



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 11 Aibreán 2019

Thursday, 11 April 2019

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Eugene Murphy) i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I wish a good morning to the staff of the House, the Minister of State and Teachtaí. It is a glorious morning outside and I am sure it will be one inside as well.

I remind all Deputies that they have 30 seconds to introduce their question. Thereafter there will be two minutes for the Minister of State to respond, a minute for supplementary questions from the Deputy, a minute for the Minister of State to come back and a final supplementary period for the Deputy. Time limits are going to have to be strictly honoured.

Defence Forces Personnel

1. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on whether the 8.1% turnover or churn in the Defence Forces is crippling the service; if the Defence Forces are struggling to fill command positions for a rotation of troops attached to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17125/19]

Deputy Jack Chambers: Those may be famous last words from the Acting Chairman.

I ask the Minister of State with responsibility for defence if he agrees that the current 8.1% turnover or churn in the Defence Forces is crippling the service, as was stated by the Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Mark Mellett. Is it the case that the Defence Forces are struggling to fill command positions for rotation of troops attached to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and will he make a statement on these matters?

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I thought the

Acting Chairman would be a little more lenient than the Ceann Comhairle or the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, particularly on this morning which seems as if we are in the sunny south east.

The military authorities have advised that there is no issue with regard to filling command positions for a rotation of troops attached to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. The 114th Infantry Battalion is due to replace the 113th Infantry Battalion in the area of operations shortly and, with the exception of one junior officer post, which recently became vacant due to unforeseen circumstances, all officer command positions are now filled. A process is under way to fill the junior officer post and this is expected to conclude shortly.

As the Deputy has pointed out, the overarching turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force was 8.1% in 2018. This rate must be viewed against an overall average departure rate of 6.3% since 2002 with a peak rate of 8.58% in 2012.

Of the 731 personnel who exited the Defence Forces during 2018, the military authorities have advised that 139, or 19%, did so before completing their initial training. The number of trainees within the overarching turnover figure can be significant and in 2017, 742 personnel departed of whom 209, or 28%, were trainees.

A total of 592 trained personnel departed during 2018 and 533 trained personnel departed in 2017. The long-run average is 500. However, the number of trained personnel departing can fluctuate significantly year on year and in recent years, this has ranged from a high of 677 in 2012 to a low of 356 in 2014.

The issue of turnover in an organisation with the unique structures, functional areas and particular skill sets of the Defence Forces is complex. As the rate of turnover can differ across functional areas, the impact of turnover can vary accordingly. Headline turnover figures do not reflect this complexity.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Minister of State said that military authorities have advised there is no difficulty but Vice Admiral Mellett said, “There are gaps.” He also said:

You are always going to have a churn and a churn is healthy, but I would rather it be down about 5% rather than the 8.1% it is at present. It is that extra per cent that is crippling us at present.

I know from speaking to people who have been deployed overseas that there has been a process of de facto mandatory selection, where personnel have been bounced and semi-threatened into overseas deployment. Some of those people might have familial or personal circumstances which do not suit deployment overseas but attempts have been made to put guns to these people’s heads, without necessarily pulling the trigger, and bouncing them into overseas deployment.

A survey of the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, RACO, shows that domestic and personal commitments are one of the reasons people are leaving the Defence Forces. I welcome deployment overseas but we need to look at the serious nature of what is happening within the Defence Forces. Morale is worsening and people are being bounced into situations. That is confirmed by what Vice Admiral Mellett has had to say. Furthermore, it is concerning that implicit threats have been made to members of the Defence Forces.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: As the Deputy knows, Finnish personnel pulled out of the United

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Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, at the end of 2018. Our military management proposed to me that they would fill that gap for a period of 12 months. We have increased our personnel in that force by approximately 106 or 110 for a period of 12 months from the end of 2018. I was assured by military management at the time that they would be able to fill that gap. I would not have allowed it to happen if we were not able to fill that gap.

I do not believe a gun is put to anybody's head to make them go on overseas service. To judge from the people I have spoken to, a significant number of people want to serve overseas. I am happy to say that the Polish and Hungarians will join us in Lebanon at the end of this year, which will decrease the number of people going overseas next year.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Minister of State has to agree there were difficulties.

The Minister of State visited the United Nations in New York and was showing a force of strength with the Defence Forces. It is a bit like the emperor with no clothes because the words the Minister of State uses abroad do not match the reality of the morale and retention issues at home. The facts and figures in the RACO climate survey carried out by Amárach bear that out.

People want to go overseas but it does not suit certain people at a particular time. It is because of the gaps and the retention crisis, and because the Minister of State's Department has stopped the acting-up rank being facilitated because of the computer logic of some of the mandarins in his Department that we have this image of a fighting force overseas while Rome burns at home. The Minister of State should be more honest when he is over at the United Nations about the difficulties the Defence Forces are facing. The focus should be less on the Minister of State making a pitch to successfully get a seat on the United Nations Security Council, which I would welcome, and more on supporting our troops. That is the important context.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: We have nine different overseas missions currently. If Defence Forces management tells me it is unable to fulfil any of the commitments, I will listen and take it very much into account. Any overseas mission in which we partake is with the *imprimatur* and agreement of military management. The Chief of Staff has responsibility to make sure we have the capability and capacity to fulfil our roles overseas. It is up to the Chief of Staff to advise me if there is a situation where the Defence Forces are unable to fulfil that commitment. The commitments we made at the recent UN peacekeeping conference in New York were with the agreement of the military and the Chief of Staff. He was there with me. Any commitments I made were on behalf of the organisation. We had the full support of military management in making any pledges of support.

Defence Forces Remuneration

2. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the Public Service Pay Commission's meeting with management parties following the joint submission from military authorities and his Department; if he or a representative from his Department was at the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16981/19]

4. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his engagement with the Public Service Pay Commission on the pay, allowances and conditions of members of the Defence Forces; his views on the need for improvements to pay and conditions in view of the low pay and poor conditions faced by members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [16982/19]

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: These questions relate to the status of the Public Service Pay Commission and a recent meeting it had with the management parties on a joint submission from the military authorities and the Department. What progress is happening on the Public Service Pay Commission submissions to ensure there are proper pay and conditions in our Army?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I propose to take Questions Nos. 2 and 4 together.

Similar to other sectors in the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures to assist in stabilising national finances during the financial crisis. Improvements in the economy have provided an opportunity to progress the unwinding of the financial emergency measures in the public interest, FEMPI, legislation, which imposed pay cuts across the public service.

In 2016, the Government established the Public Service Pay Commission to provide objective advice to the Government on public service pay policy. Following the publication of the Public Service Pay Commission's report in May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road agreement. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, which was accepted by members of the Permanent Defence Force through their representative associations, provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement. By the end of the current agreement, the pay scales of all public servants, including members of the Defence Forces, earning less than €70,000 per annum will be restored to pre-FEMPI levels.

In accordance with the agreement, the Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with conducting a comprehensive examination and analysis of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in those sectors and employment streams identified in the commission's report of May 2017. This includes the defence sector. To assist the commission with its analysis, the Department of Defence was requested to provide specific data. A joint civil and military team prepared this material. The commission's work is ongoing. The Department of Defence continues to engage with the Public Service Pay Commission and is responding to queries and requests for further information from the commission as they arise and to any issue that may arise as all of the data submitted are examined.

The Public Service Pay Commission issued an invitation to representatives of departmental and Defence Forces management to follow up on defence material submitted, and a meeting was held on 6 March. The Secretary General of the Department of Defence, the Chief of Staff, civil and military personnel from the Department of Defence, senior officials from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other military people attended the meeting. The Government will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that may arise from the work of the commission. I am happy to say military management and the Department had an opportunity to address the Public Service Pay Commission and give their side on issues and questions that the commission had and to ask any questions they had.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: On 2 May last year, the Minister of State told me the Public Service Pay Commission was due to complete this exercise in the second half of 2018. It is now April 2019. What is the delay? Why are we now at a stage when members of the Defence Forces and their families continue to suffer? There seems to be prevarication and a desire to

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delay. There is no sense of urgency in what is happening, so much so that the representative associations are losing confidence in the process. In January, one stated it had lost confidence in the process. All the while, the Defence Forces are haemorrhaging people. This is not a separate issue because pay and conditions are some of the reasons people are leaving. Will the Minister of State please indicate when this will be dealt with? Will the report be in time to be considered to ensure that in the budget for 2020, the key decisions required to be made will be made and those families suffering at present have some hope?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Does the Minister or the Government have any sense of shame about the conditions of exploitation and downright poverty for many members of the Defence Forces? Over the Christmas period, many Defence Forces families were reliant on food hampers to get by. Sarah Walsh of the Wives and Partners of the Defence Forces stated the families live in poverty and suffer from food, income, fuel and child poverty, that many of them can only dream of owning their homes and that this month some of them are facing uncertainty about their homes while others face homelessness. She also stated that she knows these people. The treatment of ordinary members of the Defence Forces is scandalous. They have very little confidence that the Public Service Pay Commission process will deliver, particularly given the delays Deputy Ó Snodaigh has pointed out. Why should they believe anything will happen here? What is the attitude of the Minister of State? Does he believe the circumstances facing them need to change?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: To reply to Deputy Ó Snodaigh, it is a matter for the pay commission and I cannot speculate on when it will complete its work. The Government will give due consideration to the recommendations of the report when it is completed. What I said on the record in May last year was that I wanted the pay commission to receive all of the material. Unfortunately, there was a huge amount of back and forth between the pay commission and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and between the Department of Defence and military management. We wanted to be able to make sure we provided all the data requested. This is something of which we were very conscious and we did provide it. It is one of the reasons I was very willing for the Department and military management to have an opportunity to have face time with the pay commission so they were able to put forward their side in person. It is very important to do so. It is now a matter for the pay commission. I hope to see this as soon as possible but it is an independent pay commission.

To address Deputy Murphy's question, I have no sense of shame. I am waiting for the pay commission to report. It is easy for Deputy Murphy to be on the Opposition side of the House and be able to shout off the sidelines. He is the same person who came in here and said 50% or 60% of members of the Defence Forces were on family income supplement, which was untrue and false.

Deputy Paul Murphy: How many are?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Less than 1% of members of the Defence Forces are on family income supplement. Deputy Murphy is the same person who was shouting and roaring this out but he was wrong yet again. As I say, it is easy for him to do it. I am confident that we will have a set of recommendations from the Public Service Pay Commission as soon as possible. I cannot get involved as the commission is an independent body, but whatever recommendations it makes will be considered by the Government. I hope to see them as soon as possible.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: What I quoted was exactly what the Minister of State said

last year. I quote him again. He said: “The Public Service Pay Commission is due to complete its exercise in the second half of 2018.” That period has come and gone. The Minister of State’s colleague, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, has said he now expects it to report at the end of quarter 2 this year. Why is there a delay? There is no reason and there appears to be no urgency. Why was it only in March that the Secretary General and the Chief of Staff met the commission? Why did it not happen last year or the year before? We all understand the exceptional work and schedules of the Defence Forces and how they have suffered as a consequence. They are unlike any other part of the public service, which is why they should have been dealt with first. The Government is hedging its bets. If the commission reports at the end of June, within the timeframe indicated by the Minister for Finance and even if it is not kicked to touch, will the measures be brought before the House in the budget? If not, will the Minister of State implement interim measures to stop the haemorrhage from the Defence Forces owing, in particular, to pay levels?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Does the Minister of State deny that conditions of poverty are widespread among low-paid members of the Defence Forces and their families? There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that is the case, but I am interested in the Minister of State’s answer and whether he continues to be shameless on the question. The underlying issue is trade union rights, in particular the right to organise and associate. The INMO and the PNA have shown how public sector workers can win concessions through organisation and industrial action, but that basic right to organise is denied to members of the Defence Forces. The retired soldier Anthony Bolger who has protested in favour of increased pay for the Defence Forces notes that members of the Defence Forces are not allowed to speak in public, bargain collectively or assemble for protest. As a consequence, their position is being represented by their families and retired soldiers. While that task is being undertaken very well by the WPDF, members of the Defence Forces should not have to rely on it and should instead have the right to organise into their own trade union to negotiate with the Government.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: To Deputy Ó Snodaigh I say that once we consider the recommendations of the the Public Service Pay Commission, we will move as quickly as possible. From a public expenditure point of view, there is a process to be gone through. However, the Deputy can be sure I will push as hard as I can to ensure we will have that. I am not sure whether Deputy Paul Murphy read the review of the conciliation and arbitration scheme, but he should take the opportunity to do so and prepare himself when coming to the House. One of the recommendations made by the chairperson of the review was that we enter into a conversation with ICTU on behalf of members of the Defence Forces. Officials of my Department have already started that process. If the Deputy prepared himself before coming to the Chamber by reading the recommendations-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Does the Minister of State agree that there should be a right of representation for members of the Defence Forces?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Absolutely, I agree, as I have stated. If I did not agree, I would not have asked officials in my Department to talk to ICTU about the issue. It was one of the recommendations made in the review of the conciliation and arbitration scheme that I adopted in 2018. I brought in an independent chairperson who produced a set of recommendations which I accepted in full when the review of the conciliation and arbitration scheme was published, part of which meant entering into dialogue with ICTU, as I have stated. If the Deputy had listened more carefully, he would have heard my public utterances on the matter. Perhaps I am ahead of the ball *vis-à-vis* the Deputy on this one.

Defence Forces Recruitment

3. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of former officers who previously left the Defence Forces and have returned to service; when a scheme for former enlisted members to return will be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17126/19]

Deputy Jack Chambers: How many former Defence Forces' officers, having left service, have returned? Will the Minister of State outline in detail the scheme he has put in place for former commissioned officers to return and will he make a statement on the matter? In the Dáil the Taoiseach diverted attention from the recruitment and retention crisis by referring to the re-entry scheme previously outlined by the Minister of State. Perhaps he might give the House more information on it.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am advised that, to date, a small number of expressions of interest in a return to the Permanent Defence Force, PDF, have come from former officers. As I have indicated previously to the Deputy, a scheme is in place which facilitates the re-entry of former officers to the PDF. In the absence of a standard policy for dealing with requests to re-enter, each case was previously dealt with on an individual basis and governed by the rules, regulations and circumstances that applied at the time. In the absence of a defined policy framework, the processing of such applications posed a number of difficulties such as defining procedures, identifying the requirements and needs of the organisation and agreeing terms and conditions with the individual. To provide a more transparent scheme to facilitate the re-entry of former PDF officers, a policy framework setting out terms and conditions was necessary.

I am pleased that the terms and conditions for the recommissioning scheme include the provision that the recommissioning of former officers of the PDF shall only be considered in specific circumstances. These are where the Chief of Staff has identified a deficiency in personnel, military capability or expertise in the PDF that cannot be resolved in a sustainable or timely manner from within existing personnel resources. Recommissioned officers will be offered a short service commission for a period of three years. In that period they cannot compete for promotion, nor will they block a promotion opportunity for existing officers. Recommissioned officers may only be offered a substantive appointment after three years on the advice of the Chief of Staff and the Secretary General of the Department of Defence. While a scheme is in place for former officers of the PDF, the attendant scheme for enlisted personnel is still being progressed. The statutory basis for enlisting and re-enlisting personnel varies considerably from the basis on which officers are commissioned. For the purpose of re-enlisting former personnel, it is likely that there will be a need to change primary legislation.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The reality is that the recruitment initiative which the Taoiseach lauded to tackle the numbers crisis in the Defence Forces has attracted nearly no interest. The response to a parliamentary question on the subject which I received from the Minister of State in the last week contained a single digit figure. Is the scheme actually being advertised? Who makes the decision on recruitment? Is it in line with public sector recruitment practices? I understand that directly after the GOC of the Air Corps had briefed his staff on the Minister of State's intention to recommission two former pilots, two serving officers submitted requests to resign, citing the new policy as their reason for doing so. In fact, the Minister of State's policy has had a negative effect and is, in many instances, driving serving officers out of position. The net effect of the scheme is that an already restless group of employees is livid and speeding up

plans for early retirement as a consequence of a failure to introduce a proper retention initiative such as a career incentive scheme. Instead, the Minister of State is diverting attention, receiving no interest in the scheme and creating a further wedge in dealing with the numbers crisis.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: If the Deputy looked, he would see that there are a great many career incentive schemes already in place in the Defence Forces. I do not know from where he is getting his information, but he should go back and check. I presume he is referring to the representative association, RACO, when he says some members have reservations about the re-entry scheme. I can absolutely understand people being apprehensive about the scheme. However, many of their concerns have been taken into account.

One of the major concerns relates to whether they are entitled to promotion after their re-entry, but the policy framework sets out clearly that they cannot compete for promotion within this three-year commissioning period.

Let there be one, two, three, four or five pilots. This will make a major difference to the organisation, including the Air Corps.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: As I have told the Deputy previously, this recommendation came from military management. I agreed with and supported management on this and will continue to do so. The Deputy will shake his head and disagree with me, but that is his job. I support this initiative. It is a good one, and I hope to see more people re-entering the organisation.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The facts are-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I apologise, Deputy, but we almost went a minute over time there. I want to be fair to everyone.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am sorry.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Everyone should try to stick to the time schedule, please.

Deputy Jack Chambers: There has been no interest in this initiative. It reveals the hollow words that we constantly hear from the Government concerning the crisis in our Defence Forces. The attempt to fill the gap in the Air Corps has resulted in more people leaving. The Defence Forces are haemorrhaging numbers to the point where overseas missions are now in jeopardy and naval vessels cannot go to sea. Using figures from the Department of Defence, the Taoiseach claimed in the Dáil that allowing ex-personnel to return would be an effective measure to address the retention crisis. We now know that to have been empty rhetoric. The Taoiseach's waffle about a re-entry scheme diverts from the systemic retention crisis over which the Minister of State presides. Not only has this policy not seen anyone return to the Defence Forces, there appears to be no interest in such a scheme at all, as the Minister of State has put on the record. It seems to be a tactic to cloud the Government's disregard for Defence Forces personnel. The Government needs to address the real issues at the heart of the retention and recruitment crisis, for example, decent pay and working conditions, so that the Defence Forces can be an attractive career option. These are the facts and figures. Interest can be measured in single digits, never mind how many people have actually re-entered. In the context of the ongoing crisis, the Minister of State's words are hollow.

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Deputy Paul Kehoe: I assure the Deputy that they are not hollow. It is interesting that, while he originally asked about enlisted personnel, he never mentioned them in any of his supplementary questions. I will mention them. They are equally as important as the officers. Without enlisted personnel, we would not have the Defence Forces. We would need to legislate to accommodate enlisted personnel who wished to re-enter. Were I to introduce such legislation, I would ask for the Deputy's support. A number of former enlisted personnel want to return to the Defence Forces. Regardless of whether that number is five or ten, they should be allowed to do so. The same applies in the case of officers. It is a changing organisation. Most armies across the world allow former officers and enlisted personnel to re-enter. I agree with that. We are in a changing society and world with different personnel and opportunities. We must allow former personnel to re-enter. I fully support the proposal.

Question No. 4 answered with Question No. 2.

European Defence Capabilities

5. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the remit of the European peace facility, EPF; the way in which it will be financed; and the way in which it will contribute to conflict prevention and peace building. [16964/19]

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: How will the EPF be financed and how will it contribute to conflict prevention and peace building?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The EPF is a proposal from the High Representative and Vice President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, who has proposed that a financial mechanism be established for funding actions under the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, CFSP. The mechanism would, if approved, incorporate the Athena mechanism and the African Peace Facility. It would also include a mechanism for funding actions in support of capacity building for peace and security. Under the High Representative's proposals, the EPF would be used to fund infrastructure and equipment for the training and capacity building of security and military forces in fragile and conflict states so that they can better provide their own security. The most controversial aspect of the proposal is the suggestion that this could include funding for some lethal equipment, most likely small arms and weapons.

The aim of the EPF is to give the EU the capability to contribute to the financing of global military peace support operations led by international partners such as the African Union. This financing would assist in building the capacities of partner countries' armed forces to preserve peace, prevent conflict and address security challenges. By providing comprehensive support through integrated packages of training, equipment and other means of support as necessary, partners would be enabled to address their own crises and security challenges.

Since the initial circulation of the proposal last June, the topic has been discussed at a number of ministerial and working group level meetings only. At these meetings, there has been limited support for aspects of the proposal and a clear view expressed by member states that they wish to ensure continued member state control of such funding mechanisms, similar to the current existing governance arrangements.

I have stuck to the Acting Chairman's time.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: People could be forgiven for thinking that this is part of the increasing militarisation agenda in Europe and the growing pressure to have a European army, but there is no doubt that there has been a great deal of mystery surrounding this facility. Its remit is “to broaden actions with a military or defence nature, such as capacity building activities for military actors, that can be undertaken under the CFSP”. In particular, this would cover a new range of military related training, equipment and support to the armed forces of third countries, *inter alia*, the provision of infrastructure, military equipment and supplies, or military technical assistance. This is going under the name of “peace facility”, but there are many questions to be asked about how funding weapons, ammunition and salaries for soldiers will contribute to peace. Questions arise regarding accountability, how to ensure that this mechanism will not be used in the mistreatment of people, including prisoners and human rights activists, and guarantees on the funding’s use. The facility raises more questions than answers. It is good to hear that some member states are against or not in favour of it. Where does Ireland stand on the fund and its accountability mechanisms?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I agree with some of what the Deputy has said, but this is at the stage of initial discussions only and has not reached ministerial level. It has been dealt with by the civil side more than the political side. From speaking to my EU colleagues, there genuinely is limited, and I mean limited, support for this proposal. It has only been discussed at working group meetings so far. Contrary to the commentary from some in Europe, there is in no way widespread support for it. I assure the Deputy that I will highlight our neutrality policy in any decision that is made.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: There is some positivity in the Minister of State’s reply. From what he said, it sounds like some countries were testing the water to see whether the proposal would be supported. Those who have criticisms and reservations about it must raise them strongly. I hope that Ireland takes the lead in that regard, given the significance of the questions raised. There is no guarantee that the EPF will contribute to conflict prevention or peace building, which is what the EU, UN and so on are about.

