



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**DÁIL ÉIREANN**

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

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# DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Dé Céadaoin, 14 Meitheamh 2017*

*Wednesday, 14 June 2017*

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

*Paidir.*  
*Prayer.*

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## **Resignation of Taoiseach**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I understand the Taoiseach has a statement to make by way of information to the House.

**The Taoiseach:** A Cheann Comhairle, tá orm a chur in iúl duit gur éirigh mé as oifig mar Thaoiseach inné trína chur sin in iúl don Uachtarán de bhun an Bhunreachtá.

Yesterday I resigned from the office of Taoiseach by placing my resignation in the hands of the President, pursuant to the Constitution.

## **Nomination of Taoiseach**

**The Taoiseach:** Tairgim:

Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Leo Varadkar le bheith ceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.

I move:

That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Leo Varadkar for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.

Having worked closely with Deputy Varadkar throughout his political career I am confident that he will carry out the role of An Taoiseach with energy, integrity and skill. From his deep involvement in the Young Fine Gael movement as a young student to his election to Fingal County Council in 2004 and his election to this House, Dáil Éireann, in 2007, Deputy Varadkar has demonstrated the drive and the commitment that are required to succeed in politics.

Immediately upon his election to this House I appointed him to the Fine Gael Front Bench, first in the enterprise brief and later as spokesman on energy and communications. In both

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roles he worked diligently in developing new and innovative policy proposals. Since then I had the privilege of being first elected Taoiseach in 2011 and have had the privilege of appointing Deputy Varadkar to three separate Cabinet positions, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Minister for Health and more recently as Minister for Social Protection. In each of these Ministries Deputy Varadkar has had significant achievements, whether the revitalisation of the tourism industry, the oversight of The Gathering, stabilising the health service and rolling out free general practitioner, GP, care for children younger than six years or increasing the weekly payments to those dependent on social welfare.

In 2011 the Irish people elected a new Government to rescue the economy, to get Ireland working again and Deputy Varadkar in his Ministries was central to that work. Today our country is in a much stronger position than previously, the troika has left, unemployment has fallen dramatically and the public finances are in very good shape. However, many challenges remain, not least in areas such as health and housing and child poverty. We must continue to manage the economy carefully so that it generates the resources that we need to rebuild our essential public services.

As Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar will meet these challenges head on, including Brexit and Ireland's future place in the European Union. As the country's youngest holder of this office he will speak for a new generation of Irishwomen and Irishmen. He represents a modern, diverse and inclusive Ireland and will speak for it like no other, an Ireland in which each person can fulfil his or her potential and live his or her dreams.

I wish Deputy Varadkar and his team every success in the challenges that lie ahead. I have no doubt but that he will build on the solid foundations on which our country now stands and that he will see that it is managed carefully in the people's interests and that the decisions his Government will make will always hold the people as central to those decisions. I therefore commend his name to the House for selection as Taoiseach of Ireland.

**Deputy Josepha Madigan:** The Office of Taoiseach has been occupied by many great men. Today, the baton is passing from one of these great men to another. I am privileged to be following Deputy Enda Kenny in seconding Deputy Varadkar's nomination for the position of Taoiseach.

These great men were men of their time. Deputy Varadkar is of his time. He is a leader for the Ireland of today - open, decent and compassionate. I was first elected 16 months ago to represent the constituency of Dublin-Rathdown and was fortunate to participate in the government formation talks last year. There I saw up close Deputy Varadkar's leadership skills. He is a person of great qualities - honest, genuine and decisive with first-class intellect. Most of all, he is courageous. A famous man once remarked, "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities ... [because] it is the quality which guarantees all others."

So far in your life, Deputy Varadkar, you have shown great courage and achieved so much. You will need every ounce of that courage to provide the leadership required for this country over the coming years. There will be many challenges ahead but I am confident you are the best person and are best placed to meet these challenges. There is so much we can be proud of, yet there is always going to be more to be improved upon. I believe that under your leadership we can take this country forward to a place of continued growth and increased revival. You are sensitive to the needs and wants of all. You are dedicated to the public interest. You are an honest man. I know you will not be found wanting. You have all the characteristics and, as Deputy

Enda Kenny said, the energy to succeed, energy that will be needed every day you occupy the Office of Taoiseach. I also know you will do everything to make sure you will leave this country in a better place, not just for us but for our children, and you will do so, not just for the few but for the many. You have the talent to lead the country. You have the ambition for this nation and all her people. For this beloved country of ours, you are the right person for the right time.

Ireland stands to gain from the election of Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach. That is why I am honoured to second his nomination.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call on the Chief Whip to announce the proposed business for the day.

Debate adjourned.

### **Business of Dáil**

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that No. 1, in relation to the proceedings on the nomination of Taoiseach, the following arrangements will apply: the speeches of a representative of the Government and of the parties and groups shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; (ii) that all Members may share time; and (iii) that the proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion after two hours, whereupon the House shall stand suspended for four hours and all divisions demanded in the House following the suspension of sitting shall be taken manually.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Are the arrangements set out by the Minister of State agreed? Agreed.

### **Nomination of Taoiseach (Resumed)**

Atairgeadh an cheist: “Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Leo Varadkar chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.”

Question again proposed: “That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Leo Varadkar for appointment by the President as Taoiseach.”

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Before proceeding to call on the leaders to make their contributions, are there any further nominations for the position of Taoiseach? As there is none, I call Deputy Micheál Martin.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Is nóiméad cinniúnach agus tábhachtach i saol an daonlathais é ceannaireacht Rialtais a athrú, go háirithe nuair a tharlaíonn an t-athrú seo i lár théarma na Parlaiminte. Tugann sé dúshlán dúinn uilig mar Theachtaí Dála atá tofa ag an bpobal seasamh siar ón díospóireacht laethúil polaitiúil agus bheith ag smaoineamh go géar ar na dúshláin atá roimh an tír anois agus sa todhchaí.

Debates on the nomination of a Taoiseach have far too often been defined by loud partisan speeches and attacks on the legitimacy of the mandates held by others. In fact in some cases, the smaller the mandate of one’s party, the more likely one is to claim to speak on behalf of the people. Yesterday, we saw this again when Deputy Brady of Sinn Féin went so far as to tweet

from the Chamber an attack on the fact that I described Deputy Enda Kenny as an Irish patriot.

In addressing the nomination of Deputy Varadkar, I start from the basic belief that everybody in this House has a mandate and a sincere concern for the interests of our country. There are deeply important policy differences between us that demand robust debate and different levels of commitment to the democratic republicanism that defines our State. However, the people who sent us here have a right to demand that we be constructive. A change of Taoiseach in circumstances such as these is a standard democratic procedure. No dramatic change in the basic policy of Government has been proposed which would require a general election in order to obtain public legitimacy.

In addressing this nomination, I would like to deal with the role of the Taoiseach, the priorities of his Government and the work of this Dáil. Within this, I will of course deal with the basis upon which my party is honouring its existing commitments as part of the confidence and supply agreement. First, let me make a personal point. This is a very special day for Deputy Leo Varadkar. In becoming Taoiseach he will have both fulfilled his clearest ambition and secured the most important role in our parliamentary democracy. His family and loved ones have every right to be immensely proud of him and his achievement. This also applies to the many people who make up his local organisation and who have worked with him since he first stood for election 18 years ago. I think even Deputy Varadkar was somewhat embarrassed by the euphoria with which his election as Fine Gael leader was embraced by some commentators. However, there is no doubt that his unique personal story and success is important for many. This should be acknowledged and valued.

As we showed repeatedly last year, our preference in this Dáil was for Fine Gael to be removed from power. In fact, Fianna Fáil Teachtaí Dála are the only Deputies who voted for a realistic means of ending Fine Gael's leadership of Government. Others delivered long-winded harangues where their bottom line was a demand that parties other than themselves be in government. We continued to oppose core Fine Gael policies as outlined in its manifestoes and in its approach to governing. We do not share the enthusiasm of Deputy Kate O'Connell's "choir-boys" for a new dawn being ushered in by their leader. However, as we wish our country well, we also wish Deputy Varadkar well and hope that he is successful in significantly changing the performance of the Government of which is a member and which he will now lead.

He has today started well in his decision to get someone other than Deputy Noel Rock to nominate him.

**A Deputy:** Once bitten, twice shy.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** As we all know, that did not end up too well last time. I hope Deputy Varadkar will respond to the rumour that he sent Deputy Rock out of the country for the duration of the leadership election and only allowed him back in for the vote.

Deputy Varadkar's decade as a party spokesman and Minister has shown us a lot about how he approaches politics but he will reach the office of Taoiseach with almost nothing known about his views on many major policy issues. Even his most ardent supporters have had to strain themselves to claim that he has more than a modest policy record as a Minister. They ultimately had to resort to claiming for him policies which had clearly been initiated by others. In fact, there was something almost indecent about the attempt to snatch credit from Senator James Reilly for the few bright spots in his time as Minister for Health.

Deputy Varadkar's views on the challenge of building a lasting peace, prosperity and unity on this island are largely unknown beyond the few general statements about being in favour of all three. The same is true about the development and reform of the European Union, industrial policy, education policy and even the future of our health service. It is certainly true that Deputy Varadkar's views would be significantly more right wing on most economic topics than the centre-ground consensus. In last year's negotiations, his approach was very distinct from that of his colleagues. During his leadership contest, he again gave an emphasis which showed him to be by instinct more inclined to prioritising deregulation and tax cuts ahead of a more social emphasis. This morning's headlines suggest that he will temper his ideology. Let us hope this has some substance to it.

The core reason Deputy Varadkar secured such a crushing victory in his parliamentary party is that his colleagues hope he will restore their political fortunes and not because he was offering the type of genuinely transformative and modernising leadership offered by a Taoiseach such as Seán Lemass. Deputy Varadkar won their hearts conclusively by using his opportunities as a stand-in at Leaders' Questions to be more aggressively partisan in attacking opponents. This followed on from a series of electoral campaigns where his preferred role was as a designated attacker of the Opposition. His colleagues were also impressed by his open approach to the media. For many years he has been renowned as the most accessible source in Government. His skill at avoiding hard news and distancing himself from the controversies of a Government he sat in was remarkable. Added to this has been his ability to spin every minor development in one of his Departments as a step change. It is striking that the strong support which this record won him in his parliamentary party was not reflected in the much broader membership of Fine Gael.

The role of Taoiseach is profoundly different from that of Minister and party spokesman. It is only by him holding the office that we will see if Deputy Varadkar is willing to make the changes necessary to be successful. There will come a point when the soft coverage ends and the accountability begins. The tactical obsession with managing headlines can only work for a while. It has already been indicated that a raft of initiatives such as the new infrastructure plan had been held up in order that they can be branded as showing new energy in the Government. This is the same approach that for six years has seen every passing policy put in new covers and stamped with the words "action plan". In taking over a Government defined by its ability to over-spin and under-deliver on nearly all major issues, success will not be achieved by the implementation of a new media management grid for sharing out policy morsels. The true mark of success for Deputy Varadkar will be if he understands just how wrong he is when he says that if one tries to represent everyone, one will represent no one. The very definition of the job of Taoiseach and the Government is to represent all the people. It is not about picking winners and losers or finding new labels to divide people. It is about representing every citizen. It is about fighting against the growing polarisation we have seen in recent years where a deep sense of unfairness has developed, especially among those who feel their struggles are ignored. Our country faces many deep challenges. Some of these are the result of a refusal to acknowledge problems until they become crises. Others are the result of external threats.

The confidence and supply agreement which we agreed last year is unusual in international terms in only one respect, namely, it is solely focused on policy. We have sought and received none of the access to patronage or resources found in nearly all such agreements. We did this because we wanted to ensure an absolute focus on the substance of new and targeted policies. The most important thing that has been achieved is that Fine Gael's divisive approach to bud-

gets has been curtailed. The regressive tax cuts and assault on key services have been halted. Deputy Varadkar said last year that the latest budget is the first fair one of his party's time in office. However, the broader implementation of the policy agreement has been unacceptable. In housing, commitments for delivery on social housing have been missed, while misleading figures have been used to cover this up. In mental health, the Government has simply refused to allocate or spend the agreed and desperately needed extra funding. In hospital services, the manipulation of rising waiting lists continues, and the full funding of an agreed and proven way of tackling the lists has been unacceptably delayed. With regard to the budget, the lack of transparency and bad faith in outlining available resources was an unequivocal breach of the agreement, as was the use of financial powers to block a non-financial Bill introduced by Fianna Fáil. Even on a small but deeply important commitment such as the restoration of dedicated career and guidance counselling in schools, there have been unjustified delays and splitting of hairs.

In broader terms, the past year has been one of ongoing drift and excuses from the Government. The two principal excuses have been that Deputy Kenny was on his way out which left a leadership vacuum and that Ministers are scared to propose anything because they do not know how the Dáil will vote. With the change of Fine Gael's leader, the first excuse is gone. The second was always nonsense. The bulk of legislation that has not been published is uncontroversial. For other initiatives there is no credibility whatsoever because Ministers have failed even to set out what they would like to do let alone produce proposals we could vote on. Today the time for excuses ends. The Fine Gael Party has the dominant control of Government. It has major staffing and financial resources at its disposal to develop and, more important, implement badly needed improvements for our people. The full, complete and fast implementation of the agreement which allows it to be in government is not open for debate. If it operates in good faith and with transparency, the agreement will run its full course but if it sees every issue as a partisan opportunity and seeks to manipulate the budget process to suit immediate electoral strategies, it knows the consequences.

I have been assured by Deputy Varadkar that he will fully implement the agreement and instruct Ministers to end delays on agreed funding. In addition, he has accepted the need to move immediately on other agreed proposals such as a new initiative on mental health. I have also raised our concerns about Northern Ireland and Brexit. We need a much more active and ambitious engagement if we are to overcome threats of historic significance. This is not about having more photo calls but a return to the days of Dublin seeking to take an active leadership and ending the stranglehold of narrow party interests.

If Deputy Varadkar wishes to do more than talk about changing politics, he has an opportunity to do this today before the vote on the new Government. Yesterday's appointment to the Court of Appeal was the first time in nearly a quarter of a century that an appointment such as this was made in this manner. It directly bypassed established procedures and the excuse that there were no qualified applicants is clearly false given that the last application process closed nearly six months ago and there was no public advertisement of this vacancy. Given the controversies which the outgoing Attorney General has been involved in and the findings of the Fennelly report, the rushed and unusual manner of the appointment to which Deputy Varadkar and all of his colleagues agreed is, at best, squalid.

Added to this is the behaviour of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Shane Ross. Where once he insisted on removing politics completely from such appointments, he has now agreed to the most directly political appointment in nearly a quarter of a century. It is essential that Deputy Varadkar addresses this controversy. We expect him to explain what he

knew and outline his discussions with the Minister, Deputy Ross, on this matter and the highly unusual decision to take one partial recommendation of an incomplete report from the Garda Commissioner and announce it with a banner on a south Dublin road.

The challenges faced by our country are as they were last year. The obligation on the Government and Dáil to act constructively to tackle this challenge remains. After a wasted year of drift and delay, the time for excuses is over. We will have a new Taoiseach who has been chosen by his party to turn around electoral performance. What we need is a new focus on the much harder work of delivering for the Irish people.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** Tá mé ag roinnt mo chuid ama leis an Teachta Louise O'Reilly. Lá mór é seo i saol an Teachta Leo Varadkar agus saol a mhuintire, go háirithe a thuismitheoirí atá anseo inniu agus iad bródúil agus sásta. Cuirim fáilte mhór rompu. I particularly welcome Deputy Leo Varadkar's family to the House who are proud and happy on this big day in his and their lives.

Never in the history of this State has the need for a progressive head of Government been more essential. The ongoing difficulties in the North, the dire consequences of Brexit, the all-pervasive continuation of corruption, the hardship borne by ordinary people because of the crisis in the health services and housing and the scandals in justice and An Garda Síochána all demand a reforming Taoiseach to represent all of the people, not just some of them.

It is a major honour to serve as a Taoiseach, especially at 38 years of age but not all young people are radical, progressive or visionary. Today, the question is what kind of leader are we getting in Leo Varadkar. I have already expressed my fear that Teachta Varadkar will drag this Government even further to the right. As Minister for Social Protection, when he should have been working to protect the most vulnerable he used his position to make their lives even harder. More recently, he spent more than €200,000 of public money on a campaign which suggested that welfare fraud is rife in this State. That has since proved to be untrue. This attitude contrasts sharply with Fine Gael's attitude to white collar crime and corporate tax dodging.

In his time as Minister for Health, Deputy Varadkar failed to tackle a crisis that leaves patients languishing on trolleys and tens of thousands more waiting months for vital treatments. He presided over a two-tier health service and the privatisation agenda that is at the heart of Government policy. A couple of weeks ago, he claimed that the health services did not require significantly increased investment despite knowing that billions of euro had been cut from the health budget since 2011. There are now 3,200 fewer nurses and midwives than in 2008. Services for citizens with disabilities and other vulnerable citizens, including children, have been vandalised.

During the Fine Gael leadership contest, Deputy Varadkar stated that Sinn Féin represented the "greatest threat to our democracy". This is nonsense, and he knows it. This Chamber is a little theatre. It lends itself to theatrics and play-acting. Most of the media reflect this and I do not blame them for that. The politics of the soundbite rules and most of us can play that game.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** Deputy Adams certainly does.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** However, this Chamber is also a bubble, a silo detached from the lives of citizens. Sometimes politics takes the form of cheap shots, slander, demonisation and playing to the lowest common denominator. The first term of this Government saw lots of that. The political discourse was cheapened and coarsened as a result.

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I hope the new Taoiseach does not repeat that mistake. I think he is a decent man. I wish him well. I do not know him well though he and I once attended the same pilates class.

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** We could not get the former Taoiseach to stretch as far as that.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** It would not be big in Mayo.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** This is a big day for Leo and his clan, who are rightly proud. We wish them all well.

Maybe he is perplexed by Sinn Féin's refusal to accept the *status quo* or join the cosy club typified by his party's little arrangement with Fianna Fáil. Declaring that he is going to take on Sinn Féin might play well in some quarters, but it means little in the real world. Successive British Governments and the old unionist regime, using extraordinary powers and cruel oppression, took on Sinn Féin for decades. They failed miserably. For most of that time, they were actively assisted by successive Irish Governments also using extraordinary powers and cruel oppression. They also failed miserably. Maybe the Taoiseach-to-be should get to know Sinn Féin.

I commend the example of the late Albert Reynolds. He was the first Taoiseach to make a difference when the peace process needed it. When others talked the talk, Albert walked the walk. He was able to do so because he had an affinity with the North, in many ways he was not in thrall to the system and, especially, he was new to the office. Albert Reynolds did the right thing when the prevailing political mood and most of the media agenda were against it.

Leo Varadkar also has the opportunity to do the right thing. He could allay the fears and worries of ordinary people about what he will do in office. I appeal to him to do that, to tear away from the easy rhetoric of a "republic of opportunity" to the hard task of building a real rights-based republic with a plan to eradicate inequalities. That means turning away from the politics of austerity and cuts in favour of investment in our people and the rebuilding of vital public services. It means ending poverty and disadvantage. Leo Varadkar could be a Taoiseach who sees the level of homelessness and the state of our health services, including mental health services, and says, "No more, not on my watch." He could be the Taoiseach who invests in rural Ireland. Ba chóir go mbeidh mar chuspóir aige Éire níos fearr d'achan duine a chothú agus a thógáil - an Ireland where no child calls a hotel room home. Becoming Taoiseach gives a person an opportunity to do great things, such as ending discrimination against women. The eighth amendment is a relic of the past. It has to go. It must be replaced with compassion. I ask Deputy Varadkar to get behind the campaign to repeal the eighth amendment and to enact legislation.

Greatness is not determined by status or power. It is determined by how well one treats those who can do nothing for one. That involves going against the direction set by the establishment. It means tackling the crisis in housing by delivering social housing and tackling extortionate rents. It means investing in our health service to ensure that it is truly a public health service where access to treatment is based solely on medical need and not on the size of a person's income. It means making the economy work for the citizens, not just for the market or the profit motive. It means really reforming the administration of policing and justice. This has to start with the removal of the Garda Commissioner.

The policy and the position of the political system here is partitionist. After almost 100 years of the existence of this State, that is hardly surprising. It is also very self-serving and self-ish. A visionary Taoiseach would foster a real affinity and a spirit of solidarity with all sections of the people of the North. The Good Friday Agreement defines the relationship on this island and between these islands. A visionary and truly patriotic Taoiseach would promote and protect that Agreement against all comers, including those in Downing Street who have undermined, and who are prepared to abandon, this cornerstone international treaty for transient and temporary political power. A visionary Taoiseach would facilitate a referendum as soon as possible to allow citizens in the North and the diaspora to vote in presidential elections. He would allow those Northern MPs who wish to have speaking rights in the Dáil to have them, as was agreed here in 2003.

Turning the tide of an entire political agenda which has been in place since partition will take courage, vision and determination. Tá an rogha ag an Teachta Varadkar. He will soon have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of people across this island who need it most. Ná cur amú é, ná habair é, déan é. Deputy Varadkar recently said that the North should stay in the customs union and the Single Market and that any customs checks should be in the airports and ports not on land borders. He also recognised the vote of the people in the North to remain part of the European Union. Designated special status for the North within the European Union is the best, and only, solution and Deputy Varadkar can deliver on this crucial issue. The prospective new Taoiseach must also get behind the cause of Irish unity. That is his constitutional duty. It makes political, social and economic sense. Deputy Varadkar should become a persuader for the ending of partition and the reunification of our country.

Sinn Féin will not support this nomination but I look forward to working with an Teachta Varadkar on the basis that he is willing to take meaningful action to deal with these issues. If he is not, or if he believes that the right-wing policies currently pursued by the Government have the support of the people, then he should put that belief to the test by calling a general election. Go n-éirí an t-ádh leis an Teachta Varadkar ar mhaithe na tíre. Tá mé dairíre faoi sin.

**Deputy Louise O'Reilly:** I congratulate the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, on his effective appointment as the new Taoiseach. I am sure it gives great hope to other Fine Gael Deputies who have failed to excel in their ministerial posts and are unwanted by their own membership, to see that failure and unpopularity are not barriers to becoming the leader of Fine Gael. I also congratulate the *de facto* Tánaiste, Deputy Micheál Martin, who yet again has stood steadily by his very best friends in government. Maith an fear Deputy Martin. He is indeed the gift that keeps giving to Fine Gael. I also wish the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, well in his new role. I hope, for the sake of the Irish people, that he can find it in himself to be benevolent and to work to create a fair and equitable society but I do not think he will. I have seen nothing from him in his career in politics to date that gives me the hope or the confidence that he will be anything other than the most right-wing Taoiseach this State has ever seen.

As Minister for Health, Deputy Varadkar missed targets, saw record numbers of patients on trolleys, oversaw botched recruitment schemes, saw the numbers on waiting lists soar, abandoned universal health care, perpetuated the drive towards the privatisation of the health service and generally stumbled from one disaster to the next. Added to this, he had the audacity to insinuate that investing in fixing the health crisis would somehow make front-line staff lazy and unmotivated. However, during his time as Minister, there was only one lazy and unmotivated person.

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As Minister for Social Protection, he tried to become the Minister for fraud but he exposed himself. We now know that his crusade was nonsense and that his “Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All” campaign cost over €200,000. Interestingly, I have never heard him challenge the levels of tax avoidance and tax evasion in Ireland. He says he wants to take a special interest in health. He can start by looking at the failure to recruit and retain nurses, midwives, doctors and other vital front-line health workers. The Government’s less-than-ambitious target of 130 nurses per month is not even achieving 50%. Nothing in his record or plans gives me hope that he will be the best person to lead the charge to recruit these vital staff.

