pledges to implement fully the recommendations of A Vision for Change. That requires funding. The Fine Gael manifesto pledges €35 million annually so it seems strange that this was absent from the programme for Government. I hope it was an oversight.

Will the Minister of State work to ensure a funding increase in the region of €37.5 million per annum, which is required to meet the commitments in A Vision for Change, will be made and assure us that the mental health service staffing level, which is currently 75% of that recommended in A Vision for Change, will be adequate? It will require some €187.5 million to rectify this.

Deputy Helen McEntee: The full €35 million that was ring-fenced for this year will go into the base for next year. The budget will have to account for the fact that we are examining cross-departmental options. As such, I intend to have each Department and Minister identify a specific element of their remit through which they can contribute to mental health services be-

cause the issue is not confined to the Department of Health or, for that matter, the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs and Education and Skills. The overall budget for mental health services is larger than it may appear and will continue to increase year on year. I hope it will also receive a greater focus than was the case in the past.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

4. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recruitment processes for all grades, groups and categories in the Health Service Executive; if there have been budgetary impediments to the recruitment processes in specific areas; if there has been a problem with recruitment because of budgets; where has this occurred, by area, hospital and location; how he will meet staffing needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14021/16]

Deputy Simon Harris: An easing of restrictions on the employment of additional staff was announced by the previous Government in budget 2015. Under this new approach, public sector organisations can obtain delegated sanction to recruit within the parameters of their pay budget once they obtain approval for their pay and numbers strategy from their parent Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This change allows for greater autonomy to be delegated to Departments and agencies to manage their staffing levels within allocated pay frameworks. It also provides for further recruitment flexibility, for example, where it is determined that offering permanent contracts can achieve more economical service delivery than agency usage. This practice is evident across the health service.

The Health Service Executive is working with the Department of Health on the finalisation of its 2016 pay and numbers strategy. This has involved the development of detailed workforce plans at hospital and community service level. Rather than HSE head office telling health service entities what their recruitment requirements are, the strategy involves a bottom-up approach to recruitment requirements. Meanwhile, the HSE has emphasised to service providers that they must operate within their pay budgets. This does not impact on a hospital's ability to recruit where there is funding available to facilitate recruitment, for example, in the case of funded replacement posts or where additional funding has been allocated for new positions under the HSE service plan. Mental health is one very important area in that regard, but recruitment can also take place in the areas of critical care and emergency services. I was pleased to be able to provide assurances for the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation in that regard this week.

The HSE has continuously increased staffing levels since the beginning of 2015. By the end of April this year, overall health service employee numbers had increased by more than 6,000 whole-time equivalents since the start of last year, with an extra 1,600 whole-time equivalent staff in the first four months of 2016 alone. The vast majority of these employees are in front-line positions. Numbers in the medical and dental category increased by almost 600 whole-time equivalents or 6.5% since the start of 2015, while nursing figures rose by more than 1,700 or 5% during the same timeframe. Let me be clear that the number of staff working on the front line of the health service increased this year and last year and will increase every year under the Government.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Let me be equally clear - activity levels in the health service are increasing but staffing levels are not matching them. The Minister can deny that there is a pause in recruitment, but I have in writing from the office of the assistant national director for

oral health a statement that there is a pause in temporary recruitment pending the outcome of cost containment discussions. No one will contradict me when I state there is not a hospital or health facility in the State that is staffed to adequate levels. Is the Minister aware that between January and April 2016 the HSE spent €68 million on 2,379 whole-time equivalent agency staff? I sincerely hope I do not have to convince him that agency workers are less cost-effective than directly employed labour. If it is established that agency workers are less cost-effective and money is the main issue, why is more direct labour not being employed? Doing so would be a much better utilisation of budgets. I have a statement that there is effectively a pause in recruitment.

Deputy Simon Harris: No, the health service must be cognisant of its budget. I am sure many areas of the public service need more front-line staff. I am aware that the public service went through an extraordinarily difficult time and that an increase in the numbers of front-line staff is needed. We increased staff numbers in 2015 and will increase them again this year and in subsequent years. However, if the Garda Commissioner wants 1,000 more gardaí tomorrow morning, she has to be cognisant of the budget available to her. Equally, hospitals must be cognisant of the budgets available to them. However, exemptions apply to emergency departments and critical posts and more autonomy is available at local level. This relates only to the pay budget and is not to offset overspending in any other area.

The Deputy makes an important point on agency staff. These posts can continue to be converted into permanent posts. Agency staff conversions continue in the health service and it is possible to recruit staff. As the Deputy is aware, it is not always possible to recruit staff in certain parts of the health service and certain locations. I am not suggesting there is an adequate number of employees on the front line of the health service. Approximately 12,000 health service posts were lost in the deep recession, of which approximately 6,000 have been reintroduced. I acknowledge, however, that we have much more to do.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Given that activity is increasing, even returning to the staff levels that applied before they were decimated will not cut it. The Minister referred to the Garda Commissioner. As he will be aware, we have had carnage and a great deal of blood spilled in the north inner city. Is this what we are waiting for before the budget will be increased? The Garda Commissioner sought an increase in the Garda budget and €5 million was provided. It is not acceptable to claim that staff levels are increasing when clearly they are not keeping up with demand. Activity levels are increasing month on month and year on year, but staffing levels are not matching the increases. I do not know if the Minister speaks to front-line staff, but I have spoken to nurses, porters and home helps and they are at crisis point. They have heard from the Minister and other Cabinet members that some recovery is under way, but they do not see one when they look around.

Deputy Simon Harris: Of course, I speak to front-line staff. No one here has exclusivity on speaking to them and I will continue to speak regularly with them, as will, I am sure, Deputies from all sides. While staff accept that the economy is recovering because more money is being invested in the health service, they would be the first to tell me and I would be the first to agree that we must do much more to improve the health service. The only reason the previous Government was able to increase the health budget was that we had money available to do so. We could not increase it when the troika was in town. I find myself in my new position as Minister for Health at a time of reinvestment in the health service and there is much in which to reinvest. The health budget increased and will increase again. While we will continue to invest in the health service, we cannot fool people or pretend something is the case when clearly it is

not. There are recruitment issues. There are vacant nursing posts which are funded and could be filled and we need to persuade more nurses to return from the United Kingdom. This can be done by a variety of means. I speak to nurses on the front line and representatives of nursing organisations. We also need to attract consultants from abroad and, as the Deputy correctly pointed out, we must continue to convert agency posts to front-line permanent posts. While a significant job of work remains to be done, let us not promote the myth that staff numbers are being reduced when the figures clearly show they are increasing.

Services for People with Disabilities

5. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the numbers of personal assistant hours for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14120/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I thank the Deputy for her question and wish her well in her new position as Fianna Fáil Party spokesperson on disabilities.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in A Programme for a Partnership Government which is guided by two principles, namely, equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

With regard to assisted living services, the Health Service Executive's priority in the 2016 national service plan is to protect the level of services provided in 2015 and to provide 1.3 million hours of personal assistant services for 2,000 people with a physical and-or sensory disability and 2.6 million hours of home support for 7,300 people with a range of disabilities. The provision of personal assistant services has an annual cost of €30 million, with an annual cost of €52 million for home support services.

Personal assistant hours are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure the service is at all times responsive to clients needs and the hours available are allocated appropriately and in a timely manner. In 2015 the Health Service Executive exceeded the expected activity level for personal assistant hours by approximately 100,000. This reflects the responsive nature of the service provided and takes account of the fluctuation in assessed need over time. The need for increased personal assistant services is acknowledged and the HSE continues to explore various ways of responding effectively to this need from available resources.