In the context of the multi-annual financial framework, MFF, questions arise around the EPF’s financing. The same applies in respect of decision making. From the little I have read, the decisions would be made by certain member states and not the European Parliament. Many questions arise. I hope that those who are strongly against it will be very vocal in their opposition, particularly if the European Parliament will not be involved.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I reiterate that it should be remembered that the European Peace Facility is currently only a proposal and that there is a long way to go on it. A significant amount of work remains to be agreed by member states in regard to the proposal, including the budget, and it is considered unlikely that it will be concluded in its current format of which the Deputy may have read. Any agreement on the level of proposed funding will only be agreed by member states in the context of the multi-annual framework. I state that sincerely to the Deputy. Ireland’s position on this proposal will continue to be developed on consideration of proposals from the working group. Any decision we make will be within our policy framework of military neutrality. We will engage with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Finance, and Public Expenditure and Reform in formulating Ireland’s position on this matter.

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Defence Forces Recruitment

6. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the fact that the Defence Forces had a net gain of just three members in 2017 despite a recruitment and training campaign costing in the region of €15 million. [16804/19]

Deputy Clare Daly: The Government has for many years been warned about the crisis in the Defence Forces. The general secretary of the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, RACO, recently announced that, in spite of all the hype about the much-trumpeted so-called recruitment campaign, there was a net gain of three personnel in 2017. Unless the Government addresses pay and conditions, this crisis will continue. What will the Government do on this issue? I do not want to hear about the Public Service Pay Commission as we have been told about the work it is doing. The Government must acknowledge that the situation is worsening. What will it do about it?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: In 2017, expenditure relating to the publicity and advertising of various recruitment campaigns amounted to approximately €457,000. I presume the figure of €15 million referenced by the Deputy is a figure reported by the media as a saving that could result from retaining existing personnel rather than recruiting new personnel. This figure was provided by the military authorities as an estimate of the cost of training the number of personnel to replace a similar number who left voluntarily in 2016. There is significant scope for misinterpreting such estimates. The majority of that estimated cost relates to the pay of personnel being trained and their training staff. However, I must point out that if the personnel being replaced by trainees had not left, their salary costs would still be incurred. As such, those costs would be incurred in any event. In addition, there has always been a requirement to train recruits and to have instructors to do so.

I am advised by the military authorities that as of 31 December 2017, 751 personnel were inducted into the Defence Forces while 742 personnel exited the organisation. Of the 742 discharges, 209 were personnel who left before they completed their initial training, mainly comprising general service recruits. The long-run average for turnover of general service recruits during training is 22%, while in 2017 it was 28%.

In retention of trained personnel, 533 trained personnel left the Permanent Defence Forces in 2017. This compares to a long-run average departure rate of approximately 500 trained personnel. Additionally, the 2017 discharge rate of slightly more than 8% must be viewed against an overall average departure rate of 6.3% since 2002, with a peak of 8.58% in 2012. The issue of turnover in military organisations is complex, having regard to the range of specialties and internal training dynamic. The impact of turnover may vary depending on the functional area and the ability to regenerate capacity.

Deputy Clare Daly: There are none so blind as those who will not see. The Minister of State in his response is basically trying to tell me that there is no problem at all and the turnover is normal. There is a crisis. Even the figures he gave indicate that a significant number of skilled personal are leaving the Defence Forces. That is a fact. It cost a lot of public money to get them to that level of experience. They are leaving in greater numbers than was previously the case.

Pay is not the only reason for the increased number leaving. The crazy conditions in which personnel are expected to work are also a factor. According to a member of the Defence Forces

who has just returned from a deployment on Operation Sophia, he was working a 12-hour day at sea, seven days a week, with two or three 24-hour duties thrown in. He worked approximately 80 hours a week for an extra €125 per week on top of his basic salary of €435. That is a total of €560 for a 40-hour week with 40 hours overtime. Such working conditions could be addressed in order to save experienced and qualified staff who must endure long commutes on low pay. It is absolutely disgraceful. This is the reason why many personnel are leaving. If the Government continues to try to justify it and state that it is not a big deal as there would be costs anyway, the problem will perpetuate itself, as it has done, and the Government will be responsible for that.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy asked that pay not be brought into it, but she subsequently did so and, as such, I must address the issue of pay. I have stated on numerous occasions that there are challenges. That is why the Public Service Pay Commission is looking at issues in respect of Defence Forces recruitment and retention. I hope to have this issue addressed shortly.

There are retirements every year. People retire for various reasons. Absolutely, working conditions may be one of the reasons for retirement. There have been retirements year on year. One must have new blood coming into the organisation. Of course, it will cost a significant amount of money to train new recruits and pay the trainers and so on. That has always been the case and will continue to be so. This is about having a healthy organisation.

There are challenges in regard to the current turnover. The Deputy raised the issue of pay. That is being addressed and I hope soon to have the recommendations of the Public Service Pay Commission such that the Government can then implement those recommendations.

Deputy Clare Daly: This is not a normal situation whereby there is a crisis because people are retiring. For the Minister of State to claim that is the case is shocking. It is not the reason for the crisis. According to a report published in early March, numbers in the Defence Forces dropped below 8,500 for the first time. The establishment level of the Defence Forces is 9,500, so it is 1,000 below the minimum level. Not only that, we are losing experienced and trained members who are being replaced by new recruits. It takes time and money to get the recruits to a similar level of expertise.

I stated that it is not only about pay. The Government's excuse up to now was that it could not deal with that issue because the Public Service Pay Commission was doing so and that it hoped the problem would soon be sorted out. However, there are several other issues in respect of the working conditions of Defence Forces personnel which are driving them out and over which the Government has control and which it could address, not least the long serving hours and the fact that it could implement the European Court of Justice 2010 ruling on working time which was ruled out of order as being *sub judice*. On issues such as Lariam and certain events in the Air Corps, the Defence Forces have greatly disrespected their staff. The Government could address these conditions. Doing so would indicate that, at least, it respects the men and women of our Defence Forces. Pay is only one part of this issue.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The working time directive is being worked upon by representatives of the Department and the Defence Forces along with the representative organisations. I have previously stressed that I want this sorted out. I want my officials and the Defence Forces military management to sort it out. There is a point of truth which we must reach on this issue. I want it to be sorted out as soon as possible.

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The Deputy referred to a member of the Defence Forces having to carry out 12-hour shifts at sea. As part of normal Naval Service life, personnel serve a week or two at sea. They do not come home every evening and dock the ship.

Deputy Clare Daly: I referred to personnel working 80 hours a week.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Naval vessels do not return to Haulbowline every evening and set off again the next morning. I recognise that life at sea is difficult and I want the pay commission to do likewise. I hope it recognises that these people put in long hours. I recognise that and I understand the frustration of some in the Naval Service. It is in the pay commission's hands and I hope it recognises the frustrations of members of the Naval Service and the Defence Forces and that we can take on those recommendations.

Cyber Security Policy

7. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on the work of the Defence Forces computer incident response team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16839/19]

Deputy Jack Chambers: There are grave concerns among members of the Defence Forces that this team has been seriously compromised and undermined and that this may pose a serious security risk to the State. I hope the Minister of State can update the House.

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As outlined in the Government's White Paper on Defence 2015, the issue of cybersecurity has very significant implications for governmental administration, for industry, for economic well-being and for the security and safety of citizens. Cybersecurity is a standing item on the agenda of the Government task force on emergency planning, which I chair.

The response to cyberthreats remains a whole-of-Government challenge, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment taking the lead role and with inputs in the security domain from An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces are committed to participating, under the leadership of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the delivery of measures to improve the cybersecurity of the State.

Ireland's national cybersecurity centre, NCSC, which is located in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment provides a range of cybersecurity services to owners of Government ICT infrastructure and critical national infrastructure. The NCSC is also home to the national computer security incident response team, CSIRT-IE, which acts as a national point of contact involving entities within Ireland, and as the point of contact for international discussions and collaboration on issues of cybersecurity. The scope of CSIRT's activities covers prevention, detection, response and mitigation services to Departments and State agencies and critical national infrastructure providers. The Defence Forces provide seconded specialists to assist with the work of CSIRT-IE when resources allow. In addition, as in any emergency situation, once defence systems are supported, the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces will provide support to CSIRT-IE insofar as resources allow.

While it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific cybercapabilities of the

Defence Forces, for both security and operational reasons, I can confirm that the priority for the Defence Forces' CSIRT is the protection of the Defence Forces communications network. Other activities undertaken by CSIRT include the monitoring and handling of cyberincidents, the enhancement of Defence Forces cybersituational awareness and the provision of cyber-awareness training.

Deputy Jack Chambers: I have been told that a decision was made in September 2018 to stand down the Defence Forces' computer incident response team as there were no trained staff left. The national cyber security centre is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Is that the case? Are the Defence Forces' computers being monitored for attacks? If it is the case that there are no staff members in the Defence Forces' incident response team, this represents a serious security matter for the State. Who is keeping an eye on the security of the Defence Forces' IT network? We do not know who may be attacking the system if the team has no staff. There can be no civilian contract for the computer incident response team because of issues of security and supervision. The Minister of State can tell the Dáil that he cannot comment for operational and security reasons but if it is the case that the computer incidents response team in the Defence Forces has been stood down, this represents a serious security risk for the State.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Jack Chambers: It means we are not providing a proper response and barrier for potential attacks and it shows how the depletion in numbers in the Defence Forces could compromise security. It is not good enough to quote the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): The Deputy will have another minute in supplementary questions.

Deputy Jack Chambers: This is a specific team in the Defence Forces, relating to the Minister of State's responsibilities to this House. I want him to provide clarity, apart from the operational and security response that he gave.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): May I remind Deputies and the Minister of State that we are now running 30 seconds over on every speaker's time? That is not fair to the people who find themselves disappointed when it comes to 11.55 a.m. We set the rules of this House and I ask the Deputies to please keep the rules of the House.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Some of the Deputy's remarks are very disingenuous. He received a reply to a parliamentary question this week relating to military management that on January 2019 the established figure for technical officers in the communications and information service, CIS, corps of the Defence Forces is 22 personnel, that is, 18 Army and four Air Corps, and all posts are currently filled.

The establishment figure for grade 5 and grade 6 technicians in the CIS corps is 202 personnel, out of which there are 66 vacancies at present. A total of 62 personnel are in training across the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps who will be eligible to grade 5 technician pay on graduation from the CIS trainee technician scheme.

Cybersecurity encompasses all sections of society, whether it is business, critical infrastructure, large industry or the ESB. It not only about military, it has a joined-up approach and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has overall responsibility

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for the State's cybersecurity. The Defence Forces assist it and will continue to do so under the service level agreement which is in place.

Deputy Jack Chambers: From the Comptroller and Auditor General, we know that the cyberunit in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is completely dysfunctional and is not fit for purpose. I am also informed that the Defence Forces cannot fulfil its obligations to that Department due to the depletion of staffing numbers and that there is a security risk. I would like further details on the service level agreement and whether cover is sufficient. Will the Minister of State outline what the service level agreement involves and how he is fulfilling his commitments to that Department? I am told there is a security risk and that there is no robust incident response team in place. According to the Department of Defence's White Paper, the Department and the Defence Forces are supposed to provide a back up to the cyberunit in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in the event of an attack, as it represents the insurance policy in the case of any significant attack. The Minister of State has given the House no clarity.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy might take this up with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton. The first national cybersecurity strategy, agreed by the Government in 2015, set out a series of measures that would be taken to build the capability of the NCSC and to achieve a high level of security for computer networks and critical infrastructure of the State. These measures included steadily increasing the capacity of the national computer security incident response team, which is part of the NCSC, as well as a series of measures to improve the network and information security of public bodies. The strategy also established how the resilience of critical national infrastructure would be improved, in part by the transposition of the EU network of information security directive and how the national incident response process would be developed through ongoing participation in the national emergency management systems.

It is important that officials from my Department and members of the Defence Forces are involved in the development of the revised strategy, which will be published by the Minister, Deputy Bruton, in coming months. The revised strategy, in conjunction with the White Paper on defence, will continue to inform our engagement in this critical area.

UN Missions

8. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when a decision will be taken on whether to deploy the Army Ranger Wing to the MINUSMA mission in Mali. [16806/19]

Deputy Clare Daly: In January, the Minister of State told me in response to a parliamentary question that the option of deploying a group of Army Rangers was being considered but that it would take some time before a conclusion would be reached. The Army Ranger unit is not trained and organised for peacekeeping and as far as I am concerned, the idea of sending them to Mali is mad. We hear a lot from the Government about international crisis management, peace support and so on, which I regard as doublespeak. Has a decision been made on this and when is it likely to be implemented?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Army Ranger Wing, ARW, is the special operations force of the Defence Forces and is part of the capabilities available to the State to be deployed in support of

our national security and overseas peace support operations.

MINUSMA, the UN mission in Mali, is authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter by the UN Security Council. It is a significant UN peace enforcement mission comprising both regular and special operations forces and high-end capabilities. Ireland currently has 20 Defence Forces personnel deployed to the EU training mission in Mali. Potential overseas missions are considered by the Department and the Defence Forces on an ongoing basis having regard to available resources and international peacekeeping requirements.

The question of deploying Defence Forces personnel to support the UN mission in Mali - MINUSMA - has been under consideration for some time, as the Deputy said. Recently, the option of deploying a small contingent of Army Ranger Wing personnel to MINUSMA as part of a larger special operations force within the mission arose and it is under active consideration. The Department and the Defence Forces are in the early information gathering stage in considering this mission. It involves obtaining detailed information on the mission and its operations, consideration of the possible role the Defence Forces may be able to undertake on the mission, how such a deployment would fit with Defence Forces capabilities having regard to existing and potential commitments at home and overseas and a detailed threat analysis and assessment of the area. This process is ongoing. On foot of the respective military and policy advice arising from this process, I will consider the matter. I emphasise that no decision has been made as of now to participate in the mission.

Deputy Clare Daly: It is my clear understanding this mission operates under Article 7 of the UN Charter and that it is an entirely different type of operation.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: My apologies. I am sorry, it is Article 7.

Deputy Clare Daly: Exactly. It is a big mistake because it is to maintain the peace through the use of force. It is qualitatively different from other missions in which Irish peacekeepers have participated such as UNIFIL and UNDOF which operate under Article 6. The Army Rangers Wing is an elite special forces unit that is not trained to participate in peacekeeping missions. When one adds the two together, it is a significant departure from what we normally do. The response the Minister of State has given is identical to the one he gave me in January. It is now April and we are none the wiser. The idea of a small neutral state such as Ireland having its army rangers wing involved in this mission is absolutely abhorrent and smacks of an effort to curry favour with the French and, possibly, the government in Mali in a bid to get on the UN Security Council. It is incredibly dangerous and we should have nothing to do with it.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: My apologies, it is Article 7, not Article 6. I was not trying to trick the Deputy in any way. It is a reply similar to the one I gave the Deputy in January because we have not yet made a decision. We are gathering information. I am not sure whether I stated to the Deputy that on my most recent visit to Mali in January, I met the head of mission of MINUSMA, by whom I was fully briefed. I want to be satisfied on what is involved in the mission and that we have the capacity and the capability to participate in it if we make a decision to do so. As I stated, we have not yet decided. I would be telling the Deputy a lie if I was not upfront in saying it is a mission we are considering.

Deputy Clare Daly: What is happening in Mali and other former French colonies is that France is supporting a series of compliant but deeply undemocratic regimes in Africa. It means that they are in a consistent state of exploitation for the benefit of France. The idea that anybody

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in the Defence Forces should be part of it is unbelievable. We are peacekeepers, not mercenaries for hire by former colonies, which is what the Minister of State seems to think. As he said in speaking about his visit, it is an incredibly dangerous place. We also have to think about the safety of our personnel. The situation in Mali is complex. Obviously, as I said, France has its objectives in the middle of it. Why on earth would we send Army rangers into the middle of it? Why should we participate in an Article 7 mission? As I said, we are peacekeepers. If we keep going down this line in a vain attempt to give the government international prestige it does not have, not only will we jeopardise the safety of Defence Forces personnel but we will also undermine our international credibility as peacekeepers.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: First, no decision has been made to deploy the Army Rangers Wing to MINUSMA. Any such decision will be based on an assessment of the requirements of the mission and, as I stated, the capacity and capability of the Defence Forces to contribute to it. The possible deployment of Defence Forces personnel has been under consideration for some time and is unconnected to the Seco campaign. It is totally separate from us trying to secure a seat on the UN Security Council. Consideration is being given to the deployment of a small contingent of Army Rangers Wing personnel to the mission. It must be stressed, however, that it is at a very early stage and further detailed analysis and planning will be required. My primary concern before we make a final decision is the safety of our personnel which is of paramount importance to me, the Department and military management. I will take advice from military management if we are to participate in the mission. The last time the Army Rangers Wing was deployed on an overseas mission was in the early 2000s in Chad. It is a well trained unit within the Defence Forces that has the capacity to participate in such a mission, but, as I said, no decision has yet been taken. I will, of course, keep the House informed and updated if we are to participate in the mission.

Defence Forces Remuneration

9. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps being taken to ensure better pay and working conditions for members of the Defence Forces; the further steps being taken to ensure appropriate supports are available to both current and former members of the Defence Forces who may be experiencing financial difficulties; if he is satisfied that recruitment methods are sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16655/19]

Deputy Bobby Aylward: I ask the Minister of State the steps being taken to ensure better pay and working conditions for members of the Defence Forces; the steps being taken to ensure appropriate supports are available to both current and former members of the Defence Forces who may be experiencing financial difficulties; if he is satisfied that recruitment methods are sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Similar to other sectors of the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures to assist in stabilising the national finances during the financial crisis. Pay is being restored to members of the Defence Forces and other public servants in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road agreement. In addition, in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA, improved pay scales for general service

recruits and privates who had joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013 were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay, ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement. The increases due under the agreement from 1 January 2018, 1 October 2018 and 1 January 2019 have been paid to Permanent Defence Force personnel. Further increases in pay are scheduled in 2019 and 2020. By the end of the current public service pay agreement, the pay scales of all public servants, including members of the Defence Forces, earning under €70,000 per annum will be restored to pre-FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under the FEMPI legislation is also scheduled as part of that agreement. New entrants who joined the Defence Forces since 2011 may also benefit from the measures which will see interventions at points 4 and 8 of the pay scales for all such relevant new entrants to the public service.

There are factors and personal circumstances which can give rise to an individual needing support and advice in dealing with particular financial difficulties. The Defence Forces, through the personnel support service, provide a confidential information, education, support and referral service to Defence Forces personnel and their families, giving access to information and services within and outside the military community.

Like other military organisations, turnover of personnel is higher than that which normally prevails in other sectors. In that context, there is ongoing recruitment and promotion to replace personnel who depart.

The Public Service Pay Commission is examining recruitment and retention issues in the defence sector. Its work is ongoing. The Government will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arise from the work of the commission.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: I raised this issue with the Minister of State at Question Time prior to the budget. At the time I stated the first step in solving a problem was recognising that there was one. I do not think the Government has yet accepted that there is a problem. It remains reluctant to face up to the scale and impact of the issues facing members of the Defence Forces and their families. Pay and conditions are major contributory factors in dealing with the issues in the recruitment and retention of personnel in the Naval Service, the Air Corps and the Army. I understand there has been a 30% turnover of staff in the past three years. That represents a 10% decline year on year. Poor pay and conditions are also major contributory factors in causing 2,000 Defence Forces families to be dependent on family income supplement to make ends meet. That is a statistic the Government should take on board. I come from Kilkenny, a town with military barracks. I have met members of the Defence Forces and their families and the situation on the ground is dire, especially for those at the lower end of the pay scale. Does the Minister of State accept that morale is low among a wide contingent of the Defence Forces? Does he also accept that there is a need for more urgent radical action to improve pay and working conditions in a way that would make a meaningful difference?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy is incorrect in saying there has been a turnover of 10%. I have often stated publicly that we have challenges in the recruitment and retention of personnel in the Defence Forces. That is why the Government prioritised the health and defence sectors within the remit of the Public Service Pay Commission. I hope to have the recommendations of the commission soon and bring them to the Government shortly. The Government and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will then consider them. I will continue to work

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with my Department and military management to address the issue.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: The Defence Forces have a sterling reputation all over the world in fulfilling their humanitarian and peacekeeping duties. They are also highly respected by the public for the role they play in the security of the State. However, the Government continues to undervalue them. In an effort to be constructive, I suggest the Minister of State investigate the possibility of increasing the availability of higher education opportunities and third level places for all members of the Defence Forces. I acknowledge that there is already a strong tradition when it comes to participating in higher education. We should, however, seek to do more in incentivising participation in higher education and increasing the availability of educational opportunities. Such a measure would make a major difference to younger recruits and especially those at the lower end of the pay scale. I also ask the Minister of State to seek to address the issue of accommodation. It is often the case that 35% to 40% of a soldier's take-home pay is spent on rent. In many other countries free accommodation is offered to members of their defence forces. It could be a huge incentive and leave a soldier, a pilot or a sailor with more money in his or her pocket at the end of each month. We have always had a tradition of military families living in barracks. That option should be re-examined.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: In the confidence and supply agreement the Deputy's party agreed to the public service pay agreement on core pay. There are already many educational opportunities in the Defence Forces for enlisted personnel and members of the officer corps. The Defence Forces' website demonstrates the many opportunities available. I agree with the Deputy that it is important we provide opportunities to up-skill and avail of educational opportunities. The issues of pay, recruitment and retention are being looked at by the Public Service Pay Commission. As I have stated clearly, I would like to see recommendations being brought to the Government as soon as possible. It will then consider them. That is the challenge for me, my Department and the Defence Forces. Most importantly, it is a challenge for members of the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Strength

10. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the strength of the Defence Forces throughout the Army, the Naval Service and the Air Corps continues to be augmented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16924/19]

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: In this question I seek to ascertain the extent to which critical strength levels continue to be maintained in each branch of the Defence Forces, the Army, the Naval Service and the Air Corps.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I thank the Deputy for his brevity. He is always great in that regard.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The military authorities have advised that the strength of the Defence Forces, whole-time equivalents, across all services and ranks, on 28 February was 8,857, comprising 7,167 Army personnel, 716 Air Corps personnel and 974 Naval Service personnel. The Government remains committed to returning to, and maintaining, the agreed strength of the Defence Forces at 9,500 personnel as set out in the White Paper on defence in 2015. In 2018, 612 personnel were inducted into the Defence Forces, encompassing general service recruits, cadets, apprentices and instrumentalists, with other intakes from direct entry streams. In ad-

dition, 15 members of the Defence Forces were awarded cadetships in 2018. The recruitment plan proposed by the Defence Forces envisages some 800 new entrants being inducted in 2019, comprising general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers.