I also note that he wants to ban strikes for front-line staff. He can spin his statement any way he likes. I have worked in industrial relations and I know a Thatcherite strike ban when I see one. I know that making Labour Court recommendations compulsory and binding is effectively a strike ban. This is the message he has already sent to emergency service workers and other health workers.

Finally, as I am running out of time-----

*(Interruptions).*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Order.

**Deputy Louise O’Reilly:** ----- I come to his attitude to repealing the eighth amendment. In a State where women have virtually no reproductive rights, he has compared women travelling to get medically necessary procedures to a lads’ holiday in Las Vegas. In 2010 he said that allowing rape victims to terminate their pregnancies could lead to abortion on demand and still the UN points out that our laws and our Government repeatedly fail to protect Irish women from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. I have seen nothing to convince me that he will not simply continue to administer this cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

While I wish the Deputy Varadkar well in his new role, I know that past performance is an indicator of future performance. Given his track record, that does not bode well for Irishwomen or Irish people in general.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Nearly as convincing as Mary Lou.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** I propose to share time with Deputy Burton.

**A Ceann Comhairle:** Agreed.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** On a personal level, I wish Deputy Varadkar well today, particularly as we worked together in government. While my party cannot support his election as Taoiseach on the basis of the existing programme for Government, it is a very proud day for him personally. Equally, I know it will be a very happy day for his partner, Matthew, his parents Ashok and Miriam and all his friends and family, many of whom join us for what is a momentous day in their lives. For a gay man, the son of a migrant, to be elected Taoiseach of this country is an important step. As he pointed out himself, it speaks well of this Republic. However, I think he will agree that we should not - and will not - see today as the end of the story.

While I sincerely wish him well for his time as Taoiseach, I must inform him that Labour will continue to oppose his Government. The programme for Government and the confidence-and-supply agreement that underpins it are deeply flawed documents. At a high level they attain a wrong and short-sighted commitment to spending one third of all available funding on

tax cuts at a time when public services badly need investment. The rainy day fund, as Deputy Varadkar has now publicly recognised as representing a waste of money, is an opportunity to invest in much-needed capital investment. That is what it should be utilised for.

In a range of other areas, as a policy programme, the programme for Government is clearly deficient. There is no real agenda to advance the rights of people to work, and who work, in society. There is no brave commitment to universal, high-quality public services that could be the best in the world. There is no determination to deal with challenging but important social issues from admission to schools to the repeal of the eighth amendment. As the agreements are between one party of the centre right, another party of the centre right, and a smattering of Independents, from my perspective the reasons for those deficiencies are patently obvious. If we were sceptical about the programme for Government last May, that is even more the case now. For more than a year, we have endured what is effectively a do-nothing Dáil. New politics has become a notion worthy only of scorn and ridicule. Only one piece of Opposition legislation has been enacted since this House was elected, namely, my party's Bill to give trade union rights to freelance workers. The Government has enacted fewer pieces of legislation than any preceding Government in the same period. As I have said on more than one occasion, when a Government does nothing, in reality it begins to do harm.

I hope the Minister will restart the engines of Government upon his election. However, I am afraid I do not expect much. It is a very small thing, but the decision, for example, to put the House into recess after the election of the Cabinet this evening does not bode well. I know that newly appointed Ministers need time to read themselves into their Departments, but the new Taoiseach could have taken questions tomorrow and he could have set out his own vision. Legislation could have been advanced. Private Members' Bills, which are queuing up, could have been debated tomorrow. Unfortunately, the Minister has chosen to forgo the opportunity to show from the start a new determination to change the way business has been transacted in this House for the past year.

I think it is fair to say that the Minister's own views have moderated on a range of issues over the years. We have had personal dialogues on them. I jokingly said at the end of the previous Government that perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Labour Party was to move him towards social democracy. The young man in a hurry who enjoyed writing letters to *The Irish Times* was a decidedly right-wing chap. Even in 2011, the Minister was a different politician from the one who stands before the House today. At that time, Fine Gael policy was to address the all-encompassing economic crisis by reducing public expenditure and increasing taxation on a ratio of 3:1. We found that a very hard Fine Gael position but the Minister's position was to do it on a ratio of 4:1.

More recently, as others have mentioned, the welfare cheats campaign caused great concern to many of us on this side of the House. I hope as Taoiseach he will take a more compassionate approach to those who have least in society. It can be easy at times to make political targets of those who rely on the State. Whether as a dog whistle to a particular electoral base or as a mechanism for reducing the size and capacity of the State to intervene on behalf of the most marginalised, too often those policies are favoured by politicians of the right.

The Minister knows how to disavow from that description and characterisation of himself. I hope his stewardship for Ireland will see these tactics abandoned by his Government. Speaking of things that should be disavowed, I note that the Minister will be supported today by Deputy Lowry. I have been informed that the Minister has spoken to Deputy Lowry on a couple of oc-

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casions in recent days. I read in this week's *Tipperary Star* that Deputy Lowry has claimed that in return for his support, he will have access to the office of the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, to his officials, and to his Ministers. As Taoiseach, I hope Deputy Varadkar will put such contact to an end. He should not depend on Deputy Lowry's support.

As I have already said, the views of the Minister on a range of other issues have already begun to change. His opposition to adoption by same-sex couples and to gender recognition legislation have now, thankfully, been dropped. For those, however, who regard his election as a liberal triumph, there is, I am afraid, still much to be proved. I recall only too well the agonising debates between his party and mine over the X case legislation. At every step, the Minister wanted more checks on women. Ludicrously, at one point Fine Gael suggested that women should require six medical opinions. This view was regarded by the Labour Party as an attempt to renege on our agreed position to legislate for the X case judgment. I will credit the former Minister, James Reilly, as one of the few rational people within Fine Gael on that issue.

To give him credit, it seems that the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, favours a referendum on the eighth amendment next year. On the face of it, that is indeed welcome, but that commitment must now be tested. The Minister seeks to make a particular virtue of allowing everyone to take their own position on the issue. That is fine for as long as he remains a Minister, but as Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar will have a duty to lead, to guide the proposed solution, to advocate for it and to make sure it commands the support of the people and a majority in these Houses.

Serious change comes about because serious people lead it, and this brings me to my ultimate ask of the Minister. As Taoiseach, he cannot continue in a role of commentator. I hope he will not miss too much the proffering of pithy soundbites to Newstalk on issues of the day. We might miss those soundbites on issues such as the opening of the Garda station at Stepside, news of which coincidentally leaked out yesterday, but he must now be willing to lead from the front. Deputy Varadkar's predecessor is not a perfect man, but he is a good man who always sought to lead from the front with humour and integrity. If Deputy Varadkar can do the same, that will be a good start. Tús maith, leath na hoibre.

At the start of my contribution I said that I wish the Minister well. Having recovered from an appalling crisis, Ireland now stands at a moment of wonderful opportunity. Our growing prosperity could transform our society or it could be squandered in the search for electoral success. Much of that choice will be Deputy Varadkar's to make.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** On my own behalf and on behalf of people in Dublin West, I express my congratulations and good wishes to Leo and his family, to his parents, Miriam and Ashok, and to his partner, Matt. This is a very proud day for the family and it is a great achievement and honour for Leo. Dublin West, the area which the new Taoiseach and I have the honour to represent, is one of the most diverse parts of Ireland. Some 30% of the population in that region is either foreign born or has parents who were born abroad. In its diversity, Dublin West represents a microcosm of the successes and challenges facing modern Ireland. Global and Irish business leaders such as IBM and PayPal, along with major Irish employers such as Dunnes Stores and Keelings, employ tens of thousands of workers in the Dublin West area. There is a huge population of young people, children and young families and, also, a growing older population. The constituency of Dublin West reflects many of the social challenges that we in this Chamber all face alongside the economic growth the country is currently experiencing.

Time waits for no Taoiseach or Tánaiste. I know that and Deputy Enda Kenny knows it.

The new Taoiseach will have to hit the ground running. I know that Deputy Varadkar is well capable of this, having met him jogging many a time along the banks of the Royal Canal. He will have to get on his bike and get going. That is the least we expect. There are decisions he will have to make almost immediately if he is to invigorate a tired and becalmed Administration.

On the social side, the Taoiseach-elect, if he has not already done so, must decide a target date today for the referendum on repeal of the eighth amendment. I would suggest a target of next April or May, prior to the Pope's visit to Ireland. We do not want any more horror stories of the type of heard yesterday regarding a young girl detained on mental health grounds when she required a termination and a woman making the lonely journey to Britain because her much longed-for baby was diagnosed with fatal foetal abnormalities.

I urge the Taoiseach-elect to opt for a clear programme of tax justice. He must end the scandal of extraordinarily profitable companies paying little or no corporation tax. In this regard, the Labour Party has advocated a minimum effective corporation tax structure so that corporations contribute their fair share-----

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I wonder where Deputy Burton got that idea.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** -----and a standing commission on taxation that will address loopholes and flaws in our tax system as they arise. We have accumulated tax losses in our system of over €15 billion, €9 billion in the financial services sector and over €400 million in the construction sector. As things stand, if the proposed sale of AIB goes ahead, that company could avoid paying any corporation tax for many years.

As already stated, we have a tired and becalmed Administration. We have a dysfunctional Department of Justice and Equality and Garda Síochána, a health service which three Fine Gael Ministers for Health, including Deputy Varadkar, have been unable to reform and a housing situation, notwithstanding the huge resources that have been put into it since 2014-2015, which is failing to produce the affordable and social housing people and families need.

One of the demands of Deputies Coveney and Varadkar during the 2011 general election campaign was a bonfire of the quangos. Unless the Taoiseach-elect creates a State authority to develop social and affordable housing, we will be faced with a 20-year housing crisis.

On the North, Brexit and the island of Ireland, we need a union of hearts and minds. We have heard here how bitter Sinn Féin and, on television, those on the Unionist side have become in recent days. It will be the privilege and responsibility of the new Taoiseach to address this and create an union of hearts and minds for all on this island.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** Deputy Burton could do with a bit of a heart.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I am sharing time with Deputies Coppinger and-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** Deputy Ellis is shouting from the sidelines again.

*(Interruptions).*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Order, please.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Stop the clock.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Allow Deputy Boyd Barrett to speak, please.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I am sharing time with Deputies Ruth Coppinger and Mick Barry.

First, I extend my sympathies to the victims of the horrendous fire in London. We do not yet know how many there are but the scenes are shocking and we should extend our support for, and solidarity with, the people there. We do not know why the fire took place, but very serious questions are being asked. I am no expert in this area but, coincidentally, I received a call this week from a fire consultant who told me that many housing developments in this country are very serious accidents waiting to happen because fire regulations are not being fully complied with, even in local authority housing stock. The tragedy of London should prompt us to consider whether fire safety is being properly applied in the housing stock of this country.

I do not want to be mean-spirited on an important day for the Taoiseach-elect, Deputy Varadkar, and his family but for the thousands of families facing intolerable hardship because they are homeless, the hundreds of thousands languishing in pain on hospital waiting lists waiting for operations and the many women in this country who urgently need the eighth amendment to be repealed in order that they do not have to suffer unacceptably when faced with crisis pregnancies, the fanfare of recent days and the pantomime of the Fine Gael leadership over recent weeks have been a source of frustration and, in many cases, anger rather than a cause for celebration. Most right-thinking people lament the rise of the politics represented by Donald Trump and the phenomenon of fake news and all that goes with it, but the establishment-political-media bubble has fed the causes of this phenomenon over recent weeks by engaging in a theatre that has been all about personalities and nothing about the policies and issues that make a difference to the lives of ordinary people who suffer in unnecessary hardship.

*1 o'clock*

I do not believe it makes any difference whether Deputy Enda Kenny, Deputy Leo Varadkar or Deputy Simon Coveney is Taoiseach. What is important is that he is from Fine Gael and we need to interrogate the policies of that party to see whether those policies are delivering for ordinary people. We also need to interrogate the policies of Opposition parties and everyone in this House to see how we can address the issues facing the citizens of this country. That is what they expect us to be doing. We should take a salutary lesson from what happened in the recent election in Britain. Prior to the election and for the first few weeks of the campaign, if one was to believe the political-media bubble, it was all about the personalities of Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn. Theresa May was going to walk the election and Jeremy Corbyn was to end up as toast. Then something changed and that was something called a manifesto. A manifesto was leaked with policies about the issues people cared about. They were not the issues the media were talking about, nor those with which the bubble was concerned. They were issues such as housing, health, education, equality and tax fairness, in which corporations and the wealthy would pay their fair share of taxes. They were about not bringing in fees for students, ensuring rights for those with disabilities, and fairness in the treatment of immigrants.

At the time, Jeremy Corbyn's policies were condemned by Deputy Howlin as being much more like the policies of Solidarity-People Before Profit than Labour Party policies. Deputy Howlin is on record as saying that.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** Can the Deputy show that record to the House?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It worries me that over recent weeks, the only serious policy issue that emerged was the rather shocking attack by Deputy Varadkar on welfare cheats and a group of people who supposedly do not get up before 7 a.m. That was a new low in politics. It was very divisive and showed a deep level of prejudice against those who suffer inequality and hardship but skated over the fact that, as Millward Brown have just reported, 30% of people who are entitled to family income supplement do not claim it. There is more money not being claimed by people who are suffering hardship and poverty than is supposedly being defrauded by the welfare cheats the Minister unjustly targeted during the Fine Gael leadership campaign.

Deputy Coveney was the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government during the greatest housing and homelessness crisis in the history of the State and was more concerned with the Fine Gael leadership campaign. However, he took time out from that campaign to vote against a Bill put forward by Solidarity-People Before Profit which sought to stop evictions and control the rents that are being ratcheted up by the vulture funds to which Deputy Coveney sold the property of this country and on which the Government does not levy proper taxes.

I also raise the issue of the young woman who is at risk of suicide and is seeking an abortion. In a macabre re-run of the X case scandal, she has been imprisoned by the State.

What people want is hope, not hype. They want policies, not pantomime. Judging by recent weeks, we will not get that from Fine Gael but that is what Solidarity-People Before Profit will be trying to put forward in this House.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** I am sharing time with Deputy Mick Barry. Deputy Varadkar will not be surprised that Solidarity-People Before Profit cannot support his nomination today.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** There is a shock.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** Deputy Varadkar made a confession in this House during a debate on the exorbitant prices charged by drug companies. He said that dealing with some of these companies would bring out whatever socialist instinct may be buried within him. No one really believed Bertie Ahern was a socialist. However, maybe when Deputy Varadkar gets into the top job he will see how corrupt, unfair and rotten the system is and he will dig deep for that socialist vein and maybe he will become the first socialist Taoiseach. That is probably unlikely as he is wearing blue tie today. We certainly recognise the-----

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** Judging by his tie, Deputy Micheál Martin is not a socialist either

**Deputy Michael Creed:** It is an effort at humour.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** Solidarity-People Before Profit recognises the significance of having a Taoiseach who is a gay man with an Indian background. That is a massively positive comment on the changing social attitudes in Ireland that have allowed that to come about. We saw that in the marriage equality referendum which was driven by young people and resoundingly endorsed in working class communities. Deputy Varadkar will ultimately be judged by the policies and positions he takes on those issues.

We also encourage the involvement of migrants in politics. Migrants have many different

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views. Last weekend, I spoke at the formation of a left group, Kranthi, in the Indian community. I hope that migrants will get involved to get the type of change that is really necessary, which is to change people's lives through a massive transformation in how wealth is owned and controlled.

Deputy Varadkar will take the helm at a critical time when the people's aspirations are going way beyond what the system is prepared to offer. After a decade of brutal austerity, in which Deputy Varadkar was very involved, it seems that what was taken in the recession is not going to be restored. Two-tier pay and a second class status for young people will be made permanent. It is for this reason that in a host of countries, including the United States, France and the UK, we have seen a political earthquake. We have seen huge enthusiasm for left and socialist policies. In Ireland this is causing a nervousness among sections of the establishment which want a firmer right hand at the helm. It looks like that will be found in Deputy Varadkar. He made insidious comments during the election campaign about welfare cheats. The phrase about people getting up early in the morning will haunt Deputy Varadkar for decades. We know what he meant and the code he was using. He was not referring to the homeless families from Dublin west who get up early to bring their kids to school because they are in far-flung bed and breakfast establishments. It was a divisive comment and a smear against people who have lost their jobs or who cannot work. It was also untrue, because he called for a ban on the right to strike for many people who get up very early every morning, for example, firefighters, hospital staff and bus drivers.

Deputy Varadkar is certainly more upfront about being a hardliner for capitalism and in effect a representative of the rich and the elite. He spoke about a republic of opportunity. In 1987 Margaret Thatcher launched a policy under the name of land of opportunity. The top 300 in this country have doubled their wealth during the recession, yet 10% of Traveller children die before the age of two. What will the Deputy do about those opportunities?

There is an eagerness in this country for massive social change, for equality, women's rights and abortion rights. We have heard from some new converts to those ideas today. There is a huge gap between how most people outside this Chamber feel and how they are represented in this Dáil. I do not envy Deputy Varadkar. He is a representative of the neo-liberal policies that people are rebelling against in country after country, and his policies can only increase the potential for a left movement in this country. Bring it on.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** The nominee is quoted in the papers this morning as supporting a republic of opportunity. How does he square that with his support of the abandonment of the principle of equal pay for equal work and his support for wage discrimination against young public servants? Two-tier pay rates in the public services were presented as being emergency and temporary measures at the height of the austerity crisis. However, they are now being maintained, without any end date whatsoever, in the Government's new public service pay deal offer, and this in what has been described as the fastest growing economy in Europe. The discrimination in pay rates on grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation is wrong. Why then is discrimination on the grounds of age defended? Of course, the Government gets around the anti-discrimination laws by pointing to the fact that the lower pay rates are for new entrants, but everyone knows that the vast bulk of new entrants are young and that this is effectively an act of discrimination against young people. Deputy Varadkar leaves himself open to the charge of double standards here. He defends the idea of low rates of pay for young nurses and teachers but he no doubt does not support lower rates of pay for young taoisigh. I assume that as a new entrant he will not be starting on a lower scale than that enjoyed by Deputy Kenny.

Deputy Coveney recently expressed concern that Deputy Varadkar would lead his party further to the right. Deputy Varadkar himself recently suggested that workers who provide essential services, such as air traffic controllers and tram workers, should have their right to strike curtailed. William Martin Murphy was the champion of denying tram workers the right to strike. Ronald Reagan was the champion of denying air traffic controllers the right to strike. Neither of these men could be described as men of the political centre. They were both men of the right, as indeed is Deputy Varadkar. In opposing equal pay for equal work and in suggesting a curtailment of the democratic and human right to strike, the Deputy is showing support for policies which are not centrist but actually rather extreme. The best defenders of these basic rights and principles are the left which the Deputy so strongly denounces. Along with our allies in the working-class movement, we will continue to defend them and to remain a strong obstacle to the Deputy's pursuit, as Taoiseach, of a right-wing agenda.

**Deputy Joan Collins:** I am sharing time with Deputies Catherine Connolly and Mick Wallace. I received an interesting reply from the Taoiseach-elect in his former position as Minister for Social Protection. He replied in a parliamentary question that he wanted to reduce consistent poverty rates to pre-crisis levels and lower, and wanted to do the same for child poverty. Deputy Varadkar is also on record as saying that housing and health would be the priorities of his Administration. Wanting to do something, being well-intentioned and having the political will and policies to implement real progress in these areas are different things. It is here that I have no expectation of any change. It will be the same old politics. Serving the interests of big business, the wealthy and the lobby groups representing the power and privileges of the few will continue to be the key priorities of this Government. Let us look at the issue of health. There is a very good report from the Committee on the Future of Healthcare which will be before the Dáil soon. This report, if adopted and implemented by the Government, would almost represent a revolution, with the provision of a single tier, universal public health service free at the point of use, based on need and not on ability to pay. The problem is that it will never be implemented by a Government dominated by Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. The political will to fund it and stand up to the vested interests which oppose this report, including the medical profession, private health interests and religious institutions, does not exist in these parties.

I want to raise the issue of housing. The Government programme, Rebuilding Ireland, is not working. In fact, it is making the crisis worse. On the basis of the present progress on tackling the housing crisis, it will take 40 years to eliminate the housing waiting list in Dublin. Rebuilding Ireland targets 134,000 social housing units from 2016 to 2021. It sounds good, but 87,000 of these, approximately two thirds, are totally dependent on the private sector. Of the target of 47,000 new builds only 21,000 are actually social housing. The real figure for public and social housing is 21,000 over five years. Even this meagre target is not being achieved. Actual new builds in 2016 amounted to only 650 units, with 40 of those in Dublin.

I wish the so-called Government would at least listen to people. If it does not agree with me that is well and good. A radical new approach which is not based on the private sector is necessary. The Nevin Economic Research Institute has proposed the establishment of a State housing company to build up to 10,000 public housing units a year at an initial cost of €12 billion, to be raised off the books and paid for with affordable rents based on the European cost recovery model using the 730 sites held by local authorities. We need to treble funding from local authorities to eliminate this crisis.

The Society of St. Vincent De Paul today described hubs simply as new, if slightly improved, forms of temporary accommodation. The charity has assisted 130,000 households who

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go to moneylenders in their communities, are not benefiting from the recovery, have inadequate incomes, and are facing intolerable rents in the private sector. Again, there are powerful vested interests which need to be challenged.

On poverty, according to the Think-tank for Action on Social Change, TASC, we are now the most unequal society in the EU before welfare payments. Some 33% of income now goes to the top 10% of earners. Some 20% of workers are low paid, and 50% of workers earn less than €28,000 if we look at median earnings. The squeezed middle are not being squeezed but crushed and have gross household income below €35,000 a year. To combat this we need strong trade unions, the right to organise, the right to workplace access and a legal living wage. It is ten years since the minimum wage was set at €8.65 an hour.

On the question of the eighth amendment, the situation of a young woman being detained against her will when seeking an abortion is barbaric, medieval and a shame for all right-minded people. The 2014 Act is an unworkable fudge. We need a referendum on this issue urgently.

I have no hope for change from this Government of Fine Gael and Independents, or from Fianna Fáil. Only when we build a genuine new politics, a broad-based progressive left movement to end the rule of the neo-liberal politics propped up by the Labour Party, will we have a republic fit for purpose in the 21st century. I honestly do not believe Deputy Varadkar will lead that.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** I gceann tamaillín, beidh an Teachta Varadkar ina Thaoiseach nua ar an tír álainn seo. Is pribhléid í bheith mar Theachta Dála agus is pribhléid faoi leith í bheith mar Thaoiseach. Guím gach rath ar an Teachta Varadkar ina ról nua, a thagann le freagracht thromchúiseach. Tá comhghairdeas tuillte aige, ag a thuismitheoirí agus ag a chlann atá anseo inniu. Déanaim comhghairdeas freisin leis as ucht na n-iarrachtaí atá déanta aige a chuid Gaeilge a fheabhsú. Is maith an rud é sin. Is í ár dteanga náisiúnta í an Ghaeilge. Tá súil agam go mbeidh tuilleadh díospóireachtaí sa Teach seo ina mbeidh an Ghaeilge á húsáid againn. Má leanann sé ar aghaidh leis an nGaeilge - tá mé cinnte go leanfaidh ós rud é go bhfuil éacht déanta aige go dtí seo - gheobhaidh sé amach nach bhfuil meas madra ag cosmhuintir na tíre seo ar an mbrathadóir. Chothaigh an Teachta Varadkar an saghas duine sin lena fheachtas nuair a bhí sé mar Aire Coimirce Sóisialaí. Má leanann sé ar aghaidh leis an nGaeilge, gheobhaidh sé amach freisin go bhfuil ardmheas ag cosmhuintir na tíre seo ar an meitheal, nuair a thagann daoine le chéile ag obair as lámh a chéile ar son leas na tíre, seachas ar son lucht an rachmais.