4 o'clock

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: I wish to congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, on his appointment. He has been a powerful advocate for people with disabilities during his time in public life. I know that will continue and I look forward to working closely with him.

The Minister has said a lot about plans, budgets and reviews, but with respect, the people who need these hours need them now. We need funding to be put in place now. It is quite dis-

turbing that no extra funding has been put into personal assistant services since 2009. Currently there are people here who require but who have no personal assistant hours and also people who require extra hours. I would like the Minister of State to commit to working to ensure a significant increase in personal assistant hours is provided for in the next budget and HSE service plan and to setting a target for that.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I accept the Deputy's point that we have had some difficult years in regard to public finances following the international banking crisis and that there has been a reduction in resources over the past number of years. This has changed and it is now planned to invest in resources. As part of the programme for partnership Government, I have a new proposal coming on stream in regard to personalised budgets for people with disabilities.

The programme for partnership Government contains a commitment to establish a task force within three months for the implementation of personalised budgets for persons with disabilities. Personalised budgets provide an individual with more control in accessing services, giving the person greater independence, control and choice. The budget for the service is devolved to the person so that he or she can shop beyond traditional service providers to fit their needs. Other important policies in regard to transforming the lives of people with disabilities recommend the move towards a model of person-centred and individually chosen community based supports, underpinned by a more effective method of assessing need, allocating resources and monitoring resource use.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: As the Minister well knows, it is almost impossible to overstate how crucial personal assistance is in the lives of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, many of those who receive a service only get four hours per week. This is not good enough as they must squeeze an awful lot into those four hours. I urge the Minister of State to consider a further allocation for the people who receive only four hours assistance.

Clearly, this service needs to be expanded and I believe the Minister of State will look into that. It is deeply disappointing that there will be no additional services provided for in 2016. Also, relative to the outturn in 2015, there are serious concerns that the service may even be reduced this year. A €10 million increase in 2017 could deliver 400,000 plus hours. I call on the Minister of State to make this his priority.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I accept the Deputy's point in regard to the allocation of only four hours per week to a person with a disability. I plan to change that because it is unacceptable. It is important that the rights of people with disabilities are recognised. They are citizens of this State and have a right to a quality service. Our plan is to work with the task force to ensure people with disabilities get the maximum support. For that reason, I am bringing in a group of people to the task force to deal with personalised budgets. The idea is to ensure the adoption of a national, coherent application system to develop budgets before the end of 2017. The adoption of a single national coherent system will provide accountability for spending and will ensure the exploration of brokerage models where people are assisted to connect with and purchase the services that meet their needs.

I am also working on the Estimates for this year's budget and I make a commitment to the Deputy that I will do my best in regard to funding. We must try to catch up following the lack of resources over the past number of years.

Other Questions

Hospital Waiting Lists

6. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when the upward trend in waiting list and waiting times will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13802/16]

Deputy Simon Harris: I look forward to working with Deputy Kelleher in his role as his party's spokesperson on health, a role he has carried out for a number of years.

Improving access for patients is a key objective for our public health service. The 2016 HSE service plan undertakes to maintain 2015 levels of service in respect of scheduled care and to continue to address waiting times as part of the regular performance and accountability process. The HSE seeks to ensure that those whose clinical needs are most urgent are prioritised accordingly, while managing the needs of those who have been waiting longest for routine treatment in chronological order. Currently, 94% of patients wait less than the maximum waiting time of 15 months for inpatient, day case or outpatient procedures, with over 60% of patients waiting less than six months for their required care.

A scheduled care governance group has been established within the HSE to co-ordinate key initiatives to reduce waiting times and the number of patients awaiting treatment. Actions overseen by this group include driving greater adherence to chronological scheduling, relocation of low complexity surgical procedures to smaller hospitals and administrative and clinical validation procedures to ensure that patients are available for treatment. All too often, I have heard stories of people who have passed away remaining on a waiting list and the difficulty this has caused for their family and for the accuracy of the list.

Each hospital group has been mandated to designate a key person to lead and support waiting list management improvements so as to advance towards compliance with maximum waiting times. The National Treatment Purchase Fund supports the management of inpatient, day case and outpatient waiting lists, by working with the HSE to assist hospitals in developing local demand and capacity planning and providing technical guidance materials to ensure the highest standard of data quality and practice.

My Department is currently engaging with the NTPF and the HSE on a focused plan for endoscopy waiting lists in 2016. The programme for Government and the supply and confidence arrangement with Fianna Fáil contain a commitment to reactivate the NTPF and to provide €15 million in 2017 to address waiting lists. My Department will engage with the NTPF and the HSE in this regard.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is a sad indictment of the situation that over the past number of years we have seen an escalation in the number of people waiting for inpatient day case treatments, with 74,000 plus now awaiting treatment. The waiting list for outpatient appointments has risen to 407,000 people. Over the past number of years there has been a due diligence process in place for assessing waiting numbers, so the lists are reasonably accurate. The previous Minister for Health set a target of 15 months, a less ambitious one than the Minister prior to him. Therefore, it is backwards we are going in terms of the adjudication of our success or failure in terms of our ambition. This issue must be addressed.

I understand the Minister has had a meeting in regard to the winter readiness programme and I acknowledge that at least the Department is preparing in time. One of the solutions to winter readiness is the cancellation of elective surgeries and scheduled treatments, but I do not believe this can be seen as a long-term sustainable solution to overcrowding in our emergency departments. The NTPF is in place and I hope it is used wisely and efficiently. However, the issue of the 407,000 people on the waiting list is a sad indictment on everybody, because these people are unsure of what is wrong with them until they get a proper diagnosis.

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy has made a fair point in regard to the 15 month target. As I said earlier, some 94% of patients are being seen within that 15 month target and 60% of patients are being seen within the six month period. However, we must continue to try to do better.

What we see here is a direct result of a period of difficult economic decisions, through the time Fine Gael was in government and during the time Fianna Fáil was in government before that. We are now in a different place, where we can now begin to reinvest in the health service, increase health budgets and increase the resources being made available to tackle the issues outlined. I am not afraid to admit it if I hear a good idea from somewhere else and I accept the NTPF was a model championed by the Deputy's party. I believe it has a role to play here and that it needs to be reactivated. We should all strive for investment in the public health service, but there is also a role for the NTPF in the effort to reduce waiting lists. I want to start a programme for endoscopy with the NTPF this year, to put at least €15 million into the NTPF for 2017 and to have discussion in this House about how best to target that in terms of the most difficult and acute types of treatment needed.

In regard to the winter initiative, the Deputy is correct that we must be very careful that the consequence of preparing for the emergency department situation does not distract from the waiting list situation. The best way to ensure that is to increase resources for the health service and increase recruitment and retention of front line staff.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: As an aside, access to diagnostics is an important issue, particularly the issue of direct referrals by GPs into diagnostics. The reason we have such a build-up of people on waiting lists currently is due to the inability to access diagnostics. We do not seem to be sweating the assets of public diagnostic services, which work on a five day week. We should be imaginative and creative to change the rostering programme in order to make radiography and other diagnostic services available seven days per week. We should utilise the huge capital investment that has gone into this in recent years to ensure we have greater capacity in diagnostics in the public health system. It is a key area.