The 2019 recruitment campaign commenced with a Naval Service general service recruitment competition. It closed on 21 January and attracted 969 applications. In addition, I launched a general service recruitment competition on 12 March in the Glen of Imaal in County Wicklow. The competition for general service recruits will remain open throughout the year to maximise the training capacity of the Defence Forces. This will give applicants more opportunities to apply. The military authorities have advised that targeted media campaigns using social and traditional media, cinema and print, will continue to form important elements of their recruitment drive. A variety of recruitment initiatives will also be undertaken throughout the year, including outreach events at local and national level. There are retention challenges with some specialist posts such as pilots, air traffic controllers and certain technicians. I have previously acknowledged this fact, which reflects current economic circumstances and the attractive job opportunities available in the private and commercial semi-State sectors.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. Has he examined specific measures which might be complementary to encourage enlistment in the Air Corps and the Naval Service, given that numbers are lower in these branches? There is a special need to maintain strength in these two critical services in case of emergency or there is a need for surveillance measures in the future.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There is ongoing recruitment, which is important. The Minister, the Department of Defence and I came up with that initiative. When I first entered the Department, there was only one opportunity to engage in recruitment at the start of the year. We then expanded that number to two. It is important, however, that a person can go online at any stage to apply to enlist in the Air Corps, the Naval Service or the Army. I will also be launching a cadet recruitment campaign next week. If the Deputy or any other Deputy has specific ideas for measures that might be taken to encourage recruitment or promotion, he or she should let me know. There are good career, training and educational opportunities in the Defence Forces for any young person.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I suggest research be undertaken among the general public and existing members of the Defence Forces as the results might indicate practical measures that could be taken. Those who have been in the Defence Forces might be able to shed some light on the most appropriate measures to take to augment the strength of the Army, the Naval Service and the Air Corps. Maintaining strength in the Naval Service and the Air Corps is a particular concern.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I have recently initiated a review of recruitment to the Defence Forces. We have to examine many lessons which have been learned to see what we can do better to improve recruitment, including advertising. We also have to look at the current recruitment process. We brought in an independent chairperson to look at the conciliation and arbitration scheme within the Defence Forces. I can bring in an independent person who will be able to talk to the people about whom the Deputy spoke - former members of the Defence Forces - about why they joined the Defence Forces and why any young person would want to join the Defence Forces. It is important that we look at all these areas, which is why I want to initiate this review of the recruitment process in order that we look at our practices and the way we do things. I envisage that there will be an input from all people involved in the defence sector.

11. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason 150 members of the Defence Forces had their return from Lebanon delayed and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16838/19]

15. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason 130 members of the Defence Forces were unable to leave the Golan Heights on their scheduled departure date of 4 April 2019 and the steps he will take to ensure accountability for this failure in view of the fact that it is the second time in a year that members of the Defence Forces have been unable to return home on time. [16803/19]

19. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason for the recent problems with flights for members of Defence Forces returning from Syria and the measures that will be taken to avoid such instances in the future. [16970/19]

Deputy Jack Chambers: I want to ask the Minister of State about the reason certain members of the Defence Forces had their return from Lebanon delayed and if he will make a statement on the matter. This is the second time this has occurred in six months and demonstrates a complete failure on the part of the Minister of State and his Department. In his public announcements, he said that it was the UN's fault. He is responsible for our troops. He let them down again. Many families were upset because they had this planned date. Can the Minister of State provide the House with an explanation of his actions?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I propose to take Questions Nos. 11, 15 and 19 together.

The recent UNDOF rotation was due to be completed on Thursday, 4 April 2019. The UN was responsible for organising the rotation flights to transport the current UNDOF contingent back to Ireland and has been organising these rotation flights for decades without incident. On 3 April, the UN advised my Department that the Lebanese authorities had not granted approval for the landing clearance in Beirut for the aircraft. I am glad to report that the UN subsequently secured an aircraft and the requisite clearances were put in place enabling all the soldiers to return home safely on Sunday evening last. All personnel impacted by the delay were kept informed of the situation throughout and families were also updated by designated family liaison officers.

The rearranged flight was the result of a concerted effort by UN staff, the Irish and Lebanese missions in New York, government authorities in Lebanon and Syria and the staff in my own Department and in the Defence Forces. I regret the impact of this delay on Defence Forces personnel and their families.

In October 2018, there was a delay in the return home of personnel from the 57th Infantry Group and in the deployment of the 58th Infantry Group. Similar to the recent incident, the delay last year was due to circumstances beyond the control of my Department. In that instance, the clearance that issued from the authorities stated incorrectly that it was for the UNIFIL contingent rather than the UNDOF contingent, as stated on the request. On that occasion, the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade and Ireland's Embassy in Cairo actively engaged with authorities in Lebanon and Syria and with the UN and the UNDOF mission to secure the relevant clearances in order to ensure the rotation of the contingent and the return home of those personnel completing service with UNDOF at the earliest opportunity.

The UNDOF contingent is operating in a very challenging region where there can never be complete certainty on transit routes and where the administrative procedures relating to the transit of military personnel are complex and cut across a number of jurisdictions. Approvals for the transit of foreign military forces in a congested conflict zone involve many international layers and are, therefore, not without hazard. While every effort is made to secure the necessary clearances on time, we do not have control over these and rely on the good offices of the states through which we are transiting. We will continue to engage with these states. However, given all the variables, it is not possible to guarantee rotation dates at this time with the requisite certainty and personnel will be advised of this uncertainty when deploying in future.

Deputy Jack Chambers: This shows that the Department cannot even be trusted to arrange a flight. The Minister of State is the one responsible along with his Department and he cannot deflect attention to the UN. What happened on both occasions shows that both he and his Department were asleep at the wheel. Many families had to cancel their holidays again or cancel plans. All those plans were cancelled when they were looking forward to seeing their loved ones after six months. It was a failure to ensure the safe and timely return of our troops, which is cruel on families.

One concern raised by the wives and partners of Defence Forces personnel was that the Minister announced the return date in the Irish media to protect himself, ahead of the troops on the ground being informed. If that is correct, and perhaps the Minister of State can correct the record, it shows he is putting protecting himself and his reputation over the people who have served Ireland and proudly represented the UN over there. This was a shocking development to see and I hope the Minister of State can clarify it.

Deputy Clare Daly: To make a hames of the return once is unfortunate but to do so twice definitely smacks of carelessness and a lack of attention from the Department. In his answer, the Minister of State accounted for what happened. We know that but we still do not know why it happened. I would like to know how many other defence forces personnel from other jurisdictions have been similarly impacted in this way. Can he tell us how many have been affected? If he cannot, can he get us that information? Why does he not know? I have been in and out of Beirut on a number of occasions in the past two years and I have never had any problem. The Irish Government does not seem to have any problem in trafficking hundreds of US troops through its shores on a daily basis so I do not buy the explanation that it is a complex and difficult issue in an uncertain area. That does not add up.

If the Minister of State is blaming the UN for this, what has he done to address the situation? How could it possibly happen and what is the nature of the contract in which the Department has engaged to get our personnel back because the idea of this happening twice to families is disgraceful. We are talking about people who have been away on a foreign mission.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: This is the second time this has happened that we know of. It is a cock-up of monumental proportions for the families awaiting the return of their loved ones who have served for six months. They probably had some idea, given that they were the ones who went in after the last cock-up. On that occasion, 119 soldiers were unable to return at the time they were told they would be returning. The Minister of State has blamed the UN. What has he said to the UN since then? Is he going to take this without any protest or without being given any guarantees? I ask because at the end of his reply, he said that when deploying troops, he could not guarantee return dates. That essentially is what he is saying. While he will send them wherever, it is a case of perhaps getting them back on the day on which they are supposed

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to return but it also might be a week or two weeks later.

In the last instance, a payment was given to those who were discommoded, that is, to each of the 199 soldiers affected. I do not know whether the Minister of State has looked at compensation for the changes families had to make to their routine, which had been set for a number of months, given that when the Minister of State sent the troops out, he indicated they would return after six months.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: In response to Deputy Jack Chambers, my office announced this on social media on Thursday afternoon. Some media outlets picked up on that. I would call them very professional because they were able to pick up on that. I understand that the Deputy and his party communicate through social media. It is a very important tool that allows us to communicate-----

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Minister of State told the media before the troops.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy might listen. He is not good at listening. We communicate through social media to inform the families. It would have taken 130 phone calls and up to very late on Thursday night to do that. I want to be able to communicate the message as quickly as possible. Many media outlets picked up on that.

In response to Deputies Jack Chambers and Clare Daly, the UN was responsible for this rotation. It is a very complex part of the world. There is war in Syria and thousands of people are crossing the Syrian border into Lebanon. This leads to very complex issues and this is one of them. The fact that other Irish troops who were going to go to the UNDOF mission were landing in Lebanon raised many issues. We spoke to the Lebanese Prime Minister's department, the Minister's department and our ambassador to the UN, Geraldine Byrne Nason.

We all worked together to get it fixed. Unfortunately there was a delay.

To answer Deputy Ó Snodaigh's question on compensation these people who were delayed coming home were delayed going out by two weeks and they received the overseas allowance while they were at home. I did not stop that. They were given a commitment that we would pay their overseas allowance from the very start. We did that even though they were not deployed on a mission overseas.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Dara Calleary: Across the country there are many thousands of people who wish to buy their own homes or apartments. They are working, multiple jobs in some cases, and many of them have moved home to have the opportunity to save the deposit. They pay enormous and rising rents and because of the size of those rents it is even harder to save a deposit. They are now faced with a new challenge, that after putting the deposit together, as in a case I came across in Dundrum during the week, and paying a booking deposit, funds are swooping in to buy entire stocks of apartment developments and housing estates around Dublin and the country, leaving these people who are working and saving hard and making enormous sacrifices without access to a first-time home and apartment.

We accept there are many challenges in this housing crisis and many decisions to be taken but Government has control over some areas and this is one where it can begin to make a difference. Legislation in 2013 for these real estate investment trusts, REITs, introduced them into Ireland. It was an ideological position taken at the time to stimulate the development of homes in 2013. That was six years ago. Now, in 2019, these funds are straying far beyond what was intended for them. They are known colloquially as cuckoo funds, they are faceless and profit driven and are swooping in to buy estates and apartment blocks in Balbriggan, Dundrum, Lusk, in Deputy Curran's and Deputy Jack Chambers' constituencies, any number of constituencies, but also outside Dublin, thereby depriving people of that chance to get on the home ownership ladder and forcing people to travel and commute longer distances to work, to continue to live at home with their families well beyond the point when it is sustainable to do so.

These funds are not subject to corporation tax on their Irish property profits or gains. They have no obligation to report what they make in profits here to the Revenue Commissioners. Last Monday's *Irish Independent* made for chilling reading because it showed that 3,000 homes were snapped up by these big corporations last year, five times more than in 2017 and €1.1 billion was being spent by these funds. All the time rents will rise by a further 17%. We are leaving people to the penury of rent, standing by while those rents increase, depriving them of the opportunity to save for the deposit. Would the Tánaiste agree that it is time to shout stop? It is time that the *modus operandi* of these funds, buying entire developments either off plan or after building, needs to be curtailed. It should not happen that somebody can work incredibly hard to put down a booking deposit and then be told that the entire development has been taken from them, as happened the people I met in Dundrum on Tuesday night. Is it time to curtail the advantages and to buy entire developments? Would the Tánaiste not agree that it is time to give people a chance to get on the housing ladder?

The Tánaiste: That is a very interesting question. We are trying to increase supply in the property market to ensure that where possible we see a rental market changing for the better, where large commercial landlords are part of that rental market, providing a professional service at a fair and affordable price. One of the flaws in the Irish rental market is that approximately 85% of all landlords own only one property. In respect of standards and responsibilities that landlords need to take on in law it becomes difficult to manage that. There is a role for investment funds to invest in the rental market in particular to increase supply significantly over a short space of time, which we need to do. The Government needs to be careful to monitor constantly the role and impact of outside investment in the property market here to make sure that it is proportionate and that it is adding positively to increasing supply.

As the Taoiseach repeats, we are a Government that supports home ownership and we want to make sure that people can afford to buy homes close to where they work. That is a supply issue. We need to build approximately 35,000 housing units a year. By the end of this year we hope to be close to 25,000 and increasing. It is a combination of more social and affordable homes and more affordable rental properties, all happening at the same time. Property funds can contribute positively to that but when there is a shortage of supply there is going to be competition between a private homeowner looking to purchase a property and commercial funds looking to increase their portfolios by providing more rental properties. The answer is to increase supply significantly but also to assess constantly the appropriate legislative protections that are needed to make sure that the contribution of international funds to increasing supply is as it should be because our property market is changing all the time.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I agree that we need to increase supply but these funds come in and

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take 3,000 off the plans before people get a chance to see it. The Tánaiste spoke about competition but that is not fair competition. The Government is equipping and incentivising these funds through our tax laws to offer completely unfair competition. The Government is giving them huge power in comparison to the first-time buyer, the person looking for that start. These funds are given advantages that the individual buyer does not get and the Government is consigning people to high rents, that will increase by 17%, to saving for a deposit for a property they may never get. Yes, it needs to increase supply but it will have to put restrictions on what happens to that supply. Is it in the Tánaiste's mind fair that a fund can come in with very few profit taxation requirements and acquire an entire development of houses, even where people have paid booking deposits? Is that fair and good competition? Is the Tánaiste happy to consign people to a lifetime of rent, of scrimping and saving or to a commute from hell?

The Tánaiste: I do not think it is either one or the other.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: That is what is happening.

The Tánaiste: The priority needs to be the homeowner or the person looking to get affordable rent.

Deputy John Curran: There are no affordable rents.

The Tánaiste: That is what this is for, to facilitate profits for international funds that want to come to Ireland to invest in a property market that is evolving or changing. We are trying to ensure that there is investment and that we increase the professionalism of landlords. In other European cities apartment blocks are often owned by one fund that is managed in a way that is in the interests of stable rent. That is the kind of rental market we need to create in Ireland but because of a lack of supply when a new development is selling from the plans or just completed, having large funds competing with individuals who want to buy their own homes is something we need to move away from but primarily by increasing supply.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: This week it was reported that a man had been before the courts on three counts of sexual assault of three women over two weeks in 2016. In one case, the man in question, a taxi driver, touched a 19 year old woman's chest, rubbed her cheek, and when she managed to get out, he followed her in his taxi and continued to harass her and try to get her back into the car. He rubbed the face and lip of another victim, a 20 year old woman, before brushing his hand down the right side of her body. When she arrived at her home, he asked her if she needed a hug before he leaned in towards her as if to kiss her. In another case, an 18 year old schoolgirl got into his taxi and he immediately began rubbing her leg and telling her how soft her skin was. She managed to push him away and he tried to get his hand into her underwear. The woman in question accepted a call from her friend while in the taxi and tried to give her the information she could read from his ID. He became very angry, leaned across her, opened the door and told her to get out. She tried to take a photograph of him but he stopped her from doing so. The man in question here has pleaded guilty to these incidents and his legal team have accepted that these were young vulnerable people who were relying on him to bring them home safely. He did not do that.

I accept that court decisions and sentencing are the remit of the Judiciary and I will not be commenting in a way that influences that, although the Tánaiste will know that I am anxious for sentencing guidelines to be introduced to ensure consistent and fair sentencing. What I want to raise with the Tánaiste is the safety of women. Bail conditions have been agreed for this man

that stipulate that he can continue to drive a taxi but that female passengers are not permitted as front seat passengers. Incredibly, this man is still entitled to drive a taxi and carry passengers, including women. This is outrageous. How can any women feel safe in a taxi, no matter where they are seated, that is being driven by a man who has pleaded guilty to three counts of sexual assault? What mother or father would not be worried that this man could collect their daughters tonight in a taxi? It is unsafe, it is absolutely wrong, and our legislation should not allow it.

What is the Government going to do to ensure that people who are guilty of sexual offences and these specific types of offences are nowhere near taxis and in a position to collect people? What message does this send to the overwhelming majority of decent taxi drivers and the checks they have to go through? If it requires legislative change, let us do that. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, needs to get on top of this immediately. It is beyond unacceptable. It is frightening that such a man could drive a taxi in Dublin tonight and it should not be allowed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before the Tánaiste responds, this is a matter that is still before the courts, as I understand it, and it is highly irregular for us to engage in any sort of discussion about a matter still before the courts, notwithstanding the enormity of the importance of the case that the Deputy raises. I trust-----

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I accept that, I have given careful thought to what I have worded, and the proposition that I have laid before the Government is on legislation and who is entitled to drive taxis.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let all of us tread very warily here.

The Tánaiste: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for that guidance. I can understand the Deputy's concern but we need to be careful about what we say here in the context of individual cases, particularly when there are court cases ongoing. I am not familiar with the status of the court case so I need to be careful.

I would like to say more generally that the Government is totally committed to preventing and addressing sexual abuse and gender-based violence. Increased reporting of sexual crime to An Garda Síochána can be seen in some ways as a success in that victims feel more confident in reporting these crimes today. The laws surrounding sexual offences have been significantly strengthened in recent years through the introduction of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 and the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017. This important legislation helps victims identify that the behaviour they are suffering is wrong and encourages them to report it to An Garda Síochána. Divisional protective service units are also being rolled out this year across all policing divisions. These are specialised units tasked with improving services to victims, improving the investigation of sexual violence incidents, and identifying and managing risk. The Government has also approved a radical new national survey approach to the collection of data by the Central Statistics Office on the prevalence of sexual violence in Ireland, which will greatly improve the evidence base for public policymaking in this area in the future.

I know the Deputy is looking for a more specific answer from me. As a father of three daughters, I have to say that it is important that parents and young people can have faith that when they get into a taxi, they are safe. I need to be careful in referring to any individual case but I will try to come back to the Deputy later, having taken some advice on it, to give him a more detailed answer.

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Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: The question I asked was not answered and perhaps I can put it in a way that the Tánaiste can answer. For the Ceann Comhairle's information, what I am about to say is quoting directly from newspaper reports and I will not depart from that. It is what is in the public record.

The victim impact statement from the first woman said that she would not allow her boyfriend to touch her where this man had touched her and she said she felt scared and numb and had problems sleeping at night. She later attended weekly counselling and she still finds it difficult to get a taxi, especially at night. The second woman was traumatised after the incident and lost trust in taxi drivers. She worries about the safety of others in taxis and feels ashamed for allowing herself to be so vulnerable.

I ask the Tánaiste this in the abstract in the hope he can answer it. Is he confident that the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 ensures that people who are guilty of sexual offences are not entitled to drive taxis? If not, will the Government bring forward legislation to ensure that is the case?

The Tánaiste: As I said earlier, we need to be careful what we say, regardless of what is written in newspapers or what has been in the media, whether it is social media or mainstream media. We have to stand over what we say in this House ourselves because we should set the standard in cases such as this. Having said that, the issue the Deputy is referring to is a serious issue and of course legislation should be tested and, if necessary, changed to ensure that people who are travelling in taxis are protected appropriately and that people who are given a licence to drive taxis are appropriately vetted to make sure that women or men who are travelling in taxis are given the appropriate legal protections that they deserve.

Deputy Michael Harty: This question refers to threats to our agricultural industry and our agricultural community. There are three threats as I see it. In the short term there is Brexit, as we are all aware. In the medium term there is the potential reduction in the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, budget. In the longer term there are challenges presented to the agricultural community by climate change and climate action.

On Brexit, the issues have been well identified and I will not go over them now, but any form of Brexit will have a negative impact, whether it is a soft Brexit via a withdrawal agreement involving the UK staying within the customs union and the Single Market in some form or other, or a harder Brexit where the UK cuts its ties almost completely with the EU. The loss of the UK market will be substantial for the beef and dairy industries. The imposition of tariffs will add to that and the delays in transport across the UK landbridge will be a serious blow to agricultural exports. Farm families need to know from the Tánaiste what level of support will be available from the Government and from Europe to maintain their incomes. I would like the Tánaiste to outline what those supports will be.

The CAP budget is under review and there are fears that this will be reduced substantially, with consequent threats to the beef and dairy sectors, if the UK leaves the European Union. The loss of the financial contribution that the UK makes to the CAP will obviously be a major factor there, so what reassurances can the Tánaiste give to farmers on this? Ireland is the most exposed of the European countries to a CAP reduction.

On the challenge posed by carbon emissions from beef and dairy farming, farmers are very fearful of the narrative that their traditional indigenous industry is being blamed in some quarters as a major damaging contributor to greenhouse gases and the threat to our planet. An

educational guide recently issued to schools by An Taisce recommends a reduction in meat and dairy consumption, equating such consumption with contributing to environmental damage. I believe this is the wrong message to give to our children, who are very impressionable. Excessive intakes of sugar, processed carbohydrates and salt are all contributing to obesity, which is now reaching epidemic proportions. This is the message which should be given to our children and their parents regarding diet while at the same time promoting exercise and sport. We all know that a balanced diet is very important for health and well-being, and the manner in which we process and cook our food is as important as the content of that food. The message should go out that farm families are custodians of our environment and are not contributing to its destruction. The uncertainty in the farming sector regarding Brexit and the CAP budget is being compounded by the narrative that farming damages our planet and provides food that can damage our health. We should ensure educational material does not do that.

The Tánaiste: I thank Deputy Harty for those questions. I would have liked a much longer time to reply because I have a lot of personal interest in this area given that I am a former Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and a farmer.

We know that Ireland is more exposed and more vulnerable to a no-deal Brexit or the wrong outcome from Brexit. Ireland exports more than €1 billion worth of beef to the UK and dairy products worth more than €1 billion. We also import food and drink worth billions of euro from the UK. Should this trade be subject to tariffs in the future, or to other non-tariff trade barriers, it would be very damaging to the Irish agricultural and food industry and to Irish farming. We are conscious of this and we have been for many months. Hardly a Cabinet meeting passes without the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, raising these issues and the challenges that emerge from them.