In a little while, the Minister for Social Protection will be Taoiseach and, without hesitation, I wish him the absolute best in that role. He deserves congratulations. To his family who are here today, cuirim fáilte Uí Cheallaigh go dtí an Dáil. His attempts with Irish are well done too. They show great respect for the language and I look forward to more use of the Irish language here.

As the Minister goes on, however, he will learn that Irish people do not have much respect for the informer in their society. That is exactly the type of policy he promoted with his terrible campaign on social welfare. I think he did it for short term gain and it was deplorable but it is an example of the type of politics of Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Fianna Fáil which does not look at what people want in this country. They have moved on, they are way ahead of us in the type of society they want. I have repeatedly said here that when I canvassed, as others did, door to door, people did not ask for tax cuts, empty rhetoric about a land providing opportunities or for someone to patronise them. They asked for a serious debate on how to make this

country more equal and for serious recognition of the problems that exist arising directly from neoliberal politics. They are a politics and policies that regard the economy as thriving, with the housing crisis, the health crisis, the public transport crisis as collateral damage. My colleagues and I have a different vision. We want a thriving economy but one that serves all of us and a realisation that an economy cannot possibly be described as thriving if the collateral damage is people on trolleys in Galway City Hospital or a centre of excellence that has one MRI scanner. We hear empty rhetoric from a Minister and a Government about building housing. Not one house has been built in Galway city since 2009.

While the empty rhetoric goes on, we are moving in the direction of privatisation of every single essential service in this country. Heads are shaking on the Government benches, I am not sure why because I would be delighted to work with anybody in this Dáil to make our country a better one. That is impossible with the policies the Minister is setting out and his empty rhetoric. The Minister sought to divide and conquer with a despicable social welfare campaign which was not even based on truth. I have the privilege of sitting on the Committee of Public Accounts and we know for a fact that fraud has a minimal impact in the context of the overall social welfare budget. Tá mo chuid ama istigh. Guím gach rath ar an Teachta.

**Deputy Mick Wallace:** There are many problems facing the Irish people. Finding a house to live in and to rent is certainly one of them. Solving the housing and homelessness crisis will be one of the big challenges facing the Taoiseach-to-be. Many things need to be done. The new Taoiseach will need to challenge the fact that this is one of the few countries in the developed world that does not tax landbanking. A major difficulty is that private developers have an incentive not to build because the latter is more profitable for them. We have never tackled this problem. We need to remove the extraordinary tax incentives afforded to the new institutional landlords in Ireland in the form of real estate investment trusts, REITs - such as Hibernia REIT and Irish Residential Property, I-RES REIT - which pay bugger all tax on their rental incomes and no capital gains on their future sales. This should be compared with the traditional landlord who must pay tax on both.

We must stop selling Ireland to the vulture funds. The new Taoiseach should make it illegal for Irish banks to sell the underperforming mortgage or small business loan of any person to a vulture fund. He needs to commence a programme of building social and affordable housing directly by the State because that has not started. We cannot rely on the private sector to develop social housing through Part V. It will never deliver enough. The National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, says it can provide 20,000 units at approximately €350,000 each. Those units could be done for €250,000 each but the new Taoiseach must put the structure in place, take NAMA's land and pay builders to build on it. He should not pay developers to build on NAMA land. If he pays builders, the units can be supplied for €100,000 less per unit. We need affordable as well as social housing.

I ask the new Taoiseach to immediately suspend the activities of NAMA that have played a role in all the issues I have raised and that have created the housing crisis. NAMA has facilitated landbanking by selling huge swathes of land at fire-sale prices to developers and has facilitated REITs through its policy of selling huge apartment blocks in bulk at fire-sale prices and facilitated vulture funds such as Cerberus by selling the loans and mortgages of Irish people at knockdown prices. One of the final decisions of the outgoing Taoiseach was to set up the commission of investigation into NAMA's Project Eagle. The Comptroller and Auditor General considered one dimension of one portfolio and found it wanting. That is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more problems coming down the track. The Comptroller and Auditor

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General may soon be investigating Project Tolka and this morning we were told about problems relating to Project Nantes. In March 2014, one month before NAMA came under the remit of the freedom of information legislation, the board of the agency agreed to delete the emails of all former staff after one year. Its parent agency, the National Treasury Management Agency, NTMA, has no such policy. NAMA tells us this is best commercial practice. It seems to forget that it is a State agency. Time will show that the workings of NAMA will prove to be the biggest financial scandal in the history of this State and I hope the new Taoiseach will spare no energy in getting to the truth. It does Ireland no favours to be seen as a cowboy country when it comes to doing big business.

The Taoiseach-to-be says he is a decisive character. He should get rid of the Garda Commissioner. It is outrageous that she is still in place. That will be the first step required to change how we do policing in Ireland. We will not change the position until the new Taoiseach takes action on that matter and the sooner he does so, the better.

I welcome the parents of the future Taoiseach to the Chamber. We will be merciless in our efforts to hold him to account but we respect him and will treat him with respect. Our criticism will never be personal. We will not be voting for him. We do not agree with his politics but we wish him well because, despite the fact that our policies and our way of looking at how society should be organised are very different, it is in everybody's interests to do so. The better he does for the people of Ireland, the better all around. I wish Deputy Varadkar the best and good luck to the last fellow.

**Deputy Michael Harty:** I congratulate Deputy Varadkar on his election as leader of Fine Gael and, by inference this afternoon, Taoiseach. It is my decision to abstain on his nomination as Taoiseach which will allow me to articulate a different point of view on many issues and to provide an alternative way of analysing and thinking on the issues of the day. I suggest the theme for Deputy Varadkar's term in office should be that of reform, not just of structures in our services but also of the static inertia of the old ways of thinking which inhibit the culture of reform. We need to embrace change and reform in our health services, as well as in other State agencies. The administration of our services is snowed under by bureaucracy and red tape.

The administration of the Leader programme is a prime example of this. A programme set up to stimulate enterprise is hobbled by meaningless review and audit, while worthwhile projects are left without essential finance. The Government must embrace digital technology to increase efficiency and gather data which will inform real and meaningful reform. Without accurate real-time information, we cannot make correct decisions. The true way to plan and deliver reform is to talk to the people on the ground who are supplying the services. Sanitised visits to hospitals will not give a true vision of the problems and solutions. Meeting front-line staff, hearing their experiences and addressing their concerns will give a much better insight into problems and solutions. Quite often junior staff will have just as important insights into what is needed to reform our services as those who are detached from the front line in higher management. Speak to these people.

“Some men see things as they are, and ask why. Others dream of things that have never been, and ask why not.” These words were written by George Bernard Shaw almost 100 years ago and repeated in this House in 1963 by the then US President, John F. Kennedy, when he visited Ireland. They are as visionary now as when they were originally written. Deputy Varadkar should set his sights high. Sometimes he will not succeed but that is better than setting his sights too low and achieving little. Courage, compassion and honesty are from where true

leadership comes. Deputy Varadkar will get his authority from how he cares for people. Leadership is about taking advice. If he needs advice about reforming the health service, I would be delighted to put him in contact with people delivering true reform.

I wish Deputy Varadkar, his partner, Matthew, and his family the best of good fortune for today and in the future. He told me yesterday he did not have enough hours in the day to complete all his tasks. By getting up early in the morning, he will not have a problem in achieving all his tasks. He should get some sleep tonight as the country awaits his tenure in office with great expectations.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I wish Deputy Varadkar well in his nomination today. Cuirim fáilte Uí Cheallaigh roimh a chlann go léir atá anseo freisin. I will give him a small bit of advice. He might be aware of the song “Won’t Get Fooled Again” by The Who.

**Deputies:** Who?

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** It might be a case of who’s who now but who will be who over there later today? That is when the sport will start, will it not, Teachta Kenny?

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** The song ended with the lyrics, “Meet the new boss/Same as the old boss”. I wish the old boss well too, as I was not here yesterday. Only time will tell if we stand the test of time.

Much time has been spent this morning on posturing and political statements condemning new politics. It would be better for us to enhance new politics and embrace the reform the electorate voted for in the previous general election. It should be remembered we did not just decide it here. I thank all Members who are making the effort to make it work. Those condemning it are rather envious of the time some Members in these groups have. It is pathetic. According to Deputy Micheál Martin, from his talks with Deputy Varadkar, both agreed to cut down the speaking times for these Members. Those were his words I read in a newspaper but it might be fake news now. Tosach maith leath na hoibre. That would be a bad start and, from engaging with him, I know Deputy Varadkar will not.

Deputy Varadkar had a brief time in the transport Ministry in 2011. I cannot remember any stand-out issues he had there. In 2014, he replaced the now Senator James Reilly as Minister for Health. He certainly made no impression there. While he visited Clonmel - I hope he will come again - nothing has changed at the hospital there. The adage from Oliver Callan, it was like that when I got here, cannot be used now. I wish Deputy Varadkar luck but he needs to act and clean up matters. The location of the national children’s hospital is one dastardly mistake. In one of his acts as Minister for Health, Deputy Varadkar cut €12 million off the €35 million budget for mental health. That is a poor record. I hope he rectifies that by dealing with the savage issue of mental health, as well as other health issues.

In January 2015, Deputy Varadkar was heavily criticised for being on his laethanta saoire - I must commend him on his efforts with the Irish language - in the USA during the worst hospital trolley crisis ever. I suppose it made no difference that he came back because the trolley crisis has got worse. It is pathetic, a shame and not good enough for our people who have to wait. He has to tackle the bureaucracy. During the talks for the programme for Government, Deputy Enda Kenny promised us more times that with new politics there would be reform of

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the system. Deputy Michael Harty referred to it. We have to reform the permanent government and insist that those people accept new politics as well. They are in there as public servants, many of them good ones, and they must deal with and serve the public. They cannot be creating quango after quango and retirement homes for themselves.

My view on the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, the night it was set up was that it was like a wild animal released in the woods and we would never know where it would end up. We now know where it is. It is a mess. Will the new Taoiseach take the wheels off that wagon or spangle the animal and stand it down, as Deputy Wallace has called for, because it is just not functioning? It will only land us in inquiry after inquiry.

I thank the Attorney General for her time and wish her well in her new role. We need to change our mindset. We want the new Taoiseach to engage with the people. I know he has been on a Fine Gael roadshow around the country over recent weeks. I know they were even in Tipperary but I did not bump into them. He was there with the other contender, Deputy Coveney, and they got free publicity out of it. Fine Gael had its leadership election and I compliment Deputy Coveney on it. Now, Deputy Varadkar has to lead for all the people and be respectful of all the people. I know he is from my dealings with him as Minister for Social Protection.

Will Deputy Varadkar deal with the vulture funds and the banks? Their persecution of ordinary people in this country is disgraceful. AIB has been merciless in putting people out of their homes and businesses over recent weeks, getting ready for its sale. This must be dealt with.

I wish Deputy Varadkar well. I will not be voting for him because he did not ask me to and I want to be able to challenge him in the House. I will vote positively with him on positive issues, however. Go néirí an t-ádh leis.

**Deputy Michael Lowry:** After the previous general election we had political fragmentation and prolonged confusion. It was difficult for our Parliament to find a way to respond to the will of the people and the result they had delivered. Many Members decided to sit on the sideline to observe from a distance, do nothing and criticise everything. I took the decision that our country and its people needed a Government. I followed that conviction by casting my vote in favour of the formation of a Government led by Deputy Enda Kenny. I was reliable in my support for a Government confronting enormous problems both at home and abroad.

Today, I will be consistent and vote for the election of Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach. I do so because our country needs strong leadership, continuity and stable government. Deputy Varadkar's elevation to the Office of Taoiseach is an extraordinary personal and political achievement. I congratulate him on it. He is in there on merit. He has the intellect, the energy, the ability and vitality to be an excellent Taoiseach, leader of our country and ambassador for our people abroad. The public likes his directness, command of his brief, as well as his informed instinctive response to questions and issues. My advice to him is to be himself. If he is himself, he will be an excellent Taoiseach.

In conclusion, a Cheann Comhairle, let me say that I consider Deputy Howlin's comments here today to be nasty and offensive. I have absolutely no doubt, and I am in this House for 30 years, that his actions and words were prompted by his Deputy from Tipperary, Deputy Kelly. They would be typical of his reaction to me in my county.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** Thanks. That is coming from you.

**Deputy Michael Lowry:** When Deputy Howlin attacks me in such a manner as he did today, he insults the people of Tipperary who vote for me as an elected representative of this House. I remind Deputy Howlin that, like every Member of this House here today, I have a democratic mandate from the people of Tipperary who have voted for me consistently and put me as their representative in this House. I have enjoyed their confidence and trust for more than 30 years and I hope, when the next election is called, they will re-endorse me as a Member of this Parliament for the constituency of Tipperary.

Finally, I will say to Deputy Howlin that I have exactly the same entitlements to access the system of government as any other Member of this House. My telephone conversations with the Taoiseach-elect, Deputy Varadkar, were on the basis of the programme for Government and the policies which I was hoping he would support. On the basis of those two discussions I had with him, I am happy to support him as Taoiseach and to continue to support this Government, particularly on budgetary matters. It is not possible as Members of a Parliament to be clamouring every other day for resources and moneys to be spent on particular projects if we are not prepared to stand up and take the budgetary measures necessary to ensure that there are funds available to implement the policies we seek.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** I congratulate the Taoiseach-elect and his family on this very special day. I also compliment and wish well the deputy leader, Deputy Coveney, who always had a great work ethic. He proved this very much during the talks and negotiations for the formation of this Government.

Coming to the programme for Government, the Taoiseach-elect has an awful lot of work to do. For instance, on the hospital services and waiting lists, more than 660,000 people are waiting for operations and procedures. I have said consistently in this House that people are going blind in our country waiting to have cataracts removed. People waiting to have hip operations are in agony.

There was a commitment in the programme for Government to our post office network. I will be calling on the Taoiseach-elect to deliver on that commitment in the programme for Government to save our post offices. It is so easy for him to do it. All he needs to do is implement the Private Members' motion that was brought before this Dáil by me, Deputy Mattie McGrath and our group, and all of the people who were here supported it.

People are waiting for a life-saving drug, Respreeza. People are suffering from Lyme disease. The Taoiseach-elect can help them. There are commitments in the programme for Government including an liquefied natural gas, LNG, project for north Kerry. That has to be delivered on.

During the leadership election, the Taoiseach-elect said that he promised an awful lot to be done for self-employed people. An awful lot has to be done for them because they are the people who are giving local employment. I want the Taoiseach-elect to live up to his commitment to them.

Our farmers are in dire trouble. The troubles in the Brexit negotiations and what that will mean for tourism in our country are very important. I agree with Deputy Mattie McGrath, who spoke about those who would like to quench the speaking time of smaller groups and parties in this House. That is wrong. As Deputy Lowry said, everyone in here is entitled to his or her say, whether in a small group or a big group.

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The Cabinet proved yesterday that it can do an awful lot and can expedite an awful lot of work if it wishes to do so. On that, people were critical of the Minister, Deputy Ross. I compliment Deputy Ross on Stepside Garda station being opened again. The only thing that is wrong with some people is that they might be jealous of the fact that he was able to do it.

On better funding for students who cannot access SUSI grants, the Taoiseach-elect has to live up to the commitment in the programme for Government. Home help hours and a fair deal for a people who stayed home have to be delivered, as well as respite services and the bereavement grant should be restored. The recovery that we hear about is not being felt by everyone. There are 5,000 people on the housing list in County Kerry. I want the Taoiseach-elect to deal with that. The tenant purchase scheme is useless because it debars 82% of the people from accessing the right to purchase their home. The Taoiseach-elect has to deal with that. I call on him to ensure that the motor and house insurance issues we are trying to deal with are tackled. We do not have broadband and Internet in County Kerry. Our mobile phone service in County Kerry is atrocious at the moment.

I am abstaining on the vote here today because the Taoiseach-elect asked me to do so. I am also doing it because I believe there is nothing productive to be gained by voting against him today. I really believe that. On abstaining, I do not like abstaining on any vote. I only did it once ever before in my life and I am doing it again here today for a good reason. I want to allow the Taoiseach-elect to get on with a programme for Government. I want him to deliver on the programme for Government and to do the things such as keeping our post offices open. That is the reason I am supporting. The Taoiseach-elect should just remember one final call: I ask him on behalf of the people of rural Ireland to please remember that the world does not stop at the Red Cow roundabout.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** I am seeking to share time with Deputies Shortall, Eamon Ryan and Healy.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Agreed. Can we have order for Deputy Murphy, please?

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** In the first instance, I wish to be associated with the remarks of Deputy Boyd Barrett on the terrible tragedy that is unfolding in London today as we sit here. Today is a very important day for Ireland. It would be churlish not to acknowledge the progress in Irish societal attitudes that has facilitated the ascent of the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, a man who may be considered to have multiple diversities, and his elevation to the highest political office in the land. It is a big day for him and his family, who I welcome here as well.

Just because someone comes from a diverse background does not mean that he or she has empathy with others of similarly diverse backgrounds. It is important that note is taken of that. It was evident in last year's general election on the doorsteps. As we swapped notes with everyone else, the same kind of thing came up. Where Fianna Fáil was blamed for breaking the economy, the last Government was very much blamed for breaking Irish society. People felt there was a point below which a society should not fall. People were looking at families with children becoming homeless. We had never seen it before yet it has got worse, if anything, and not better. They reiterated the point relating to our health services. They wanted this country to be reformed. They wanted this country to be rebuilt.

Diversity comes in a whole lot of different packages, but privilege is one of those diversities that Deputy Varadkar could not say he has not enjoyed. That has helped him to overcome the

diversities that are part of his make-up.

I am very short on time so I will skip to saying something slightly different. Today we will have approximately 58 people of 158 people electing Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach. In fact, he will rely on Deputy Lowry. I take issue at being preached to about budgetary responsibility from someone who has been in the courts and has dealt with Revenue with regard to his tax affairs. It is hardly the kind of ethical behaviour that should exemplify the rebuilding of this country. There are diverse voices in this House. I have a hope for those diverse voices. The housing crisis, whistleblowers, NAMA and the IBRC were all things that were brought to this House by diverse voices. Please do not silence us. Please do not make that the first thing you do. That would be a big mistake.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** On a personal level, I congratulate the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, on his soon-to-be elevation to Taoiseach. I recognise that this must be a very proud day for him, his partner, his family and his many political supporters. I wish him well because we need him to do well as Taoiseach. It would be great to think a changing of the guard represented a change in the kind of politics we have had in this country for the past number of years. We desperately need a departure from the kind of politics we have seen, which has resulted in public confidence in the political system being at an all-time low, has left so many people behind and many others struggling just to survive. There are two issues which do not augur well in that regard. The first is the issue raised by many other speakers of Deputy Varadkar's welfare cheats campaign which was a serious error. It was nasty, ill-founded, disingenuous and wasteful. The second is what happened yesterday at the last Cabinet meeting where a decision was taken to appoint the outgoing Attorney General to a plum judicial position bypassing the normal procedures that are required. This represented the worst kind of crony politics. The acquiescence of the Minister, Deputy Ross, in it is the height of hypocrisy and establishes this kind of pork barrel politics as now acceptable within this Government. It puts Tom Parlon very much in the ha'penny place.

The phrase the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, used today in the media is "the republic of opportunity". It is an interesting phrase and it will be interesting to know just exactly what it means. Is he talking about equality of opportunity where people who are already strong, healthy, well-positioned and well-connected can avail of opportunities or is he talking about the much more challenging approach which is to ensure equality of outcome? He needs to have the courage to make the kinds of deep interventions and investment required to lift people out of the abject poverty which unfortunately so many of our people are living in. It will be interesting to see which of those opportunities he is talking about. Does he have the courage and political foresight to bring about the kind of fundamental reform that is required? There is a glaring requirement to act on corruption and white collar crime and to restore public confidence in the rule of law both within public life and the business community. An independent anti-corruption agency is needed for that to be done. I hope Deputy Varadkar will take up the Social Democrats proposal on it. He has a unique opportunity to do something of real, lasting impact in our health service. There is now a report before him that has full cross-party agreement on how to bring about an equal and efficient public health system. Please do not squander that opportunity.

**Deputy Eamon Ryan:** I hope Deputy Micheál Martin does not have his way. He will give me his wounded Corkman look next. Who would disagree with me that in terms of overrunning time, Deputy Martin is in a nervous position? I hope he does not have his way trying to silence smaller parties because I am with Deputy Harty in that we need a diverse and edgy Dáil. In the last two hours I have listened to every single word by people from every party. I have not heard one single person say that one of the challenges we face in this country at this time is how

to live differently within our natural world. We need to make a just transition. It offers us an opportunity to bring the social change we need. If we do not do that within Deputy Varadkar's lifetime, the best scientists say the centre of India will not be habitable. It is not just a matter for the Indian people. Hundreds of millions of people from India will have to flee and we will have to manage that migration and the security problems that come with it. It will be replicated in many different places. We have listened for two hours and no one has mentioned it as something worthy of consideration as we set out the challenges any new Taoiseach has.

I am afraid we will not be able to vote for Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach. We wish him the best and we will work politely with him but we cannot vote for him. He is too right wing. Despite all the pilates, Frappuccinos, skinny lattes, avocado mash and jogging, there is not a scintilla of green in him that we have seen over the past 20 years. We have known him since he walked through the gate in Trinity and the campaign to become Taoiseach began. Perhaps he can reverse the dictum and the Leo-pard will change his spots. I look to his honourable and proud father with hope. There is a dictum if one is not a socialist at 20, one has no heart; if one is not a conservative at 35, one has no head. I understand from reading the papers that Deputy Varadkar's father tends to vote left. Maybe he will follow his father's example and steer the country and himself in that direction. I am afraid everything we see says the opposite. The leadership election was a clear choice Fine Gael members had between collaborative politics of seeking consensus and competition and standing up for Fine Gael, and between a just society and individual opportunity. Fine Gael Members of the House went with the latter but the party went two thirds to one third the other way. The Deputy realised on the hustings, which I watched from a distance, that he had taken the wrong tack because he turned at the fourth hustings in Cork and was all compassionate conservatism. I hope it is the way he goes. Everything I have seen in my 20 years has been the opposite. The Deputy shadowed me as energy spokesperson when I was energy Minister. He was brilliant at scoring political points but when one looked for the substance behind it, it was not there. His decision to delay the metro was historically the worst ministerial decision I have seen in the past 20 or 30 years. We will all pay for it in the housing and transport crisis we have in the city. It is true, unfortunately, what others say here today that in his time as Minister, Deputy Varadkar was more of a commentator for health than Minister for Health. I agree with the consensus among the Deputies who will not vote for him that the position in social welfare depicting the biggest issue of our day as social welfare fraud was just plain wrong and unfair to the Irish people.

We will work with Deputy Varadkar. We will not vote for him today but we will work with him. We will work with him particularly if he accepts what I said at the start about a just transition to a clean, green economy. Not only do we have to do it because of the existential crisis we face but it delivers better paid and more stable jobs. It also places us correctly in the international co-operation we need in Europe, the UK and America. We have a difficult and changing task in managing our position within the European Union. We cannot be seen as we are at the moment as green laggards.

The other issue that has not been mentioned here today goes back to my very first point. Migration is one of the difficult things on which we have done fairly well to date. Deputy Varadkar is the living proof of it as the son of an Indian migrant. It is very welcome. We have managed it well. Let us not give up on the broad consensus and the fact there is not a single person in this House who plays the right-wing, anti-immigrant card. It is something we should be proud of. Tackling the challenges I am interested in helps us deliver on all the different goals of changing to a just economy, standing up internationally, being seen as good in what we need to do and

managing migration which God knows is a tough task. We have to admit to our people it is still a real challenge. As much as we have not allowed that voice into the Irish political system it will still be the real challenge of our time. It needs to start now.