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy is correct. I recently met some of the representatives of radiographers and I am aware that the latter are willing to do more within the public health service. We are exploring with the HSE the additional tasks they want to take on, which will lessen the burden on other parts of our health service. Where health service professionals put their hands up and say they are willing to do more and play a role, it is very important that the HSE responds positively.

We must ensure that diagnostics are available within the community where it is possible to do so in order that we might keep people out of acute hospitals. Sometimes we clap ourselves on the back too much for building a primary care centre when the real question we must ask is what is in the primary care centre. It cannot just be a fancy GP centre that has diagnostic

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equipment. There is a commitment in the programme for Government to look at how we can incentivise health care professionals to provide diagnostic equipment within the community so that primary care centres can provide real primary care.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

7. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants employed at Portiuncula Hospital, County Galway, and the number of vacant consultant positions. [13759/16]

(Deputy Simon Harris): There are 28 consultants employed at Portiuncula University Hospital, while three posts are vacant. This hospital, like many other smaller hospitals, has difficulty filling certain posts and relies on locums to fill posts pending permanent appointments. Of the 28 consultants in post, five are currently employed as locums.

The hospital is focused on filling posts on a permanent basis, reducing reliance on locums and recruiting additional consultants. Within medicine, three locum posts are due to be filled on a permanent basis this year, two in September and one in October. It is also intended to re-advertise one consultant in geriatric medicine post and one consultant in gastroenterology post.

In obstetrics, the consultant working as a locum at present is due to take up a permanent post on 7 July, strengthening the team to five permanent consultants.

Within radiology, two consultant radiologist posts are in clearance stage, one is to commence later this year and the second in 2017.

Reflecting the improvements in train, the hospital recently secured the permanent appointment of a consultant anaesthetist. This post-holder has key responsibility for the intensive care unit and is a joint appointment between Portiuncula and Galway University Hospital. There is also an additional consultant due to commence on the 23 January 2017.

The Saolta Hospital Group recognises the importance of Portiuncula to the delivery of care within the group and this is reflected in the recent and planned improvements in consultant recruitment at the hospital. I assure the Deputy that this process will continue.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I have congratulated most of the Minister's team on their appointments but I wish him well. Gan dabht, is jab an-deacair é d'aon duine bheith ina Aire Sláinte ag an am seo ach tá mé cinnte go mbeidh an tAire ina Aire Sláinte maith le linn an Rialtais seo. The very best of luck.

I welcome the reply to the question but I ask the Minister to ensure that all the appointments to which he referred will happen in the coming months. Portiuncula University Hospital is a very important part of the health system in the Roscommon-Galway constituency. Not only does it look after patients from Roscommon-Galway, it takes them from Clare, Offaly and other adjoining counties. Ever since the closure of the accident and emergency department at Roscommon University Hospital, it is even more important that all the services available at Portiuncula are retained and upgraded. I ask the Minister to make every effort to ensure that the appointments to which he referred will be made in the coming months because they are essential for the future of the hospital.

Deputy Simon Harris: I thank the Deputy and I do assure him of that. The process of increasing both the number of consultants working in the hospital and the number working on a permanent basis, rather than on a locum basis, is the intention of the HSE and the Saolta hospital group. Three locum posts will convert to permanent posts later this year, two in September and one in October. In addition, we will advertise the consultant post in geriatric medicine and I invite the Deputy to keep in touch with me and the HSE on the matter. It is my intention that this continues to develop and that the number of consultants required, not just in this instance but throughout the country, are installed.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Since my election as a Dáil Deputy for the Roscommon-Galway constituency, I have met the community in Ballinasloe on three occasions, including business people and community people in the town and staff in the hospital. They are very proud of the hospital at Portiuncula and want to talk it up. They want to see new developments. It is really important for Roscommon University Hospital that they happen there as well. There is talk of a 50-bed unit at Portiuncula University Hospital going to planning and that is extremely important for the future of the hospital.

I welcome the Minister's statement and I hope the reinvestment that is taking place in the health service will continue because it is essential for the health care of the people in that region.

Hospital Services

8. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health why, as of 29 April 2016, only 234 of 301 new hospital beds were added to support the acute hospital system; the progress being made to date to increase capacity; the funding allocated and used to date for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13697/16]

(Deputy Simon Harris): I am very conscious of the impact that long wait times in emergency departments can have on patients and their families, as well as on front-line staff. Last Monday I attended my first meeting of the emergency department, ED, task force implementation group, which is co-chaired by the director general of the HSE and Mr. Liam Doran of the INMO and which is providing focus and momentum in dealing with the challenges presented by emergency department overcrowding. As Minister for Health, I intend to personally attend the monthly meetings in order to keep momentum going.

In June 2015, additional funding of €18 million was made available to the HSE under the winter additional capacity initiative. The initiative identified 301 additional winter capacity beds that could be opened. In some hospitals, beds have proved more challenging to open than envisaged, owing to difficulties in staff recruitment. However, to date, 236 of these 301 new beds have opened. In addition, 116 closed beds have re-opened and a further 14 beds have been opened in Sligo. In total, 366 new or reopened beds have been made available.

This extra capacity has enabled similar emergency department performance to the equivalent period in 2015, despite an average increase of nearly 6% in attendances so far this year.

Furthermore, figures for May show total numbers of patients on trolleys are approximately 18% lower than in May 2015, with numbers waiting over nine hours approximately 24% lower than in May 2015. I do not say this is acceptable but I want to put it into context.

The demand for acute hospital services continues to increase in line with a growing and ageing population. The overall population growth year on year is in the order of 1%, whereas growth in the over-65 age group is of the order of 3% to 4% per year. In addition, in 2014 adults aged 65 years and over accounted for nearly 13% of our population but used 53% of total hospital inpatient care, which demonstrates the demographic pressures on our health service.

Reviews of bed capacity and medical assessment unit hours of service are needed and are key commitments in the programme for a partnership Government, as well as for me, as Minister for Health, so that I can look at ways to address pressures on our emergency departments. I am planning a winter initiative, not just for this year but next year too and this is under way.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Some €18 million was spent last year on the winter initiative. Can the Minister advise if the same amount is being set aside for this year, or will it be more? We are 65 beds short of the target of 301 which was promised. Where did those 65 beds go?

The Minister said it is the intention to undertake a bed capacity review and that is very welcome. When will that start and finish and who will conduct it? Does the Minister have any plans or money set aside to act on the recommendations that will be made? We do not need too much time to know that there are not enough beds in the system. The bed capacity review should be a fairly quick exercise and it would be interesting to know whether the Minister has identified somebody who can carry it out.

Deputy Simon Harris: I am not in a position to reveal the figure for the winter initiative today but I will be shortly. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform have made clear in this House that we will present our health Estimate, as well as all other Estimates for departmental Votes, in the next fortnight. I hope I will be able to provide clarity to Deputy O'Reilly in this regard at that stage. I hope the decision to commence the winter initiative now, at the end of May or start of June, is seen as a signal of my intention and that of the HSE to try to prepare for this in advance and to look at next year as well. As this is a crisis that happens year on year, we need to plan ahead for it.