I want to reassure farm families. There are 130,000 farm families in Ireland, nearly 100,000 of whom get some farm income from beef and 70,000 of whom get all of their farming income from beef. I want to reassure them that if Ireland faces a no-deal Brexit - which looks less likely today than it did last week - we will be ready to support Irish farm families and the food industry through what will be a very difficult period of change and disruption. We are working with the European Commission and Commissioner Hogan has been very strong on this also. There will be a significant support package to help farmers through the disruption of a no-deal Brexit, which would be considerable for Irish agriculture.

On the issue of CAP, I was involved in trying to finalise the Common Agricultural Policy the last time around. There is a really competitive environment for EU funds now. With the UK likely to leave the European Union and in the medium term no longer contributing to EU budgets, and with increasing demand for more money in EU budgets at the same time, especially in respect of security, external relations, climate and the promotion of technology and research, we have seen some pressure on the CAP budget and on other regional budgets. The Government has made it very clear that it is a priority for us in the new multi-annual financial framework, MFF, to protect the CAP budget. We have said that we will contribute more to EU budgets as long as the CAP budget is protected. We have developed a strong alliance - and the Minister, Deputy Creed, has worked very hard on this - across the European Union to protect the CAP budget. A significant number of countries are now part of that coalition to do this. As the debates continue on the MFF I can assure the House that the CAP budget will be a big priority for us.

The third issue raised by Deputy Harty was on climate. The agriculture and food industry

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has a responsibility to ensure we respond to the emissions challenge facing the sector, as faced by other sectors also. We need to do that in a way that continues to protect farm incomes and to protect the agriculture and food industry as part of the broader economy. This is what we will continue to do, as the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton and the Minister, Deputy Creed, work together from a climate change perspective, as well as an agricultural perspective.

Deputy Michael Harty: I linked the three items of Brexit, CAP and climate change together because I have met farmers over the last months who have become quite disillusioned with the way they are being portrayed and in how they are being supported. I accept the Tánaiste's comments on the supports that will be delivered, whatever form of Brexit develops over the next months. The uncertainty over CAP cannot be predicted but the farmers can certainly see, coming down the line, that they will be under severe financial pressure if there is a reduction in the CAP budget.

Because they are a traditional, indigenous industry, farming families feel they are now being blamed for climate change, for damaging the climate and for producing food that is deemed to be unhealthy. As I said earlier, a balanced diet is very important. Farmers need to be reassured that they are recognised as being custodians of the environment and the land, and that they are not producing products that damage people's health or damage children's health. Perhaps the Tánaiste might address this issue in his next response.

The Tánaiste: Food Wise 2025, the current agrifood plan for the country, is about sustainable growth and expansion. It is about ensuring that young people are still attracted to farming as a way of life and as a way of deriving an income. It is also about driving efficiency: driving down the carbon efficiency of how we produce food while sustainably realising the potential of a growing and expanding dairy sector. Ireland produces dairy products at the lowest carbon intensity on the planet. Surely it makes sense for countries that have the capacity to produce dairy products, which is a huge part of human nutrition globally, and who do this best from a climate and emissions intensity perspective, to allow their industries to grow and expand.

In respect of beef, Ireland is probably in the top 30% in terms of efficiency and we need to do more in that regard. Part of the challenge is the herd size. We are breeding more efficiency into our breeds and supporting farmers financially in making that change through the beef genomic scheme and other innovative schemes. We will continue to support this sector to make the changes it needs to make to become more climate aware and emissions efficient. This does not mean the farming and food industry does not have a bright future of growth and expansion.

Deputy Seamus Healy: South Tipperary General Hospital is a success story despite swingeing cuts to budgets and staff numbers and a shortage of beds. I compliment and thank all of the staff at the hospital, from the newest recruit to senior management, who work in partnership and as a team in delivering quality hospital services under very difficult circumstances.

In November 2008, in response to the HSE and the Department of Health proposals to downgrade the hospital and to transfer all of its acute services - medicine, surgery, maternity, paediatrics and emergency department - to Kilkenny and Waterford, the Save Our Acute Hospital Services Committee was formed. Working with the whole hospital community, all stakeholders and the public, the committee responded to the threat and put 15,000 people onto the streets of Clonmel to stop the proposals in their tracks. Success saw a huge increase in hospital activity, a significant increase in inpatient admissions, and a virtual explosion in outpatient and

emergency department attendances. Side by side with this we had budget cuts, staff cuts and shortages of beds. The hospital today works at 120% capacity overall. The medical department works at approximately 150% capacity. Unfortunately, given that the hospital regularly has 40 or more patients on trolleys we are consistently near the top of the trolley watch figure. Last week the hospital had to appeal to the public not to attend the emergency department because of the huge overcrowding. Despite the best efforts of staff, the conditions for patients in that overcrowded emergency department are totally unacceptable. Staff are under constant pressure every minute of every day. Fortunately, pressure was applied and led to the approval of a new 40-bed modular unit for the hospital, and after several false dawns that unit is now under construction and will be completed at the end of July. It was supposed to have been completed by June of last year. However, there have been significant delays in approving funding for equipping and staffing the unit. It is required urgently and should be opened immediately upon completion. I want the Tánaiste to confirm today and give us a guarantee that this unit will not be the subject of the staff freeze which was announced last week by the HSE. Will the Tánaiste assure us that staff numbers and funding will be agreed by the HSE and that the unit will not be subject to a phased opening into next year? It should be fully opened on completion because the hospital desperately needs beds.

The Tánaiste: I thank the Deputy for his very reasonable approach to this issue. It is true to say that South Tipperary General Hospital has been under pressure, as have other hospitals, through the winter. Looking at the national picture, it is true to say that the trolley count through the winter months this year was about 13% less than last year and the lowest for the past five years. That being said, many individual hospitals, including South Tipperary General Hospital, have been under pressure at different times. There is a capacity issue in Tipperary, which is why the Government is committed to and has funded the building of a 40-bed modular unit to add capacity. It is under construction and will open mid-summer. My understanding is that there will not be staffing difficulties associated with the new unit, but I will revert to the Deputy later today with an exact response from the HSE on that matter.

On the circular from the HSE concerning staffing freezes, which has been raised this week in the House, where there are plans that are within the spending estimates of this year, there are no problems in terms of taking on more staff. In fact, the ambition is to take on significantly more staff this year, but that ambition has to be managed from a cost perspective. I will revert to the Deputy on the staffing implications of a new 40-bed modular unit in south Tipperary. It makes no sense to open that new unit with the aim of increasing capacity and taking pressure off the existing hospital infrastructure if appropriate staffing is not lined up to ensure that the unit can do what it is intended to do. I will revert to the Deputy later today with a more precise response on the staffing implications, the staffing decisions and the financing of it.

Deputy Seamus Healy: The concern around staffing stems from the fact that the HSE has form in allowing units to be completed and then allowing them to lie vacant for quite considerable lengths of time. We have only to look at Our Lady's Hospital in Cashel, just 15 miles down the road. Some €14 million was spent on that facility, it was in pristine condition, but it has been vacant, with not a bed in it, for the past ten years. Something similar happened in South Tipperary General Hospital in the early 2000s. I am asking the Tánaiste to instruct the HSE to exempt this unit from any staffing freeze and to agree the business case and the staffing proposals from hospital management which have been with the HSE for the past 12 months. This unit must be opened urgently. The hospital is under severe pressure. It is doing excellent work under very difficult circumstances. I welcome the Tánaiste's indication that he will come

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back to me later today on some of the issues I have raised.

The Tánaiste: Under the capacity programme for 2019, which has been agreed, provision is made for increases in capacity. As set out in the national service plan for 2019, 78 additional beds are planned for quarter one of this year, including a 40-bed modular build in South Tipperary General Hospital, which the Deputy referred to. The plan also refers to other hospitals. Funding has been provided in the national service plan 2019 to facilitate the opening of the modular build at South Tipperary General Hospital, and the HSE has advised that the project is at an advanced stage. There is no reason that this building should not open once it is completed. It should serve the purpose it is being built for, which is to relieve pressure on South Tipperary General Hospital from a beds capacity perspective. I will get back to the Deputy with the precise costing for staff to ensure it gets across the line.

Ceisteanna ar Reachtaíocht a Gealladh - Questions on Promised Legislation

Deputy Dara Calleary: The former President of the High Court, Mr. Justice Nicholas Kearns, made some stinging remarks recently about insurance costs. He said that we have an immediate and urgent problem with a compensation culture, and he has called on politicians to step up and do something. Fianna Fáil, in particular through Deputy Michael McGrath, has for some time been offering many suggestions on what can be done, but the Government is not taking them on board.

On the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017, will Fine Gael finally stand up to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, and allow that Bill to proceed? Why are we not proceeding with an insurance fraud unit that could start investigating false claims?

On the issue of insurance companies, three of them reported profits of €200 million in recent weeks while small businesses were closing. Is it not time, as Mr. Justice Kearns said, for the Government to step up?

The Tánaiste: The Government is stepping up in this area. The Bill the Deputy referred to is in the Seanad. A conversation is happening between the Department and the Commissioner on a specific Garda fraud unit to respond to the concerns the Deputy has raised. I know that Deputy Michael McGrath only yesterday introduced new legislation which will go to Second Stage soon. We will look at the merits of that Bill. There have been three pieces of legislation passed in the past 12 to 18 months concerning insurance and insurance costs. This is an issue and we are responding to it. I agree with the Deputy that, despite all of the things that have been done in recent years to respond to concerns and frustrations from the insurance industry, there always seems to be a new reason for insurance premiums to increase. Looking at asset values and profits in this sector, there is no large insurance company in Ireland making a loss at the moment, and many are making very significant profits. We will respond, but we also expect an appropriate response from the insurance industry.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Throughout this country, and indeed in the constituency I share with the Tánaiste, people are seriously struggling with rent. Rents are rising rapidly, sometimes swallowing up to a third or a half of people's income, making getting a mortgage impossible for many. Rent pressure zones cap the increase in rent at 4% per annum, and were applied to city council areas and some electoral areas and counties, including the Ballincollig-Carrigaline municipal district in our own county. Some of these electoral areas have since

been revised. How will the rent pressure zones apply in new areas which are to be brought into districts that are already rent pressure zones? My colleague, Councillor Michael Frick Murphy, has asked me to raise the issue of whether the southern end of Carrigaline, including Fountainstown, Myrtleville and Crosshaven, will now fall under the new Carrigaline municipal district and a rent pressure zone, and whether they will benefit from capped rent. I am sure similar situations pertain in districts throughout the country as well. Will these new areas benefit from the rent pressure zone?

The Tánaiste: I understand that they will. The change to the boundary and the changed local electoral area boundaries that go with that will mean that the new city boundary will encompass a rent pressure zone for the whole city. I understand that what was the Ballingcollig electoral area, which is now becoming the Carrigaline harbour area, will also become a rent pressure zone in its entirety. It is the RTB that will have to confirm the relevant metrics, but that is my understanding.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Since the publication of the Morris tribunal report a number of years ago, significant and far-reaching proposals for reform of An Garda Síochána have been made. Multiple reports and recommendations have been produced during the years. The Policing Authority report published yesterday assesses the progress of the modernisation programme which is now five years old. It is the seventh and final report produced by the Policing Authority and outlines the lack of connection of rank and file gardaí to the modernisation programme. It sets out the lack of impact on the front line where the necessity is most evident. The Minister for Justice and Equality said the report had been superseded by the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. While we have had many programmes for change, the proof of the pudding will surely be in implementation of radical reform. What specifically does the Government intend to do to respond to the view of the Policing Authority that transformational change is simply not happening?

The Tánaiste: I reinforce what the Deputy said about the report being outdated as it has been superseded in many ways by the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It is replacing one plan with another, but nothing has been implemented.

The Tánaiste: When one looks at the detail of the report of the Commission of the Future of Policing and the new personnel in place to deliver on it, it is a very serious piece of work. Of course, we will be judged on it. With a new Commissioner in place and a very clear reform agenda as a result of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, the Deputy will see fundamental change and reform for the better across An Garda Síochána. We will be held to account by the Policing Authority in that regard.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Right now, activists from This is Me, a campaign to improve transgender healthcare in Ireland, are sitting in at the Department of Health. They have stated clearly that they will not move voluntarily until they have a time and date for a meeting with the Minister, Deputy Harris. It is a meeting which has been promised repeatedly over the course of the last 14 months. It was promised first in a reply to Deputy Coppinger, but there were many subsequent promises, including, for example, a promise by the Taoiseach of a meeting within six to eight weeks in July 2018. The nine months since have proved to be a very long six to eight weeks. The activists are not looking for a chat with the Minister for no reason. They

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are asking for a meeting because, notwithstanding the WHO declassification of transgender identities as a question of mental health disorder 12 months ago, Ireland continues to practise a strict psychiatric diagnostic model which means that transgender people are forced to obtain a psychiatric diagnosis before being recommended for HRT. This is a damaging state of affairs. The question is very simple. They must not wait any longer. Does the Government agree that a time and date for a meeting must be given now in order that they can stop waiting and the occupation can end?

The Tánaiste: With respect, I cannot commit the Minister for Health to arranging a meeting. Certainly, I will pass on the request, of which I am sure he is aware already.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I have just come from a meeting of all Tipperary Deputies with Mr. David McRedmond, Mr. Gary Doyle and Mr. Angus Lavery of An Post and the committee to save the post office in the Square in Thurles. The Government is trying to claim it has no responsibility for it, but we were just told that An Post was finding it very hard to get Government business. The An Post representatives noted that driving licence transactions were given to a private company recently, as were many other things. They also said the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection was actively encouraging recipients to accept payments through banks or online and not through the post office network. The Government is destroying post offices single-handed, but it states here every day that it will not meet people. I ask the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach to instruct the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, to meet this group and cut out the codology, playing games and passing the buck. It is the Government that is in power and it is destabilising An Post. Some time ago it asked us to allow An Post to raise stamp prices. I voted against it, but it happened. It is reckless. An Post is trading recklessly, while the Government is tying its hands behind its back. It is time the Government took action and that the Minister was instructed to meet the people mentioned and the public representatives of County Tipperary.

The Tánaiste: The Deputy should be careful with what he says in this House. An Post is not trading recklessly.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is trading recklessly.

The Tánaiste: An Post has managed to agree a reform programme with postmasters in order to ensure An Post does not have to trade recklessly.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: A dirty shady deal.

The Tánaiste: The Minister, Deputy Bruton, has answered the question the Deputy asked him last week. He made it very clear that he has to operate within the law. There are decisions that management in An Post need to take and there are decisions that Ministers need to take; there should not be crossover.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: None of them are taking them. It is a cop-out.

Deputy Catherine Martin: This week in my constituency of Dublin Rathdown, the local community learned important information about the arrangements for a new school via social media through a tweet with a picture of a letter giving vague information about the securing of a site for a new school due to open in September with no indication of who had written or signed the letter. This was the first that many concerned residents learned about the plans for the school site. Was the Minister for Education and Skills aware that this information was being

given out in this manner? If he was, did he send this letter on to certain elected representatives? How did he determine who should be updated on this?

It is not the first time this has happened in our constituency. In the past schooling arrangement announcements have been distributed first on social media before even the schools have been told, before parents and children have been told and before the local community has been properly informed. There is an urgent need to overhaul how new schools are announced. Currently they are announced with great fanfare without even the sites secured, which causes serious confusion for the local community. I have raised this with the Minister, Deputy McHugh, and previously with the then Minister, Deputy Bruton.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up now, Deputy.

Deputy Catherine Martin: This drip-feeding of unofficial information on social media is not fair on school communities and is disrespectful to the local community.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy, the time is up.

Deputy Catherine Martin: Surely there is a better way of engaging.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Tánaiste.

Deputy Catherine Martin: What is the Government's plan to improve its engagement with the local communities on announcements of schools?

The Tánaiste: I am glad the Deputy has raised the issue with the Minister, Deputy McHugh, because this is obviously his responsibility. I hope he gave her a detailed response to her question. I am not familiar with the individual project concerned.

Deputy Catherine Martin: It is a general issue.

The Tánaiste: I understand. That is the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Skills. I will make sure he is aware of it.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It would not be the first time that an announcement was made on social media that was not subsequently followed through. We have certainly heard that before.

The Minister for Education and Skills announced that the review of history and the junior certificate would be complete by the end of March. I know a new board was appointed to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA. Can the Tánaiste confirm that history will be restored as a compulsory subject in the junior certificate as the Minister has indicated?

The Tánaiste: That report has not come to Cabinet, but we are expecting it shortly.

Deputy Pat Buckley: It has been brought to my attention that certain protected disclosures within the health services have not been acted upon properly. I have also been informed that a number of these cases have not been investigated. One of my sources has told me that they no longer feel safe in the workforce after making a protected disclosure. While nothing was done, no one was reprimanded regarding a very serious incident. I am very concerned about our mental health services and in particular that many protected disclosures have taken place without anything being addressed properly. One of my sources said, "I pray for my patients every night." Why are these protected disclosures not being dealt with stringently? Why are

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some perpetrators still allowed to work within the health service after the protected disclosures have been made against them? I am aware that some Ministers present are in receipt of this information.

An Ceann Comhairle: The matter might be the subject of a parliamentary question.

The Tánaiste: There is very clear legislation in this area outlining the responsibility of the State and Departments in providing a response to protected disclosures. To make an accusation that may or may not be true - I do not know - without any evidence to back it up-----

Deputy Pat Buckley: It is not an accusation.

The Tánaiste: It is impossible for me to respond to something like that.

Deputy Pat Buckley: It is not an accusation and the Minister is also in receipt of it.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: It is almost two years since the publication of the Sláintecare report regarding reforming the health service into an effective and efficient service, and the Government continues to fail to deliver on commitments. My constituency has major issues with the need for physiotherapy. This week I received a letter from someone whose child cannot leave a hospital in Dublin because sufficient paediatric physiotherapy services are not available in Sligo. A letter from the child's consultant orthopaedic surgeon states:

This is a note regarding Callum. He has had extensor mechanism reconstruction and is doing well and walking on a frame now. Hopefully he will be progressing onto crutches. We are keeping him as an inpatient in Cappagh despite the inconvenience and cost of same for all concerned because there is only a limited amount of physiotherapy resources available in Sligo. Obviously it is very disappointing that children from the West are required to stay as inpatients in Cappagh for lack of such resources and I might ask you to perhaps increase paediatric physio availability in that region to facilitate this kind of physio which is badly needed, as you know, by many children along the Western Seaboard. It is unfair on their families that they have to travel and stay in Dublin ... [when it is not necessary].

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is difficult to comment on an individual case on which I do not have the background information. I could talk about the services in general. I am happy to get an update for him on services in general in his area after this business but I will not be able to comment on a specific case.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: The programme for Government contains various commitments to reduce the employment rate while prioritising balanced regional development. Community employment, CE, schemes are a very important aspect in achieving this and provide a path to employment for many long-term unemployed people particularly in rural areas. This week I have been contacted by several of the 1,250 CE supervisors who have no access to any occupational pension scheme despite a 2008 Labour Court recommendation in their favour. The campaign for action on this recommendation will continue into May 2019 with an escalation in industrial action as the Government continues to ignore its responsibility to facilitate them regarding that Labour Court ruling. I am also informed that groups of CE scheme supervisors have been seeking a meeting with the Minister for some time but their requests have fallen on deaf ears.

Fianna Fáil passed a motion in the Dáil in April last year calling for action on this issue which also has been ignored by the Government. Can either the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, or the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, indicate whether they intend to engage with this group in an effort to resolve the matter?

The Tánaiste: The Government's position on this has been outlined by the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, on numerous occasions. While the Government is and continues to be very supportive of CE schemes, those employed on the CE schemes are not employed by the State even though State funds many of them and consequently there is a contractual difference between somebody working on a CE scheme and somebody employed across the public sector.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: What about the Labour Court recommendation?

Deputy Michael Collins: Page 43 of the programme for Government indicates that the Government promises to put in place measures to revitalise all of Ireland. In January 2017 the Government launched the Action Plan for Rural Development and Pat Spillane was appointed an ambassador to engage with local communities. Rural Ireland is getting a hammering in every way possible. I have been canvassing in west Cork and have found at every second house I have called to that people are angry at the way the Government has walked away from rural Ireland. My sources tell me that Pat Spillane, who the Government appointed and who has been a clear voice for the people of rural Ireland, has been removed from this position. Is this another nail in the coffin for rural Ireland? Has the Government removed the ambassador for rural development?

The Tánaiste: The Deputy knows west Cork well, as do I, but anybody who would suggest that places like west Cork in rural Ireland - or that rural Ireland - are being abandoned by the Government simply is not looking at the facts. We are investing in rural communities right across the country and we will continue to do that. We have for the first time a medium-term plan for this country to move away from the dominance of the east coast and Dublin and urban centres generally to invest in rural Ireland in terms of the increasing population and that plan is starting to work. People should not continue to reinforce the view that somehow rural Ireland is being abandoned. There are pressures in rural Ireland but the Government continues to prioritise both social infrastructure across rural Ireland and many of the other businesses and enterprises that are part of rural life.

Deputy Michael Collins: My question was about the ambassador for rural Ireland to which I did not get an answer.

Deputy John Brassil: On pages 93 and 94 of the programme for Government a commitment is given to increase accessibility to third level education. In September of this year the rent for University College Cork accommodation will increase by 10%, bringing the average annual contribution towards accommodation in the 1,200 spaces available to €6,000, which works out at roughly €200 per week per college year. The issue of rent pressure zones was raised earlier. Does the Government intend to include university accommodation in the rent pressure zones, minimising the increases to a minimum of 4%? The obvious knock-on effect for students is that if they cannot afford university accommodation, they will move out into the private market and the spiral will continue. Can the Minister ensure that university accommodation is included in the rent pressure zones to prevent such exorbitant rent increases?

The Tánaiste: The Government made a commitment that we would include student accom-

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modation within the remit of rent pressure zones, which I believe will impact positively in this area.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: Promised legislation is due before the House on *in vitro* fertilisation and assisted human reproduction availability. We all know that at present, private patients who can afford it can avail of services. One in four couples in this country struggle to have children and the cost of treatment is excessive and prohibitive for many. I am well aware that income tax relief can be claimed for this treatment. However, in the interim a commitment was given by both the Minister and the Taoiseach that money would be set aside to help childless couples in particular to avail of the services. This was promised in the first quarter of 2019. When will that service be available to those anxious couples?