I regret Deputy Ross is not here. He needs to step away from the issue of Stepaside Garda station, as much as my colleague, Deputy Catherine Martin, is pleased to see it happen. He needs to step up to the plate and start investing in a completely different transport system. It is the same with the Minister for Finance, whoever it will be. Our finance system is completely incapable of understanding the new economic shift we need to make. I hope Deputy Varadkar changes his spots. I hope we can work with him if he does. To date, everything he has done has been in the other direction. If he turns to where his father has been we will all work together.

**Deputy Seamus Healy:** Recent Governments drawn from Fianna Fáil, the Green Party, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and now Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance are often rightly described as neoliberal. While it is correct, it can sometimes be confused by the general public as meaning they are tolerant of different views. The truth is that neoliberalism is a deliberate policy of supporting the rich and powerful in society while impoverishing low and middle income families. Neo-liberalism means cruel, capitalist extremism. Recent Governments in which the proposed Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and his Ministers participated were, and are, proponents of cruel, capitalist extremism, grossly favouring the rich and powerful in society over the poor and struggling. Deputy Varadkar together with the acting Taoiseach, Deputy Kenny, the Minister, Deputy Noonan and former Minister, Deputy Burton, promoted the greatest confiscation of Irish assets by foreign landlords, foreign investors and foreign governments since Oliver Cromwell laid this country waste.

As a result, in addition to the €6 billion in State revenue we have been paying out to service private banker debts, rents and interest payments from apartments, shopping centres, business premises and homes are streaming out of the country to foreign vulture capitalists. The decision of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and the Green Party to sign up to the EU fiscal treaty means the State no longer has economic sovereignty and has less power to deal with a crisis than it had in 2008.

Do not be fooled. While there is a recovery, it is a recovery for the rich and its fruits have gone to the rich over and above the disabled, the homeless and the sick. In its previous two budgets, the Government gave €172 million in tax and universal social charge relief to the top 5% in society who are on average annual incomes of €186,000. The 12 richest citizens have assets of €50 billion, of which they gained €6 billion in the past 12 months. They will not pay a cent in tax on these assets. The richest 10%, whose financial assets alone are worth €36 billion more than they were at the peak of the boom level in 2006, will not pay an additional cent in tax either.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul's pre-budget submission for 2018, which was launched yesterday, says everything about the country and the policies of this Government and previous Governments. Entitled *Bridging the Gap: An Unequal Nation*, it confirms that the top 1% have increased their share of income by 20%, while the income share of the bottom 50% has fallen by 15%, some 91,000 households are in need of social housing, 2,700 children are homeless and 132,000 children are living in consistent poverty. In addition, the poorest 10% of the population pay more of their income in tax than the richest 10%.

The record will show that the establishment parties, including Fianna Fáil and the Inde-

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pendent Alliance, will always put the interests of the very rich first. Deputy Varadkar and his Government will continue the policy of cruel capitalist extremism, enriching the super-rich of the general population and poor. I will vote against his appointment as Taoiseach.

Cuireadh an cheist.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 57; Níl, 50; Staon, 45.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>

<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>O'Keefe, Kevin.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Regina Doherty and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Eoin Ó Broin.

Question declared carried.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhtas tar éis glacadh leis an gceist.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** It would be appropriate to call on the Taoiseach-elect to address the House at this point.

**Minister for Social Protection(Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Go raibh míle maith agat a Cheann Comhairle. Is mór an onóir dom a bheith anseo inniu mar Thaoiseach tofa i nDáil Éireann. Táim fíorchorraithe agus thar a bheith buíoch as ucht an tacaíocht atá faighte agam ón Dáil. Is am speisialta é seo, ní hamháin domsa, ach do mo chlann, mo chairde agus mo lucht tacaíochta ar fad. Ba bhreá liom buíochas a ghabháil leo as ucht an méid oibre atá déanta acu ar mo shon. Tá a fhios agam go mbeidh go leor dúshlán náisiúnta agus idirnáisiúnta romhainn sna laethanta atá le teacht. Táimid réidh dóibh.

I thank Deputies Enda Kenny and Josepha Madigan for nominating me today. In particular, I thank Deputy Enda Kenny in a very personal way. Yesterday, we heard wonderful tributes to his leadership. I have no doubt that only for him this country as we know it would not be here today.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Leo Varadkar:** On a personal note, I would like to add that were it not for Deputy Enda Kenny, I have no doubt that I would not be standing here today. As a result of his stewardship, I was able to regain the seat for our party, first on the council and then in the Dáil. In fact, I took my seat in the Dáil for the first time ten years ago to the day, as did many other people. Congratulations, class of 2007.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** Great expectations.

**Deputy Leo Varadkar:** Deputy Enda Kenny also gave me the opportunity to serve on the Front Bench and then to serve as a Minister, along with an opportunity to demonstrate my ability and potential. Without opportunity, there is no hope and there can be no progress. This is a theme to which I will return later. Deputy Enda Kenny's leadership also enabled me to become an equal citizen in my own country only two short years ago and to aspire to hold this office - an aspiration which I once thought was beyond my reach, at least if I chose to be myself. I would like the outgoing Taoiseach to know that those of us who take on the torch of leadership here today will protect all that he has achieved and make him proud of us by building on all that he has done for the country.

Later today, I will be speaking to Prime Minister Theresa May and I will be passing on the sympathies of the Dáil and the Irish people following the terrible fire in London last night. The United Kingdom has been through some dreadful and terrible tragedies in recent weeks. To its people, on behalf of this House, we offer our sympathies, solidarity and support.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Leo Varadkar:** I have been elected to lead, but I promise to serve. I thank Deputy Micheál Martin, the leader of the Fianna Fáil Party, for his words of advice. I thank all of the speakers who have set out the challenges facing this country and this new Administration. Leadership should never be just about one person. Leadership is not just about setting a course for the future, it is also about listening. In the months ahead, I will seek to do exactly that. I also thank Deputy Gerry Adams for revealing our little secret - that we attended the same pilates class on a number of occasions. I think he was much better at it than I was. Perhaps he has greater experience of being in a tight squeeze. While we will clash in this Dáil, I want to offer a genuine willingness to work together on matters relating to Northern Ireland and matters outside this State. That applies to all parties. We all have responsibilities. Our responsibility, as a Government, is as co-guarantor of the Agreement. The responsibility of all the parties in Northern Ireland is now, after two elections, to form an administration. I am delighted the talks in that regard are under way. I will have meetings on Friday with some of the Northern parties.

I do not wish to respond to the other Deputies. Suffice it to just say this, I received 57 votes today. Only two of those 57 were allowed to speak. On the benches opposite, 40 Members chose to abstain but only one was allowed to explain why. It is important in a democracy to have diversity. However, democracy is also about proportionality.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Leo Varadkar:** Therefore, the equal right to speak must also apply to Ministers and backbenchers of this party and also Members of the main Opposition party. As stated earlier, I took my seat in the Dáil exactly ten years ago today. So much has changed in the intervening

decade. I have grown, evolved and changed in that time as well, but I am still motivated by the same ideals which drove me to enter politics in the first instance and which I know also drive many of the people in this House. For some, “politics” is a bad word but we have seen in other countries, and sometimes in this one, that politics can also be a way to inspire people to believe in something bigger. It can be a way to convince people that change is possible. I believe in the power of politics. It is not perfect, but it is the best way of solving problems and helping to build a better future. Michael Collins believed that, with the right political and economic social system in place, Ireland could become a shining light unto the world. A century later, that dream lives on in all of us in this Chamber, in all parties and none.

The election of a new Taoiseach is always an important day in our country’s democratic life. It is a day when special attention is given to the working of this Oireachtas, not just at home but also around the world. Today was a demonstration of our democracy in action - something which we sometimes take for granted, yet for which other countries struggle. I thank all of those who spoke in this debate, those who spoke in favour of my nomination as well as those who spoke against it. I also recognise and thank those who voted for my nomination as well as those who voted against it or abstained. This Chamber is full of politicians who care passionately about the future of this country and who want to do what is right for all of our citizens. We may disagree about policies and implementation - we may even differ about the very goals themselves - but the fact that we meet here and express those opinions openly, based on our principles and our genuinely held beliefs, is a tribute to our forbears.

There have been a number of times in the history of the State when the Taoiseach has changed mid-term. It has often had a very significant effect. A change mid-term brought Seán Lemass to office in 1959 and he proved to be a modernising and reforming Taoiseach who transformed this country. It is also how John Bruton was elected in 1994. For three years, Mr. Bruton led the rainbow coalition with great distinction and made enormous progress in advancing the Irish economy, committing us to Europe and building on what had been done to help put in place the foundations for peace in Northern Ireland. I remember well the change of Taoiseach in 2008, when I had only been in the Dáil for a year. Back then, I noted that being elected Taoiseach is the greatest honour that can be bestowed on any Irish politician, perhaps hoping - but not expecting - that it was an honour that might be bestowed on me one day. Passing on my congratulations to Mr. Cowen and his new Cabinet at the time, I said I wanted a Government that was strong on ethics, strong on the economy and strong on the principle of equity. Nine years on, I stand by those same principles and I will demand of myself and my Government what in the past I insisted of others.

I know that the mandate I am being given today comes from the Dáil. Nevertheless I hope that through our actions as a Government and the progress we achieve, we will be able to prove we have earned the trust and support of the people as well. As Taoiseach, I will always respect the Dáil, because this Chamber represents the elected will of the Irish people.

Today I am reminded of the words of the late Seamus Heaney in his poem *From the Republic of Conscience*:

At their inauguration, public leaders  
must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep  
to atone for their presumption to hold office

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I am seized of the enormous task ahead of me and my responsibilities to this country and all its citizens. I approach it not with a feeling of presumption, but with a sense of profound humility, respect and appreciation for all that has gone before.

When the new Constitution was debated in 1937, some Deputies objected to the designation of Taoiseach as head of Government. Is é “Taoiseach” an teideal atá againn ar Phríomh-Aire na hÉireann. Is téarma Gaeilge é, agus is ceart agus is cóir sin. Léiríonn sé ómós dár stair, dár gcultúr agus dár n-oidhreacht. Fiú nach bhfuil mo chuid Gaeilge féin chomh líofa agus gur mhaith liom go mbeadh sí, tá an-chion agam ar ár dteanga dúchais. Le blianta anuas, tá sár-iarracht déanta agam feabhas a chur ar mo chuid Gaeilge. Mar Thaoiseach, beidh se ar intinn agam níos mó gnó agus níos mó díospóireachtaí a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge le mo chomh-Theachtaí Dala. B’fhéidir nach mbeidh mé i gcónaí chomh tapa nó chomh líofa agus gur mhaith liom a bheith, ach ceapaim gurb é an rud is tábhachtaí ná iarracht a dhéanamh. Sa chaoi seo, tá súil agam go spreagfaidh mé níos mó daoine an Ghaeilge a úsáid sa ghnáthshaol.

Arthur Griffith, whose monument stands on Leinster Lawn, believed that people could not be moved solely by a cold thing like economics. He said it was rather a question of feeling. What he meant was if one wants to inspire someone to believe in one’s vision, one has to appeal to their heart as well as their head. Economics and economic policies on their own were not enough. The Government I lead will not be one of left or right because those old divisions do not comprehend the political challenges of today. While others in the House might be obsessed with the political debates of the 1980s, I can assure them that I am not nor will my Government be. We will be focused on the solutions of the 21st century and the future. The Government I will lead will be one of the new European centre, as we seek to build a republic of opportunity that is a republic in which every citizen gets a fair go and has the opportunity to succeed, and in which every part of the country has a chance to share in our prosperity.

It is my honour to accept the nomination of Dáil Éireann for the position of Taoiseach and I will now go to the President to inform him of my nomination in order that under the Constitution he may appoint me as Taoiseach. Accordingly, I suggest that the House be suspended for four hours before we resume to discuss and debate the nomination of members of the Government.

*Sitting suspended at 2.35 p.m. and resumed at 6.35 p.m.*

### **Business of Dáil**

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I call the Government Chief Whip, Deputy Regina Doherty.

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose that the sitting now be suspended until 7.30 p.m.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** Why?

**Deputy Regina Doherty:** I just do what I am told.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** That is not a reason.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Government Chief Whip is proposing that the House suspends until 7.30 p.m. Is that agreed? Agreed.

*Sitting suspended at 6.35 p.m. and resumed at 7.30 p.m.*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I understand the Government Chief Whip has a further business proposal to make.

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Apologies. With the agreement of the House, I propose a further 15 minute recess.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

*Sitting suspended at 7.35 p.m. and resumed at 7.50 p.m.*

### **Allocation of Time: Motion**

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I move:

That, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(1) The following arrangements shall apply in relation to the approval of nominations by the Taoiseach of other members of the Government: the speech of the Taoiseach and of the leaders of the parties and groups, or a Member nominated in their stead, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; the first round of speeches shall be followed by a second round, which shall not exceed 30 minutes, and which shall be divided as follows: ten minutes each for the Government and Fianna Fáil; five minutes for Sinn Féin, five minutes for a speech in reply by a member of the Government, and Members may share time; and the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after two and a half hours.

(2) The Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 June 2017, and the order in which questions to members of the Government, other than the Taoiseach, shall be asked in accordance with Standing Order 39(2) shall continue unchanged until the Dáil shall otherwise order.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Appointment of Taoiseach and Nomination of Members of Government**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call the Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, to confirm his appointment as Taoiseach by the President and to move the motion.

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

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

Tairigim:

Go gcomhaontóidh Dáil Éireann leis an Taoiseach d'ainmniú na dTeachtaí seo a leanas

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chun a gceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar chomhaltaí den Rialtas:

I move:

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

Proinséas Mhic Gearailt Frances Fitzgerald

I also propose to nominate her as Tánaiste

Pascal Ó Donnchú Paschal Donohoe

Risteárd de Briotún Richard Bruton

Síomón Ó Cómhannaigh Simon Coveney

Cathal Ó Flannagáin Charles Flanagan

Heather Mhic Unfraidh Heather Humphreys

Síomón Ó hEarchaí Simon Harris

Micheál Ó Críod Michael Creed

Donnacha Ó Neachtain Denis Naughten

Seán de Rossa Shane Ross

Caitríona Zappone Katherine Zappone

Micheál Ó Rinn Michael Ring

Ríona Uí Dhochartaigh Regina Doherty

agus

and

Eoghan Ó Murchú Eoghan Murphy

I intend to assign Departments of State as follows:

Department of Enterprise and Innovation to: Frances Fitzgerald

Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to: Paschal Donohoe

Department of Education and Skills to: Richard Bruton

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with special responsibility for Brexit, to: Simon Coveney

Department of Justice and Equality to: Charles Flanagan

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to: Heather Humphreys

Department of Health to: Simon Harris

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to: Michael Creed

Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to: Denis Naughten

Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to: Shane Ross

Department of Children and Youth Affairs to: Katherine Zappone [who cannot be with us today and our thoughts and prayers are with her at this time]

A new Department of Community and Rural Affairs to: Michael Ring

Department of Employment and Social Protection to: Regina Doherty

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to: Eoghan Murphy

I propose to nominate Seamus Woulfe SC for appointment by the President to be the Attorney General.

I also propose to nominate the following as Ministers of State who will attend Cabinet:

Deputy Joe McHugh as Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht with responsibility for Gaelige, Gaeltacht and the Islands

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor as Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills with responsibility for higher education

Deputy Paul Kehoe as Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Defence with special responsibility for defence

Deputy Finian McGrath as Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, and the Department of Health with special responsibility for disability issues.

I have tasked my new Government to build an Ireland, a republic of opportunity as I have spoken about, as one in which every person has an opportunity to succeed and in which all parts of the country have an equal chance to share in our prosperity. I have also tasked it with ensuring Ireland remains at the heart of Europe and becomes an island at the centre of the world. To help create this republic of opportunity, we need to be a Government of purpose, a Government that gets things done.

We are fortunate to be in government with some hugely talented Independent Deputies. These are men and women who have brought with them their own vision for the country, their own determination to do what is right, and their own ideas about what is needed to help all our citizens, and we are stronger because of them. They showed courage in entering government a year ago and they are making a real difference on issues, from medical cards for people in receipt of domiciliary care allowance to child care, judicial reform and broadband. I look forward to a long and enduring partnership with them.

I want this to be a genuine partnership Government that mobilises the talents of all those involved, those in Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance Ministers and Deputies, as well as

independent Ministers and Deputies. It will be a partnership built on mutual trust and respect, underpinned by a shared desire to help all our citizens, whatever the challenges or problems that are thrown at us. We will work together in the public interest for the common good.

Today marks the end of one chapter in Irish history and the beginning of another. To those countries around the world that are looking at Ireland tonight, I have a simple message. This country will be at the heart of Europe, the common European home we helped to build, playing our part in the great debates and meeting the great challenges of our time. We will strengthen the bonds with those countries with which we share historical and cultural links, such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. We also reaffirm our connection with all the countries where we have developed strong links in recent years. This Government is committed to multilateralism and we will face the great international causes of our time, with climate change and international development being two of the most pressing. We will continue to play a role in the United Nations, building on our great history of international co-operation and responsibility. We will work to protect our citizens and we will work to pay our part in combating the growing threat of radical terrorism. I have a special message of support for our diaspora around the world, wherever they are to be found. We pledge that we will provide a voice for your interests and strengthen links to this country.

I shall now set out some of our priorities. I have asked the Minister, Deputy Coveney, to take on the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for co-ordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit. We face enormous challenges in foreign policy as relationships on this island, between these islands and across Europe change. I have given Deputy Coveney the task to work towards re-establishing devolved government in Northern Ireland, to secure the best possible deal for Ireland on Brexit, to win seats for Ireland on the UN Security Council and to expand our diplomatic and trade footprints overseas.

I have asked the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, to serve as the head of two Departments: the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I have asked him to keep our public finances sound, to drive the implementation of a new, ambitious capital infrastructure plan for Ireland, to ensure our public services continue to be reformed and to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of Brexit. In 2011, given the scale of the crisis this country was facing, it was the right decision to create two Departments to deal with the questions of finance, public expenditure and reform. Having restored our economic sovereignty, we are now working to ensure the recovery is shared across the State, and there is now a real logic in having the same Minister in charge of these two areas to ensure integration and co-ordination.

Deputy Frances Fitzgerald will continue to serve as Tánaiste, a role in which she has excelled in recent years. She will also serve as the Minister for Enterprise and Innovation. The Minister is tasked with driving employment growth and investment in Ireland, especially outside the greater Dublin area, with expanding our agency presence abroad and with ensuring Ireland is business ready for Brexit. I also intend to enhance the office of Tánaiste, including attending some State occasions and trade missions and chairing some Cabinet committees.

The Minister, Deputy Charles Flanagan, will serve in the Department of Justice and Equality where his key tasks will be to continue to reduce crime, to pilot the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill through the Dáil and to drive reform and culture change in An Garda Síochána.

The Minister, Deputy Creed remains as the Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food and

he will prioritise preparations for the next round of Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, reforms, expand Ireland's overseas markets for food, drive the implementation of Food Wise 2025 and look to harness our ocean wealth.

The Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, will stay as the Minister for Education and Skills and will be responsible for the enactment of the Technological Universities Bill 2015, securing a broad consensus on a new model of funding for third level education, and implementing the action plans for education and educational disadvantage. Education is the most effective tool to break cycles of disadvantage and to provide opportunity. It is also the foundation of a successful and modern economy. Given the importance of education in a society where there is genuine equality of opportunity, I am appointing Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor as Minister of State with responsibility for higher education, attending Cabinet. We need to drive this sector forward, give it autonomy and resource it adequately.

Deputy Regina Doherty will take my place at the Department of Social Protection which, in line with other countries, will gain the labour affairs and labour law responsibilities of the former Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, thus becoming the Department of Employment and Social Protection. Her key responsibilities will include ensuring budget packages are progressive and reduce income inequality, advancing the social insurance reforms now under way, the new deal for the self-employed and providing access to an occupational pension for all employees.

No country has a perfect health service. However, Ireland is an outlier among wealthy countries when it comes to patient charges and patient access. Surely a country and political system that managed to weather the worst recession in a generation, rescue the banking system and bring an end to a conflict that lasted centuries should be able to get this matter right. I am determined that we should do so. The all-party Sláinte Care report provides good guidance. I task the Minister, Deputy Simon Harris, with preparing a detailed response to that report, including proposed measures and timelines. I am also asking him to complete passage of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill through the Houses as soon as possible. He will also be responsible for bringing forward legislation to allow for a referendum on the eighth amendment in 2018.

The Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, remains at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. He will drive the implementation of the transport improvements provided for in the new capital plan, protect our tourism from the risks of Brexit, and work to secure the Rugby World Cup for Ireland in 2023.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy will join the Cabinet as Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. Rebuilding Ireland is working but it may not be enough and so I am tasking him to review it within three months and to consider what additional measures may be required, including consideration of a greater quantum of social housing build, a vacant home tax and measures to encourage landlords to remain in or enter the rental market. He will also take on responsibility for Ireland 2040 and further reform of local government and electoral reform.

The Minister, Deputy Katherine Zappone, remains at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Her principal responsibility will be the successful introduction and implementation of the affordable child care scheme and the associated legislation, and also leading the Government's response to reducing child poverty.

I am appointing Deputy Michael Ring to head up a newly reformed Department of Com-

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munity and Rural Affairs. His role will be to support local communities in all parts of Ireland, urban and rural, and to ensure economic recovery and investment is accelerated in rural areas, market towns and villages which have not experienced economic recovery to the same extent as our cities.

I have long believed that Ireland should have a dedicated Department of Culture, as other countries do. I have been enormously impressed with the Decade of Commemorations so far and with Creative Ireland. I want the Minister, Deputy Heather Humphreys, to continue her excellent work in this area. I want there to be new emphasis and importance attached to the promotion of arts, culture and heritage in Ireland, matched with an appropriate budget. It is our creativity that makes Irish men and Irish women different and we need to foster it. I am assigning responsibility for the Department of Culture and responsibility for Gaeilge, Gaeltacht and the Islands to the Minister of State, Deputy Joe McHugh, in addition to his duties as Chief Whip. I am tasking him with the role of promoting the learning and use of Irish in all parts of Ireland and to be a voice at the Cabinet table for our first national language.

The Minister, Deputy Denis Naughten, will remain at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. I am determined that the Government should show new ambition when it comes to tackling climate change by setting out a roadmap to a low-carbon economy. Climate will be the first item to be discussed at our first full-day strategic Cabinet meeting in a few weeks. The Minister, Deputy Naughten, will also drive the implementation of the national broadband plan until every premises has access to high-speed broadband.

The Minister of State, Deputy Paul Kehoe, remains in his post as a Minister at my Department and as Minister for Defence. I will delegate all functions relating to defence to him, including the Office for Emergency Planning.

The Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, remains Minister with responsibility for disabilities across several Departments. As a Government, we are renewing our commitment to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities this year and to improving services available to people with disabilities, especially respite care and emergency residential places.

This will be a Government of purpose. It will be a genuine partnership Government that works to improve the lives of all our citizens and all parts of our country.

I commend the Government to the House.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I dtosach báire, déanaim comhghairdeas leis na hAirí nua atá ceaptha anseo tráthnóna. Is lá ceiliúrtha agus den bhfiorthábhacht é dóibh siúd atá ceaptha agus dá muintireacha. Guím gach rath orthu leis na dualgais a bheidh orthu as seo amach. Is é an rud is tábhachtaí agus is práinní ná béim a leagan ar pholasaithe substaintiúla agus iad a chur i bhfeidhm ar mhaithe le saoránaigh na tíre. Caithfidh an Rialtas an Conradh atá againn leis a chomhlíonadh go huile agus go hiomlán. Is léir do chách go bhfuil géarchéim úafásach fós ann i gcúrsaí tithíochta agus sláinte agus go bhfuil easpa muiníne as ár gcóras dlí agus cirt. Ní mór dúinn na fadhbanna práinneacha seo a réiteach go héifeachtach.