The Deputy spoke about the closed beds figure and asked where the 65 beds went. As I outlined in my initial response, there have been staff recruitment difficulties in some hospitals and some areas. One cannot open beds without staff. However, some 366 new or reopened beds that were not available in the system are now available in the system. The bed capacity review has to be different this time. I have no interest in carrying out a bed capacity review for acute hospitals only. We cannot keep seeing the acute hospital as the beginning and the end of every conversation. We must look at capacity in the community as well. I refer to nursing homes, long-term stay beds and community hospitals. The bed capacity review must look at the whole continuum of care and beds. I will come back to the Deputy with details of the timeframe. I would like it to take place as quickly as possible, particularly because I am conscious of the review of capital plans that is due to take place next year. I need to know the data so I can deliver in that regard. On the question of how I will have funding to deliver all of these things, the Estimates will be in the House in the next fortnight, as I have said.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: We need to know who will conduct the review. I welcome the Minister's statement that it will encompass all beds because there is a serious need for that to be examined. The Minister may already be aware that according to the OECD, the number of beds we have per 1,000 people is below the EU average. We already have a deficit. I am disappointed that the figure for the winter initiative, which the Minister is right to start early, is not

being shared with us. As the winter approaches, the pressure on our accident and emergency departments will increase. It used to get particularly bad when there were spikes, but now a level of difficulty is being maintained. I am familiar with this from my previous job. When one talks to the staff one is told that there used to be quieter times, but there are no lulls anymore. The sooner the bed capacity review is undertaken the better, because I believe this will result in all the beds that have been identified being opened. According to our figures, we are still 65 beds short, notwithstanding the other beds.

Deputy Simon Harris: This is my first outing here, so I do not want to disappoint the Deputy at this early stage of our exchanges. The Deputy will know the figure within the next fortnight. In fact, she will know when I know. Obviously, we have to look at what did and did not work last year and what we did not look at last year that we should look at this year. That is the message I delivered to the emergency department task force on Monday of this week. The important message for the HSE is that the solution to this problem is not one that solely rests in the acute hospitals. It has to involve the primary care divisions of the HSE, social care and the home care packages that were discussed by the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, with Deputy Kelleher earlier. We will have clarity on this matter for Deputy O'Reilly in the next fortnight or so. I largely agree with what she has said about bed capacity. I stress that we need to identify exactly where the beds are needed. We intend to work with everybody on this. As I have said, we also need to look at delayed discharges because the infrastructure in the community is sometimes inadequate.

Hospital Services

9. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recast the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise, County Laois, as a model 2 hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13755/16]

Deputy Simon Harris: I thank Deputy Fleming for this question. I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin midlands hospital group. Patient safety and outcomes must come first. As Deputy Fleming knows, a number of reports on the hospital in Portlaoise have been published in recent years. These reports pointed to the need for reconfiguration of some services to ensure patients are treated in the most appropriate setting by specialist staff who can safely meet their needs. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital to develop and enhance management capability, on implementing the changes needed to address clinical service deficiencies and on incorporating the hospital into the governance structures of the Dublin midlands hospital group. Governance and management arrangements in Portlaoise have been strengthened, additional clinical staff have been appointed and staff training, hospital culture and communications have improved.

The Dublin Midlands Hospital Group recently produced a draft plan for clinical service delivery at the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise. I want to stress that the draft plan, which has been discussed with officials in the Department of Health, is currently the subject of further work and consideration by the HSE. Any change to services at the hospital, including any plans for service reconfiguration, will be undertaken in a planned and orderly manner and will take account of current use of services, demands in other hospitals and the need to develop particular services at Portlaoise in the context of overall service reconfiguration in the Dublin midlands

hospital group. It is important to note that this work is being done to strengthen services in Portlaoise from a patient safety and quality perspective and to ensure the services currently provided by the hospital that are not viable are discontinued and the services that are viable are safe, adequately resourced and developed on the basis of health needs. I am confident that any changes will improve services for patients at the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise. I have to emphasise at this stage that no decisions have been made. There is quite a body of work to be done in this regard.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I welcome the Minister and congratulate him on his new position as Minister for Health. I wish him every success in the interests of the people of this country, who depend on our health service. Essentially, I am calling today on the Minister to reverse the plans for the downgrading of the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise that are being considered by the HSE regional manager. She has produced a plan to reduce the services provided at Portlaoise to the level associated with a model 2 or category 2 hospital. Such an approach, as set out in the draft plan referred to by the Minister, would mean that a full accident and emergency service would not be available at Portlaoise into the future. If that were to happen, we would not have a proper paediatric or maternity unit in the hospital because such units require the presence of a full-time accident and emergency department. As the Minister knows, the hospital in Portlaoise has one of the busiest accident and emergency departments outside the major cities of this country. Up to 35,000 people attend it every year. People who need urgent treatment might not be able to make the journey to Dublin, Naas or Tullamore. This will put lives at risk. Patient safety must come first. Everybody knows that the accident and emergency unit in Portlaoise is overcrowded and that additional staff are required to deal with this situation. The HSE's approach, which involves trying to curtail services rather than upgrading them, is a dangerous one.

Deputy Simon Harris: I thank Deputy Fleming for his good wishes. I emphasise that no decision has been made on Portlaoise or on the services mentioned by the Deputy. Officials in the Department of Health have been liaising with the HSE on the significant body of work that needs to be done in relation to the draft report that has been drawn up by the HSE. This work will answer some of the significant questions that have been asked here by Deputy Fleming. I want to make it crystal clear that nothing will be done to compromise patient safety and everything will be done to address patient concern. I cannot be clearer than that. Any decisions taken will have to be based on clinical evidence. Decisions about the provision of health services should be made by clinicians and not by Ministers for Health. There is a body of work to be done in that regard. I have read the media commentary. I know there has been some commentary in local newspapers and in national media outlets. I say respectfully to everybody that there is a body of work ongoing here. No decision has been made. Any decision that is made will be based on an assessment of the issues that have been outlined by Deputy Fleming and the other Deputies from the Laois constituency. I refer to issues like service provision and the capability of other hospitals. Consideration will be given to what should be provided in Portlaoise and what could be provided elsewhere. As I have said, there is quite a way to go in this regard. I will certainly keep the Deputy informed.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I am pleased that the Minister has an open mind on this matter. A great deal of further discussion will be required. I will set out the essential problem that has arisen in Portlaoise. As the Minister has mentioned, a number of reports have previously been published. The maternity unit has had a troubled history. It was under-staffed for several years. Twenty additional staff have been provided in Portlaoise over the past year or so. As a result, a

first-class maternity service is now available in the region under the direct supervision and management of the Coombe hospital. The accident and emergency department at the hospital needs a similar staff upgrade. A lazy approach should not be taken just because there is a difficulty. I understand that HIQA officials are in the hospital this week. They are carrying out a number of inspections as we speak. These reports should be used to improve services. They should not be employed as a lazy excuse to downgrade services. This issue has arisen since the new regional manager arrived. She announced last autumn that she wanted to curtail the accident and emergency department by providing a daytime-service only, but she was told she could not do that. She was sent away to draft a report to back her original preconceptions. That report is now in front of the Minister. I am saying to the Minister that we need to keep the accident and emergency department in Portlaoise. As we all know, the triage service at the hospital currently sends some patients to the stroke unit in Naas. If there is a major car crash, injured people are sent to the trauma unit in Tullamore. That is fine but the facility in Portlaoise, which is used by 30,000 people every year, needs to be maintained in the interests of patient safety.

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy is right to acknowledge the additional staffing that has been provided at the hospital in recent years. According to the information that is available to me, an additional 65 posts have been filled at Portlaoise Hospital since 2014, comprising 17 medical posts, ten nursing posts, five allied health professionals, 24 patient and client care staff and nine administrative staff. I have a more detailed list here, but I probably do not have time to go through it.