The Tánaiste: The assisted human reproductive Bill I understand is still undergoing pre-legislative scrutiny, so we are anxious to move that forward as soon as we can.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: Money was promised in this respect.

The Tánaiste: I will have to come back to the Deputy on that.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: Yesterday I attended the launch of the Women's Aid impact report of 2018, which focused on children let down by the system and we learned there were more than 20,000 referrals last year. I could raise many issues but I will focus on one, that of the family law courts. We have a state-of-the-art court building for criminals but what families who are going through the most difficult of circumstances must endure in Dolphin House is appalling. I attended the launch three years ago and at the invitation of the chair, I spent a morning there to see how bad the situation was. At that time we were told there was a place for a new law court on Hatch Street that was shovel ready but three years later nothing has happened and the situation has worsened. I want to ask the Tánaiste about the provision of a family law court to deal with people who find themselves in very difficult situations in Dublin.

The Tánaiste: This is a very real issue and I know the Minister for Justice and Equality is aware of it. My understanding is that he has plans to introduce a dedicated family court. I can get a more detailed response for the Deputy on that but that is certainly my understanding of his intention.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: That has been the intention for ten years.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I have a question for the Minister of the State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy English. As he well knows, at this stage the patience of homeowners in Donegal who are affected by mica defective concrete blocks is well run out. They have been waiting for a long time for the Government to come forward with a scheme. Will the Minister of State confirm it is the intention that a scheme will be brought before the Cabinet next Tuesday, bearing in mind that for two weeks after that the Dáil will be in recess? Will he also confirm that the scheme will ensure the full cost of the repair work will be carried out and that it will be broad enough to ensure those homeowners who want to start work can get on with it and be taken out of the misery and stress involved with having a house which continues to deteriorate, while waiting for a scheme to be published and brought forward by the Government?

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): As the Deputy will be aware, it was confirmed in October that we

would introduce a scheme. Our Department, in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, has been working on it for the past few months. It was ready to bring to Cabinet a few times but different issues arose with Brexit and so on. We hope to bring it either to the next Cabinet meeting or the one after that to have it dealt with. We have discussed the proposed scheme with the residents affected, both in Donegal and in Mayo, on numerous occasions and all the issues about which they have concerns were brought to the table. The scheme should satisfy most people's needs.

I o'clock

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I wish to raise an issue I have raised previously concerning the Central Bank (Amendment) Bill, which might be used to introduce a code of conduct that might in some way assist homeowners who are in arrears with their mortgage and who are making regular and reasonable payments, and it might in some way enhance their protection.

The Tánaiste: Is the Deputy referring to the code of conduct on mortgages?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Yes.

The Tánaiste: It is an issue that is constantly under review by the Central Bank but I am not aware of any plans for the Central Bank to change its approach any time soon.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: There is an unacceptable delay for people applying for carer's allowance and many families are making decisions in regard to care of a loved one who is elderly or who needs care within the family. They are applying for carer's allowance and they may be reducing their work or perhaps taking leave from work. They are now waiting 12, 14 and even 16 weeks for a decision on carer's allowance, which is unacceptable. In a short period, I have seen many families affected by this issue. We have to keep hounding the Government until we get a commitment from the Minister to ensure there is a reduction in the waiting time and that adequate resources are given to carer's allowance to make sure these applications are processed in a orderly and fast way. It is a very serious issue and I am going to continue to raise it until I get some traction from Government.

The Tánaiste: I am happy to try to get the Deputy a detailed answer. Carers do extraordinarily good work and, without them, the State would be under pressure that we would not be able to bear, frankly. I will talk to the Minister and I will try to come back with a more accurate answer than I can give today.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I want to raise again the issue of insurance. This week, I have had contact from businesses in my constituency, as I am sure every Deputy has had, about the escalating cost of insurance. Last week, Deputy Pearse Doherty raised this issue with the Tánaiste, who promised he would speak to the Minister for Finance to convene an emergency meeting. It is an emergency situation. What we have here is, in effect, a market failure where the cost of insurance is putting people out of business. It needs to be dealt with as an emergency. I want to find out if the Tánaiste has spoken to the Minister for Finance. Is that meeting happening and is it happening as an emergency?

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: On the same issue, the Tánaiste was asked last week if he would convene a meeting with the Minister for Finance. He will be aware of this issue, as we are all aware, given we are lobbied by business groups all of the time, in particular by small SMEs that cannot get insurance in various sectors of the economy. Businesses are closing and we need urgent action. We want to know whether the Tánaiste spoke to the Minister for Finance last week, as he said he would.

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The Tánaiste: I did speak briefly to the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, in regard to this issue after Question Time last week. A lot is happening in this area and there is legislation before the Seanad as we speak. We know there is a significant disparity between the award levels, in particular for soft tissue injuries, in Ireland versus the UK. That is something that has been the focus of media this morning, understandably so. As a Government, we want to try to correct this but we have to do it within the confines of the Constitution.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Page 108 of the programme for Government states that the development of the agriculture and food sector is a fundamental priority and that the priority for agriculture is rewarding farmers for high quality produce. The beef sector is currently in deep crisis and, of course, the factors that have added to this are factory prices, the current Brexit scenario and currency fluctuations, in addition to the proposed reduction in the CAP budget. Beef farmers the length and breadth of this State are experiencing serious financial losses and the 5 cent per kilo drop for beef last week has impacted further on an already bad situation. In my constituency, there are farmers in Laois and Offaly struggling to pay household bills and in great hardship. What actions and interventions, apart from the newly announced loan scheme for businesses and farmers, will be put in place to assist our farming families, particularly in the beef sector, who are experiencing great financial hardship at this time?

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I thank the Deputy for her question and particularly for her focus on the beef sector. As she is aware, we place significant emphasis, in the context of a functioning market, on having adequate competition, particularly in the area of live exports. The Deputy may have seen in one of the agricultural publications today news of significant interest in cattle for live export to Libya, which is an ongoing issue in terms of competition. With regard to the resources the State can put into the industry, the Deputy will be aware that in the most recent budget we introduced a new initiative in the beef environmental efficiency programme and we increased payments in the areas of natural constraint scheme.

We cannot, nor should we, interfere in the market relationship in terms of being able to influence prices at factory level. However, what we are doing is trying to facilitate the organisation of farmers as a collective so that, instead of negotiating on a basis of one farmer-supplier dealing with the factory, it would be done through producer organisations so they can have greater clout. We have seen a manifestation of that in the most recent development between Kepak and Glanbia in terms of producing to the market and being able to get a premium price for that. A variation of that theme is the producer organisations, which is another area where we are directing support to the beef sector.

Deputy Tom Neville: The programme for Government refers to roads. With regard to rural Ireland, I welcome the blitz in regard to the local improvement scheme and improving access to that type of private road. I would like to raise an issue in regard to tertiary roads and third class-type roads. I believe we should consider some sort of scheme and have a blitz in this area as well, which would not only aid the road network but would also aid rural Ireland. Councils are often pushing those roads into what was called the community involvement scheme, where members come up with a percentage of the cost. While that was required during recessionary times, now that we have the economic fruits coming back, we might look at a plan that would put funding into tertiary roads. Once they are done, many of these roads can last ten or 15 years.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I acknowledge Deputy Neville's strong advocacy for investment in roads at lo-

cal, regional and national level in recent years. Thankfully, in recent years we have been in a position to increase the level of funding for local and regional roads, as well as for our national network. I accept it is not enough and that there is a lot of catching up to do. We know there have been years of under-investment and we are trying to catch up on that. I will discuss the matter with the Deputy in detail. If there are any specific cases, I will bring them to the attention of the roads section of the Department.

With regard to the community involvement scheme, in certain cases where there are a small number of houses on, for example, a major road, the amount required from residents can be prohibitive, which is something we need to look at, as I appreciate. I will be happy to engage further with the Deputy.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has committed to a review of taxi licences. We know that a number of weeks ago there was an exposé where the Garda, working with the NTA, exposed scores of illegal drivers operating on our island under fraudulent names and fraudulent documentation. As referred to earlier, we also know there has been a situation in the last 24 hours, which we will not go into today. There is a commitment by the Department to review how taxi licences are issued in order to give certainty that everybody who is operating is of good character and has met their obligations in regard to Garda clearance. Will the Tánaiste confirm to the House when the review of taxi licence operation will be commenced and completed?

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I thank the Deputy. It is an important matter, not only in terms of transporting people but, from the tourism side, this is a front-line industry that is critical in regard to the impression of Ireland. We want to ensure people are reputable and that customers are getting a quality service. I understand the process is under way. I will try to get an update for the Deputy today from the Department with regard to dates and times and I will then come back directly to the Deputy.

EU Regulations: Motion

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade(Deputy Simon Coveney): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion, provided by Article 4 of Protocol No. 19 on the Schengen *Acquis* integrated into the Framework of the European Union annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to request to take part in the following measure to the extent that it relates to the operational management of the Visa Information System (VIS), the establishment, operation and use of which are governed by Council Decision 2004/512/EC, Regulation (EC) No 767/2008 and Council Decision 2008/633/JHA, the operational management of the Entry/Exit system (EES), established by Regulation (EU) 2017/2226, the operational management of the European Travel Information and Authorisation system (ETIAS) established by Regulation (EU) 2018/1241, and the operational management of the parts of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) governed by Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006 in which Ireland does not participate:

Regulation (EU) 2018/1726 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA), and amending Regulation (EC)

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No 1987/2006 and Council Decision 2007/533/JHA and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 22nd November, 2018.

Question put and agreed to.

EU Regulations: Motion

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade(Deputy Simon Coveney): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to accept the following measure, insofar as the measure relates to the operational management of Eurodac, as governed by Regulation (EU) No 603/2013, and the operational management of Dublinet, established by Commission Regulation (EC) No 1560/2003:

Regulation (EU) 2018/1726 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA), and amending Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006 and Council Decision 2007/533/JHA and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 22nd November, 2018.

Deputy Barry Cowen: On a related issue I note that some weeks ago, when he was asked about the impending European elections and whether or not the UK would take its seats, the Taoiseach said that there could be two counts to provide for either outcome. I am looking for clarification from the Government. If we are to revert to the number of seats we had in the last European Parliament, surely we should revert to the constituencies and configuration we had then. If that is the case, the constituency of Laois-Offaly is left between two constituencies.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not sure that is relevant to this motion. There is no provision for debate anyway.

Deputy Barry Cowen: It is not, but it needs to be answered and clarified, especially since the Taoiseach said there could be two counts when questioned. I could not comprehend what he was trying to say.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government(Deputy John Paul Phelan): European Parliament legislation approved by both Houses about three weeks ago sets out that there will be one count in all three constituencies. However, if Brexit is not concluded prior to the European Elections being held the final seat in Dublin and South will not be taken up until Brexit is concluded. In light of last night's agreement, one might interpret that if Britain leaves the European Union at Hallowe'en the final seat in Dublin and in South will be taken up by those who are elected in the election of 24 May, once Britain has left the European Union. That was approved and agreed unanimously by all parties in both Houses.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: That is not the question.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: It is the question.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a debate on this matter now. There is no provision for debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Estimates for Public Services 2019

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I move the following Revised Estimates:

Vote 1 — President's Establishment (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €4,434,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Secretary General to the President, for certain other expenses of the President's Establishment and for certain grants.

Vote 2 — Department of the Taoiseach (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €34,337,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Department of the Taoiseach, including certain services administered by the Department and for payment of grants.

Vote 3 — Office of the Attorney General (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €15,592,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Attorney General, including a grant.

Vote 4 — Central Statistics Office (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €54,714,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Central Statistics Office.

Vote 5 — Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Revised)

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That a sum not exceeding €42,809,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Vote 6 — Office of the Chief State Solicitor (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €34,616,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Chief State Solicitor.

Vote 7 — Office of the Minister for Finance (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €39,716,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Finance, including the Paymaster-General's Office, for certain services administered by the Office of the Minister and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 8 — Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €8,657,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Vote 9 — Office of the Revenue Commissioners (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €378,580,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, including certain other services administered by that Office.

Vote 10 — Tax Appeals Commission (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €3,208,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries

and expenses of the Tax Appeals Commission.

Vote 11 — Public Expenditure and Reform (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €58,993,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, for certain services administered by the Office of the Minister and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 12 — Superannuation and Retired Allowances (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €371,297,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for pensions, superannuation, occupational injuries, and additional and other allowances and gratuities under the Superannuation Acts 1834 to 2004 and sundry other statutes; extra-statutory pensions, allowances and gratuities awarded by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, fees to medical referees and occasional fees to doctors; compensation and other payments in respect of personal injuries; fees to Pensions Authority and other professional fees, miscellaneous payments, etc.

Vote 13 — Office of Public Works (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €439,738,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of Public Works; for services administered by that Office and for payment of certain grants and for the recoupment of certain expenditure.

Vote 14 — State Laboratory (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €9,795,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the State Laboratory.

Vote 15 — Secret Service (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €1,250,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in

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course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for Secret Service.

Vote 16 — Valuation Office (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €12,730,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Valuation Office and certain minor services.

Vote 17 — Public Appointments Service (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €14,858,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Public Appointments Service.

Vote 18 — National Shared Services Office (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €50,324,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the National Shared Services Office and that a sum not exceeding €1,168,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 19 — Office of the Ombudsman (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €11,718,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Commission for Public Service Appointments, the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information.

Vote 20 — Garda Síochána (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €1,654,808,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Garda Síochána, including pensions, etc.; for the payment of certain wit-

nesses' expenses, and for payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €3,581,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 21 — Prisons (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €349,536,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Prison Service, and other expenses in connection with prisons, including places of detention, and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 22 — Courts Service (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €90,624,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for such of the salaries and expenses of the Courts Service and of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court, the Special Criminal Court, the Circuit Court and the District Court and of certain other minor services as are not charged to the Central Fund and that a sum not exceeding €2,500,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 23 — Property Registration Authority (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €30,449,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Property Registration Authority and that a sum not exceeding €56,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 24 — Justice and Equality (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €423,714,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Justice and Equality, Probation Service staff and of certain other services including payments under cash-limited schemes administered by that Office, and payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €942,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which

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may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 25 — Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €6,662,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 26 — Education and Skills (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €9,800,656,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Education and Skills, for certain services administered by that Office, and for the payments of certain grants.

Vote 27 — International Co-operation (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €543,826,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for certain Official Development Assistance, including certain grants, and for contributions to certain International Organisations involved in Development Assistance and for salaries and expenses in connection therewith.

Vote 28 — Foreign Affairs and Trade (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €212,499,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and for certain services administered by that Office, including grants and contributions to International Organisations.

Vote 29 — Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €421,990,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries

and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €15,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 30 — Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €1,303,683,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, including certain services administered by that Office, and of the Irish Land Commission and for payment of certain grants and subsidies and for the payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes and the remediation of Haulbowline Island and that a sum not exceeding €22,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 31 — Transport, Tourism and Sport (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €2,316,869,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, including certain services administered by that Office, for payment of certain grants and certain other services and that a sum not exceeding €18,366,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 32 — Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €896,965,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, including certain services administered by that Office, for the payment of certain subsidies and grants and for the payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes and that a sum not exceeding €27,600,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 33 — Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Further Revised)

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That a sum not exceeding €335,195,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain subsidies and grants and that a sum not exceeding €700,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 34 — Housing, Planning and Local Government (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €3,937,303,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, including grants to Local Authorities, grants and other expenses in connection with housing, water services, miscellaneous schemes, subsidies and grants.

Vote 35 — Army Pensions (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €244,133,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for retired pay, pensions, compensation, allowances and gratuities payable under sundry statutes to or in respect of members of the Defence Forces and certain other Military Organisations, etc., and for sundry contributions and expenses in connection therewith; for certain extra-statutory children's allowances and other payments and for sundry grants.

Vote 36 — Defence (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €735,313,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Defence, including certain services administered by that Office; for the pay and expenses of the Defence Forces; and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 37 — Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €10,599,773,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries

and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, for certain services administered by that Office, for payments to the Social Insurance Fund and for certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €1,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 38 — Health (Further Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €16,692,260,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Health and certain other services administered by that Office, including grants to the Health Service Executive and miscellaneous grants.

Vote 39 — Office of Government Procurement (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €18,031,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of Government Procurement and that a sum not exceeding €96,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 40 — Children and Youth Affairs (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €1,482,676,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, for certain services administered by that Office and for the payment of grants including certain grants under cash-limited schemes.

Vote 41 — Policing Authority (Revised)

That a sum not exceeding €3,324,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Policing Authority.

Vote 42 — Rural and Community Development (Further Revised)

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That a sum not exceeding €260,682,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Rural and Community Development including certain services administered by that Office and for the payment of grants.

The Revised Estimates Volume, REV, for public services was presented to the House last December, with further Revised Estimates presented to the House in February. The Estimates set out the allocation of Government expenditure by Vote for this year, amounting to €66.6 billion, an increase of 5.5% on the outturn in 2018. The vast majority of this, nearly 90%, relates to day-to-day current expenditure. This represents a year-on-year increase of almost 4%. Indeed, combined funding for the key day-to-day public services of the Departments of Health, Education and Skills and Employment Affairs and Social Protection amounts to almost €47 billion in 2019, almost 79% of total expenditure.

Spending on our health service is now at a record level. Including the allocation of capital spending, it now stands at €17 billion. This is an increase of over €1 billion on the amount spent in 2018.

Turning to education I note that this year's allocation amounts to €10.8 billion, an increase of over 5% on the 2018 outturn. This will allow for the recruitment of additional teachers and special needs assistants and enable more targeted investment in higher and further education to meet the skills and education needs of the labour market.

Some €20.5 billion has been allocated to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. This allocation includes provision for an increase of €5 per week in the weekly maximum rates of all social welfare payments. Jobseekers on age-related reduced rates of payment will benefit from the full increase.

Other areas of investment include the recruitment of additional gardaí and additional housing supports in the shape of increased funding for the housing assistance payment. Furthermore, additional funding has been provided to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to facilitate our children and young people in reaching their potential.

A high level of uncertainty still exists in relation to Brexit. It is an event which under any circumstances is unfavourable for the State. That is why we need to be careful with our public finances. We also need to put in place plans like the future growth loan scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, and the agriculture and food sector.

Overall capital expenditure will amount to €7.3 billion this year. This represents an increase of approximately €1.4 billion on last year's outturn. This will play an important role in delivering public infrastructure across Ireland, particularly in areas such as housing, education, healthcare and transport. Additional funding is being provided for enterprise supports to support economic recovery and promote jobs growth. Increased funding is also being provided to support investment in areas such as flood defences and climate change mitigation.

This allocation to capital infrastructure is consistent with the national development plan and Project Ireland 2040, which set out a ten-year investment of approximately €116 billion. As recent events have clearly demonstrated, to protect this investment we must put the right structures in place to deal with capital cost overruns. In light of this, new procedures are now being developed in the context of the ongoing review of the public spending code and the new medium-term strategy of the Office of Government Procurement. The allocation of these re-

sources provides investment to build our economy and support our long-term growth. Passage of these Estimates will allow the House to put in place the funding that we need to maintain current services for our State and provide support to citizens in the areas the House has committed to.

Deputy Barry Cowen: As we know, these Estimates were discussed before being put before the relevant committees and are now before the House again for its expected approval. I acknowledge that. It is pertinent that this is happening in the week that the PricewaterhouseCoopers, PwC, report was published. In that context I looked up the mission statement for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which is “To serve the country, its people and the Government by delivering well-managed and well-targeted public spending, through modernised, effective and accountable public services”.

One would have thought that the PwC report would reflect or confirm that this Department was all over the national children’s hospital project. It is the Department charged with responsibility for ensuring that the taxpayers’ money is dealt with appropriately, as per the mission statement. However, the Department is only mentioned twice in the report; in the glossary and when the Minister was informed about the overrun after the event. That does not reflect very well on the Department’s role or its mission statement. The Department is quick to take responsibility for high-vis jackets and shovels when projects are announced, but it has been twice as quick to hide behind the contract committee, a subcommittee of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board which decided on a split contract.

It was the Minister’s job to take on board, analyse and scrutinise the board’s recommendation. It appears there was a failure there. There was a failure in the contract committee’s decision and a failure on the part of the Minister and his Department, which did not adequately analyse or scrutinise that recommendation. It was accepted verbatim. The Minister can respond if and when he wishes, but it is patently obvious to me that there was a glaring failure on the part of the contracts committee which was compounded thereafter when the matter was referred to the Minister, as it was his responsibility to adhere to the board’s wishes.

I will pick some phrases from the PwC report that leap off the pages. They include “significant failures”, “a lack of sufficiently comprehensive or robust planning”, “poor at all levels of governance structure”, “red flags were missed”, “contained material errors and did not adhere to the public spending code”, “poorly co-ordinated and controlled”, “weak and inadequate”, “unstructured”, “fragmented” and “lacked key information”, yet we have no accountability. It is essential that the recommendations made in the report be implemented swiftly and measures put in place to address a further risk of cost increases.

We face into another significant project, another responsibility borne by the Minister, in the provision of broadband. When I asked two questions in recent weeks, I received contradictory answers from the Minister and his colleague, the Minister with responsibility for the project, Deputy Bruton. The Minister said initially that he would carry out due diligence, but now I am told that he is not adhering to his own commitment in that regard. What is the Department’s role if it cannot live up to its own mission statement? Clarity is required at this early stage on the Minister’s involvement in the due diligence process in the preparation of contracts for the remaining bidder in the provision of broadband. Given what is clear in the PwC report and the extracts I quoted, it is essential that we do not have a repetition of what happened at the national children’s hospital. I received contradictory information in the responses I received to the questions I asked about due diligence being carried out by the Department of Communica-

tions, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. That matter must be clarified because the Dáil must ensure the lessons learned, to the tune of €100 million this year and €100 million for the next four years, will have a significant impact on many constituents who expect public capital programmes to be carried out in accordance with what was originally outlined in the 2040 plan.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: The Minister outlined what the moneys outlined in the Revised Estimates would be used for. I wish to focus on two areas, one of which is the increased provision for the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme to account for 16,000 extra tenancies. While that is welcome, there is a downside to pumping more money into the HAP system which I believe is flawed. The number of people coming into my constituency office who are being evicted from HAP properties into homelessness is increasing. I am sure it is reflected across all constituencies. Issues arise with HAP tenancies that must be addressed by the Government. It is becoming commonplace for landlords to send tenants a notice to quit on the basis that their property is going to be sold or that a family member is moving into it. I can provide the Minister with evidence to show that properties are back in the rental market six months later, as family members have not moved into them and they have not been sold. Tenants have been evicted because of three loopholes, as I call them, and end up in emergency accommodation at great financial and social cost to individuals and the rents charged for the properties are hiked up. That is something which needs to be addressed.