To be nominated to serve as a member of Government is a great honour. It carries with it great responsibilities. Each person nominated by the Taoiseach today to continue in government, or to join it for the first time, has the right to be proud of his or her achievement. I offer my congratulations to each of them, their families and the large body of supporters that stand

behind them.

This Government is being nominated at a profoundly challenging time for our country, Europe and the wider world. Many of these challenges have grown over the past year because of the policy of drift and inaction which was to be found in almost every Department. In no area has the past year seen sustained progress in setting out or implementing substantial reform, policy or service development. All those appointed will be members of a Cabinet which has run out of excuses and must now start to have an impact. They will be measured not on glossy brochures and launches but on the hard substance of whether they are delivering. The public has long since stopped listening to the spin and is angry with the policy of repeated denial of the existence of problems or false claims of progress based on misleading statistics.

To those who have been left off the list, I am sure that for the time being they are satisfied with reassurances that they will be considered for a position as Minister of State. Given the number of promises that appear to have been handed out during the leadership race it will be interesting to hear what will be told to the five Fine Gael Deputies not on the list and left without a portfolio. The use of the superior junior Minister, conceived many years ago to facilitate former Deputy Pat Rabbitte, is beginning to be abused in that there are now four super junior Ministries. This seems to be an avenue of convenience for taoisigh to resolve very difficult choices.

**Deputy John Halligan:** Deputy Martin might need it himself.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is at best unfortunate that so many of today's appointments have been done on the basis of internal party concerns rather than on the basis of the most suitable person for the position. If this is to be a transformative, radicalising and modernising Administration, this is a poor start. Certain of the assignments appear unlinked either to past performance or interest. The prominence which is being given to party organisation and electoral preparation is highly unusual and the various minor realignments which have been made go nowhere near meeting the hype which has preceded them.

The Good Friday Agreement represents one of the greatest achievements of constitutional republicanism. It secured the agreement to end an illegitimate campaign, take the gun out of politics, establish agreed institutions and move forward on the fundamental objective of a lasting reconciliation on our island. Key elements of this progress are today under threat. Years of a dysfunctional duopoly, underlying sectarianism and neglect from Dublin and London have caused immense damage. The decision of the Tory Government to rely on the DUP cannot be allowed to threaten or undermine the core dynamic underpinning peace.

While we would certainly have had differences with Deputy Charles Flanagan in terms of the urgency and ambition of his approach to Northern Ireland, he is the only Member of Government to show any interest in this area in the past six years. The decision to remove him from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade undermines the claim that this is a Government whose members and portfolios have been defined by ability.

The issue of Brexit is such that the challenges are changing every day. The terms of reference for the EU-side of the negotiations are very general and a non-specific start to what will be complex and detailed negotiations. A number of Ministries have responsibilities which are profoundly impacted by Brexit, including enterprise, social protection, education, agriculture and health. There is a need for the Government to set out concrete proposals to limit the long-term damage of Brexit. The outcome of the UK election poses an opportunity to moderate the

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hard Brexit for which the previous Tory Government was pushing. This is a matter Fianna Fáil has been talking about in detail for some years and our greatest frustration has been the refusal to engage in substantive, rather than symbolic, discussions. It is our hope that today will mark a departure from this.

I congratulate my constituency colleague, the Minister, Deputy Coveney, on his transfer to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is an excellent Department which had no obvious need for a change of leadership. Over the course of his pitch for the leadership of his party, he toured the country constantly and emphasised that he believes in finishing a job once it is taken on. He criticised his new boss for running out of the Department of Health after a year and a half, but today he is choosing to leave the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government after little more than a year. There is nothing in the housing agenda which is anywhere near to being implemented. A year and a half after the general election, in which the scandal of homelessness was a defining issue, the problem is demonstrably worse. For a shocking illustration of how desperate the crisis is, one need look no further than the Capuchin Day Centre which is accessed by at least 8,500 children for emergency meal services on an annual basis. After the endless stream of announcements and initiatives from the former Minister, Deputy Kelly, we have had a new stream of announcements and initiatives, each one heralding the final conquering of the problem. There are clear commitments in place on social housing and every element of the housing crisis but it is long past time to put a sustained focus on delivering the unequivocal commitments of Government on housing.

The separation of the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform originated directly from the Labour Party demand for a share of the finance portfolio in 2011. With that party's usual genius for negotiation, it got the responsibility for the cutbacks while Fine Gael got to claim credit for an economy which retained the core strengths that drove the recovery. This was matched only by the later decision of the Labour Party to swap education for water. The decision to unify the Departments again is not an unreasonable one but the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, will find himself in the unique position of being a Minister required, by law, to consult and seek approval from himself before taking most decisions.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** He is good at that.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** In recent days, it has been widely trailed that the Taoiseach intends to abandon the rainy day fund and spend it on infrastructure. However, the fund is not yet in place and its creation is part of the deal which allows this Government to exist. He has no freedom to unilaterally change this policy and any attempt to manoeuvre on the ground for the next election by playing with overall budgetary limits will not be tolerated.

Few areas have been more disastrously managed by Fine Gael than health. A series of damaging decisions and an obsession with managing headlines rather than services have led to real deterioration and hardship. Its record is a lot worse than merely unfinished business. It is a sad reflection on the recent Fine Gael leadership contest that health is seen as a place to keep a Minister to be punished, rather than a challenge to be tackled head on. We have run out of patience over the implementation of agreements on the funding and provision of mental health services and no more delays will be tolerated. The National Treatment Purchase Fund is a proven way to immediately tackle waiting lists and waiting times. Its abolition caused real harm and its proper restoration is required immediately to reduce waiting times for patients. There are now 666,000 people waiting for inpatient and outpatient appointments.

On its first day in office, Fine Gael abolished the place of community development at Cabinet. This has caused hardship in urban and rural communities and the damage is obvious to anyone who cares to look. We regret that this damaging policy will continue. We also regret the fact that no significant effort is planned to address the rising crisis in many rural communities. There is no better demonstration of this than in the massive cuts to and underspending in respect of the Leader programmes. At a time when rural communities are literally terrified of the implications of Brexit, the failure to give their concerns any serious attention to date is an important omission. Investment in education and research is the most effective way to underpin the economic and social development of this country in the future. It will fireproof us against Brexit and other external threats. The Cassells report is a key policy intervention in this regard that needs to be advanced. Investment in and reform of preschool, primary and second level education are also essential. Education should be at the heart of a strategic approach to our people's future and we are prepared to engage constructively with the Minister for Education and Skills, as well as the new Minister of State with responsibility for higher education, in pursuing and advancing that agenda.

The ongoing crisis of confidence in key parts of the justice system has been the hallmark of recent years and was the most important impulse in the decision of Fine Gael to have a leadership contest. This is a topic which requires much fuller discussion. However, we have not yet heard anything that goes beyond the empty promises of reform of which we have been hearing since the days of the former Minister, Alan Shatter. The manner of the appointment of the former Attorney General to the Court of Appeal stinks. This can not be overcome by comments such as, "Ah sure, we'll do better next time". The silence from the Labour Party on this issue is deafening. Why has 23 years of precedent been abandoned for no real reason?

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Why was no specific open advertisement issued in recent months for the job?

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** It is beautiful - the Deputy would want to see it.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Why was the job held open for nearly three months and then filled in this manner?

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Why did a Minister, once staunchly opposed to any political involvement in judicial appointments, quietly wave this appointment through?

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Was it anything to do with a decision to seek an interim report on facilitating the reopening of Stepside Garda station, even though the full report is due in weeks? It has been said to me today that it was a good, old-fashioned trade between a judicial appointment and the opening of a police station.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** Jealousy is no good.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** There was a decision to cherry-pick one part of an interim report

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for announcement by means of a political banner in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and every member of Cabinet who agreed these measures on Tuesday will carry the cloud of a squalid piece of low horse trading until they fully explain what went on.

Each Minister in the Government is obliged to serve the public interest and implement the basic agreements which helped him or her secure office. A record of growing division and unfairness has been replaced by inaction and drift in the past year. What our country needs is concerted action, not a more effective media policy or political operation. The Taoiseach has every right to enjoy his moment but there will be no honeymoon and no more excuses. He has been given a great opportunity to serve the people of this country and we all hope he uses it in an effective and productive manner.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Beidh mé ag roinnt mo chuid ama leis an Teachta Pearse Doherty.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Ceart go leor.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Taoiseach, an Teachta Varadkar. I congratulate him on presenting himself to Uachtarán na hÉireann and returning to us as Taoiseach. We live in historic times. It is interesting to hear Deputy Micheál Martin, Uachtarán of Fianna Fáil, talk tough while, for the second time, ushering into office a Fine Gael Taoiseach. There has been lots of talk in recent times about abstentionist politics and the evils of abstentionism from the Westminster Parliament but the true abstentionists of Irish politics are, in fact, those in Fianna Fáil.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** They sit on the fence and look the other way, giving the new Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, a honeymoon of indefinite duration.

I am underwhelmed by the Cabinet, save for hearing of a Minister by the name of Seán de Rossa. I liked the restyling, the makeover in the new Cabinet to give a bit of Gaeilge glamour.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Up Tipp.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Up Tipp, Mattie. The Taoiseach talked about courage and cited it as the prime virtue of any person but his first decision reflects caution. The appointment of the Cabinet, which is the first decision of the Taoiseach, shows caution and conservatism. Far from a team preparing to meet the challenges of our time, he now captains a team of procrastinators, excuse-makers and responsibility evaders.

The Minister, Deputy Harris, has survived the trauma of recent weeks and remains in his post, which is no doubt a great relief to him. He may know that as Cabinet members were wiping their fevered brows and perhaps even wiping away some tears of disappointment today, in the real world, 405 Irish citizens were on hospital trolleys. That is the reality of our health service. Members of the Cabinet have had many chances to remedy that, but have failed. People looking on expect them to fail once again. Let us hope that we will be proven wrong.

I welcome that the Taoiseach has prioritised a 2018 referendum on the repeal of the eighth amendment. He must make it clear that that will take place early in 2018 because Ireland is rightly and roundly internationally condemned for failing women and for acts of cruelty through

commission and omission by the State. That cannot continue. If the Taoiseach's courageous new world and commitment to equality is to mean anything, it must translate into improvements in real time and real terms for women.

Simon the elder now assumes the portfolio of foreign affairs. The partition of Ireland and the Irish peace process are not foreign affairs. They are core domestic policies. I put it to the Taoiseach and the Minister, Deputy Coveney, that the commitment to Irish unity which they both vigorously proclaimed in the course of their leadership campaign must now find real life through the preparation of a Government White Paper on Irish reunification.

**Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** Hear hear.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Now is the time to plan for that new Ireland. The Taoiseach has invoked the memory of Michael Collins more than once in recent times. The Taoiseach will recall Michael Collins's thinking, which was not uncontroversial at the time, about the freedom to achieve freedom. The Government now has the opportunity to chart a course-----

**Deputy Michael Creed:** The Deputy is a belated convert to that.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----to achieve that freedom. I hope it grasps that opportunity. I hope that the Taoiseach, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, and the Government are familiar with the Good Friday Agreement and the fact the Government is currently in default of that agreement, among others, which dubious honour it shares with the Tories in Great Britain. The institutions in the North came down not because of belligerence on the part of Sinn Féin, as some people would have others believe, but because of corruption within those institutions. If political experience in this jurisdiction has taught us anything for the future, it is that there is a cost to tolerating or acquiescing in political corruption. Sinn Féin and the late Martin McGuinness were not prepared to look the other way when the renewable heating initiative, RHI, scandal broke. The institutions also came down because of the default that I have mentioned in respect of agreements.

Tomorrow, the Sinn Féin leadership will travel to London to meet with Theresa May. On Friday next, it will meet with the Taoiseach.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** But it will not go to Westminster.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** I hope that will mark the beginning of a process whereby outstanding issues can be resolved. As the Taoiseach knows, those issues include matters concerning Acht na Gaeilge.

The Taoiseach should understand that Sinn Féin is not the biggest threat to democracy. Some Members of Sinn Féin smiled when he said that. For the Taoiseach's purposes, Sinn Féin is more a threat to the *status quo*. If that hurts the feelings of any members of the Government, that is too bad, because Sinn Féin makes no apologies for the political stances it takes.

The Minister, Deputy Flanagan assumes the justice portfolio. He should be clear that the position of the Garda Commissioner is no longer tenable and has not been so for a significant period of time. He should be clear that he cannot credibly allow the culture of impunity within the most senior ranks of the Garda Síochána to go unchecked. He now carries a responsibility for morale within the force and also for public confidence in the administration of justice.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** The Deputy should know by now that I do not take lectures

from Sinn Féin.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** As for the housing portfolio, same old, same old. Members have listened to that rhetoric for as long as Governments of which the Taoiseach has been a member have been in office.

In terms of the portfolio of employment and social protection, the Taoiseach has set out the objective of income equalisation. I say bravo to that. I note that the issue of welfare fraud has been dropped. Is it not very odd, in the context of the Taoiseach thinking only a short time ago that it was suitable to spend €200,000 on a campaign to stamp out all this fraudulent activity, that it now does not feature as a matter of priority? That raises a question about the manner in which the Taoiseach assumed his office. It seems that he very deliberately thought it politically smart to target people who he believed to be powerless or at least very, very vulnerable. If he proposes to govern, design policy and carry himself politically on the basis of cheap shots or targeting people on the margins or anywhere else who he believes to be vulnerable, Sinn Féin, which he believes to be a threat to democracy, will stand toe-to-toe against that.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** Déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Taoiseach úr, an Teachta Varadkar, as an éacht atá déanta aige agus é tofa anseo inniu ar 57 vóta le tacaíocht Fhianna Fáil. Déanaim comhghairdeas lena theaghlach, lena pháirtneir, Matt agus lena mhuintir go léir. Déanaim comhghairdeas fosta leis na hAíre uilig atá ainmnithe go dtí an Binse Tosaigh anseo. Tá cuid mhór acu anseo le tamall fada anois. Bhí an pobal mór amuigh ansin ag fanacht leis an lá seo. Bhí muid ag cluinistín sna meáin le tamall fada go raibh ré úr agus ré órga ag teacht isteach le Taoiseach úr agus le Binse Tosaigh úr a cheapfadh an Taoiseach úr. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil cuma iontach sean ar an Bhinse Tosaigh seo agus ar an Rialtas seo.

There has been much hype about this day and the election of a new Taoiseach, along with much hope that this would be a new era led by the youngest ever Taoiseach and that there would be energy and excitement about the new Government. The Cabinet was appointed 20 minutes ago and the picture speaks volumes. Its members look quite old, stale and lacking a bit of insight and ambition. The reason I say that-----

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** The Deputy is looking very beautiful.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** That is the same script the Deputy used last year.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** The reason I say that is because one can easily get caught up in the bubble of everybody wanting to find out which Minister will occupy which Department minutes or seconds before the announcements are made. However, it is not about personality politics. It is about politics of substance. Members, Ministers and the Taoiseach need to recognise that this country faces substantial and serious issues.

I wish the new Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, well in his role. That role will be very challenging for him but will be more challenging for the people of this country if he follows the script that the new Taoiseach outlined in debates with the Minister, Deputy Coveney, during the Fine Gael leadership campaign. The Taoiseach made it clear that he wants the limited fiscal space of less than €400 million that the Minister will have available in the 2018 budget to be used for tax cuts for the wealthiest in society. He makes this grand gesture that nobody should pay a marginal rate of 50% or more, knowing that every

single person earning under €70,000 pays less than 50%. What he is talking about is a tax cut that is worth over €500 million to people who at least earn twice the average income. This is at a time when we have countless homeless families. This is a time when we have children with life-limiting conditions whose parents want them to enjoy the last number of years that they will have and to be allowed to die with dignity in their own homes not being supported by the HSE. This is a time when there are hundreds of thousands of patients on hospital waiting lists and hundreds of people on trolleys in hospital corridors.

The new Taoiseach speaks about there being no left or right and that he wants to appeal to the centre. It cannot be denied that if one argues for tax cuts for the wealthiest, it will come at a cost to health, education, rural areas or infrastructure. This money cannot be conjured up. I am asking him to prioritise the needs of the country. We are almost ten years into the economic crisis and yet 80,000 families are in mortgage arrears. Is this new Government going to stand up for the banks? I doubt it. We have not seen anything yet. We will have a new Minister with responsibility for community and rural affairs, yet 100 bank branches across rural Ireland and elsewhere are becoming cashless, shutting customers out from across-the-counter services.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** They are afraid they will be robbed.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** The outgoing Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, said a year and a half ago that it was unacceptable. Will the new Government stand up to the banks or just dish out more of this type of cheap shot?

The new Minister of State with responsibility for the Gaeltacht is going back to his old position. I wish him well. He is a constituency colleague of mine. Let us be clear. There are fewer people speaking the Irish language now than ever before. Sa Ghaeltacht agus taobh amuigh de. Tharla sin i ndiadh sé bliana de Rialtas Fhine Gael. Tá sé iontach maith go bhfuil Gaeilge mhaith agus líofa ag an Taoiseach - cuirim fáilte roimh sin agus beidh go leor díospoireachtaí ansin - agus tá sé iontach maith gur fhoghlaim an Teachta Joe McHugh Gaeilge nuair a rinneadh Aire Stáit dó. Caithfidh sé bheith níos mó ná siombalachas. Caithfidimid cinnte a dhéanamh go bhfuil an infheistíocht á cur isteach sa Ghaeilge, sna pobail Ghaeilge agus sa Ghaeltacht sa dóigh is go dtig linn borradh a chur ar an teanga. Caithfidh sé bheith i bhfad níos doimhne ná mar a dúirt an Taoiseach inniu.

There are great challenges facing this country, one of which is Brexit. I want to welcome the appointment of Deputy Coveney as Minister for Foreign Affairs. Hopefully, Sinn Féin can work with him on that issue. However, this Parliament voted for special status for the North and that it remain within the European Union. The Minister, Deputy Coveney, has a mandate to make that the central negotiating position during the forthcoming talks. I remind the new Taoiseach of the commitment he gave to the effect that, as Taoiseach, he would negotiate for the North to remain within the customs union and the Single Market. There is no doubt that there will be toing and froing over the next number of weeks and months until this Government eventually collapses.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** I propose to share time with Deputies Penrose, Sherlock and Jan O'Sullivan.

On my own behalf and that of the Labour Party, I offer my congratulations to each of the new appointees. Some have had the honour of serving in government and others are experiencing that honour for the first time. I call it an honour because that is what it is. Collectively, they

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are now required to act according to the requirements of the common good. They are the highest office holders of our sovereign, independent and democratic State. Each holds within his or her grasp the ability to shape our collective future. They have the power to better the lives of our people. I hope that power will be used judiciously.

Approximately one week ago I flagged my concern that Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach would seek to appoint one Minister to lead two Departments, namely, the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. I put on record my reasons for saying what I did. The scale of the jobs to be done in those Departments requires, in my view and experience, a dedicated Minister for each. The job of public sector reform is far from done, and I was concerned that this would be the issue that would be abandoned on the desk of an exceptionally busy Minister. The legal complexities around a Minister being required under law to consult with himself is significant. It was my mistaken view that the chatter around the possibility was simply that and that our new Taoiseach would have the wisdom not to make this mistake, but it seems I was wrong. While the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, is a good and capable Minister, the decision taken by the Taoiseach is a mistake - the first mistake on his first day in office.

People may say that I have a vested interest in this area, and I suppose I do. I do not raise this issue to score points but to bring attention to a very real issue. It might be suggested that Minister of State can have issues delegated to them and that would prevent any conflict between the new Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe. That suggestion would run counter to the law. Under the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment No. 2) Act 1977, a delegated statutory power is exercisable by a Minister of State subject to the general superintendence and control of a senior Minister and it remains vested concurrently with the senior Minister. In other words, neither version of the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, can delegate a matter to a Minister of State and he does not actually retain control over himself. For the new arrangement to operate, a full Cabinet Minister would regularly have to step in a play one or other of the roles assigned to the Minister, Deputy Donohoe. That, I am afraid, has already been determined by our courts. The House should be informed as to which other Minister is going to periodically be asked to bear that task.

The leader of Fianna Fáil was critical of the Labour Party for taking the spending Ministry in the previous Government. I remind him that what we did in government was negotiate an open and public collective agreement with 26 public sector unions, unlike the decision by Fianna Fáil while in government to impose wage cuts on public sector workers without even discussion, much less agreement. That is one of the reasons that we took that office.

My colleagues will address a range of issues that now stand before the Taoiseach and his Ministers. Each of those deserves attention. I want to briefly mention some issues. Brexit remains the greatest challenge our country faces. My party has published a set of tangible actions that Government should take on immediately. I hope that we can have discussions with the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, to advance those. I also hope that we can begin to deal with a matter of greater substance, which is the future of this island. My party, among many others, has floated ideas about this in recent weeks and months. It is time that we got past individual statements and started to engage meaningfully on how to create an agreed island. Perhaps the Taoiseach might invite party leaders to discuss an appropriate forum or convention that might allow this discussion to become tangible.

The Taoiseach and his Ministers have reading to do. I hope that will be done in detail. I hope that they enjoy some celebrations tonight and tomorrow, and that when we come back next

Tuesday that we will all get down to the real job of work that faces us all.

**Deputy Willie Penrose:** I congratulate the Taoiseach and his new Cabinet. I wish to focus on issues relating to rural Ireland and the need for the Government to focus on the regions. I particularly compliment the new Minister with responsibility for community and rural affairs, Deputy Ring. I have no doubt that he has earned his spurs, and he will make sure that rural Ireland's problems are addressed and not forgotten.

There are many challenges facing rural Ireland, with Brexit being the main one. Farming organisations have said today that farming and the food and drinks industry must be one of the Taoiseach's top priorities in the Brexit negotiations. They are not wrong. We have already seen the mushroom industry decimated by the impact of Brexit and we cannot afford to have any other industry suffer in the same way.

The new Minister for Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Fitzgerald, should note that the midlands has the lowest number of IDA Ireland-supported jobs of any region, followed closely by the north west and mid-east. She must prioritise investment in small towns across the regions but in particular in those areas that have not benefited from the recovery in employment. There is no substitute for infrastructural investment by the State for long-term development. There is no substitute for advanced factories and offices, high speed broadband, good quality roads and public transport connections. Indeed in Mullingar there is a fine industrial estate of 27 acres ready to go in Marlinstown and the Industrial Development Authority Ireland, IDA Ireland, has failed to deliver there. It is like the forgotten child, bypassed every time. If regionalisation and development of the regions is going to mean anything the Minister should start in the midlands. State investment is critical to securing foreign investment and IDA Ireland must spearhead this in small towns.

Connectivity and increasing the scale of high speed broadband is critical for rural areas. It can transform them. The Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen is an outstanding example of how transformation can be achieved. The World Bank has suggested that a slight increase in broadband speeds can raise local gross domestic product, GDP, by 10%. Once super fast broadband reaches an area success follows. Connectivity is a key. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. The Ludgate Hub serves as a beacon of innovation for rural Ireland and this can be replicated across the country if there is a will to do so. Talk is cheap but bringing the whole community together and installing the necessary infrastructure can bring results. Let us resurrect rural villages and bring people back into rural towns.

The Minister knows that villages are being decimated. I live in one. Shops are closing. Very soon there will be no shop between the two major towns of Longford and Mullingar. Petrol stations and newsagents are disappearing. We do not want to impose rates on shops that are not making a tosser by calculating them on the basis of leasing values. What sort of a message does it send to rural areas when the rate for a shop that has been for sale for six years without an offer is calculated on the basis of a leasing value relative to a town? Shops in rural towns and villages create four or five jobs. They pay the proper wage and they pay their taxes. There is no black economy in those shops but they are being decimated by Government policy. It must be reversed. I ask the Minister for Community and Rural Affairs, Deputy Ring, to make sure that will be achieved. There is a report on the post office network and now is the time to implement it. In County Kildare, the service available at the post office was widened and it is going to thrive in Ballymore Eustace. That is the prototype that should guide us forward.