There has been significant investment. As I acknowledged at the outset, a lot of effort has been put into this hospital in terms of addressing a number of issues over the past number of years. I have no intention of stating anything other than the factual position. There is still a substantial body of work to be done. There are still conversations that need to be had at a clinical level in terms of what services can be provided and in what hospital within the hospital group. That work is ongoing. What I can assure the Deputy and the people of Portlaoise today is that all of this will happen in an orderly and planned manner and that people will be kept informed of any developments.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Will the Minister send me a copy of what he did not get an opportunity to read on the record?

Deputy Simon Harris: It is a breakdown of the 65 posts. I will send that to the Deputy.

Mental Health Policy

10. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health his role in formulating the mental health policy to be implemented in schools; and how he has co-operated with other relevant Departments in this regard to ensure the provision of best practice and adequate funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13716/16]

(Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank Deputy Stanley for putting forward this question with regard to mental health promotion and policy and how it will be implemented in schools. I presume Deputy Louise O'Reilly will respond in his stead.

Back in 2013, the Department of Education and Skills, the HSE, and the Department of Health jointly developed Well-Being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health

Promotion and Suicide Prevention. This was followed in 2015 by the publication of guidelines setting out a framework for mental health promotion in primary schools. Supporting schools to implement the guidelines involves a great number of agencies of the Department of Education and Skills and health promotion officers within the HSE. In addition, the Department of Education and Skills recently revised the Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resource Material.

In 2015, the Government launched Connecting for Life, Ireland's national strategy to reduce suicide. The aim is to reduce suicide and self-harm. We are looking at the figures from 2015 to 2020. The strategy clearly sets out a vision where fewer lives are lost through suicide and, most importantly, in which communities and individuals are empowered and given the ability to improve their own mental health and mental well-being. It provides a community-based organisation with guidelines, protocols and training on effective suicide prevention. It is so important that we equip ourselves with the ability to deal with everyday stresses and everyday life. Most importantly, education is key. It is important that we have a constant and direct link between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and my own Department of Health.

One of the main goals in Connecting for Life is to target approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health among priority groups, most specifically among young people. The best way to reach our young people is through education and within our schools. There are several key actions which have been identified to further this goal. I will not go through them all but they are there. They are part of the overall policy objectives of the Department of Education and Skills. They are supported by my Department and the HSE through the inter-agency implementation arrangements provided for in Connecting for Life and are overseen by the Cabinet committee on social policy and public service reform.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: It is in the programme for Government that a wellness class will be added to the junior certificate cycle. That is to be welcomed. I share the Minister of State's views on the need to address issues of mental health and, more importantly, mental health well-being at the earliest possible stage. Has this been agreed with the people who will be delivering it, namely, teachers at the front line? If it has been agreed, when are we going to see the first wellness class as part of the junior certificate cycle take place? Has the Minister of State given any thought to the programme run by Pieta House? I think it is called "school resilience". I believe it to be a very good model, particularly with regard to young people. Specifically, we want to know when the first wellness class for a junior cycle student will take place.

Deputy Helen McEntee: Unfortunately, I cannot give the Deputy a set timeline for that. I spoke to the Minister for Education and Skills only yesterday on this issue. Essentially, what it means is that over a three year period up to the junior certificate, students will have to partake in 400 hours of wellness classes across a variety of different sections.

With regard to school resilience and Pieta House, at the moment Connecting for Life has a strong youth element to it. There is a pathfinder project set out to implement the youth aspect of it. What I will be introducing in the next 100 days on top of that is a youth mental health task force that will build on the pathfinder project and specifically focus on education at an early stage. The problem that we face is that many mental health problems manifest themselves much earlier than we feel comfortable talking about. We need to implement some sort of educational programme at a primary school level. There will also be a second dimension to that task force which will involve non-political, non-departmental individuals who are currently

working and have a keen interest in advancing our services. Programmes, such as the school resilience programme, will be taking from what is best practice, what is out there and how we can best implement it together.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: It does not sound like much of a priority if the Minister of State cannot even give us a date. It should be a priority and one that is accompanied by identifiable targets, dates, times, etc. We welcome the task force on youth mental health. Will the Minister of State give us some insight into the individuals who will be involved? The plan is that it will be established within 100 days. That is very much to be welcomed. We would like to know who is going to be on the task force.

To go back to my earlier question on the junior certificate cycle, is there agreement? We all know that there are issues around the junior certificate cycle with the people who are delivering it. Has this been agreed with teachers directly?

Deputy Helen McEntee: Unfortunately, as this is specifically within the Department of Education and Skills, I cannot give that information to the Deputy. However, I will give her a commitment that I will speak to the Minister of Education and Skills. As far as I am concerned, it is at an advanced stage. We should see it being implemented soon.

With regard to the specific individuals on the task force outside of the Department and the political sphere, I cannot give the Deputy the names because I do not have all of the names. They do not know themselves. That is a work in progress. The specific Departments that are going to be working with the taskforce will be the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and our own Department. I have spoken to both Ministers in that regard and both of them are very much on board and their staff are willing to work with us on a continuous basis in order that it is a priority. This is something that will be worked on every week with all three Departments.

Health Services Funding

11. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health his progress, in conjunction with the Health Service Executive, in securing funding to complete episodes of scheduled care commenced in 2015; the amount of funding required to complete these episodes; how many episodes of care are outstanding for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13695/16]

(Deputy Simon Harris): In January 2015, my predecessor introduced maximum permissible waiting times for inpatient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end. As the House will know, additional funding of €51 million was approved in 2015 to maximise capacity across public and voluntary hospitals as well as outsourcing activity where capacity was not available to meet patient needs. HSE figures for the end of December 2015 show 95% achievement for inpatient and day case waiting lists and 93% achievement for outpatient waiting lists against the 15 month maximum wait time.

The HSE has advised that €28 million of the funding provided was utilised in 2015. Expenditure on this initiative has continued into 2016 in respect of those patients who had been referred for appointments in the latter part of 2015, as well as those who had commenced treatment which could not be completed before year end.

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In addition to the almost 40,500 patients who have already been treated under the 2015 initiative, there are currently 700 patients who are in the process of completing their episodes of care. The HSE has provided assurances that all episodes of care are to be completed by 20 June and that all treatment providers have been apprised of this deadline. Final expenditure on this initiative will be available after the end of this month, once all episodes of care have been delivered.

The outcomes of this initiative will inform the implementation of the programme for partnership Government commitment to provide €50 million per year to reduce waiting lists, including a sum of €15 million for the National Treatment Purchase Fund. I will be considering in the context of budget 2017 how best to utilise that €50 million, inclusive of the €15 million, to tackle waiting lists. I will await the end of this period of care at the end of the month in terms of how to best evaluate that.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The National Treatment Purchase Fund is simply code for privatising a problem. We do not support that. We support investment in our public health service. There is €50 million of continued investment - that is it how it is termed - per year and yet the ministerial brief given to the Minister advises that there was only €28 million of funding spent in 2015. There is clearly a deficit in those figures. Was this primary funding or additional funding? In terms of what the money is spent on, exactly how many episodes of care did this cover for the year?

Deputy Simon Harris: I also fully support the public health service and want to see investment in it, and I want to see the committee we set up yesterday devise a vision, a plan and funding costs for how to get the service to the place we all want it to be over the next decade.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Not privatisation.