I welcome the publication yesterday of the PwC report on the national children's hospital. It was appropriate that the Government published it at the earliest opportunity and I have read it. I disagree slightly with Deputy Cowen on his point about the role of the contracts committee. To be clear, it did not make the decision to implement the two-stage process. It was asked for an opinion on whether the development board could use such a process. It outlined all of the pros and cons in undertaking the project over a two-stage tendering process and they were outlined clearly in the report. The decision to go down that road was made by the development board, not the contracts committee.

The oversight bodies that were put in place - the steering group and the programme project group - come in for some criticism in the report. The phrase being used is that they were hampered. They were able to assess the information coming from the development board, but they were not able to question a lot of the decision-making process.

The Government has asked for a number of weeks to assess the report and examine the recommendations made. I presume it will come forward with ways by which we can improve future capital projects. I have a number of questions. I hope we will have an opportunity to discuss the PwC report. I accept that the various committees will discuss it in the coming weeks, but it is important that Opposition spokespersons such as Deputies Cowen and Burton and I have an opportunity to sit down with the Minister and some officials to go through some of the issues raised. Fianna Fáil introduced legislation to strengthen the tendering, contracts and procurement process. We also introduced legislation. Rather than the Government automatically knocking back the proposals, it would be an ideal opportunity for us to meet the Minister and his officials to see if there were some good ideas. We all have a responsibility in that regard, not just the Government. With any other Deputy, I could be in government in the morning. We must ensure the processes and procedures we put in place will serve us well in the next 20 years and the lifetime of the national development plan. I urge the Minister to consider arranging such a meeting to examine the proposals each of us has to make and come to an agreement on how best to proceed to ensure we will not see another major overrun. That would be a good

starting point.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister may or may not be aware that yesterday there was overcrowding on the train services from Kildare and west Dublin into town, so much so that by the time trains reached Castleknock people could not get onto them. I have taken up this matter for the past year and a half with the relevant people involved in transport services because, as more people go back to work, there is a greater demand for public transport. When I was a member of the Cabinet, electrification of the railway line was well advanced and on target to be at detailed planning stage now, but the project seems to have been put on the long finger and has not been included in the extended capital plan for the period 2020 to 2040. This morning when I was talking to commuters about their experiences yesterday, I had to say to them I had no idea when the Government intended to proceed with electrification of the Maynooth railway line. I wish I could tell them because when I was a member of the Cabinet, I was confident about the time horizon, but I am not any longer. I travel to other cities where I see people taking double decker trains. In a carbon conscious world there are far more people using public transport, yet what we are offered in Dublin, to put it mildly, is a very confusing BusConnects report which is well intentioned, but it was a computer based survey carried out by engineers who did not know the city and had to learn about the questionable points made in the proposals from local people and public representatives. I have been excusing the Government on the grounds that it is very occupied by Brexit, but I am now very worried that the commitment to decarbonising the economy through better and more frequent public transport services is slipping behind. When the Minister and I were in government, we had the Luas line extended to Broombridge. We had the tunnel under the Phoenix Park reopened-----

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: Yes.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----something for which we had been asking of CIÉ for years. However, these achievements are now entering the realm of history. I do not know what to say to the people who could not get on a train at Ashtown yesterday and those who could not possibly get on it further down the line. For Heaven's sake, people could not get on the train at Castleknock because it was already packed. I went there this morning to see for myself what was happening. The Minister needs to send somebody to take a look at what is happening there.

On the national children's hospital, the suggestion is that it was a cost underestimate, rather than a cost overrun. I have to confess to working as an accountant in a previous life and given the client, it certainly sounds like the language they can take home to mammy or somebody like her to explain what went wrong without really explaining it. Does it mean that the State is a soft touch for firms of professional advisers in pitching for any cost increase for which they care to pitch? What are the implications for other projects? We know that hospitals are being built across the world. Recently I referred the Taoiseach to the new hospital being built and developed in Lisbon. It will cost a fraction of what it will cost to build the national children's hospital in Ireland. At various locations in America costs are very much lower. Obviously, I do not expect the Minister to be able to answer a question about broadband, but the all-singing, all-dancing broadband plan, replete with social media posts and videos, is due to be launched shortly and what are we to believe? In respect of current expenditure, not just capital expenditure in the Estimates, is it true that the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, is already touting the idea that he may need an extra €1 billion by the end of the year? The figures, therefore, are continuing to climb.

Alongside this, the Minister is facing demands in respect of public pay and performance.

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He is promising to review the guidelines for civil servants on boards in order that we can receive more timely information. I do not know whether the Minister proposes to do this, but we need much more information. Otherwise, outside Brexit, this seems to be a Government that is adrift because we are moving further from the promises made in the capital plan in terms of implementation schedules. Costs are rising at a level which is frightening for many taxpayers in terms of what they will have to fund down the line. That is in dereliction of the first responsibility of the Government.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Deputy Burton's comments remind me that the wonderful new stadium built by Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane cost just over €1 billion which is perhaps half the cost of the new national children's hospital.

The introduction to the Revised Estimates mentions that they "have been supplemented with key performance information regarding programme outputs and impacts". We were also promised that information on key performance indicators would be provided in the 2019 HSE service plan and that a number of post-budget technical and policy adjustments would be included in the Revised Estimates. However, if we examine the expenditure of €66.6 billion in 42 Votes, while there is some useful information on the delivery of spending programmes, we will see the performance metrics for each Vote give little insight into the achievement of the strategy being pursued by each Department of State. That is particularly true for the €52.3 billion or 78% of total Government spending provided for in four key areas - Department of Education and Skills, Vote 26; the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Vote 34; the Department of Health, Vote 38; and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Vote 37.

The excellent Parliamentary Budget Office, in Paper No. 10 of 2019 on the Revised Estimates, notes, for example, that the modelling of retirements from the education sector is an ongoing issue which has required a Supplementary Estimate each year since 2014, yet the Minister has not addressed it. Also, there are issues with the European Social Fund and the capital budget accounting systems of the Department of Education and Skills.

I represent the constituency of Dublin Bay North which has about 7,000 households on housing and homeless lists. It has the worst total of any constituency or county. The critical metric of 10,000 citizens in emergency and homeless accommodation was passed a few weeks ago. The housing Vote is rising from a figure of €3.3 billion in 2018 to almost €4 billion in 2019, yet the housing output metrics on page 160 do not give any hint of how this sum can remotely address the ongoing suffering of the tens of thousands of citizens in dire need of housing, of which the Minister is very aware. There is an element of "housing solutions" about which we hear in the PR statements of Fingal County Council and councils in other counties when, as my colleague said, it actually refers to the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme tenancies. The Minister has provided for a further 17,000 such tenancies in the Revised Estimates.

Since its inception, the Parliamentary Budget Office has, rightly, drawn attention to difficulties in measuring and assessing Vote 38 for the Department of Health and, in particular, the problems in reconciling expenditure incurred under the HSE national service plan with voted expenditure and the annual use of Supplementary Estimates. Expenditure is projected to be €16.6 billion, or just over €17 billion taking account of appropriations-in-aid of €405 million. Much of the increase seems to be related to the acute hospitals sector. I hope we will see the results of that expenditure on the ground. It is not clear if the first charge is dealt with in the 2017-18 budget and the carryover to 2018-19. Also, as we do not yet have the 2019 national service plan, how exactly can the Vote work?

The austerity Governments have held Vote 37 for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection virtually static since the crash. It now stands at €10.6 billion, €200 million less than in 2018. With the inclusion of the Social Insurance Fund, the figure is approximately €20 billion, the same it has been throughout the austerity era. The Parliamentary Budget Office has drawn attention to the Christmas bonus. Why does the Minister not mainstream it as basic income at Christmas time for citizens on lower income and not leave it to the whim of the Government?

Yesterday, at the Committee on Budgetary Oversight, I asked the Chairman and committee members to respond vigorously to the report of the PwC consultants on the outrageous escalation in the cost of the national paediatric hospital. I asked the Minister to come before the committee and understand he will do so shortly. At long last, we might see the Secretary General of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr. Robert Watt, also talking to the committee. I asked specifically that the committee focus on the reason the so-called red flags in respect of the runaway cost of the project were not noticed or acted on by the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, their Secretaries General and senior staff since about 2013. It is incredible that at management committee meetings - there was an item related to risk on the agenda for every meeting - the Minister was not raising his own red flags virtually each month on the biggest infrastructural project in the State until we come to build the metro. It is astonishing that the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, said nothing to the Minister for three or four months about this incredible elephant in the room. Many of us worked in the construction sector earlier in our lives. Almost all of us have been on building sites, but probably the most experienced Deputy in that regard is Deputy Wallace. He made a powerful and cogent case yesterday for a retendering process the completion of the project at St. James's Hospital, with bills of quantities based on clear, transparent and detailed architectural and engineering designs. The Minister could try to fix this problem.

We have all watched the proceedings in the House of Commons in the past three or four months. If they were in the House of Commons, this Minister, Deputy Donohoe, and the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, would be gone. There is no question about that. The least the Minister can do now is try to fix and curtail it. As the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and the Minister like to point out, we have not spent the vast bulk of this money yet. We can do it better, and the Deputy who is probably the most accomplished person in this area, even though many of us have experience in the building sector, made a strong case. We have had the revised Revised Estimates, or whatever they were called, and €75 million has been lost by other bodies.

With regard to the capital budget, the Parliamentary Budget Office, PBO, has suggested a capital reserve and a move to programme logic model analysis. Those are two suggestions the Minister's staff might examine for coming years.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I thank the Deputies for their contributions and I will respond to the points they made. First, as was acknowledged by Deputy Cowen, these Estimates have gone through their relevant committees. I took the Estimates for both of my Departments to the committee a number of weeks ago and my colleagues did the same with theirs. That means all the Votes in these Revised Estimates went through detailed scrutiny on the many different points that have been raised by Deputies today.

Second, with regard to the discussion that is under way about Ireland 2040 and the national children's hospital, while of course the Deputies and I will always point to what must be improved or changed, as Deputy Burton did, we should also give a degree of recognition to the

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fact that this is a plan that this year will deliver 6,500 new homes built, 90 new schools, 18 new primary care centres and three major road projects across the State. It is understandable that the House would focus on the great difficulties and what went wrong with the national children's hospital, and the PwC report will be discussed further in the House next week, but I also wish to recognise the progress that the plan is making and the difference it is making to communities and citizens at present.

A further point was made about oversight of different Votes and the status of those Votes. Deputy Broughan referred to the Vote for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. In deciding that the Vote is flat the Deputy was using as his benchmark the budget of a number of years ago, during a difficult period when the then Minister, Deputy Burton, had many challenging choices to make. In that period Deputy Burton ensured that the social welfare payments for many hundreds of thousands of people who were unemployed did not go down. The Deputy is now evaluating this Vote at a time of almost full employment against a point when we had an unimaginably high level of unemployment. He has to compare that Department's Vote in the context of what was happening in the labour market with joblessness at the time.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien raised a point about procurement, and I am aware of the number of Bills the House is putting forward in this regard. Officials from my Department met the Deputy to discuss his Bill. They pointed out to the Deputy that we have a genuine difficulty with some areas of the Bill. However, if colleagues, including Deputy O'Brien, wish to be constructive on this and to see if we can build a consensus on whether legislative change is needed in our procurement strategy, I will be happy to meet them and I will do so after Easter to have a discussion about it. One of the many things I have learned about procurement policy is that changes in one area can have many different unintended consequences. I would like the opportunity to talk to the Deputy, and any other Deputies who wish to join us, about that.

Deputy Cowen raised a number of questions about the national children's hospital. I will be discussing this in the House again next week. I have discussed it with the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach, and I am due to appear again before the Committee on Budgetary Oversight next Thursday, which might provide an opportunity to discuss it further.

Deputy Burton pointed to the progress we have made in public transport. I am pleased to have been part of a Government that brought the Luas to Cabra and made changes to the Phoenix Park tunnel. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, is involved in many big and positive changes in public transport and he has secured a very high level of funding for that Department. I accept there are difficulties due to congestion and how busy the train and Luas carriages are, but that is the reason I am asking the House to support these Revised Estimates. They contain funding and resources that can make a difference to these problems in 2019.

Finally, in response to Deputy Broughan, in any context or setting it is always great to hear him talk about White Hart Lane.

Votes put and agreed to.

An Bille um an Ochtú Leasú is Tríocha ar an mBunreacht (Neodracht) 2018: An Dara Céim (Atógáil) [Comhaltaí Príobháideacha]

Thirty-Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Neutrality) Bill 2018: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: We must deal with a postponed division relating to the Thirty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Neutrality) Bill 2018.

Cuireadh an cheist arís: “Go léifear an Bille an Dara hUair anois.”

Question again put: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 41; Níl, 80; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staan</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
<i>O’Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
<i>O’Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
<i>O’Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	

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<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	

	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Seán Crowe; Níl, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin.

Question declared lost.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis diúltú don cheist.

Building the Housing of the Future: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Jan O'Sullivan on Wednesday, 10 April 2019:

That Dáil Éireann:

declares that:

— shelter is a fundamental human right, as recognised in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in Ireland everyone has a right to
2 o'clock decent, affordable housing;

— it is the duty of the Government and the State, as well as of everyone in society, to ensure that every person can have their right to shelter fulfilled, through the provision of quality affordable housing; and

— in the context of Ireland's obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all housing should be designed or retrofitted to minimise emissions, and in so doing, reduce and eliminate energy poverty;

acknowledges that:

— the cost of renting and home purchase has soared in recent years, especially in the major urban areas, far in excess of the average household incomes, which clearly shows

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that the current situation is unsustainable and that housing is no longer affordable for many workers;

— more than 10,000 persons are currently homeless, tens of thousands of people have experienced homelessness in recent years, and every year more people are becoming homeless than are leaving homelessness; and

— around 75,000 households (4.4 per cent) are unable to afford to keep their homes adequately warm, and around 138,000 (8.1 per cent) go without heating at some point during the year;

recognises that:

— for over 10,000 people to be homeless is a national scandal and proves Government policy on housing to have failed utterly;

— Ireland's market-dependent approach to housing provision has failed and a fundamentally new approach is required;

— in some European countries, especially in cities such as Vienna, a much larger proportion of the population rents their homes from public authorities;

— in some European countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, housing co-operatives provide a much larger proportion of the housing stock, which is more affordable;

— in other jurisdictions, standards of insulation are much higher than in Ireland, whereas in Ireland nearly half (49 per cent) of all dwellings with an energy rating, are rated D1 or worse;

— the Government has the means to invest at least €16 billion for State-led development of social housing and affordable public housing without increasing taxes;

— the State can build well-insulated, good quality homes for less than €200,000 per unit on publicly-owned land; and

— State-led action to provide social housing and affordable housing would reduce house prices overall, making it easier for young families to afford home ownership, if they wish, while also providing them with a secure alternative; and

calls on the Government to:

— create an Irish housing development bank, by merging parts of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) with the Housing Agency, Housing Finance Agency and the Land Development Agency, to act as a State-owned commercial housing developer with a remit to produce social housing and affordable public housing on publicly-owned land;

— allocate €5 billion from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund to the Irish housing development bank;

— allocate annual payments of €500 million to the Irish housing development bank rather than to the so-called 'rainy day fund';

— establish a State-led public housing fund in the Central Bank of Ireland, to allow

credit unions to invest some or all of their approximately €14 billion in savings, so that this money can be used by the Irish housing development bank to develop social housing and affordable public housing;

— create through these means a fund of no less than €16 billion which can be invested to develop at least 80,000 units of social housing and affordable public housing on publicly-owned land over the next five years;

— keep the same or greater amount of land for residential housing in public ownership;

— establish a retrofitting scheme, to ensure that all local authority housing is brought up to a high-energy rating in terms of good insulation and energy efficiency;

— raise the requirement to sell housing units at cost to the local authority under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 from 10 per cent to 20 per cent, and allow local authorities to choose which units to purchase at cost;

— create housing executives within a number of local authorities, to operate as shared services across all of the State and to restore the necessary competencies for housing management, maintenance and development at local government level;

— strengthen the protection of tenants in the private rented sector, especially those at risk of homelessness, while supporting landlords with only one or two properties to comply with the law;

— provide a strong legal basis for long-term leasing of private residential property, with safeguards for older people and people affected by illness or disability; and

— support home ownership by supporting the development of housing co-operatives and by regulating institutional buy-to-let investors to ensure they have no unfair advantage over households seeking to purchase housing.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 3:

To delete all words after “That” and substitute the following:

“Dáil Éireann acknowledges the extensive range of measures which the Government has brought forward to address the significant challenges in the housing sector and, in particular, notes that:

— the Government introduced the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness in 2016, providing a comprehensive framework for tackling the range of complex issues needing to be addressed across the housing sector, and it is underpinned by over €6 billion in funding to support the delivery of 50,000 new social housing homes and 87,000 other housing supports over the 6 years from 2016 to 2021;

— very significant progress has been made on delivery through local authorities, approved housing bodies (AHBs) and a range of other delivery partners, with over 72,000 households having their housing needs met during the first three years of Rebuilding Ireland, with a further 27,300 households, supported by a record investment of €2.4 billion in housing, to be supported this year, bringing to almost 100,000 the

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total number of households who will have been assisted under Rebuilding Ireland by the end of 2019;

— notwithstanding the continued increases in homelessness, record exits from homelessness into sustainable tenancies have been achieved in recent years and the Government remains resolutely focused on ensuring that all appropriate measures to address the challenges in relation to homelessness will continue to be deployed, including:

— the national roll out of Housing First;

— the provision of additional emergency beds to reduce rough sleeping; and

— the further development of family hubs to provide more appropriate short term accommodation for families than can be provided through hotels, while more enduring housing solutions are brought forward;

— Rebuilding Ireland is further supported by Project Ireland 2040, the Government's overarching policy initiative to align, in a strategic manner, our spatial planning and investment programmes, to underpin a sustainable approach to planning for a growing population and the associated need for housing;

— the new €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund aims to support sustainable growth in Ireland's five cities and other large urban centres, with the aim of delivering at least 40 per cent of our future housing needs within our existing built-up areas;

— the Land Development Agency (LDA) has been established to ensure more effective co-ordination and management of the development of lands, in particular publicly-owned lands in our urban centres, supporting the ambition to achieve more compact and sustainable growth;

— the LDA has an immediate focus on managing the State's own lands to develop new homes, and regenerate under-utilised sites and, in the longer-term, assembling strategic landbanks from a mix of public and private lands, with the overall objective to be involved in the delivery of 150,000 new homes over the next 20 years;

— to enable more delivery of social and affordable homes on public lands, the Government has, in parallel with the establishment of the LDA, approved a new public land affordability requirement, whereby a minimum of 30 per cent of any housing developed must be reserved for affordable purposes, be it affordable purchase or cost rental, in addition to the 10 per cent statutory social housing requirement under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, whether such development is being progressed by the LDA or any other market operator;

— following enactment of the required primary legislation, arrangements will be finalised in relation to the capitalisation of the LDA, through a combination of transfers from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and private finance, with capital of up to €1.25 billion to be used to fund enabling feasibility appraisal, masterplanning, infrastructure, and in some cases the ultimate development of sites, as well as strategic private land acquisition;

— in order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, funding of €310 million over 2019 to 2021 has been allocated for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) in Budget 2019;

— cost rental housing is being brought forward in conjunction with the Housing Agency, the Land Development Agency, local authorities and other stakeholders, with two pilot projects already being progressed;

— there is no current legislative or regulatory impediment to the credit union sector (or any other party) establishing a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to invest credit union funds in Tier 3 AHBs, and on foot of proposals from the credit union sector, a new investment framework was introduced by the Central Bank in March 2018, following a public consultation, to specifically allow for such investments up to certain limits;

— in terms of housing generally, overall supply continues to show significant increases, with over 18,000 new homes built in 2018, a 25 per cent increase on the previous year and the highest number of newly built homes any year this decade and, in addition, more than 2,500 homes were brought out of long-term vacancy, and almost 800 dwellings in unfinished housing developments were completed, meaning the number of new homes available for use increased by almost 21,500 in 2018, together with over 3,700 student bed spaces;

— there is clear evidence of moderation in the annual rate of growth of house prices, due primarily to increasing supply and the Central Bank macro-prudential rules, and residential property prices increased by 5.6 per cent nationally in the year to January 2019, compared to 6.4 per cent in the year to December and 11.8 per cent in the year to January 2018;

— moderation in the rate of rent increases is also evident, reflecting increased supply and the impact of the measures introduced under the Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector, including the introduction of Rent Pressure Zones in areas of high and increasing rents, and further strengthening of these and other measures in the rental sector is being introduced through the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2018;

— the Housing Agency has a broad remit to work with and support local authorities, approved housing bodies, and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in the delivery of housing and housing services and is already working with the LDA in appropriate areas;

— the Housing Finance Agency is operating effectively, in advancing loan finance to local authorities and the voluntary housing sector;

— the Government has also established Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI), a new State lender for small and medium sized builders/developers, with an initial €750 million to fund the delivery of up to 7,500 new homes over the next five years;

— the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) was established with a very specific legal mandate, which was approved by the European Commission in 2010 and it is important that NAMA's role is preserved and that it completes its work in

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line with its original mandate;

— The ‘rainy day fund’ forms part of the Government’s policy to stabilise the public finances and increase the State’s resilience to external economic shocks, and it is intended to act as a counter-cyclical buffer which can complement the operation of the automatic stabilisers in the event of a particularly severe economic downturn; and the annual allocation will operate in the first instance as a contingency reserve that may be drawn on in the event of a serious unforeseeable event occurring during the relevant year, with the unused balance rolling into the ‘rainy day fund’;

— the Government’s commitment to improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock, through a number of grant schemes to encourage energy efficiency upgrades in homes, including supports for lower income households, an energy efficiency programme in the social housing stock that has seen 64,000 homes upgraded with some €116 million of investment to end 2018, with a further 9,000 homes to be upgraded in 2019;

— the National Development Plan sets out the Government’s target of 45,000 deeper retrofits each year from 2021;

— new Building Regulations will be brought forward to introduce minimum energy performance requirements for existing buildings undergoing major renovation where feasible; and

— the issue of a right to housing has been addressed in the Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution, which, by resolution of both Houses, has been referred to the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach for consideration.