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**Deputy Jan O’Sullivan:** I congratulate all the Ministers and wish them well. I am, however, disappointed that there will be one woman fewer sitting at the Cabinet table than before this reshuffle. That is particularly disappointing.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** That is not true.

**Deputy Jan O’Sullivan:** The Attorney General was female so there will be one fewer women at the Cabinet table. That is particularly disappointing at a time when we need to see more women in positions of power and influence. I very much regret that.

I very much welcome, as Deputy McDonald has done, an indication that there definitely will be a referendum to repeal the eighth amendment to the Constitution. I do not think the Government has said that before but the Taoiseach has specifically tasked the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, with arranging for a referendum, which I hope will be early in 2018. I ask the Taoiseach to set the date as soon as possible.

The first speaker in the round of debates today, the outgoing Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, referred to the need to address child poverty. The new Taoiseach has referred to it in connection with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Zappone. Addressing child poverty, however, needs to be led by the Department of the Taoiseach. It is one of the most important issues the Government needs to address, particularly as there is economic recovery and more money in the economy but many children still live in consistent poverty. I am glad the outgoing Taoiseach brought it up as one of two or three issues he specifically referred to when speaking this morning. I hope the new Government will place it centre stage because it is so important.

Among the children most at risk are those who are homeless. I wish the new Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, well in his job in that Department. It is a very challenging job. While there has been a plan and many announcements there has been very little real action. We need real action and the provision of homes for all our people. A suggestion was slipped out very quietly last week by, I think, an official of Dublin City Council, that the target of taking all families with children out of hotels by the beginning of July may not be reached. If that is the case it is most disappointing and I urge the new Minister to ensure immediately that particular target is met.

I welcome the fact the Taoiseach has said the issue of vacant homes will be addressed because there are almost 200,000 vacant homes around the country. That can be the quickest win but we have not yet seen the vacant homes strategy. That needs to be announced very quickly. I also welcome the fact the Taoiseach did suggest that he would consider a vacant homes tax. We need a tax to ensure that empty houses become homes for the many people around this country who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. There are several housing issues that are most urgent but we particularly need to see action rather than simply words and announcements.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I join in wishing the Taoiseach and the new Cabinet well in their endeavours. I particularly wish the new Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, well in his new role. I acknowledge his commitment to and role in the negotiations in Northern Ireland. He has made an impact and the parties in Northern Ireland will miss his solid engagement there.

There was a so-called public sector pay agreement that has yet to be balloted upon but there was nothing in the Taoiseach’s speech tonight to give comfort to those public sector workers and trade unions about who now has political responsibility for continuing the work. I wish the

new Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, well in his endeavours. If he is to continue to lead in this it will be an onerous task in addition to responsibility for finance, public expenditure and reform. I worry that the Government will take the foot off the pedal in those important talks with the public sector unions.

In respect of Innovation 2020, I have noticed in the past year that the foot has been taken off the pedal of Ireland's research, development and innovation agenda. The innovation agenda was a key pillar of the last Government and continued to be, under the Minister of State, Deputy English, when in the Department of Jobs, Innovation and Enterprise and by the Minister, Deputy Bruton, until he became Minister for Education and Skills. It has now slipped off the agenda. Ireland is now far below average in its spending on research and development and the number of PhDs in real terms is decreasing. If we are talking about becoming an innovative island on the western periphery of Europe, Brexit has permutations too in respect of our ability to attract world class researchers to our shores. The Government needs to give priority to that and we must ensure that our spending on research, development and innovation does not become a lower priority. It needs to be given greater weight by Government.

While I congratulate the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, I fear that we are going to lose him because the foreign affairs agenda will perhaps take him away from the Cork agenda and the Munster agenda and the regional economic development-----

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** It is alright. I will look after that.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** -----of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Donegal, the western seaboard of this island, and the investment in the Cork-Limerick bypass.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** Kerry too. The Deputy is forgetting Kerry.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** Kerry as well. We should not forget Kerry. It is important to speak to the action plan for jobs which has specific targets in respect of job creation beyond the pale and that includes those counties I have just referred to. That needs proper infrastructure.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh an Teachta Mick Barry ag úsáid leath den am atá agamsa. Ba mhaith liom an Taoiseach a mholadh mar gheall ar an iarracht a bhfuil á dheanamh aige an teanga a labhairt sa Dáil. Má choimeádann sé leis an iarracht sin, b'fhéidir go dtabharfaidh sé cic sa tóin, mar a deirtear, don Dáil go léir níos mó úsáide a bhaint as an teanga.

I admire the Taoiseach for making that effort as it is important.

I am quite puzzled by much of what the Taoiseach said. One point which really puzzled me was that he claimed this Government will neither be left nor right because the old divisions of yesterday do not comprehend those challenges today. The Taoiseach and his Cabinet will need to explain that over the next period. As one goes through each of the Ministers,  
*9 o'clock* one will find a common thread, namely, they all believe in low taxes for multi-national corporations and for the very wealthy. All of them are committed to the privatisation of services. The Taoiseach himself has made a renewed commitment to restricting workers' rights, which no doubt will be contained in the public sector deal of the new Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe. The central myth that the free market will solve all our problems lies at the heart of the Taoiseach's policy and Cabinet.

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When he says he is neither left nor right, he is actually saying he does not recognise the class system which dominates this globe. I am afraid it recognises him. More importantly, it recognises the poor, the marginalised and the majority of people on this planet who do not have the privilege and equality the Taoiseach and many of his Ministers have.

To claim he is neither left nor right is nothing new. This is a claim made by Tony Blair, Macron and the centre of Europe, to which the Taoiseach seems to be so devoted. It has been the rhetoric of many governments for about three decades. What has it given us? It has given us the most unequal society ever on the globe with the widest gap between wealth and poverty that we have ever seen. It has given us the 1% versus the 99%. It has given us the few versus the many.

The Taoiseach's commitment to equality is an idea. In practice, however, he will have to show that. It baffles me how he cannot recognise that there is a class structure in this world while at the same time claiming he is committed to equality. In practice, if he wants to commit to equality, he will have to recognise that difference to bridge the gap between it.

For example, Linn Dara, a child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, inpatient unit in Ballyfermot, lost half of its beds in the last week. Many of those who suffer with mental health problems are young gay people. The rate of mental health disadvantage among gay people is equal to that of the Traveller community. Young gay people are four times more likely to be suicidal and to self-harm. However, the Government has allowed half of the ward in Linn Dara to be closed down, which equals one fifth of mental health beds available in the country. If the Taoiseach wants to address inequality, he would immediately tell the new Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, to end inequality in nurses' pay and address the fact the health services cannot retain or recruit nurses. He would instruct the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, to reopen these beds. The Taoiseach would tell the new housing Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, to bring back rents to realistic levels in order that nurses can afford to live in Dublin city. In that way, the Taoiseach would address the inequality with which adolescent young people are treated.

It is abstract to say there is no such thing as left or right. The only place that it really matters is when the Taoiseach agrees with Deputy Micheál Martin to shut up this side of the House. He wants to shut down what we have to say precisely because we are shining a light on and throwing open the contradictions that he stands for. I looked over a speech which the Taoiseach made last summer at the MacGill Summer School. He shared a platform with Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett who spoke eloquently about the issue of equality. In his speech, the Taoiseach acknowledged that a free market was amoral and did not address the question of equality. I know he keeps saying that he is progressing, maturing and changes his mind along the way. Less than a year ago, he acknowledged the free market cannot address the question of inequality. How will the Taoiseach and his Cabinet do this? It amazes me that every single Minister will make that commitment to, on the one hand, supporting the rich and inequality in this country, while, on the other, making a commitment to the Taoiseach who says there is no such thing as a class divide and one cannot claim to be either left or right.

We have to deal with the housing crisis, the health crisis and, crucially, with the inequality meted out to women in this society. I am glad it was mentioned that the Taoiseach is reducing the number of women in his Cabinet. Shame on him. It is a backward step. I hope when the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, looks at the role of the Citizens' Assembly that, along with other Deputies who will take part in that, he will insist it meets throughout the summer in order

that we can hurry up a referendum on the eighth amendment, not slow it down. We have waited 33 years for it. All my adult life, we have been fighting for equality and abortion rights in this country. The young woman who last year was incarcerated in a mental institution because she asked for an abortion reminds me of the X case, all of more than 25 years ago. Let us put an end to that.

The only way we can do that is by giving people a say in how this democracy is run. It will not be done by throwing open the entire project to privatisation and the free market or giving away all the rights to NAMA to do what it wants with empty properties or to throwing homeless people into hubs and not homes. These only worsen the situation. I look across at the Cabinet members and I do not believe they have a commitment to actually address the question of inequality. I believe the Cabinet will perpetuate it, as will the Taoiseach. I believe we will remain here to challenge them on this.

The only thing the Taoiseach can agree on with Fianna Fáil is to try and shut us up on this side of the House. Everything does not happen in here. It also happens outside. On Saturday, thousands of women and men will gather in Galway, Cork and Dublin to demand the repeal of the eighth amendment. Thousands will also gather to demand an end to the housing crisis. That will continue. Life also exists outside the Dáil, as does opposition.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Deputy McHugh is to be the new Government Chief Whip. I am sure he was listening carefully to the Taoiseach's acceptance speech today, where he indicated quite strongly that he supports a change to the rules that apply in the House. The Taoiseach framed this as a democratic issue. The real agenda, however, was shown yesterday on the front page of the *Irish Independent*, which ran the headline, "Fianna Fáil deal with Leo will quieten left parties in the Dáil". He will have a hard job doing that, but we will take it as a backhanded compliment. Those who would wish to quieten us feel we are speaking rather loudly on issues such as water charges, the eighth amendment, strikes and the housing crisis, among other things.

I would point out to the Taoiseach and the new Chief Whip that what is being raised here is the idea of tearing up a rulebook which they themselves wrote barely 12 months ago.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** It is rewriting it.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** These were the rules that they agreed at the Dáil reform committee just over 12 months ago. Our group, Solidarity-PBP, will make it clear tonight that those rules will not be changed without our strong opposition and resistance, as well as that of all the other Opposition parties, apart from Fianna Fáil.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** And the groups too.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Deputy Eoghan Murphy is to be the new Minister with responsibility for housing. He will face major challenges. Before I speak about them, I want to make some comments about the Minister leaving that post, the Minister, Deputy Coveney. In the course of the Fine Gael leadership election, he spoke about wanting to fight in the interest of the man in the sleeping bag. There are many more men and women in sleeping bags now than was the case when this Government took the reins. In fact, when Deputy Coveney took the position of Minister with responsibility for housing in May of last year, there were 1,994 children homeless in this State. The figure is now 2,708, which is an increase of 35%. We saw the scandal last month of 12 families with more than 30 children being told to go to Garda stations for accommodation overnight.

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**Deputy Simon Coveney:** That is not true

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Three families were forced to sleep rough in a nearby park.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** That is not true either.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** Fake news.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** It is not true.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** It is not true.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** Fake news.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** It is true.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** Fake news.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** It is not true.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** The Deputy is misleading the House.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Let me say as well, a Cheann Comhairle, that the Minister can shout about fake news all he wants-----

**Deputy Regina Doherty:** It is true that it is fake news.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** It is fake news.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** -----but the fact is that the number of homeless children in this State on his leaving his watch is far above when he took over the job.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It has increased by 35%. That is a fact.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** That is a fact by any standards. Will we have more of the same from the new Minister, Deputy Murphy, or will we see a change in policy? The Taoiseach indicates that there is to be an increase in local authority house building. We will hold him to that, and it must not and cannot be a small or token increase. There needs to be a major - even a massive - increase in local authority house building. We will watch that one very carefully. We also need rent controls to take on the landlord interests and a banning of economic evictions. We will continue to push for that.

Deputy Paul Kehoe is to be reappointed as Minister of State with special responsibility for defence. I do not think that they will be jumping up and down for joy in the barracks up and down the country this evening. He has failed to address the low pay crisis that exists among the ranks of the Defence Forces. One in five is on family income supplement so that their families might live free from poverty. It was tremendous at the weekend to see the wives and partners of the Defence Forces group organise the largest protest of Defence Forces families seen in this State in 25 years. It happened in County Kildare when more than 200 marched to the Minister of State's Department headquarters. That group will do so again because that is a movement that is on an upward curve. I will leave that point except to state that we will be putting forward a Bill in this House next week on the question of union rights for soldiers. The Minister of State can expect sharp debate on the issue.

The final point I would like to make relates to a very particular case. That the Minister, Deputy Harris, is back in the Department of Health has been spoken of as some kind of punishment. If I were Minister for Health, I would see it as a tremendous opportunity.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** So do I.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** He does.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** If Deputy Barry was Minister for Health, we would be in trouble.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** It would be an opportunity to introduce a national health service, which is what is needed in this country. However, the very first thing I would do is attempt to ensure justice for Vera Twomey. I drove down to Vera's home in Aghabullogue, County Cork, at the start of this week and sat with her over a cup of tea in her kitchen. She told me about how she is being forced to go abroad with her family. Why? To access medicine for her sick child. Tonight, as this debate is taking place, she is packing her bags and making the preparations to go, perhaps as early as next week.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** The Deputy should not be abusing Vera Twomey for political reasons. He is a disgrace.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** She is texting us here.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Yes.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** She is texting us here.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** I talk to her too. The Deputies should not be politicising her case.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Let us see what Vera Twomey thinks about the debate here tonight---

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** Let us see what she thinks.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** -----and what the Minister, Deputy Coveney, has to say on the issue.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** She is a vulnerable person and the Deputy should not be using her for political reasons.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** That is cynical. The Minister broke his promises to her.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Yes, she is a vulnerable person which is precisely the reason-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies, please.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** She is a good person and a vulnerable person and the Deputies should not be using her for political reasons.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** She is a good person. I agree with that entirely. What should be done on foot of those points are two things. First, stop the foot dragging and the attempt to delay the Bill to legalise medicinal cannabis-----

**Deputy Simon Harris:** The Deputy is not a doctor.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** -----and do what needs to be done and talk to the people in the HSE

to ensure-----

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** Let doctors make decisions and not politicians.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** Dr. Barry.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Stop interrupting..

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** The Deputy is abusing a vulnerable family.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy Barry. Your time is up.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** The Government has ignored the Irish Medical Organisation.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** Did the Deputy bring the cameras with him?

**Deputy Mick Barry:** The Irish Medical Organisation has called for change on this issue.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** Did he bring the cameras with him?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Ministers, please.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** It is the Government's foot dragging-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy's time is up.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** My time is up because of the interruptions.

**Deputy Regina Doherty:** That is what he spends his life doing in this House.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** I will finish on this sentence.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Stop provoking them, please.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** I will finish on this sentence. I have the record tonight of being interrupted by the greatest number of Ministers. Is that not some record to have?

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** The record for making the most outrageous allegations.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** Stop delaying. Stop the foot dragging on the legalisation of medical cannabis and do what needs to be done to assist Vera Twomey. Stop the scandal of her being forced to leave the country to get medicine for her sick child.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** I am surprised at Deputy Boyd Barrett.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** Leave her out of politics and the Deputy might help her.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Our next speaker is Deputy Clare Daly.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** The Deputy knows that is an unfair exploitation.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It is absolutely not. The Government absolutely let Vera Twomey down consistently. Ask her.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** The Deputy is not a doctor.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** They drag her into politics.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Rubbish.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** They exploit a vulnerable woman.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We would expect more of the Ministers to try to restrain themselves and not be provoked.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** When they bring someone like Vera into the conversation-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Clare Daly.

**Deputy Clare Daly:** In deference to the hour and the tetchiness of the Front Bench, I will try to be briefer than the time allotted. I am sharing that time with my colleague, Deputy Tommy Broughan. I wish to start by saying that there is an incredible irony in tonight's situation. We heard the resounding applause earlier about the talk of curtailing the rights of Members on this side of the House, yet Deputy Micheál Martin, the great advocator of equality of speaking time, managed to hog the entire 30 minutes of Fianna Fáil's speaking time entirely for himself.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Good point.

**Deputy Clare Daly:** It makes a bit of an irony out of proportionality and inequality and leads us into a situation, which we have heard a lot of tonight, where language is losing its meaning.

I do not claim to know the Taoiseach at all but I remember him as a larger person than he is now when he was a member of Fingal County Council. He usually arrived in late to the meetings - he had probably been at work - with a can of Coke and a Mars bar in his hand. However, I also do not ascribe to the points made by other people earlier who said that he did not distinguish himself in his ministerial offices and that he had not stood out. As far as I am concerned, he did a good job in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. When I had to go to him on issues of health, he distinguished himself to me. I associate myself with the remarks made earlier by Deputy Wallace that we respect him, but that does not mean that we will spare him. It is very much in the context of those remarks and in all sincerity that I can genuinely say that I am utterly gobsmacked and underwhelmed by the announcement of his new Cabinet tonight. In some ways I just cannot believe it. It is not a good sign for his term of office and I genuinely think he has made a serious mistake here tonight.

People identify the Taoiseach as someone with a bit of backbone who is not afraid to stand out from the crowd. He displayed that when he was the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and he was the first Minister that Maurice McCabe went to. We remember the time when we could not get issues about Maurice McCabe's case onto the agenda. He was the Minister to whom Deputy Wallace tabled a question about something else but brought in the whistleblowing points. In fairness to him, he answered Deputy Wallace on those points and put the issue on the record for the first time - showing backbone and balls.

However, we did not see it here tonight. The Cabinet we got is mediocrity and political expediency. Without being derogatory, I know he did not have an abundance of people to play around with, but he could have shaken things up more than he did. By arranging the deck chairs

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on the *Titanic*, the Taoiseach has ensured that he is on a collision course for an iceberg. To me it has shown that this Government can only be short-lived, helped by its friends in Fianna Fáil.

I could talk about a lot of things but I know that everyone is tired. They justly want to go and spend time with their families and so on.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** I am not tired at all.

**Deputy Clare Daly:** I could talk about my friend Dermot, whose 87 year old mother went into hospital this day last week with chronic pain. She ended up breaking her hip in that hospital - the Bon Secours - and was sent to Beaumont Hospital over the weekend, where they would not operate on her. She was then sent to the Mater Hospital and was only operated on days later after sitting on a trolley. I could talk about the hundreds of people who turned out for a school meeting in Lusk last night because their children cannot get access to proper decent facilities in the community school there. We could talk about the fact that the average house price is now €350,000 in Dublin, meaning a couple would have to have an income of €90,000 to get a mortgage. Only 7% of the population is in that category. We have a crisis in the State in needs that are not excessive and which people thought were normal such as the right to health care when one is sick. The belief people have that their children can be educated and given the opportunity which they perhaps did not have and the idea of a roof over one's head were delivered on in the past but are under threat now. We have a serious crisis in the State. I do not have time to develop those points but the challenges are huge. There is an incredibly sad irony in the fact that as we sat here today the Charleton inquiry was under way. We heard evidence that 11 of the 15 phones that Mr. Justice Charleton needs to access are lost. Nobody can find them - surprise, surprise. We heard that Martin Callinan was talking broadly about Maurice McCabe being a "kiddie fiddler" and that nobody should listen to him. We heard today in the Committee of Public Accounts about the ongoing crisis in An Garda Síochána.

I am not being personal but the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, has shown no interest in any of these issues previously. If we are to believe the media, he did not want that job. He was not happy to get it. I can guarantee him we have made up our minds to make it absolutely the case that he will not be happy in that job unless the hard decisions, which unfortunately were not taken by his predecessor, are taken. There are two very simple measures which could be taken immediately that would signal to the people that the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar's Government is different from the last one and that he intends to clean up the show and to deliver confidence. The first issue is the role of the Garda Commissioner who has lost all credibility. Removing her from that position would demonstrate leadership and seriousness and it would give an absolute boost to the men and women of An Garda Síochána and the people the length and breadth of the country. It would be a fitting conclusion to the journey started with Maurice McCabe all those years ago. If the Taoiseach does not do it, he will be letting him down.

It is in that context that I found yesterday's announcement of the promotion of the Attorney General to a lucrative position in the Court of Appeal as utterly shocking. I do not say facetiously that she is probably the worst Attorney General in the history of the State. She lost court cases taken against the Government and her advice in the children's referendum was found to be wrong. She was roundly discredited by Mr. Justice Fennelly as being the catalyst for the removal of Martin Callinan and putting the former Minister for Justice and Equality and the Taoiseach in an invidious position. That a person would be given a job he or she supposedly did not look for, in that context, is utterly shocking. I do not have any further time. I want the Taoiseach to enjoy his night tonight but I think he has made a mistake. I hope he thinks on some

of the points because, as Deputy Wallace said earlier, we want him to succeed. It is in the interest of the people that he does. Unfortunately, his Cabinet decisions do not give us an enormous degree of confidence in that regard.

**Deputy Thomas P. Broughan:** I am delighted to have the brief opportunity to comment on the appointment of the new Government or, rather, this rehashed and still very feeble Government. On a personal level, I am sure the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and his Ministers will find their elevation satisfying. I wish the new Taoiseach and his ministerial team the very best in their new and old portfolios. There is no indication this restructured Government, with its minus 22 seat minority, will give any better direction and care to the Irish people than the earlier Fine Gael-led austerity Government has since 2011.

In May 2016, in a speech on the formation of the Government of the Thirty-second Dáil, I called it a sham Administration which was providing cover for its Fianna Fáil puppet masters to pretend they and their conservative Fine Gael partners were both in Government and Opposition at the same time. I note that at least the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, has not ruled out a Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil coalition in the future. Hopefully Dáil numbers in the Thirty-third Dáil will not permit Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil to swap places and carry on the current charade after the next general election. The ambition of all parties on the left of this House should be to work towards the day when both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael will be together in Opposition in this House.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** Deputy Broughan will be back in Labour.

**Deputy Thomas P. Broughan:** I called repeatedly for a dedicated Brexit Minister over the past year and I welcome that the Minister, Deputy Coveney, has been given that task as part of the foreign affairs and trade portfolio. It is very disappointing and regrettable that the Minister, Deputy Coveney, has chosen to walk away from the Department of Community, Housing, Planning and Local Government. The most telling judgment on his tenure in the Department is that the new Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, is to carry out a three-month review of Rebuilding Ireland, with a brief mention of further housing policy solutions. It is testament to the failure of the Minister, Deputy Coveney.

All of those who warned against merging the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform were correct. One of the few good initiatives of the 2011-16 Government was the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The change is happening just as the budgetary oversight office is being appointed to invigilate State spending and report to the Committee on Budgetary Oversight. Any committed, serious Government would keep all aspects of expenditure under close scrutiny. Proper attention was just beginning to be given at last to the very high cost of tax expenditures such as the research and development tax credit which we were informed today costs us three quarters of a billion every year.

My colleague, Deputy Clare Daly, has addressed some aspects of the justice portfolio. It was being mooted that the only way of changing the culture of the Department of Justice and Equality was to separate the security and home affairs function from the justice and reform function. It is something the Government has chosen not to do. Once again, Fianna Fáil is the anchor of this Fine Gael Administration. The conservative dead hand of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil together has resolutely refused to implement a housing emergency programme to house the tens of thousands of families on housing lists and in hotels and guest houses. On this day, the day the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, was elected, many of us got calls from mothers of families

in desperate situations facing eviction in the next few weeks. The HAP programme is not working in the Dublin region and we have had no hope in this area.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael together have refused to address the urgent needs of 660,000 citizens on health waiting lists or to finally implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Together, they have starved the education sector of resources and opposed pay equality for young teachers. From 2008, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael together, because of their joint and continuing support of the blanket bank guarantee, have allowed public investment to fall below minimum depreciation levels and allowed our infrastructure to wither and fall into decay. I noticed the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, did not have a word to say today in his introductory speech on the Government about our infrastructure. I was no admirer of the Deputies Kenny and Noonan Administrations which carried on the programmes of the former Deputy Cowen and also the late Deputy Lenihan of needless steep cuts and austerity which seriously damaged many of our people. It was laughable yesterday listening to journalists and some Members of this House waxing lyrical about the so-called achievements of Deputies Kenny and Noonan. Their performance at EU level was pitiful and their cowardice in not standing up to Chancellor Merkel and the EU Commission has left Ireland with an incredible and dangerously high national debt. We very rarely see our journalists writing about that.