Deputy Simon Harris: I also recognise the NTPF as a useful vehicle at a time when there are people at home who could be watching our questions session today and who are in need of an operation, where perhaps the capacity does not currently exist within the public health service.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: There needs to be investment in front-line services.

Deputy Simon Harris: While we will disagree on the extent of that, it is very much my position and that of the Government.

With regard to the €50 million, €51 million was provided in 2015 and the Deputy is correct in regard to the ministerial briefing. Some of that funding has spilled over into 2016 in terms of pay. The €50 million referred to in the programme for Government is not something that would have been available in my ministerial briefing. It is a political commitment by me and in the programme for Government to allocate €50 million in the budget.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: That is the question I was asking.

Deputy Simon Harris: I expect that €50 million of the health budget next year will be allocated to waiting list initiatives. As I said, I will be looking at how best to outline that. I will provide the Deputy with some of the figures later.

Mental Health Services Report

12. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of A Vision for Change being undertaken, including the terms of reference, the membership of the panel, the progress to date and when it will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13717/16]

Deputy Helen McEntee: I thank the Deputy for his question, which relates to the review of A Vision for Change which is currently being undertaken. In January 2006, the Government adopted the report of the expert group on mental health policy, A Vision for Change, as the basis for the future development of mental health services in Ireland. It advocated, first, a holistic view of mental illness and an integrated multidisciplinary approach to addressing the biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to mental health problems; second, a move away from traditional institutional-based care to a patient-centred, flexible and community based mental health service; third, a person-centred treatment approach which addresses each of these elements through an integrated care plan, reflecting best practice, evolved and agreed with both service users and their carers; and fourth, the aiming of interventions at maximising recovery from mental illness, building on the resources within service users and within their immediate social networks, to allow them to achieve meaningful integration and participation in community life. This is something all of us want, namely, to be part of our community and be able to contribute to our community. Fifth, it advocated the organisation nationally of mental health services in catchment areas for populations of between 250,000 and 400,000, with specialist expertise provided by community mental health teams, which are expanded multidisciplinary teams of clinicians who work together to service the needs of service users.

A Vision for Change has guided national mental health policy for the past ten years and, as we all know, that term has come to an end. While that vision has not changed, the Department is currently finalising a request for tender for a review and analysis of international evidence and best practice in the development of mental health services, including a review of current delivery of services in Ireland. This review will provide evidence to determine the policy direction for a revision of A Vision for Change. The review will also have regard to both human rights and health and well-being objectives. At that stage, the exact timeframe for completion of the revised policy direction will be determined by the planned analysis outlined above.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The vision of A Vision for Change was never realised, although it was Government policy for five years under Fianna Fáil and further five years under Fine Gael. If the Minister of State talks to any person working in our mental health services, they will tell her the goals that were set out within A Vision for Change were not only not reached, they were not even nearly reached. All that happened is that the big psychiatric hospitals were closed but the community services that were promised were never put in place. I represented people working in the mental health services for years and we watched closure after closure and repeated failures by successive Governments, which did not put in the community care that is so essential.

We do not need another report, we need to have concrete action in terms of how mental health services are going to be protected into the future. In particular, we need to refer to the fact staffing levels are at 23% below what is needed. The Minister of State will be aware targets were set in A Vision for Change but none of those targets were reached in any discernible way. With regard to the review and everything else that will take place, will there be ring-fenced

funding and if so, will that be raided like the Government raided it the last time? Can we have confidence that we will see a priority and focus on mental health?

Deputy Helen McEntee: To agree with the Deputy, when this document was published in 2006 we possibly did not foresee the financial circumstances in which we would find ourselves in the following years. However, in the last number of years the implementation of A Vision for Change has been given greater priority, with the Government providing an additional €160 million in ring-fenced funding for mental health in the period 2012-16. In view of that additional funding, we have had 1,550 additional posts in that field. However, I am very much aware there is a difficulty in obtaining and maintaining staff. Only this week, the HSE is reintroducing a one-year post-registration programme in psychiatric nursing for nurses who are already in the general field, in intellectual disability or in the children division. While I understand it is not enough, 30 posts are being made available from August onwards. A lot of work needs to be done in that regard.

As the Deputy said, there is no point conducting a review and having it sitting on a shelf, doing nothing. There needs to be a continuous assessment and continuous review, given times have changed since A Vision for Change was published in 2006. We know that the manner in which we implement our policies and our framework must change dramatically. While it will eventually be published, this review will be continuously reviewed and the implementation will be reviewed.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Is it intended that mental health service users, their advocates, workers in the service and people with a material interest in the findings of this will have an opportunity to have an input into it? Does A Vision for Change, and the priorities set out therein, remain a priority for the Government? If so, will the Minister of State confirm that the workings of the task force will not hinder or impede the implementation of A Vision for Change any further?

Deputy Helen McEntee: It would be my intention that the report will be brought before the committee so it could be discussed not just by ourselves and by Deputies but also, as Deputy O'Reilly said, by those who have an interest in it, such as the service users, the providers and the professionals themselves.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Perhaps the Minister of State misunderstood my question. I asked if these people would have an opportunity to have an input into it, not simply to read the report when it is completed.

Deputy Helen McEntee: The review of A Vision for Change will allow the different individuals to have an input to this. We will need to look at best practice and at international norms, which will include asking those who are in the field and within the service. The Deputy asked if this is a priority, and it most certainly is. The fact is we have committed to increase spending on mental health year upon year, although I cannot give the Deputy a figure for that increase. We have committed to implement the review and implement A Vision for Change, and also to implement Connecting for Life and the priorities set out in that. *Written Answers follow Adjournment.*

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Adjournment Debate

Medicinal Products Availability

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: This is an issue the Government and the new politics urgently has to do something about. The Minister is aware that in the past few weeks, we have had two instances where people who are ill, often with life-threatening illnesses or seriously disabling illnesses, are not able to access certain drugs because of price, rather than the question of their medical efficacy or how they could help people who are sick, suffering or, in some cases, in life-threatening situations. That is just not acceptable.

Orkambi was mentioned earlier today in the case of sufferers of cystic fibrosis, of which there is a very high instance in this country. The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics stated it should not be funded at “the submitted price”; therefore, it is price which determines whether ill people will receive a drug that could make a real difference to their health and quality of life. Last week we had the issue of the availability of Pembro for those with melanoma. There has now been movement on this issue, but there had to be a fight over it and it is only occurring because there was an outcry. Last year, with others, I raised the issue of the availability of Fampyra. I had received representations from people with MS, whom this drug assisted in being able to physically walk, but it was not available for them because of price.

It is utterly obscene - that is not too strong a word to use - that the profit line of incredibly profitable big pharma corporations determines whether people will receive life-saving medicines or drugs or medicines that could make an extraordinary difference to their quality of life. Another example is Harvoni, a drug for sufferers of hepatitis C. This issue has been brought to my attention in the past week or two and I do not know whether it has appeared in the public debate. It highlights another aspect of the debate. The cost of Harvoni here is 45 times higher than in Australia because of where we source it and the profiteering of the company which produces it. There are versions of these drugs which are exactly the same, but we pay top dollar, and because of the price, we either pay too much or are not willing to pay the money.

This raises another issue. To what extent is the State looking for value for money and the cheapest versions of these drugs? We have advocated as our policy that there be a State pharmacy, the responsibility of which would be to find the cheapest versions of these drugs or else - this is important as I said earlier - we should produce them ourselves. There is no reason we could not do this. We have thousands of people and in some areas we are producing generic and much cheaper versions of drugs. We should expand this substantially, but there has been no serious push to do so.