- (Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion re building the housing of the future. On Wednesday, 10 April 2019 on the question, “That the amendment be agreed to”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment again put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 45; Níl, 74; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	

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<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	

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	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Brendan Ryan and Jan O'Sullivan.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I move amendment No. 2:

To delete all words after “calls on the Government to:” and substitute the following:

“— dramatically increase the supply of social and affordable (including cost rental) housing by increasing capital spending on housing to €2.3 billion;

— increase Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 requirements to 20 per cent in standard developments, and 30 per cent in strategic development zones;

— prioritise the delivery of public housing on public land, and aggressively target the return of vacant houses to active use;

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— ensure local authorities are fully-funded and staffed to carry out this ambitious public house building programme, as local authorities are best placed to democratically deliver social and affordable housing need;

— reduce the flow of adults and children into homelessness with emergency legislation to make it illegal for landlords, banks and investment funds to evict tenants and homeowners in mortgage distress into homelessness;

— provide real security of tenure and introduce a temporary rent freeze and measures to reduce the cost of rent;

— introduce a target for ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough; and

— hold a referendum to enshrine the Right to Housing in the Constitution of Ireland.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 26; Níl, 92; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	

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<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	

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	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell; Níl, Deputies Brendan Ryan and Jan O'Sullivan.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move amendment No. 4:

To delete all words after “calls on the Government to:” and substitute with:

“— merge the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), the Housing Agency, Housing Finance Agency and the Land Development Agency and all their land, resources and assets to establish a State-owned housing construction company, which will work with local authorities and other State and semi-State agencies to produce social and affordable housing on publicly-owned land;

— allocate €5 billion from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund to the Irish housing

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construction company;

— allocate annual payments of €500 million to the Irish housing construction company rather than to the so-called ‘rainy day fund’;

— establish a State-led public housing fund in the Central Bank of Ireland, to allow credit unions to invest some or all of their approximately €14 billion in savings, so that this money can be used by the Irish housing construction company to develop social housing and affordable public housing;

— create through these means a fund of no less than €16 billion which can be invested to develop at least 80,000 units of social housing and affordable public housing on publicly-owned land over the next five years;

— immediately cease the sale or transfer of any and all publicly-owned land whether owned by local authorities, State or semi-State agencies;

— establish a retrofitting scheme, to ensure that all local authority housing is brought up to a high-energy rating in terms of good insulation and energy efficiency;

— raise the requirement to sell housing units at cost to the local authority under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 from 10 per cent to 20 and 30 per cent in strategic development zones, and allow local authorities to choose which land or units to purchase at cost and ensuring in the case of purchase, the public homes are of the same standard and quality as the homes in the rest of the development and further empowering local authorities to impose severe penalties and sanctions on any private developer who shows evidence of land hoarding;

— support the development of housing co-operatives;

— immediately abolish the income eligibility thresholds for social housing so that people of all incomes can apply for social housing in order to ensure real social mix and to end the stigma around social housing;

— dramatically increase the supply of social and affordable (including cost rental) housing by increasing capital spending on housing to €2.3 billion;

— prioritise the delivery of public housing on public land, and aggressively target the return of vacant houses to active use;

— ensure local authorities are fully-funded and staffed to carry out this ambitious public house building programme, as local authorities are best placed to democratically deliver social and affordable housing need;

— reduce the flow of adults and children into homelessness with emergency legislation to make it illegal for landlords, banks and investment funds to evict tenants and homeowners in mortgage distress into homelessness;

— provide real security of tenure and introduce an emergency rent freeze and measures to reduce the cost of rent;

— introduce a target for ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough;
and

— hold a referendum to enshrine the Right to Housing in the Constitution of Ireland.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 18; Níl, 98; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	
	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	

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	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	

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	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett and Bríd Smith; Níl, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I move amendment No.1:

To delete the following words:

“ — allocate annual payments of €500 million to the Irish housing development bank rather than to the so-called ‘rainy day fund’;”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 3; Níl, 111; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
	<i>Brady, John.</i>	

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	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	
	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	

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	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	

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	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brid.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Eamon Ryan and Catherine Martin; Níl, Deputies Brendan Ryan and Jan O'Sullivan.

Amendment declared lost.

Question put: "That the motion be agreed to."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 56; Níl, 60; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	

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<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
<i>O'Keefe, Kevin.</i>	<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	

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<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Ryan and Jan O’Sullivan; Níl, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin.

Question declared lost.

Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Direct Election of Mayor Plebiscite Regulations 2019: Motion (Resumed)

The following motion was moved by the Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy John Paul Phelan, on Wednesday, 10 April 2019:

That Dáil Éireann approves the following Regulations in draft:

Direct Election of Mayor Plebiscite Regulations 2019,

a copy of which was laid in draft form before Dáil Éireann on 1st April, 2019.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Direct Election of Mayor Plebiscite Regulations 2019 taken on Wednesday, 10 April 2019. On the question, “That the motion be agreed to”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2) that division must be taken now.

Question again put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 97; Níl, 10; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	

Dáil Éireann

<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>	
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>		
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>		
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>		
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>		
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>		
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>		
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>		
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>		
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>		
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>		
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>		
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>		
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>		
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>		
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>		
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>		
<i>Curran, John.</i>		
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>		
<i>Deasy, John.</i>		
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>		
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>		
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>		
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>		
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>		
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>		
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>		
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>		
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>		
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>		
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>		
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>		
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>		
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>		

<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>		
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>		
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>		
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>		
<i>Lahart, John.</i>		
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>		
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>		
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>		
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>		
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>		
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>		
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>		
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>		
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>		
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>		
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>		
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>		
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>		

<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>		
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Mattie McGrath and Michael Collins.

Question declared.

Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019: Second Stage (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019 taken on Wednesday, 10 April 2019. On the question, “That the Bill be now read a Second Time”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2) that division must be taken now.

Question again put: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 102; Níl, 2; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>		
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>		
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>		
<i>Brady, John.</i>		
<i>Brassil, John.</i>		
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>		
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>		
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>		
<i>Browne, James.</i>		
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>		

<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>		
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>		
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>		
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>		
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>		
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>		
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>		
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>		
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>		
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>		
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>		
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>		
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>		
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>		
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>		
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>		
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>		
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>		
<i>Curran, John.</i>		
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>		
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>		
<i>Deasy, John.</i>		
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>		
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>		
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>		
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>		
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>		
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>		
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>		
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>		
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>		
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>		
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>		
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>		
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>		
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>		
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>		
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>		
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>		

<i>Lahart, John.</i>		
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>		
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>		
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>		
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>		
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>		
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>		
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>		
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>		
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>		
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>		
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>		

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<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>		
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>		
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Mattie McGrath and Michael Collins.

Question declared carried.

Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019: Referral to Select Committee

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Health pursuant to Standing Orders 84A(3)(a) and 149(1).

Question put and agreed to.

Courts (Establishment and Constitution) (Amendment) Bill 2019: Second Stage (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Courts (Establishment and Constitution) (Amendment) Bill 2019 taken on Wednesday, 10 April 2019. On the question, “That the Bill be now read a Second Time”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2) that division must be taken now.

Question again put: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

Deputies: Votáil.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputies claiming a division please rise?

Deputies Michael Collins and Mattie McGrath rose.

An Ceann Comhairle: As fewer than ten Members have risen I declare the question carried. In accordance with Standing Order 72 the names of the Deputies dissenting will be recorded in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Dáil.

Question declared carried.

Courts (Establishment and Constitution) (Amendment) Bill 2019: Referral to Select Committee

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Justice and Equality pursuant to Standing Orders 84A(3)(a) and 149(1).

Question put and agreed to.

Sitting suspended at 2.50 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

Message from Seanad

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Thirty-Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Dissolution of Marriage) Bill 2016 without amendment.

A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Some six weeks ago the Government launched Ireland's new policy for international development, known as A Better World. A Better World represents the culmination of over 16 months of work, including extensive consultation across Departments, with external stakeholders and with the public, including public meetings in Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo and Dublin. I would like particularly to thank the many citizens across Ireland who contributed to the consultation process on this important policy. A Better World is a clear statement of Ireland's commitment to global citizenship, helping make our planet a better place to live for others and for ourselves.

A characteristic of Ireland's official development co-operation since it was established in 1974 has been the strong support shown by Members of the Oireachtas. The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence, reviewed Ireland's development co-operation programme in 2017. That review played an important role in informing A Better World. There was resounding support in the public consultations for the committee's recommendations to put the sustainable development goals, SDGs, to the fore and to focus on reaching the furthest behind first. Prioritising gender equality, education and agriculture also gained broad support.

As the committee recognised, Ireland has a global reputation for delivering a quality development co-operation programme and for providing untied aid, delivering results for those most in need. A Better World provides the framework to build on and expand that reputation. Central to this is the Government's commitment to delivering 0.7% of gross national income

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to official development assistance, ODA, by 2030, as stated in the global Ireland strategy to double Ireland's global footprint and impact by 2025 and reiterated by both the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste at the launch of A Better World. This is a significant commitment that could see us tripling our current contributions by 2030.

We are making progress. Allocations to ODA have increased by 32% since 2014 and Irish ODA in 2019 is forecast to reach almost €817 million, an increase of approximately €110 million or 16% on 2018 budget announcements.

A Better World will guide this expansion. It is an investment in a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world. While this is a significant investment, the costs to future generations will be far greater if we do not invest now in addressing global challenges such as violent conflict, climate change and growing inequalities. This commitment is not only in our strategic interest, it is a moral imperative for us and for our children's generation.

We recognise that we cannot do this alone. A Better World provides the framework for expanding Ireland's leadership role in Europe and globally. Ireland has always been a country committed to multi-lateralism and collective action. As a small island state, we know our interests are served through working together with the global community. At a time when the challenges facing this planet are becoming greater, even existential, we are seeing many in the international community, including some of our long-standing partners, retreat into a more insular, self-interested and short-sighted world view. It is more important than ever that Ireland takes a leadership role. It is essential that we reinforce our commitments and values with action and investment.

A Better World commits us to strengthening our global partnerships, playing our full part in the multilateral system, in particular at the United Nations and in the European Union. Ireland's EU membership is at the heart of the new approach, in part recognising the need to deepen alliances with member states in the context of Brexit. In addition, our contribution to the EU development and humanitarian funding instruments is likely to increase and greater engagement with the EU institutions will be required if this significant element of our ODA is to reflect Ireland's policies and values.

Our new policy also provides the framework for expanding our partnerships and relationships with Africa, the continent of the 21st century, building on the many decades of investment we have made in east and southern Africa. We will continue our staunch support for civil society. The policy is focused on the pledge in the sustainable development goals to leave no-one behind, and to reach the furthest behind first.

Prioritising gender equality, reducing humanitarian need, climate action and strengthening governance are the four priorities outlined for directing our development co-operation to the furthest behind first. These four priorities are essential building blocks of sustainable development. Delivering on them will define Ireland's leadership and influence, inform our strategic choices around partnerships and interventions, and guide how we implement our development policy.

We are also committed to intensifying work in three clusters of interventions where Ireland has proven expertise, these being the areas of protection, food and people. These are areas authentic to Ireland's own development story over a century of democracy. The focus on protection recognises that without peace, long-term sustainable human development is impossible.

The focus on food builds on our global reputation of contributing to food and nutrition security and will draw on domestic expertise to contribute to shaping global food systems and markets that deliver better outcomes for both producers and consumers. Finally, by investing in people we will continue our long-standing commitment to improving universal access to essential social services such as health, quality education and social protection.

Many Irish people have worked in development as missionaries, volunteers and aid workers, bringing hope and inspiration to many in need. I believe this stems from a deep empathy and from a lived memory of what it is like to suffer conflict and violence, not to have enough food or basic necessities to live a dignified life and to lack access to educational or job opportunities. For my entire career, I have been particularly passionate about expanding access to top quality education in the recognition that knowledge is power. From my many visits to countries and regions where Ireland has a development co-operation programme I am always so proud to see the contribution we make in providing access to educational opportunities. Those opportunities would be denied to those most vulnerable, and in particular girls, without Ireland's support. These opportunities provide the basis for many to build a better life for themselves and their children. It resonates with our own journey at home, from free secondary education in the 1960s to the best educated young people in Europe today.

Building on this, the commitment in this new policy to draw on the world-class expertise and the research and learning institutes that we have in Ireland and to build on our reputation as educators abroad is absolutely central. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the foundation of Ireland's international development co-operation programme, it is an important time to reflect on our own path towards a more prosperous country and the huge contribution that Ireland and Irish people have made to human development globally.

We have contributed to huge strides in reducing global poverty. In 1974, when Ireland's development co-operation programme was established, about 42% of the world's population was in extreme poverty. By 2018, that has been reduced to approximately 10%. However, there is no room for complacency: climate change, conflict, growing inequality and many other challenges threaten this progress. Addressing these challenges will require all of us to work together across all sectors, and locally, nationally and globally. It will require all of us to listen to young people, like those in the Visitors Gallery, who are challenging us to respond in an effective and meaningful way.

The Government is committed to ensuring Ireland will play its part in delivering on our promise of A Better World for the next generation.

Deputy John Lahart: Fianna Fáil welcomes the publication of Ireland's new policy for international development, A Better World. It is essential that the ambition in this document be matched by resources, political will and implementation to ensure Ireland maintains its excellent reputation in relation to ODA and assisting developing countries. Our aid programme has helped to address extreme poverty, as the Minister of State has mentioned, in some of the world's poorest nations and we can be proud of the contribution and difference we have made in that regard. It is evident, however, that significant work remains to be done if we are to address poverty, gender inequality, climate change and the promotion of peace and democracy in the developing world. Fianna Fáil is committed to playing our part in ensuring Irish aid will remain untied and continue to be an example of best practice and tangible support to developing countries throughout the globe.

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Unfortunately, Ireland has fallen considerably behind in reaching the ODA gross national income, GNI, target. Based on current estimates, our current level of allocation to overseas development aid amounts to approximately 0.3% of gross national income. This is considerably behind a high of 0.59% reached in 2008 when Fianna Fáil was in government. While we acknowledge increases in overseas development aid since 2014, it is clear that sustained financial resources will be required if we are to reach this target by 2030.

While significant strides have been made in addressing some of the world's most pressing problems, many challenges remain. Conflict, displacement, climate change, and entrenched poverty and inequality continue to pose considerable challenges. Therefore, how and where we spend our resources is crucial, as it always has been. Fianna Fáil believes it is essential to ensure our aid programme is well managed, effective and goes to those most in need. Sufficient safeguards and good governance should be at the heart of our aid programme so that public money is used properly and in line with the objectives and principles of Irish aid. Fianna Fáil believes it is essential that Irish aid remains untied. Ireland has so far largely resisted the retying of expenditure of ODA to the refugee crisis and security measures, on which I commend the Minister of State. This is very much welcome and we must ensure that overseas development aid will remain untied, focused on the poorest countries, and not diverted to fund refugee costs at home or security and defence activities in the EU or the countries of origin of migrants or refugees.

Ireland has made a commitment to making incremental, sustainable progress towards achieving the UN target of allocating 0.7% of gross national income to official development assistance by 2030, and this is reaffirmed in the new development policy, A Better World. Irish official development assistance in 2019 is forecast to reach almost €817 million, an increase of approximately €110 million and a 16% increase on the allocation announced in budget 2018. While we very much welcome this increase, we are well below the UN target reached in 2008.

In reply to a recent parliamentary question on this issue, the Government acknowledged that, "In order to achieve this ambition difficult choices will be required between competing priorities, especially if economic circumstances change". This will require ongoing careful planning and consultation with other Departments, and stakeholders will be needed if a steady, phased and prudent approach is to be achieved. We therefore call on the Government to work with relevant stakeholders to develop a realistic and workable roadmap that will set out steps as to how this objective will be achieved. The fulfilment of this overseas development aid target represents an essential commitment on which the poorest nations depend. Several other countries have met this target and we must actively strive to do the same.

The OECD yesterday confirmed the 2018 overseas development aid figures. Ireland's figure was 0.31% of GNI, whereas five countries met or exceeded the 0.7% target set by the UN. Sweden and Luxembourg well exceeded it and Norway, Denmark and the United Kingdom achieved 0.7%. Ireland has reduced its overseas development aid to the poorest countries for the second year in a row.

We agree with the Minister of State on the prioritisation of gender equality. We recognise that violence against girls and women is the most pervasive human rights abuse in the world today and is severely damaging. Girls' educational participation continues to be lower than that of boys. Approximately one third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education. Some 15 million girls aged under 18 are married every year, which is 37,000 each day. An estimated 133 million girls and women have experienced some form

of female genital mutilation. Violence is the second leading cause of death among adolescent girls globally. A total of 49 countries have no laws specifically protecting women from domestic violence. Women in the labour market still earn almost a quarter less than men globally. Women continue to be under-represented in politics and positions of influence. We believe a concentrated effort is required to address this imbalance and we support efforts to improve opportunities and outcomes for women and girls.

Fianna Fáil welcomes that our international development policy is guided by the sustainable development goals, SDGs. As a country that was instrumental in the development of the SDGs, we must lead by example and honour the commitments we have made. We must work to ensure that the SDGs are not just an aspiration but a lived reality. We, therefore, need to ensure policies at national level are in line with the sustainable development goals. We, therefore, call for greater collaboration between Departments to ensure there is a whole-of-Government approach to the sustainable development goals. There must be a shared understanding of the relevance and importance of these goals, not just for Ireland but for the world as a whole.

We welcome that climate action is one of the core priorities of the new international development policy, but the Government needs to examine its own poor record on climate action, energy emissions and environmental protection. We cannot expect other countries to do what we are not prepared to do. That has been demonstrable over the past eight years of Fine Gael-led Government. We believe the Government must do more to ensure that Ireland meets its climate justice commitments, including making progressive contributions to the cost of adaptation, mitigation and emissions reduction measures in developing countries. Ireland needs to use its voice and its influence at EU and international level to address many of the injustices that continue. We must explicitly press for the empowerment of women and the end of gender-based violence, and push for the education of girls and women.

Ireland is campaigning for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2021. If we are successful, we should use our influence to effect positive change and to compel countries to advance human rights and abide by international human rights law. We are respected throughout the globe for the services we have provided in terms of peacekeeping, and if successful in securing a seat, we should use it to advance and promote peace initiatives and peace building.

As the Minister of State mentioned, Irish people are recognised as some of the most generous in the world. A Dóchas survey found 80% support for increasing levels of overseas development aid. We need to ensure we communicate to and engage with civic society on the excellent work that Irish Aid does. As a nation with a history of emigration, we have always looked beyond our borders, but we cannot take this for granted. We should continue to promote and encourage an outward looking Ireland that values our contribution to tackling global poverty and injustices.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I commend the work Irish Aid does. Irish Aid's work is transformative and makes a life-changing difference to many of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. We should have more debates on Irish Aid in this House than we do. It has been a year since we last had a stand-alone debate on Irish Aid, which happened in April last year after the publication of a report on Irish Aid by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence. The Irish Aid programme is a pillar of Irish foreign policy. It needs to be discussed in depth. It needs to be adequately financed and should be supported through a whole-of-Government approach.

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I again reiterate my support for Ireland reaching the ODA target of 0.7% of GNI. We must be accountable and transparent at all times. More could be done to educate the public about the fantastic work being done every day with taxpayers' money through Irish Aid programmes and NGO programmes funded by Irish Aid. Irish Aid receives cross-party support in this House and is a good news story that we need to promote more. There is a great deal of work that needs to be done to raise public awareness. The report of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence greatly added to this important public debate on Irish Aid and overseas development assistance, ODA, in general.

These statements are timely in that they are being made following the launch of the Government's new policy document, A Better World, as outlined by the Minister of State. The new policy brings a greater financial commitment to Irish Aid and a stronger focus on gender equality. However, much more could be done on climate action, business, human rights and support for refugees.

The world is facing an unprecedented number of humanitarian crises that have led to a global refugee crisis. The United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, estimates that 65 million people are displaced from their homes by war and conflict. I strongly welcome the support Irish Aid has provided for Palestinian refugees, as well as refugees from the war in Syria, but we all accept that we could do more. We need to increase the number of refugees we are resettling and relocating to Ireland. We can do this and also resolve the housing, health and cost of living crises in Ireland. That is an important message to send. It is not a question of either/or; we do not have to choose one or the other. We can deliver better public services and housing for Irish people and also improve our response to the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War. We also need to end the disgraceful policy on direct provision, for which there is cross-party support, and set up a new asylum process in Ireland which will have human rights at its core. We need to oppose the continued EU funding of programmes which are forcing vulnerable refugees and migrants back to countries where they face possible torture and human rights abuses.

I am deeply concerned about the European Union's negative policies in dealing with the refugee crisis and the Government's unqualified support for them. We had a lifesaving search and rescue mission in the Mediterranean. I commend the Naval Service on its work, but the Government has scrapped it and instead joined the EU military mission. That mission and the support for the Libyan coastguard which is abusing refugees, as well as financial support for detention centres in Libya where vulnerable refugees are suffering appalling abuse and human rights violations, are a massive violation of international law. Many of us in this House have heard at first hand information coming from these areas. It is appalling the way people are being treated in slave markets and so on in Libya. We cannot have statements on Irish Aid here and try to whitewash the violations of human rights and international law, of which the Government is part at EU level. Climate change is already starting to increase the scale and severity of natural disasters which are also creating humanitarian crises. We saw this most recently when Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The United Nations called it one of the worst weather-related disasters ever to hit the southern hemisphere. It is the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world who feel the impact of natural disasters and they are the least to blame when it comes to climate change. We not only need more spending by Irish Aid to support those affected by natural disasters but also to reduce our carbon emissions, specifically in agriculture and transport, something the Government has failed to do so far. About one third of the world's population - 2.5 billion people - live on less than \$2.50 a day. On a positive note, the number living in extreme poverty has fallen dramatically during the past 20 years. That is to be

welcomed, but it cannot be viewed in isolation as it masks a worrying trend. During the same period the development outcomes for different groups have been extremely uneven. However, the extremes between the haves and the have nots continues to widen. While it is welcome that the number living in extreme poverty has decreased, we need to be cognisant that we are also seeing growing inequalities across the globe. We can see it clearly in our own country. Oxfam estimates that just eight billionaires now own as much wealth as the bottom half of humanity. That is a stark reminder of the job we have to do to make the world a better and more equal place.