This afternoon, the chief economist in the Department of Finance told us at the Committee on Budgetary Oversight that the national debt still stands at just over 100% of modified gross national income, GNI\*. Irish citizens *per capita* have one of the highest national debts on the planet and there are continuing grave worries about the necessary refinancing of those huge stacks of our debt in 2018 and 2020. The Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, knows a little bit about that. That is the true legacy of Deputies Kenny and Noonan. The Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, was always at the heart of this policy failure. As I mentioned a few weeks ago in a health debate with the Minister, Deputy Harris, the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, managed to ghost his way through three major Departments since 2011 without having any discernible positive impact on public policy. I am aware from my own work that he did at least take a small interest in road safety issues at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport but there was very little legislative change to make our roads safer until he had long departed that Department.

It is fair to judge; I do not agree with my colleague, Deputy Clare Daly, on that score. It would also be fair to judge that the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, made no impact whatsoever in the health sector either in terms of budgetary expansion for additional resources or in implementing the totally misconceived Fine Gael health insurance plan. What happened to that plan? The Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar's tenure in the Department of Health had only the one consolation that he was not the former Minister, Senator James Reilly. It was striking this morning that Deputy Kenny picked out a policy initiated by Deputy Shortall during her tenure as the only thing that could be shown from the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar's tenure. In the past year, I repeatedly asked the then Minister for Social Protection questions about the restoration of pensions after the cruel budget cuts of 2012, especially for senior women workers and retirees. He steadfastly opposed their restoration or any changes that would ease the hardship to lone parent families caused by cutbacks introduced by the Government in office from 2011 until 2016. As many Deputies stated, the then Minister's recent campaign against social welfare fraud has no credibility because in his ten years in the House, I have never heard the Taoiseach once refer to tax evasion and avoidance. We know from basic reports presented by Revenue to the Committee of Public Accounts, of which I was twice a member, that the tax evasion we know about is probably 100 times greater in scale than social welfare fraud.

Many of my constituents found utterly disrespectful the then Minister's comments, when contesting the leadership of the Fine Gael Party, that he wants to represent people who get up early in the morning. Those comments revealed the arrogance of a classic neo-liberal. The Taoiseach's reference to a republic of opportunity reminded me of the old refrain of Fine Gael in the 1990s that it would provide ladders for people. Besides those who bought ladders, attached them to their bikes and went off cleaning windows, the ladders at that time were just a dog whistle for the richest and most powerful vested interests in society.

While I wish the Ministers well in their portfolios, this is not the Government Ireland needs in this dramatic era of Brexit and Trump. The Taoiseach or Deputy Micheál Martin should call a general election as soon as possible and let the people give us a proper Government.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I wish the new Taoiseach, his Ministers and the Government as a whole all the best during their time in office. We do not know how long that will be but we hope everything goes well because people depend on them.

The health system is a shambles and in need of a serious overhaul. The HSE does not seem to be accountable or providing value for money. As highlighted in the media a few days ago, one HSE manager is being paid €600,000 a year. This issue must be addressed because no man or woman in the country is worth that kind of money in any year for whatever job he or she does. Too many people are on waiting lists. Since my election, I and my brother, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, have been highlighting the cases of people waiting for cataract procedures. The position has still not improved and people are going blind. Youngsters and teenagers are waiting for four or five years for orthodontic treatment. Girls are embarrassed to go out and nearly too embarrassed to go to school because they are waiting for this treatment. It is too late when they are 17 or 18 years of age because their gums have hardened and the treatment does not have the positive effect it should have.

People on the public list must wait for a year and a half or two years for a hip operation. Some of them are unable to sleep at night because they are waiting for operations, which is not fair or right. Two weeks ago, in the middle of summer, 17 or 18 people were on trolleys in Tralee University Hospital. What will happen in winter? Even in Cork University Hospital, people waiting for heart bypass operations have been sent home because no intensive care beds would have been available for them after surgery. That is not acceptable.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** On a point of order, is it in order that only nine Cabinet Ministers and one "super junior" Minister of State are present for this debate? There must be some procedure in place. People whose position rests on a vote of the Dáil must show courtesy to the House.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** That is not a point of order.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I did not interrupt anyone. This is not fair. We do not do that.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** Deputy Thomas Byrne should let Deputy Danny Healy-Rae speak. He should not interrupt.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** The Deputy is a shame and disgrace.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I want to make very clear that the issue Deputy Thomas Byrne raised is not a point of order. Moreover, I have no jurisdiction over who should attend

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the House. I have been here for many debates on the election of Governments and it is not necessary that all Ministers be present. That is the custom and practice. It may be a matter of courtesy.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** The interruption was a tactic.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** It is a tactic being used against Kerry.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** We stopped the clock.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Kenmare and Dingle community hospitals are only half open. Deer Lodge, a 40-bed mental health facility on St. Margaret's Road, was completed two years ago. Why have its doors not opened yet? I ask the Minister for Health to demand from the HSE that the facility be opened forthwith. It was completed two years ago and it is not fair to people with mental health problems that they are not allowed to use it. The St. Mary of the Angels home is a wonderful facility that is being shut down by stealth because no new patients are being admitted. This is not fair on those who were dealt a bad hand and are being prevented from using the facility.

The decongregation model will have to be reviewed because one size does not fit all, as I have told the Minister previously. My blood boils when I hear the Minister say people can be moved from these facilities into the community. I know a person who was born 45 or 46 years ago and who is crumpled up in a little ball, cannot see, walk, talk or move his hands or legs. If the Minister is suggesting that this person can be moved into the community, he is away with the fairies. I ask him to review the decongregation model. People with physical and mental disabilities are not receiving enough help and assistance. Their parents have been dealt a hard hand and I ask the Minister to do more for them.

The people of Kerry have been denied proper infrastructure for years. Surely the Macroom bypass project will proceed now that the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Michael Creed, is to remain in place. I ask him to put his shoulder to the wheel because if he does not-----

**Deputy Michael Creed:** Did the Deputy not get the contract for fencing it?

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Yes, but that is only to keep the animals off the road. We want the road built.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** The fencing has to be done before the road can be built.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** More money is needed before it can be built.

Most of rural County Kerry does not have broadband coverage and some areas do not have telephone coverage. If an industrialist flies into Farranfore Airport and drives for one mile on any of the three roads leading from the facility, he or she will find there is no telephone coverage. That is very unfair.

I note that the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, is to be appointed Minister for Community and Rural Affairs. I ask him to address the anomaly of the local improvement schemes. It is unfair that people in rural areas do not have a proper road to their front doors. They are as entitled as people in Dublin 4 are to have a good road to their doors.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** I will deal with that.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Dublin is gaining jobs at the expense of rural areas. While we do not begrudge jobs to people in Dublin, the capital and the east of the country are prospering and the Government is not doing enough to rectify the imbalance. Houses are not being provided at the pace required to address the housing shortage. The Department has placed too many hurdles in the way. Despite all that has been said, rural Ireland is still in decline. Post offices and Garda stations are closing and services are being centralised. To take the centralisation of the ambulance service as an example, last Sunday evening a person in Sneem spent an hour on the road waiting for an ambulance. That is the gospel truth and it is not acceptable.

Last week, *The Kerryman* highlighted that farmers' incomes in County Kerry are at an all-time low. The fair deal scheme militates against farmers. The Government opposed a motion we introduced on this issue. Fianna Fáil abstained and did not support farmers. I thank all those on the left - Sinn Féin, the Green Party, the Boyd Barretts and so on - for voting to support them.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** And the Mary Lous.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Farmers are being over-regulated. What will the MOT testing of tractors and the doing away of splash plates on slurry tanks cost farmers? What about not being allowed to spread slurry at certain times of the year, even when the weather is fine? In Northern Ireland farmers can spread slurry the very same day above the ditch.

The new drink driving rules, if introduced by the Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, will impact on and further isolate people in rural Ireland. That is to be deplored because they are already isolated.

Brexit is a major concern for every farmer in the country. The Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, has an almighty task on his hands.

Am I out of time?

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** No, but the Deputy is depriving his colleague of some time.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I will finish on this point because I was interrupted.

**Deputy Tony McLoughlin:** Keep talking.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** The Taoiseach is starting off on the wrong foot by acceding to the request made by Deputy Micheál Martin to curtail speaking time for smaller groups and Independents, denying us the right to speak in this Chamber on behalf of the people whom we have been elected to represent. It has become clear to me over time that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil would like to get rid of all of the Independents and smaller parties, but try as they might, they will not muzzle us here or out there. Whether it be on the highways, back ways or other roads around the country, we will take them on. We are not one bit afraid of them. Try as they might, they will not stop us from representing the people who voted for us and elected us to Dáil Éireann.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputy Mattie McGrath has five minutes.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** And the one that we lost.

I, too, congratulate and wish the new Taoiseach, his Ministers and everyone else the best.

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I thank the Taoiseach for being helpful in his previous role as Minister for Social Protection on the many issues we raised. The Tánaiste was also helpful. I hope she has placed work on Clonmel Garda station in the safe hands of the new Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Charles Flanagan, and that the project will proceed.

As I look along the line of Ministers still present in the Chamber, Deputy Charles Flanagan did well in his role as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, as did the Ministers, Deputies Michael Creed and Simon Harris. As there is a lot of unfinished business in the area of health, I am glad to see that the Minister, Deputy Simon Harris, has been left in his role.

As for the new Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, it could be a case of smoke and mirrors, with him needing to look in the mirror every day to see which Department he is representing. Nonetheless, I am delighted that the two Departments are back under one umbrella. If the legislation has to be changed, all the better. It was Deputy Brendan Howlin who wanted the little position of Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for himself all those years ago and he was given it.

The Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, will welcome the move out of the area of housing. The Minister prior to him, AK47 or the King, was going to sort out the problems in housing provision, but he has not attended to hear one syllable of this debate. He got Deputy Brendan Howlin to speak for him. He failed as housing Minister. Big Phil the Enforcer failed before him. There is a massive housing crisis, with thousands on the housing list in every county and homeless persons all over the place. The Government is also forgetting about those in mortgage arrears. It is abandoning them and throwing them to the wolves and vulture funds. Will the Taoiseach, please, rein in the banks, NAMA and the vulture funds? He should show the compassion about which he has been tweeting for many years and deal with the ordinary people who are struggling.

AIB is being fattened. I wish the former Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, well in his retirement, but I did not support him in what he did with AIB. The shares in it are to be sold to vulture funds; some of the largest of which in the world will come in again. What about farmers and small business people waiting in their homes tonight for the sheriff to arrive, on behalf of the courts, AIB and all of the other funds that lent money recklessly? We paid them back and bailed them out. We have to look after the people and allow them to be re-energised to enable them to house themselves. Many of those in mortgage distress did not ask for council houses or free loans. The economy was wrecked and they suffered. They are now suffering again. The Taoiseach should instil some compassion into his Ministers, including those from the Independent Alliance, to enable people to help themselves and live reasonable lives instead of being forced into ill health by fear and strain caused by threats from the sheriff. A couple of years ago I brought a book into the Chamber, *Waiting for the Sheriff*, but nothing has changed since. Since I entered the Dáil, this is the third Government for which a Taoiseach has been appointed for which I have been unable to vote and that is the reason. I quoted the song "Won't Get Fooled Again" by the band The Who. We do not want to be fooled again and neither do the people.

As Deputy Danny Healy-Rae said, the Government must look after ordinary people - the homeless, the sick and the 400 or 500 on trolleys everyday. Thousands of people are on waiting lists; some of whom have been waiting for five years - I receive letters which I would not even send to them - for simple procedures, for example, cataract or hip operations. There is a four or five-year waiting list for orthodontic treatment. Young children who are entering second-

ary school and going out to meet their peers cannot have these desperately needed operations performed. There are no psychology services available in County Tipperary, which has been abandoned. Last week we found out, however, that 9% more managers were employed last year in the HSE. We can have managers but not nurses. There is something rotten in the state of Denmark. We have to rein in the HSE and HIQA. I wish the Minister, Deputy Katherine Zappone, well in what is a troubled time for her, but she has to rein in Tusla also. There is quango after quango that the Government stated it would not set up but which it did.

I see the new Minister, the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, looking at me. That fellow did a Pontius Pilate on post offices. He could not get away from them fast enough, but he is being appointed Minister with responsibility for rural development.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** Just like the Deputy ran away from Fianna Fáil.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I am shocked that he will now be the Minister with responsibility for rural development. If that is what he did to oifig an phoist, what will do to small farmers? What will he do to Tús workers? What will he do to the farm grant schemes? God help us all. I am very disappointed by the poor judgment shown. I know that he came out and said he would vote for the new Taoiseach to undermine the Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, from the perspective of a rural constituency, but he is being shoved onto the people of rural Ireland. A man who comes from rural Ireland should know better, but he handled the post office issue appallingly. He could not wait to hand over the issue for Cabinet decision and dissociate himself from it. I do not look forward to what is going to happen.

I do look forward, however, to the Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, who is laughing, dealing with DEIS schools in my constituency next year.

**Deputy David Stanton:** The Deputy is all over the-----

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I am glad that the Minister is still in the Cabinet and the Minister, Deputy Heather Humphreys, likewise as she will look after the issues that the Government-----

**Deputy Michael Ring:** Go away out of that. The Deputy would be over here if he got the chance.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** It is welcome that-----

**Deputy Michael Ring:** He would love to come over here.

*(Interruptions).*

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Will the Ministers of State, please, not interrupt?

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Yes, please. They were going to-----

**Deputy Michael Ring:** We should hear the truth. He would come over here if he got the chance.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** They never stop interrupting.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** If the Ministers of State get an opportunity to respond, they can share time, if their party colleagues agree to it.

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**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Some of them have left and more are half asleep. Some are waking up, however, and realising they are still in government. They will need to pinch themselves, but they should know that they must look after the people. It is a privilege to be elected to this House. Our duty is to be Teachtaí Dála, messengers of the people. I welcome the Taoiseach's command of the Irish language and his appointment of a Minister with responsibility for the arts, culture and heritage, which is important, but Government members must know that they are public servants and represent the people. They should not forget about them when they are re-elected, pull up the ladder and to hell with the rest.

We need to fill the places that IDA Ireland did not fill if we are to deal with the impact of Brexit. It is too serious.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Next are the speakers for the Social Democrats and the Green Party who I understand are sharing time.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** I seek to share time with Deputies Róisín Shortall, Eamon Ryan and Seamus Healy.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Self-discipline, please.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** I read with interest the manifesto of the new Taoiseach, particularly where he described Fine Gael as a compassionate party that was committed to open rather than closed politics. He used the foreword to tell us that as a young man he had been attracted to Fine Gael because he had been inspired by what he described as the party's "unshakeable integrity" in how politics should operate. Today, however, we watched as someone who had been the subject of the gravest findings by the Moriarty tribunal became Fine Gael's kingmaker. Deputy Michael Lowry now has access to the Government and the highest political office in the land because the Taoiseach can count on him. The Moriarty tribunal ran for 13 years and cost the State in excess of €55 million, yet its findings have not been acted on. We find ourselves in a situation where the election of a Fine Gael Taoiseach is being facilitated by one of the key players in that tribunal, while a controversial company, Siteserv, now known as Actavo and owned by the other person against whom the tribunal made its findings - they were about corruption - was the supplier to the Houses of the Oireachtas of the barriers used for the Taoiseach's walk of honour in the grounds this afternoon. It beggars belief and serves only to remind us why trust in government and politics has been decimated. If the Taoiseach believes in the phrase "Start as you mean to go on", the events of today mark an inauspicious start for the Government. Is this the unshakeable integrity the Taoiseach says inspired him about Fine Gael's politics?

Politics and governing must be about an ethical enterprise. One cannot ask people to have faith and trust in anything less. The programme for a partnership Government talks of greater openness, improved accountability and delivery of more effective public participation but the challenge of the new Cabinet as it sits here this evening is not to spend time finding nice lines about accountability and restoring trust in politics, lines that work in manifesto documents, but to make actions speak louder than words. The newish Cabinet assembled here tonight will be judged on its actions rather than its words. I wish people well in their new positions but now that the phony war is over, we need to start seeing some real actions on some key issues such as, for example, housing.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** At the outset, I congratulate the Ministers of State, Deputies

Eoghan Murphy and Regina Doherty, on their elevation to Cabinet and I wish them well in their new roles. Apart from that, I have to share the points made by other speakers suggesting that the reshuffle that has taken place has been quite uninspiring. In some of the areas where reform is most needed there is not too much sign that it will happen. There has been much comment on remarks the Taoiseach and the outgoing Taoiseach have made in respect of child poverty. The reality is that one in nine children now live in consistent poverty. Since 2008, that figure has doubled. The Taoiseach, during the period of the last Government, and his predecessors in government, Fianna Fáil, contributed very significantly to that doubling. That is a shameful record by any standard. Words ring very hollow. We can only judge the Taoiseach by his actions, not by his fine words on a day like today. There is no doubt but that the impact of austerity fell disproportionately on children. That has created huge problems and the loss of childhood for many thousands of children.

The Taoiseach spoke about giving the Minister, Deputy Zappone, a priority job to do, which was to tackle the area of child poverty. That is all very well but is he prepared to give her the requisite funding? The initiatives taken in the past in respect of area-based childhood programmes have been starved of funding. Their funding is only guaranteed for another few months. The Taoiseach needs to put his money where his mouth is if he is serious about tackling the scandal of child poverty. Is he prepared to provide the kind of funding needed for those areas most affected by poverty, in order to provide the kind of investment that is required in family support services, infant mental health services, general child health services, education and child care?

A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, I am sorry. There are few enough Ministers here.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I have no control over-----

**Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** We are listening to the Deputy.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** Wait now, the Deputies cannot do two things.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** For God's sake, we are listening to every word the Deputy says.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** They are in a little huddle whispering to each other. At least pay people the courtesy-----

**The Taoiseach:** I am adding some of the facts the Deputy has not acknowledged, such as child poverty decreasing in 2015.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** The Deputies should pay people the courtesy of listening.

**The Taoiseach:** It increased when Deputy Shortall was in government.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** The fact of the matter is that child poverty doubled between 2008 and last year. The fact of the matter is that the Government introduced five regressive budgets, which widened the gap between rich and poor. Let us find out what the Taoiseach is actually about. Let him leave aside the fine words today. He is very much untested. Is he serious about doing something meaningful in respect of the poverty, exclusion and inequality that exists in our society or is he using empty phrases? We do not know where he stands on key issues. We do not know whether he has any vision for the country. We do know that he cannot promise tax breaks and promise to tackle the problem of poverty and inequality. The two things just do not add up. Will the Taoiseach come out clearly and let us know what it is he is actually going to

do? Is he going to serve the few or the many?

**Deputy Eamon Ryan:** I have to echo the earlier comments of Deputy Danny Healy-Rae. We are with him in a whole new rural-green alliance. We were right. We were proud to vote for the Deputy's motion and proud that our two votes counted. He is also right that we will not be silenced. I was very disappointed to hear the Taoiseach echoing Fianna Fáil and that he is seeking to silence the smaller parties in this new Dáil. He will not find us so easy to silence. I mentioned Deputy Healy-Rae because the key point I want to make relates to the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, who has been nominated as a Minister. Unfortunately, he has just left but I am sure he will be listening-----

**Deputy Michael Creed:** Has Deputy Ryan found God?

**Deputy Eamon Ryan:** No, it is just that rural development is something we need to get right. My mother comes from a town Deputy Creed knows well. All points from there to Gougane Barra and in between are as important to us as anywhere in south Dublin. Rural development is key to what the Government needs to get right. I am concerned at the nature of the change in that regard. I very much welcome the arrival of the Minister of State, Deputy Eoghan Murphy - that phrase has a nice ring to it - into his position. I would have thought that he would have a key role in terms of rural development. My understanding the direction being taken with the national planning framework, as it was devised by the Minister, Deputy Coveney, was that the question would be put back to rural Ireland, as well as towns and cities across the country, as to how they were going to develop as part of a new national plan. My understanding was that was the key planning change from the original strategic plan we were going to carry out.

My concern is that I am not too sure how we will do that when there are now several Ministers responsible, namely, a Minister for Community and Rural Affairs, a Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, who has a role and a Minister for Culture, who also has a critical role. I am not too sure that dividing that Department into two is the right thing; in fact I think it is the wrong thing. It makes the culture Ministry too small and that cultural element will be missing from rural development. I do not see it working. Given that the creation of a new Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and a new Minister for Community and Rural Affairs is the key - and really only - change from the previous Cabinet, this is not an insignificant issue. I am interested to see how that will work but it has to work. It has to connect to what we will do in the national capital plan review and the national climate dialogue.

The reason I mentioned a rural-green alliance is because that is the nature of what is needed. Regarding what I said earlier about us making this leap and taking this whole climate change issue seriously, I say to the Minister, Deputy Creed, that farmers are the front line. I had a meeting with Teagasc and 250 of the top farmers last week. We absolutely saw eye to eye. We recognised that they are the front-line key scientists and they have to be the people tackling climate change. This is a rural development issue as much as anything else. I simply do not see in the Cabinet reconstruction how that is going to work. Perhaps it will. If I am proven wrong and the incoming Minister, Deputy Ring, works with the incoming Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and with the Minister, Deputy Creed, then I will step back and say "fair play, you have done it". I have concerns, however. I am not sure what is the strategic thinking behind those new Departments. I am not sure what the culture Ministry is doing out on its own or what the rural development Ministry is doing, if it is not doing Deputy Eoghan Murphy's new job, which is this whole planning issue about how we develop and particularly how we develop towns. Rural development is not just about farming. It is about Boyle, County Roscommon, Macroom,

County Cork and Charleville and every other town.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** It is not all west of the Shannon either.

**Deputy Eamon Ryan:** No, it is the exact same in Leinster but that is our problem. How do we revive our 19th century market towns as part of rural development? That is a planning issue. How will the new Minister, Deputy Ring, manage that? It is okay in Westport, which is working because it is a tourist boom town, but there are not many Westports out there. How do the towns which are not Westports make it? I would love to see how that will be resolved between the new Ministers, Deputies Ring and Murphy. That is one of the key questions I have.

I will make one last point, if I may. We have too many “super junior” Ministers of State. Teams of 15 or so make sense. There is something in the human condition that means we work well when we are around a table of 15. Once 20 is reached, which is where we are at now, cohesion is lost. It is almost akin to a UK Cabinet. One of the problems with the UK is that it has a Cabinet with 25 or 30 people in the room. It does not work as a team. There are too many super-junior Ministers. I am sorry, it must be a very difficult decision and a hard call when some people have to lose jobs but there are too many people around the Cabinet table.

In terms of new politics there are three things we have to do: we must establish a universal health system, we must get climate right, and we have to decide how third level education will be funded. I cannot understand how the Minister for Education and Skills is not responsible for answering that key question in conjunction with the House. It gives me a certain lack of confidence that we will be able to answer that question in the remaining time that we have. They are some of the concerns. I wish all of the officeholders well. I wish the Government well. However, Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and I are going to be all over this rural development issue. We will work together on it because there is common cause.

**Deputy Michael Creed:** That is an unholy alliance - Deputies Eamon Ryan and Danny Healy-Rae.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Minister-----

**Deputy Eamon Ryan:** That is what we need. We will need to get the Minister, Deputy Ring, to work with the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, in the same way to make it work.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** Do not sit on the fence.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Healy.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** Deputy Danny Healy-Rae is not taking up the offer.

**Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** He is not reciprocating. He is not responding.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Time is very limited. Deputy Healy has just short of three minutes.

**Deputy Seamus Healy:** The cruel capitalist extremist policies of recent governments have devastated Irish society, have devastated low and middle-income families, have created poverty for families and children and have facilitated evictions from family homes. Of course, they have left the country with a chaotic health service and a housing and homeless crisis.

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In the very short time available to me I want to address the Minister, Deputy Harris, regarding health matters. Nine months ago in October 2016 he visited South Tipperary General Hospital. He described the conditions in the hospital as utterly unacceptable and said that solutions needed to be found. He went on to say that a decision would be made before the end of the year. Nothing has happened. The hospital is a progressive, forward-looking and efficient hospital. However, unfortunately, despite the best efforts of staff, there is horrendous chaos in the hospital. This month, June, there have been as many as 31 trolleys in the corridors of the hospital. What, in God's name, will it be like in the coming autumn and winter?

Patients on trolleys have no dignity or privacy. They lack access to adequate bathrooms and washing facilities. Staff are run off their feet and are struggling to provide a safe service in a highly pressurised atmosphere. South Tipperary General Hospital has been in crisis for more than five years. It has experienced savage cuts in funding and staffing, despite increasing its emergency department, outpatient and inpatient activity. The hospital is bursting at the seams. It is operating at 130% capacity. The medical department is operating at 150% capacity. Normal capacity at full occupancy is regarded as 85%.

The hospital urgently needs additional inpatient beds as promised by the Minister on his visit. I call on the Minister to fulfil that promise and make funds available immediately for 40 additional inpatient beds to address the chaos at the hospital, which has been caused by the policies of this and previous governments.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I call the Tánaiste who, I understand, is sharing.

**Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to share my time with the Ministers, Deputies Donohoe and Ross.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** They will have three to three and a half minutes each.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** It is great privilege once again to serve in government - a Government of purpose that will work towards a prosperous nation for all and in every community. It has been an honour to serve as Minister in two Departments. Throughout my time as Minister for Justice and Equality, there have been major changes in significant areas of public life. I am very proud of those changes for which I have campaigned my whole life. I believe the commission on the future of policing will represent a seminal moment when it comes to the future of An Garda Síochána.

As the first Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I had the privilege of introducing a number of ground-breaking reforms, including the comprehensive reform of the child protection and welfare system. I am very proud of the successful referendums on children's rights and marriage equality.

I am honoured to continue in my role as Tánaiste. Life is a series of new challenges and I am very pleased to accept this new portfolio, which at its core is about creating opportunity. Getting a job, being able to pursue a career and provide for oneself and one's family is the best opportunity a person can get. It is the best way out of poverty and the best way of giving the kind of support that future generations need.

Unemployment is falling. There are challenges on the horizon. I noticed that not one Opposition speaker has mentioned that unemployment has reduced from 15.4% to 6.2%. That represents a major change in the lives of so many of our citizens and it is what they want to see.

The task now is to create and innovate, to spread opportunity in enterprise far and wide, as the Taoiseach said, to the four corners of the country and everywhere in between. We now have the green technology, the artificial intelligence and the economic foundations on which we can build the future of Irish industry with endeavour, creativity and investment.

We are an island at the centre of our global world. We will redouble our efforts to attract talent and investment. I greatly look forward to playing a central role in this Government which will be totally guided by the absolute priority of providing equality of opportunity to each and every person in this Republic. We have to banish the disadvantage and exclusion that still cripple too many lives. As I have often said, until we do that, our democracy is unfinished. We have to use our economic growth to ensure that nobody is left out. We will ensure that we protect and use that growth to transform Ireland into a modern, progressive society.

This will be a Government of delivery that ensures that everyone can have opportunities for themselves and their families in the time ahead. The Taoiseach spoke so eloquently of a republic of opportunity. The task ahead must be to restore opportunity to those who have lost it and to provide opportunity to those it has passed by.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Tánaiste may have a further two minutes if she so wishes.

**Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

We believe in a State that stands for social justice and equality of opportunity. We believe in turning our face towards the world, holding out our hand in welcome, remaining at the heart of Europe as we have made clear repeatedly, and seeking to capture new hearts elsewhere. That is what we will be judged on. The Government is totally committed to that goal.

Let me return to words I have used in the past. Democracy is not about entitlement; it is about contribution. Each and every one of us in this House has a contribution to make to the exciting future that can lie ahead for all of our citizens.

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Independent Alliance is delighted that the Taoiseach has decided-----

**Deputy Billy Kelleher:** To reopen Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** -----that we should be kept in the same roles as we held previously. We share his vision for equality of opportunity. We are also delighted that we have the opportunity to reinforce the programme for Government which we agreed with the Minister, as he was then, Deputy Varadkar, and the Government of the day this time last year. We are grateful and pleased that we managed to agree that many of the things we believed in have been accelerated in the programme as it will go forward in the future. That includes the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the judicial appointments-----

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Come off it.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** That also includes two Bills introduced by the Minister of State, Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran, and a programme by the Minister of State, Deputy Halligan.

*(Interruptions).*

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**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister without interruption.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** All of those are agreed to be accelerated and, we have been assured, they will be accompanied in many cases by more free votes in the coming years of this Government.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Against the Attorney General's advice.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** This is welcome.

I wish to address some of the issues raised by Fianna Fáil and by Deputy Troy with his interruptions - not his contribution because his interruptions are always far better than his contributions.

*(Interruptions).*

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister has been here a long time and knows that all his comments should be addressed through the Chair.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Deputy Troy is trying to win the heckler of the year award.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** No bilaterals in this House.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** In particular, I would like-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** None of my contributions has been for the Minister.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The same applies to Deputy Troy - no bilaterals.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I wish to address the issue on which he has been interrupting all evening, which is the issue of Stepside Garda station. I thank Deputy Troy for the opening. Let me address that for him to satisfy him a bit. Deputy Troy is right that I campaigned for the opening of Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** And I gave the Minister a hand with it.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** He is right that it was part of my platform at the last election. He is right that I have campaigned for it since I came into government.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** And he delivered.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me say one thing. When I was negotiating on the programme for Government on this particular issue, does Deputy Troy know who the biggest pushover on the issue of Stepside Garda station was? It was Deputy Micheál Martin.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I went to him first and I asked if he would give us Stepside Garda station and he said: "No problem, it's over. It's yours."

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Hurrah.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** -----and today he has come back and said it was a pork barrel deal. He was offering pork barrel politics by the bejaysus at the time.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** We had to explain the judicial appointments process to the Minister, Deputy Ross, when we were in the negotiations. The Minister does not seem to have learnt much about it.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Do Members want to know what these guys over here said? They said, “No”. They said, “We can’t do it. We can’t pull it because we can’t interfere with the workings of Government”, but the Fianna Fáil guys were fine. Deputy Micheál Martin was the guy who went up to Stepside during the previous general election-----

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** That is right.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** -----and he said on television - it was recorded - when he was asked if he could reopen Stepside Garda station that it would definitely be reopened. Today he is saying it is a pork barrel deal and he disapproves of it. Come on.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** What about the deal with the former Attorney General?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Come on, Deputy Troy.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** She was appointed to the Court of Appeal.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** The new ethical Fianna Fáil.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputies should not interrupt.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me say this, if there is another opportunity-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** She is now going to the Court of Appeal.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I ask the Minister not to invite interruption.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** No, I will not. I am sorry.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** He traded a judicial appointment for his local Garda station.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** He is not like that.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** When I next come to negotiate a programme for Government, I can assure the House that I will be looking over there to Fianna Fáil for the pork barrel deals, because I cannot get them out of these guys but Fianna Fáil is a pushover.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** They got their judicial appointment off the Minister.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me address something else.

**Deputy Charles Flanagan:** He might want a few gardaí in it.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** In silence. The issue was addressed again by Deputy Micheál Martin this evening. He said that there was some trade-off between Máire Whelan’s appointment and the Stepside Garda station.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The Minister, Deputy Ross’s Cabinet colleague agreed with him.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputy Troy should please not interrupt.

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**Deputy Robert Troy:** I am sorry.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me tell him something.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I ask Deputy Troy to refrain from interrupting.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I am sorry.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me tell him something, without interruption.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** We are all mature politicians.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes, that is correct.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Members on all sides should act as such.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** You are right, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Members are not allowed to talk-----

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me tell the Deputy this. I have to clarify this issue as it is important. I learned first about Máire Whelan's proposed appointment yesterday morning. When I learned about it, there was no conversation about Stepside Garda station. There has been no link of any sort between the two.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** There should be.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me tell the Deputies this - I am not going to take any lectures from Fianna Fáil on political appointments, and particularly from Deputy Micheál Martin. Let me tell the Deputies why. Does Deputy Martin remember a woman by the name of Celia Larkin? She was appointed by him to the National Consumer Agency.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** The Minister is a hypocrite.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister should refrain from mentioning names of those who are not here to defend themselves.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** We all know who it was.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I will not mention her name but-----

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I am just giving the Minister guidance.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Hypocrite.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Hypocrite.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Do Members remember this-----

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I am sorry. The Minister might be a Minister but I am in the Chair and I did not think he would need that type of advice.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Okay, that is fine. I apologise a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I will just remind the Opposition of this case. The person in question, whom I will not name, was appointed by Deputy Micheál Martin-----

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** The Minister is a hypocrite.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** -----without interview and without conversation-----

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** That is right.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** -----but she did happen to be his boss's partner. That, presumably, gives him every right to criticise other people for appointments here.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The Minister said he would change how judges are appointed.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** In the appointments made by Fianna Fáil to the Judiciary the party stuffed it with their own people for years and years.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I call on Deputy Michael McGrath.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I will introduce a judicial appointments Bill, or rather the new Minister for Justice and Equality will do so next week-----

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister cannot extend the time.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** -----to sort out this problem once and for all.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** After the deal was done.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister cannot extend the time.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The old system is rotten and should not be tolerated.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister cannot extend the time. The Fianna Fáil slot has ten minutes. I understand Deputy Michael McGrath is sharing time with Deputies Billy Kelleher and Thomas Byrne. Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Michael McGrath:** I congratulate the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and all the members of Government on their appointment this evening. It is a huge personal honour for each and every one of them and I genuinely wish them well in their portfolios. There is no doubt that, collectively, they all face enormous challenges. Among the priorities must be protecting Ireland against Brexit, managing the economy, fixing the health system and delivering houses for people.

I wish the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, well in his role. The forthcoming budget in 2018 will have to be built on those key priorities. Delivering homes for people has to be a top priority. I wish the Minister, Deputy Coveney, well in his new role and I congratulate him, but we will now have the third Minister with responsibility for housing in less than 16 months to face up to what is the single biggest emergency that people face. We will now have a three-month review of a plan, Rebuilding Ireland, that is less than 11 months old. I question the level of priority the Government is giving to the issue.

I say to the Minister, Deputy Ross, that as the man who has been such a fearless opponent of cronyism, such a passionate advocate for judicial reform, that when it came to what he reassured the House is an absolute coincidence, namely, that the announcement of the reopening of Stepside Garda station and the appointment of Máire Whelan to the Court of Appeal without

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the Government even going through the process he regarded as inadequate – the principled opposition to cronyism, the principled advocacy for judicial reform went up like a puff of smoke. As they say in Cork, the Minister is a gas man indeed.

Among the priorities the Taoiseach and Ministers will have to face are helping people in this country who are in dire straits, who cannot get home help, who cannot access home care packages or get respite care for people with profound disabilities. There are young people in an absolute crisis who cannot get access to mental health services. I could give the Government a list of them. There are children with special needs in my constituency and I am sure all over the country waiting 18 months and longer for even an assessment of need not to mention gaining access to any service whatsoever at the end of the process.

The Government is facing some very big questions. The performance to date of the Government has not been good enough. It has not been up to standard. Among the big questions it faces is the future of the universal social charge. The new Taoiseach said it will remain but the programme for Government says it is on the way out. Are we going to deal with the pensions crisis? Are we going to have auto-enrolment into pension schemes? Are we going to do anything about climate change – the greatest challenge to human kind? Are we going to even aim for balanced regional development across the country? Are we going to tackle the issues of social inequality and child poverty? Are we going to prioritise the best long-term investment of all that we can make in the country, namely, the education system? Those are the challenges. The Government has not succeeded so far and it now has one final opportunity to do so.

**Deputy Billy Kelleher:** On a personal level I congratulate those who have been reappointed and those who have been elevated to the Cabinet. In the absence of the Taoiseach I congratulate him on the privileged position he now holds. With that privilege comes huge responsibilities and we do need to ensure that those responsibilities are discharged by all the members of the Government collectively to address some of the significant challenges we face in this country.

I wish to refer to health for a moment although the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, is not present. We have a situation in the public health system which can no longer be tolerated. Children with scoliosis now wait 18 months for an MRI scan to diagnose the fact that they have scoliosis. Children are waiting two years for surgery to address the life-limiting condition of scoliosis. That is what is happening at present. I speak directly to the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, because he is now the man in charge of both taxation and spending. We need to address the significant deficiencies in health. The Taoiseach spoke today about an Ireland for all, and that everybody should be given an opportunity but people with scoliosis face insurmountable challenges. I continually meet parents who are put to the pin of collar as they see the life slowly leave their children because of this condition. That is what is happening as I stand here today.

In this short contribution I urge that we make some progress towards addressing those issues. We hear the broad parameters set out about a Government that is caring, that is centrist and that will address the challenges and afford an opportunity to everybody but we should spare a thought for the challenges that face those children. In the October budget I urge the Minister at the very least to address the most vulnerable in society. They are primarily people who are on hospital waiting lists across the country. Some 660,000 people today are waiting for an inpatient or outpatient appointment. It is simply not acceptable and I believe that collectively the Ministers have a duty to address these huge challenges in health. I do not underestimate the challenges but to date they have been very lacking in respect of real commitment to addressing it.

The then Minister for Health, the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, said that he had unfinished business in the area of health. It was the understatement of the century because the fact of the matter was that there was no business done in health for a long time under the last Fine Gael Government and this Government. We abandoned universal health insurance, the underpinning of what was going to fund the public health system, and we have simply stripped away the ability of our public health system to deliver services. The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, and the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, who I have congratulated and wish well personally, have significant opportunities and power in their hands to address the major deficiencies that are causing inordinate suffering to vulnerable people, especially children who are waiting for scoliosis operations.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Go raibh maith agat a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo chomhghairdeas a chur in iúl don Taoiseach nua, an Teachta Leo Varadkar. Tháinig an bheirt againn agus an bheirt Teachtaí Mhic Graith isteach sa Dáil deich mbliana ó shin inniu. Is onóir mhór do Theachta Varadkar agus a chlann gur thogadh ina Thaoiseach é inniu. Táimid lán-sásta leis sin agus táimid ag súil go ndéanfaidh sé gach iarracht an tír seo a chur chun cinn. Má dhéanann sé an iarracht sin tabharfaimid tacaíocht dó, fiú muna tabharfaimid tacaíocht do gach polasaí atá á chur i bhfeidhm aige. I also congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Regina Doherty, from my constituency on her elevation. It is an honour for the constituency, as well as for her and her family.

I want to refer to education. I was briefly heartened with the news that a “super junior” Minister of State was to be appointed with responsibility for higher education. I was very happy with the appointment of the Minister, Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor, because Fianna Fáil has very much pushed the issue of further education. I thought that finally, at last, the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, is getting to grips with this and realising it is an important issue. I was, however, somewhat confused and there were question marks in my head when the Taoiseach spoke. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Richard Bruton, was mentioned as having responsibility for the Technological Universities Bill and third level funding. Media reports are now coming through that what happened, in fact, was a row behind the scenes when the Minister, Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor, was offered a justice and equality brief, refused it and was given higher education instead. This disappoints me greatly because if this is the way higher education is being treated by the Government - this is being reported by *The Irish Times* this evening - then my hopes were completely unfounded and all the fears we have about Fine Gael and higher education are absolutely true.

All the fears that have been expressed throughout the university sector and the higher education sector are well founded. They worry about Fine Gael’s commitment to higher education and its funding. Now the whole sector has been thrown as a bauble to keep someone who is getting a demotion happy. Higher education should be promoted, not demoted. This is an absolute scandal and an insult to a sector that could be one of the ways of rescuing Ireland from Brexit. It is one of the first bad moves made by the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and he will have to answer for it. We have said to the Government that the Technological Universities Bill can be brought forward and passed by the summer recess. We urge the Government to do this and we want it, somehow, to finally get the message. Tonight, it does not look as though the Government has got that message. The Minister, Deputy Bruton has a job ahead of him. I do not know who is responsible for the sector; no one knows who is responsible for it. The Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, has demoted not only the Minister, Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor, but he has also demoted higher education.

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Turning to the appointment of Ms Máire Whelan SC as President of the Court of Appeal, I worry for the Government that the appointment will carry with it the stain of original sin for the entire length of the rest of the Taoiseach's term, one for which I wonder if there will be any redemption. This appointment will hang over the Government like a sword of Damocles. It will damage this Administration unless the questions that were raised legitimately by my party leader today are answered fully.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** There has been a huge degree of excitement around the House today for those newly appointed Ministers and "super junior" Ministers of State and their families. There is obviously a significant sense of achievement for them, while for others there is a sense of disappointment. Large numbers of people beyond the gates of Leinster House, however, will be deeply unmoved by what they have heard today. I am talking about the 7,680 homeless people, including 2,780 children, who tonight will sleep in emergency accommodation; the more than 90,000 families who are languishing on local authority housing waiting lists; and the tens of thousands of struggling renters and potential first-time buyers who are locked out of the housing market.

For six years, we have had Fine Gael in government. By any indicator, the housing crisis is worse today than it was when it took office. The outgoing Minister with responsibility for housing, the Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, took office some 12 months ago. It genuinely gives me no pleasure to say this, but never has a Minister with responsibility for housing promised so much and yet delivered so little. His legacy is a 20% increase in adult and child homelessness in the State, increasing numbers of people at risk of homelessness, spiralling costs for the rental or purchase of homes and a snail's pace delivery of social housing. The Minister, Deputy Coveney's first self-imposed test in the housing action plan was to end the use of hotels for families and to house those adults and children in permanent homes. Just weeks before the deadline for this measure was to pass, it is unfulfilled and he walks away. Just 12 months into a six year plan he is, in my view, turning his back on the thousands of families who were looking to him and to whom he promised hope for the future.

Ultimately this was a decision of the new Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, I have no doubt that if the Minister, Deputy Coveney, had really wanted to stay in housing, he could have done so. This is the sixth Minister in five years with responsibility for housing. Is it any wonder that the crisis has yet to be resolved? It sends out a very worrying signal that the Taoiseach neither understands nor is serious about tackling the housing crisis.

The proposed appointment of the Taoiseach's close ally, the Minister of State, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, as the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is a big surprise. I know the Minister of State from over the last years and he is very smart. I have no doubt that he will work hard, as the former Minister, Deputy Coveney, did, in the brief. The Minister of State, Deputy Murphy, however, has shown little interest in housing policy during his six years in the Dáil. In total, he has raised the issue of housing on the floor of the House 25 times. He has mentioned the issue of homelessness five times and social housing four times. He has mentioned the private rental sector just once. The Minister of State has an awful lot of catching up to do.

On hearing that he was appointed as the Minister, I wrote to the Minister of State formally, requesting a meeting at his earliest convenience in order to outline our ongoing and deep-rooted concerns over the failure of his Government's housing policy. As I said to his predecessor when he took office, if the Minister does the right thing I will support him and I will stand here and

welcome initiatives that he takes that would relieve acute housing stress. When he makes mistakes, however, we will do everything we can to hold him to account.

I note with interest that the Minister of State, Deputy Murphy, has been asked to undertake a review of the Government's housing plan and part of me would like to welcome this, especially the promise of potentially increased social housing delivery and the possibility of a vacant home tax. Given the level of disappointment that many of us now feel after 12 months of the Minister, Deputy Coveney's failure to tackle the housing crisis, I am not going to hold my breath that much is going to change in three months' time.

Sinn Féin will, of course, engage constructively in any review and we will continue to offer credible policy alternatives to tackle the housing and homeless crises. Crucially, we will continue to argue that the over reliance on the private sector to meet social and affordable housing needs, and the weak regulation of the private rental sector, are central to the failures of this Government's and previous Governments' policies. The housing crisis can be solved, but only if the right policies and, crucially, the right level of investment are put in place to ensure that secure and affordable housing is a right affordable to all and not just to the few.

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I begin by recognising the contribution and achievement of the former Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan. It is an honour to follow in his footsteps in leading the Department of Finance in addition to my current responsibilities at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. In the budget that I had the honour of introducing in the House with the former Minister, Deputy Noonan, I concluded my words with a statement. It was a statement used by others in the same debate, namely, that the centre must hold and that we must find a way of reassuring those who are looking for progress and stability that centrist, normal politics is capable of delivering them. The election of the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and a Cabinet that is honoured to serve him, is an important development that deserves the support of some in the House and, I hope, the interests of those outside the House. What the Taoiseach recognised in his contribution as a member of the Fine Gael Party in his efforts to become leader of Fine Gael is that in the face of the vacuous negativity that we hear on a constant basis from Sinn Féin and other Members of the far left, it is not enough to hold the centre, we must redefine, re-energise and renew it. That is what the election of this Taoiseach, whose life story and achievements in political life reflect the kind of Ireland that all of us aspire to create, is about. I salute and recognise Deputies who are willing to play their part, make the hard choices and seek to be constructive in electing a Government and at least to allow it to serve before condemning it and criticising it as a failure, as others seek to do.

The Taoiseach has asked us - it will be my privilege as Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to do so - to look at what more steps can be taken to ensure that we have a republic of opportunity and to ensure we have a society and not just an economy that is capable of delivering opportunity for all, regardless of where one comes from, where one is born or one's age. That is the kind of Ireland that this Government, consisting of Fine Gael and colleagues in the Independent Alliance and other Independent Members, is committed to doing. Some of the contributors to this debate, including Deputy Mattie McGrath, Deputy Broughan and the Social Democrats, referenced the need for action but they showed no interest in coming into government. What we have heard from them tonight is a desire to point out what is wrong. We know what is wrong. We know what needs to be changed. We know the opportunities that our country has to meet. We know the anguish that we must seek to quench.

Some Members spoke about our national debt, with no recognition of the progress that has been made in reducing our deficit or of the fact that, as we move into next year, this Government will ensure that our country does not need to borrow to fund the public services on which we depend. As they point to what we need to achieve in regard to child poverty, for example, could they not also recognise that in 2015 a total of 13,000 children were lifted out of poverty. It is our desire and ambition to create a society in which more children, families and older people are lifted out of poverty and an Ireland that reflects the ambitions, hopes and worth of all citizens. That is what this Administration, led by the Taoiseach, is determined to do.

I heard so many members of the far left describe this House as a bubble. It is not a bubble. This is a Parliamentary Chamber in which the voices of the people of Ireland are represented and in which those voices are heard. This Administration will hear those voices, their dreams and their concerns. It will seek to build on what has been done and to achieve far more. I had the privilege this morning of attending the re-opening of the wings of the National Gallery of Ireland along with the outgoing Taoiseach, on whose foundations we will all seek to build. It is more than a place: it is a space in which people can come together to look at our arts and to reflect on it, all of which was facilitated by the changes in our economy that so many here tonight said would never happen.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** This is a Cabinet and a Taoiseach that will be working night and day, conscious of what needs to be done and what we need to achieve but also conscious of the journey that our country has made.

Cuireadh an ceist.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 57; Níl, 43; Staon, 35.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>

Dáil Éireann

<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>O'Keefe, Kevin.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>		
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Joe McHugh and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Sno-

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daigh and Denise Mitchell.

Question declared carried.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis glacadh leis an gceist.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.50 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 June 2017.