Some of the price contrasts are absolutely extraordinary. In the United Kingdom 16 paracetamol tablets costs 35 cent. In Boots in Ireland they cost 99 cent, almost three times as much, and in Tesco, €1.55. I am not sure how much the State pays, but the point is it is an absolutely tiny fraction of the cost, even in the United Kingdom for paracetamol. In Ireland, in the case of Harvoni which I mentioned, the cost is €45,000 for a course of 12 tablets. From the hepatitis C buyers club in Australia the cost is €1,000 for the same course. This is crazy stuff. I appeal to the Government and the Minister of State. This is an issue we must address as a matter of urgency for the sake of sick and vulnerable people and to achieve value for money for the State which spends €2 billion a year on medicines via the HSE.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank the Deputy for raising this very important issue which has featured in the media quite a lot in recent days in the context of developments in the provision of new cystic fibrosis and cancer drugs. Nobody should have to pay 45 times more than what is paid elsewhere. It is not right. There should always be equal access.

Decisions on the reimbursement of new drugs are matters for the HSE. They are not political decisions, as much as we would sometimes like them to be. Every drug undergoes a scientific and evidence based assessment in line with the HSE's statutory obligations. In many cases, the prices companies seek to charge are most definitely too high and, as a result, the product does not deliver health benefits in a cost effective manner. Unfortunately, we must look at what is cost effective. I know that the Deputy is not suggesting the HSE should simply accept the first price proposed by manufacturers for their products, regardless of their clinical benefits or cost effectiveness.

As with all new drugs developed, the HSE must follow a process. I understand how patients and their families must feel in these circumstances as they await a decision by the HSE on reimbursement. I dealt with a similar matter when a gentleman in my constituency needed a life-saving drug which cost too much. This is something we see all too frequently, which is why I am eager to ensure the process is concluded as efficiently as possible for each drug.

Yesterday the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics, NCPE, published a recommendation that the cystic fibrosis drug Orkambi not be reimbursed by the HSE, as it was not considered cost-effective at the price of almost €160,000 per patient per year as submitted by the manufacturer. The high number of people who require it means that the cost is absolutely astronomical. The NCPE estimates the cost-effective price in this instance as being closer to €30,000, a significant difference. It estimates the five year gross budget impact of reimbursing Orkambi at more than €390 million and notes the significant opportunity cost associated with reimbursing the drug. Every additional euro paid to pharmaceutical companies is a euro less for investment in other critical health services and public services generally.

This is not the end of the reimbursement process. The HSE will now enter negotiations with the manufacturer to seek significant price reductions. It will then consider the outcome of these negotiations, together with the NCPE's recommendation, in making a final decision on reimbursement. I welcome the confirmation by the company to the NCPE this morning that it will continue to provide the drug for Irish patients who are involved in an expanded access programme until the issue of reimbursement is finalised in Ireland.

Two new cancer drugs have also been discussed by the HSE and in the House in recent days. I welcome yesterday's decision by the HSE to approve Pembrolizumab for reimbursement and I am sure this news will be welcomed by patients affected and their families. For the second drug, Nivolumab, I understand the assessment process is ongoing. I welcome the supplier's decision to extend its compassionate access programme for patients with advanced lung cancer to the end of June 2016 and the confirmation that all patients currently receiving treatment under the programme will continue to receive it.

The single biggest challenge in the assessment of new drugs for reimbursement is, as we have discussed, presented by the very high prices sought by suppliers. Let me be very clear - the process followed by the HSE is scientific, evidence-based and designed to deliver the best health outcomes for the patients in a cost effective manner. It is essential that the HSE have the

support of everybody in the House in its efforts to achieve the very best result for Irish patients.

Hospital Services

Deputy Hildegarde Naughton: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me the opportunity to raise this vital health issue for the west and the Minister of State for attending to answer my question. She is aware that the HSE has indicated that it intends to close the DEXA scanning unit in Merlin Park University Hospital in Galway. I am informed a reprieve has been granted at the eleventh hour, but there is absolutely no plan for the service to move forward; nor are we assured that it will not close in the future.

Ireland has approximately 91 DEXA scanners in use. The DEXA scanner situated at Merlin Park University Hospital is the only scanner not privately operated in the entire west. I am told there is a 20 year waiting list, as it stands, for a DEXA scan in Merlin Park University Hospital. No referral has been processed in three years owing to a lack of staff. Even if the unit is not closed, there will be no reduction in the waiting list owing to the lack of staff. Thousands of euros were donated by the local cystic fibrosis chapter and a charitable bequest was made to purchase the machine. Despite this, the HSE seems to be unable to staff the unit.

Since 2009 GUH staff have educated Irish health professionals on best practice for DEXA and other technologies, running International Society for Clinical Densitometry, ISCD, courses and certification examinations, which qualifications are recognised throughout the world.

5 o'clock

GUH was a centre of excellence for bone densitometry with the only DEXA specialist radiographer in post in Ireland, Professor John Carey, who is the vice president of the ISCD. GUH also established one of the first DEXA centres in the country in 1999 and one of the first fracture liaison programmes. GUH was the first Irish site to gain recognition from the Capture the Fracture programme, which recognises centres of excellence around the world.

While I could continue to recite reasons for the necessity to make and keep this unit properly operational, I think the Minister would agree that any suggested closure is a highly retrograde step. There is enormous public anger building that such a service could be threatened with closure in the west, forcing people again to travel to Dublin for what is a reasonably basic service. I am told that the difficulty with the service appears to be the hiring and retention of qualified staff.

Osteoporosis is one of the most common diseases in the world today, affecting more than 200 million people worldwide. There are no symptoms or clinical features until a fracture occurs. One in two women and one in five men over 50 will experience a fracture related to osteoporosis in their lifetime. A postmenopausal woman's annual risk of fracture is greater than her combined risk of all cardiovascular disease and invasive breast cancer combined. Ireland has one of the highest incidences of osteoporosis and hip fracture in the world. One in three men and one in five women admitted to our hospitals with a hip fracture are dead within a year following the fracture. This is almost double many other countries and well above the UK and EU norms. Many others require lengthy hospital stays in nursing homes, for example.

The cost of treating osteoporosis-related fractures is close to €1 billion annually. Many

fractures are preventable by identifying people at risk or diagnosing osteoporosis before a fracture occurs. DEXA scans play a critical role as they are the gold standard in testing to identify people with low bone mass, to diagnose osteoporosis before a fracture occurs and to monitor those on treatment. DEXA is cheap, very safe and very cost-effective. Identifying people early helps them to reduce their risk of fracture. Musculoskeletal diseases are among the commonest diseases in the world and the commonest cause of disability among men and women over 50 years of age in the developed world.

New staff were promised for the hospital's DEXA service in 2013 after a business plan was approved by the Saolta executive committee for a clinical specialist radiographer, a clinical nurse and a secretary. Only the radiographer post was finally approved for advertising nationally after two years. No one has applied for the position and neither a nurse nor a secretary was provided. It is, therefore, clear why there is a waiting list of 20 years.

The cut-off to the staff for musculoskeletal diseases since the implementation of the moratorium on new staff has had an impact on waiting lists and the welfare of patients. I urge the Minister to intervene directly in this case so this vital service is available for the people of the west and I would also like an assurance that the unit will not again be threatened with closure. It makes no sense ending this service for financial reasons or not staffing the unit properly when keeping it. Making it work effectively will save the taxpayer in the long term.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue, which is obviously very important to her, her constituents and those in the west. Galway University Hospitals, comprising of University Hospital Galway and Merlin Park University Hospital, provide a comprehensive range of services to emergency and elective patients on an inpatient, outpatient and day care basis across the two sites.

An issue has arisen with respect to the operation of the DEXA scanner situated at Merlin Park Hospital. The Minister for Health has been advised by the Saolta University Health Care Group that the bone density scanning service has been impacted, as the Deputy has rightly pointed out, by a shortage of radiographers. As a result, a waiting list has been building up for some time now.

Galway University Hospitals are actively working to recruit radiographers in order to fill a number of vacancies. One successful candidate will commence work in early July. An additional five individuals have been offered posts and are currently in the process of appointment. Recruitment to three further posts is ongoing. As I mentioned to another Deputy earlier today, recruitment of staff within the whole health sector is a big challenge that we need to overcome and a lot of changes need to happen in that regard. Saolta has advised that GUH plans to treat all patients booked into the bone density scanner service until the end of June 2016. In the interim they are reviewing options to manage the waiting lists after June, and that includes the employment of the agency staff.

The Saolta Group and the HSE are working to put the necessary arrangements in place to ensure the continuity of services from July. In the interim period until the newly recruited radiographers have taken up their posts, the hospital group is progressing a range of options, including staff overtime and outsourcing in order to ensure service continuity for patients. As the Deputy would also know, a number of facilities in Galway can also carry out DEXA scans, including Portiuncula and Sligo University Hospitals, and there are private facilities in the Galway area that also offer DEXA scans. That is her area, so she needs to ensure that the service

remains within the hospital.

It is also important to note that major developments are ongoing and planned for Galway University Hospitals. The programme for a partnership Government has committed to progressing a new emergency department facility. Construction work is also ongoing on the new 75-bed ward block as well as a new acute mental health department at the hospital. There will be much focus on making sure that those positions are filled and that the situation is tenable into the future.

Mental Health Commission Reports

Deputy James Browne: I raise the issue of the Mental Health Commission approved centre inspection reports that were published on 26 May 2016, in which 11 units across the country were assessed. As the Minister of State will know, every approved centre registered by the Mental Health Commission must, under law, be inspected at least once a year and during each inspection, the approved centre is assessed against all regulations, rules and codes of practice and section 4 of the Mental Health Act 2001.

These reports have highlighted a number of high-risk practices taking place in a number of psychiatric units throughout the country. For example, the acute psychiatric unit in Cavan General Hospital was found to have been non-compliant in its maintenance of records and had practised the use of physical restraint on high-risk patients. In St. Stephen's Hospital, risk management procedures were found to be at high risk while in the Aislínn Centre, staffing issues were found to be at high risk. In Letterkenny General Hospital, individual care plans and therapeutic services were again found to be high-risk issues while at Le Brun House-Whitethorn House in Clonskeagh, the premises and safety issues were found to be at high risk.

I want to focus, in particular, on the department of psychiatry in St. Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny. The premises was found to be of high risk and, extremely disconcertingly, the admission of children and the relevant code of practice was found to be a high-risk factor. The report states that "the approved centre was deemed non-compliant as there was no evidence of required Children First training or any other relevant training [of] staff [in this area]". The approved centre "was not suitable for the admission of children". The admission of children to adult psychiatric units is an ongoing issue. It is a wholly unacceptable practice and I ask the Minister of State what her proposals are in this regard and when it will stop. The previous Government promised to end this during its lifetime and that pledge was made in 2011 when it had come to power. It can only contribute to the mental health problems of these children by putting them into adult psychiatric units. While the staff will do their best, they cannot be given the full supports these children need, in particular early intervention supports, and many of these children are simply put on suicide watch.

The parents gave their consent to the children being admitted on most occasions to these units out of simple desperation and under a sense of duress as they feel they have no other options for their children who need psychiatric care. This is, of course, also a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are many issues surrounding mental health - 24/7 care, in particular, is a key issue - but I ask the Minister of State to make this issue the No. 1 priority during her tenure to bring an end to this practice of putting children into wholly unsuitable and unsafe places, namely, adult psychiatric units.

Deputy Helen McEntee: I thank Deputy Browne for his question. The Mental Health Commission is charged with visiting and inspecting every approved mental health centre at least once a year. The commission, as the Deputy has rightly pointed out, has now published its report on St. Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny, Cavan General Hospital, Naas General Hospital and Clonskeagh hospital. While each premises received excellent and good rankings for elements of their performance, there were concerns about the upkeep of the premises, other issues and the admission of children to the St. Luke's Hospital adult psychiatric ward. A maintenance programme is in place in each of the relevant hospitals to ensure all issues identified in the report on the premises upkeep are addressed. The Government is strongly committed to improving all aspects of our mental health services and, as Minister of State, I am committed to this also. Funding for mental health will increase from the 2015 outturn of €785 million to a projected budget of €826 million in 2016, an increase of €41 million, or 5.2%, which includes €35 million ring-fenced for mental health for new developments.

The admittance of children to adult units is sometimes permitted for reasons of geographic location, the expected length of stay, which is usually short term, and the age of the young persons involved, which is usually between 16 and 18 years. It is seldom a person younger than that is admitted, however it happens. Nobody agrees with this policy, and we all want to ensure it does not happen.

The HSE National Service Plan 2016 aims to improve the placement of children in age-appropriate mental health settings. We have set a target of 95% appropriate placement, and this is indicated in the plan, to allow for some operational flexibility surrounding emergency placements in adult units. I will take on board the Deputy's point that this must be a top priority. While it remains challenging, progress has been significant, despite increased demands on the CAMHS service. In 2008, there were 247 such inappropriate admissions to adult units, whereas in 2015 there were 95. While that was 95 too many, we are moving in the right direction and must continue to do so. It is a priority for the HSE to keep such admissions to a minimum, and this must be kept under constant review. It is not appropriate that anyone under the age of 18 be in a situation in which they feel scared or threatened and we want to ensure it does not happen.

I will continue to prioritise development of all aspects of CAMHS, including timely access to appropriate services, early intervention and an integrated service approach, again bringing it back to the community. A comprehensive approach, sometimes involving services outside of CAMHS or the HSE, is required to further reduce such placements. The admission of a child or adolescent to an acute adult inpatient unit is made following a clinical assessment of the needs of the individual. Sometimes, even if beds are available, they may be at a distance, and other factors must be taken into account.

The HSE is actively managing the issue of the admission of children to adult units. Specific measures adopted include a dedicated notification system to inform the mental health division whenever a child is admitted to an adult unit so it is constantly monitored. This information permits direct engagement with the local management team to develop a timely clinical management response to ensure a child or young person in this position is assessed and, if required, sent to an appropriate CAMHS as soon as possible. The timeframes are generally short. Many of the 95 admissions are, unfortunately, accounted for by a child who has come back a second or third time.

Bearing in mind all the circumstances, the hospitals concerned are making progress on the issues raised, while taking account of the wishes of each young person, his or her parents or

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guardians, and the complexities of each case. The Department will continue to closely monitor the issues raised in the report, particularly regarding the admission of children to places where they should not be.

The Dáil adjourned at 5.15 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 8 June 2016.