Ireland is recognised internationally as a leader in providing untied aid and it is essential that this policy be maintained. We should not place trade interests above human rights. We should not place business contracts above workers' rights and not place geo-politics above the need for untied aid. However, we could do more. The Government needs to support a binding UN treaty on business and human rights. Corporations need to be held accountable for human rights violations. As I have said previously in this House, 90% of the coal burned in the Moneypoint power station comes from Colombia, the majority of it from the Cerrejón mine. The companies that operate that mine have destroyed the local environment and trampled on the human rights of the indigenous people who live in the area. When I met a leader of an indigenous women's group in that area today, she outlined the abuses committed against her people, which are horrendous. While the Government has acknowledged the human rights abuses associated with the ESB's supply chain, it has yet to take a formal stance on the issue. The Government has pledged to contribute €5.73 million to the Global Environment Facility, GEF, Trust Fund, to aid developing countries in responding to climate change, yet Ireland is directly sponsoring climate chaos, environmental destruction and human rights violations through its continued reliance on Colombian coal. Furthermore, although Ireland has contributed €3 million to an EU trust fund in support of the Colombian peace process, importing coal from there directly undermines solidarity with the process. A key component of the peace process is land rights. We have had the example of people being stripped of their land, children suffering malnutrition and being denied access to clear water. The 2016 Global Witness Report featured a case study on the indigenous Wayúu people in La Guajira who have experienced harassment and death threats as a direct result of their resistance to coal extraction practices at Cerrejón. Therefore, Ireland cannot stand firmly in support of the Colombian peace process while continuing to import coal, the extraction of which fractures Colombian communities and their way of life. Policy coherence across government is a basic requirement and critical to ensure all Departments will contribute and not undermine or harm Ireland's sustainable development goal commitments. Buying this coal from Colombia shows that we do not have this policy coherence.

Additionally, as Oxfam pointed out, Ireland's domestic approach to corporate taxation is clearly at odds with its development objectives. Long-term viable solutions to the problem of global poverty and the inequality that stems from it are being undermined by the scale of global corporate tax avoidance which drains much needed financial resources from low-income countries. We need to radically change our approach to harmful tax policies and corporate human rights abuses.

It is welcome that A Better World strongly signals that Ireland will take a proactive, rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and work towards the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health rights. A new initiative on sexual and reproductive health rights is promised. The need to focus on sexual and reproductive health rights in emergencies is also highlighted. These are all positive developments, but they can only be realised if additional funding

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is allocated. The global contraceptive funding gap has been made worse by the decisions of the Trump Administration to withdraw funding from the UNFPA and introduce devastating cuts to reproductive health programmes which USAID had long supported. There is an opportunity for Ireland to step into a leadership role as a funder and champion of sexual and reproductive health rights. We should take that opportunity.

I again commend Irish Aid on the fantastic work it does and indicate my backing for increased financial support for Irish Aid in order that we can meet our international targets. However, we need to examine the whole-of-Government approach to sustainable development because we are clearly failing when it comes to refugees and the issues of migration, business and human rights and climate action.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I pay tribute to the life and work of Sally O'Neill Sanchez whose sudden passing was a terrible shock. I met her on several occasions. She was a tremendous advocate for the work of Trócaire and could speak passionately about the way financial assistance transformed the lives of people and entire communities in the poorest parts of the world.

That human story is what we cannot lose sight of as we debate the budget figures and the percentage allocations of resources.

Overseas development assistance, ODA, is about making a vital difference to the lives of the most disadvantaged people on the planet. We give most of our overseas development assistance through Irish Aid, but I want to focus my remarks on our entire ODA contribution. According to the OECD, the genesis of the idea behind ODA is the time when Hugh Gaitskell was leader of the British Labour Party when he wanted it to be part of his political programme in the 1950s. By 1970, the UN target for official state aid of 0.7% of GNI was agreed to by a range of countries, including Ireland. We pledged to meet this target by 1975, or 1980 at the latest, but we did not meet either of these target dates. As part of the millennium development goals, in 2005 we recommitted to meeting the target by 2015.

Ireland is home to a number of leading humanitarian organisations. We rightly celebrate their work and acknowledge the charitable giving of the people to the least developed peoples everywhere. We are a generous nation, yet even during the last economic boom we did not meet the 0.7% target. The nearest we came was 0.59% of GNI, or several hundred million euro short, but, as others said, this percentage has slipped to just 0.31% in the figures just released by the OECD. When we did not meet the target in 2015, we set a new date of 2025. In 2018, as part of its A Better World strategy, the Government recommitted to meeting the target, this time by 2030. We have 11 years left to meet this challenging target, 55 years later than the original target, but it is something on which we have to set our sights.

It is worth remembering from where the 0.7% figure came. It was derived from the economic work of the Dutch economist Jan Tinbergen. He estimated the level of income flow necessary for developing economies to achieve sufficient economic growth rates in order that they would be genuinely moving towards materially improving the lives of their populations. Developing countries need an inflow of hard currency from developed countries to power their economic capacity. That is part of the reason we need to achieve the 0.7% target. It is an important point. Development aid is not charity. It is not a handout to poorer countries that wealthy countries will keep giving forever. The purpose of giving a sufficiently strong level of development support is to end poverty and give real capacity to countries to no longer require it. Modern economic analysis suggests a figure of 0.7% might not be enough anymore as the economic

gulf between richer and poorer countries widens. However, the United Nations, the OECD and other international bodies have kept faith with the 0.7% target because it is a necessary first step to allow the least developed countries to set themselves on a real, irreversible path to catch up.

I am heartened by information from the United Nations, the World Bank and other organisations that shows that the relative number in extreme poverty around the world is decreasing, even though it is still unconscionably high. We have seen extraordinary economic development in China, India and other Asian countries, across Africa and some parts of Latin America. However, there are still countries that are so disadvantaged they will never escape the cycle of poverty unless they are given massive support and we are the only people who can do that. That is why the Labour Party agrees with the national policy of focusing our assistance on some of the least developed and most disadvantaged countries in the world.

The quality of Ireland's aid is ranked as being very good, but we have to improve the quantity. As I have just said, it is not money lost but money properly, wisely and humanely invested. We get a huge social return on investment in terms of lives saved, children properly nourished and people being given opportunities they would never have had in terms of education and their quality of life. We also over time get an economic return because the more countries develop, the more they can trade with us and buy more of our higher value goods and services. The Labour Party does not see development aid as a purely transactional approach but as a social justice issue. For those who are not convinced by such arguments, I remind them that the long-term value for money and return on investment is, even from the narrow perspective of economics, well worth the investment by Ireland in reaching its 0.7% of GNI target. The United Kingdom meets the 0.7% target and has made it a legal obligation since 2015, with cross-party support in the House of Commons. The latest figures also show that Denmark, Luxembourg and Sweden all meet the target, as does Norway. In fact, Sweden gives over 1% of GNI in ODA. This is the peer group among which we should want to count ourselves. If they can do it, we can. We can afford to do so.

That leaves me with some genuine questions for all of us in this House. First, is there any serious party or group in this House that does not believe we should achieve the target? I genuinely do not think so. If that is true, what does it mean in practice? We are giving around €850 million in overseas development assistance. The association of development organisations, Dóchas, estimates that this sum needs to rise to around €1.66 billion to represent 0.7% of GNI, an increase of over €800 million. It would be a sizeable jump, a big demand. However, if we are serious about achieving the target by 2030, it will require €75 million or more every year to be added to our ODA budget. We have to be serious about providing that level of money. So far, the Government has indicated its support to reach the target of 0.7%, but it has not yet published an incremental timeline, year on year, from now until 2030 in respect of by how much the ODA Vote will grow to achieve that target.

The A Better World strategy is good on our spending priorities and ties into the sustainable development goals, but we need to say on what we are going to spend the money to make sure we actually spend the quantity we want to spend. One option, on which I challenge everyone in the House, is for us to legislate, like the United Kingdom, to require every Government that will take office up to 2030 to meet this target by specified increments, on which we will all agree, year by year, until 2030. That would be a real roadmap. Such a law would have to come from the Government because, on this side of the House, we cannot propose the incurring of expenditure. However, I pledge my party to support it. The uncomfortable truth is that while economic growth might provide us with €75 million in one year, it probably will not do it every year. It

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requires fixed and consistent annual commitment, in good times and bad. When it comes to meeting our commitment to overseas development assistance, let us not be afraid to make the hard decisions that we will have to make collectively in the next 11 years.

The elimination of poverty is the first goal listed in the sustainable development goals to which we have signed up to achieve. The World Bank defines “extreme poverty” as living on less than \$1.90 a day. It is estimated that there 736 million people living in extreme poverty, half of them in India, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. Ireland is one of the richest countries in the world and we have a moral responsibility to those left behind. Ultimately, we will all be held to account, not in the annual debate we have here but on a commitment that, when it comes to the next budget, we will actually act de réir ár mbriathar. The only way to make sure we will not talk about it for another 55 years is to enact the legislation for which I pledge my party’s support.

Deputy Gino Kenny: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing this very worthwhile debate on an area of huge interest to me. It shows commitment to solidarity with the most vulnerable people on the planet, whether they are threatened by conflict, famine or environmental catastrophe. Across the world there are many people who volunteer through NGOs or from their own altruism to go across the world and help their fellow human beings. That is to be commended, whether it takes the form of volunteering, teaching or engineering. There are many ways that people try to give to their fellow human beings across the world. It is very commendable.

The backdrop to this discussion is the gap between the richest and the poorest people on the planet. That has never been as stark as today. As other Deputies have noted, a recent poll shows that 80% of those surveyed felt that Ireland should increase its support for efforts to eradicate poverty. The people of this country have a long history of empathy with others who have been dispossessed and traumatised by conflict and famine. As a people, we can empathise with that. We are very generous when it comes to overseas development. Our generosity has been reflected in recent decades. I welcome the debate on the percentage of gross national income spent on aid. At the moment that figure is 0.3%, which amounts to €800 million. I understand that we are trying to reach 0.7% by 2030. That is to be welcomed. Our contribution should be much more than it is now. That would significantly help overseas development.

I want to comment on something in which I have a personal interest. I was in Mozambique in January and I made it my business to go to the Irish embassy in Maputo. The Irish ambassador was in Ethiopia at the time so I met the embassy staff on my second last day there. They discussed what they were doing in Mozambique. They have a fantastic project with a small budget. We had a very good and very long discussion about where the money is going and what it is developing in Mozambique. It is an incredible country. The hospitality of the people of Mozambique is incredible. What has happened in recent weeks with Cyclone Idai is terrible. I welcome the Minister’s contribution of €1 million to help with a disastrous situation in Mozambique. The people’s hospitality and warmth were incredible. I am very proud of what I was shown in the embassy. Irish Aid is trying to make a small difference in Mozambique. It is an incredibly large country with a lot of issues but it is heartening to see what Irish Aid does considering its relatively small budget.

There is a darker side to aid. Other countries offer aid for geopolitical reasons. It takes the form of loans rather than outright aid. We must comment on that. We do not want countries to be completely dependent on aid. Dependency on aid can be counterproductive in encouraging growth. Aid should be temporary, helping countries to come out of poverty and desperation. It

should be a helping hand rather than a way of pushing people down. There is a lot to be said about multinational companies that have plundered the resources of these countries. They have thrown these countries into desperate states of poverty and marginalisation. They have a lot to answer for in this debate. The granting of aid to recipient countries can be very cynical. There are a lot of vested interests in the aid given to some countries. It comes with a price tag, usually pertaining to geopolitical reasons or attempts to grow trade with a wealthier country. It is not perfect by any means. Ireland should reject conditional aid.

NGO workers are sometimes the last line of defence. They are at the front line of catastrophic situations around the world. I have been very lucky in my life in that I have travelled a fair bit. I was in East Timor in 2006 and I saw how Trócaire was intervening. From speaking to people in that country, I know how grateful they were. Countries like Ireland have a great reputation for trying to help people who are fighting terrible injustices. That is very welcome. We have a very good history of that. At the end of the day, however, we need to challenge the reasons for the terrible poverty in the world. Until we challenge them, this situation will continue. We need to increase our contribution to 0.7% of gross national income.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: At a time when there is a lot of criticism of Government policies regarding housing, health and special education, the area of development aid presents a much more positive view of the Government. In the main, the Government has got it right. Our international aid policies and practices have given Ireland a very significant positive reputation. Our success in bilateral aid comes down to a few particular facts. First, our aid is untied and poverty focused. It is targeted at the very poor and it makes a difference. It is a pity that we cannot say the same about other investments that could make a very positive difference.

The figures from 2017 indicate that five EU countries contribute 0.7% of gross national income or more to international aid. We got to 0.59% in 2008 before the proportion went down in the years of the recession. There was maintenance of the programme in spite of the recession and we are now moving upwards. It is great that there is a commitment to reaching 0.71%. That means that 70 cent out of each €100 will go to aid. We know that the Irish public is supportive because poll after poll indicates that about 80% agree with our development aid programme. However, the increase must be planned. We need a roadmap on the best use of that increase. It must continue to be untied and targeted at the poorest recipients and we must ensure that it is transparent and accounted for. It must not be used to ease our consciences because we are not doing enough in other areas.

The annual report from Irish Aid is very good. It gives us the facts and figures of that bilateral aid so we know exactly where it is going. We do get the figures on multilateral aid and I know we have certain obligations regarding multilateral organisations. However, it is more difficult to assess the effect of multilateral aid unless it is in a crisis, when we know exactly where it goes.

I have to ask how much time the Dáil and the Seanad has given to discussing development aid apart from the work of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence. In February 2018 our committee produced a review of the Irish Aid programme. It came before the Dáil and the Minister, the committee Chairman and one other Member spoke. There were others who wanted to speak but the time ran out. The topic has not been discussed here since and I do not know if it even got to the Seanad. This is a matter for all of the Dáil. It is not just for the few of us who are interested or who are on Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence. It is good that we have an opportunity for a discussion today.

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In preparing our review, we met many NGOs and received many submissions. We met ambassadors and academics and we visited Malawi and Mozambique. The report was very clear and focused. The recommendations can be realised if there is a will to do so. This is not just about giving aid. The report also raised questions on the challenges that lie ahead, particularly in light of the contradictions between the work and the policy of Irish Aid and the policy of other Departments. There are also contradictions between Irish Aid and European policy, although the EU is a major contributor to development aid. We very strongly highlighted the need for policy coherence. We called for the Government to develop a cross-Government plan of action, as recommended by the OECD and to establish immediately a cross-departmental body to ensure better co-ordination and coherence of development policy right across Government and in line with the sustainable development goals, SDGs. We see the need for it because, otherwise, we would be hypocrites of the highest order. Some of the challenges are greater than others. We know that climate change is a challenge. Conflict leading to displacement and suffering is also a challenge. The mismanagement of migration is a challenge, as are land grabs, exploitation, tax injustice, abuse and the murder of human rights defenders. Ireland's reputation in providing ODA puts us in a unique position to be a driver of tackling these challenges. We must be committed to policy coherence. It is not enough that we give aid with one hand which is relatively easy, while the other is taking it back through lack of action on climate change, tax justice, the exploitation of certain countries and when it comes to human rights violations and growing inequalities. We have glaring practical challenges as a result of that policy incoherence which is evident when we look at corporations and their exploitation of land and resources. As well as exploiting land and resources, they do not even pay tax in the country they are exploiting, tax that could be used to meet the health and educational needs of the people. Instead it goes into the pockets and bank accounts of politicians, the military and the already wealthy classes.

Members of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence get to meet many human rights defenders who include lawyers, teachers, farmers and trade unionists. They tell us about their families and friends who have been murdered, tortured, are in prison or have simply disappeared and they do not know where they are. In the past week we met delegations of human rights groups from both Colombia and Honduras. At that meeting, as well as other meetings with human rights activists from African countries, Latin American countries and in the recent report from Trócaire, Making a Killing, we were told about the exploitation by transnational corporations of land and natural resources which led to displacement, killings and the abuse of workers, but no one is holding them to account. It is the indigenous poor people, the farmers, who pay with their lives in defending those resources. As they are global resources, in the end we will also pay.

The figures for the land lost to communities are staggering. Access to the judicial system does not mean getting justice. We can be a strong voice in supporting Trócaire's call for a legally binding global treaty governing business and human rights because voluntary guidelines and protocols are not enough. We need mandatory human rights due diligence in order to ensure businesses will respect human rights. They include Irish businesses working in countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Some Irish companies have been contributing to environmental degradation and human rights abuses. We all know about the glaring example of the Cerrejón mine in Colombia, the role of the ESB and the location of the Coal Marketing Company office in Dublin. Ireland finally has a national plan for business and human rights, but only time will tell if it will make a difference. However, policy coherence means that Irish businesses have to take human rights seriously. Otherwise, it would make a mockery of our development

assistance. Unless we do so, poverty and inequality will continue.

We know the statistics, that millions are in need of humanitarian assistance, that millions die from preventable and treatable diseases, that millions with disabilities are trying to cope and that millions are displaced through land grabs. We also know about the lack of access to health-care. Visits to these countries show what the provision of aid, especially bilateral aid, helps to do. Deputy Gino Kenny spoke about his visit to Mozambique. I remember hearing about the cash transfer on our visit to Malawi which was arranged by Ambassador Cunningham. It was a really good example of what could be done. It is like a social welfare payment and there is a mobile bank. What we saw was very poor local people being empowered. They got the money into their hand and used it, especially the women. Once one gives women money, they do far more with it than men.

The facts show that, globally, the losses as a result of corporate tax avoidance and evasion are immense. One estimate is that the losses globally amount to \$500 billion annually. The multinationals need to be taxed where their economic activities take place. If that were to happen, there would not be a need for aid. The trade agreements could also do with a dose of policy coherence. I will not go into the issue of neutrality.

A recent report on Africa noted that \$30 billion was invested in overseas development assistance, but, on the other hand, \$192 billion is moved out through profits made by multinationals, illegal logging, tax evasion, financial flows and debt repayments. A small amount of it represented remittances.

I attended the launch of A Better World and heard the speeches made by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon. They were very strong statements about our values and ambition to make a real difference. One of the points made is that it is not just about money but how the money will be used and the need for solidarity to reach those who are the furthest behind. The priorities on which Ireland will focus include gender equality, reducing the level of humanitarian need, climate action and strengthening governance. I would have liked disability to have been listed as a priority, but I accept that it does feature in the report. I looked at the list of new initiatives, some of which were very impressive. They all say the right thing, but it is the implementation that will tell. Ireland has to be consistent. Our development policy cannot be at odds with our economic, tax, climate change and defence policies. It is important that we look at parliaments and capacity building in order that parliamentarians in those other countries will have the capacity to do what we do, that is, hold Ministers and the Government to account.

The last chapter in A Better World is about doing things differently. I will finish with a quotation that I love. It is from Fr. Joseph Wresinski who founded All Together in Dignity – Fourth World movement. His point is poverty is of man's doing and that man can destroy poverty.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Wallace. How is he at managing money?

Deputy Mick Wallace: That is a tricky question. I was pretty good at it until the banking crisis burst the living daylights out of me.

An Ceann Comhairle: I meant in the context of what Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan had said.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I will not criticise the provision of aid, as I have seen genuinely

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good efforts being made to make things better on the ground, but I will be critical in dealing with the bigger picture. I started to read Jason Hickel's book, *The Divide*, for the second time last weekend. It is such an amazing read. Everybody should read it if he or she wants to know how this world is operating. I want to read from it:

[T]he aid budget is [small] ... compared to the structural losses and outward flows that the global South suffers. Yes, some aid goes a long way towards making people's lives better, but it doesn't come close to compensating for the damage that the givers of aid themselves inflict. Indeed, some of this damage is caused by the very groups that run the aid agenda: the World Bank, for example, which profits from global South debt; the Gates Foundation, which profits from an intellectual property regime that locks life-saving medicines and essential technologies behind outlandish patent paywalls; and Bono, who profits from the tax haven system that siphons revenues out of global South countries.

This is not an argument against aid as such. Rather, it is to say that the discourse of aid distracts us from seeing the broader picture. It hides the patterns of extraction that are actively causing the impoverishment of the global South today and actively impeding meaningful development. The charity paradigm obscures the real issues at stake: it makes it seem as though the West is 'developing' the global South, when in reality the opposite is true. Rich countries aren't developing poor countries; poor countries are effectively developing rich countries - and they have been since the late 15th century.

Poverty in the global South is not a natural condition any more than is the wealth of the West. Poverty is, at base, the inevitable outcome of ongoing processes of plunder - processes that benefit a relatively small group of people at the expense of the vast majority of humanity. It is delusional to believe that aid is a commensurate, let alone honest and meaningful, solution to this kind of problem. The aid paradigm allows rich countries and individuals to pretend to fix with one hand what they destroy with the other, dispensing small bandages at the same time as they inflict deep injuries, and claiming the moral high ground for doing so.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to visit the West Bank in Palestine. On one particularly hot afternoon, my hosts drove me down into the Jordan Valley to interview some farmers there about water issues. Along the way, bumping along a gravel track, we came across a huge white sign jutting out of the desert rocks. The sign announced a USAID initiative "to help alleviate recurring water shortages" by adding a new well in the area. It was branded with the American flag and bore the proud words: "This project is a gift from the American People to the Palestinian People."

Mr. Hickel's book further states:

A casual observer might be impressed: American taxpayer money offered generously, in the spirit of humanitarianism, to assist impoverished Palestinians struggling to survive in the desert. But Palestine doesn't have a shortage of water. When Israel invaded and occupied the West Bank in 1967, with the backing of the US military, it asserted total control over the aquifers beneath the territory. Israel draws the majority of this water - close to 90% - for its own use in settlements and for irrigation on large industrial farms. And as the water table drops, Palestinian wells are running dry. Palestinians are not allowed to deepen their wells or sink new wells without Israeli permission - and permission is almost never granted. If they build without permission, as many do, Israeli bulldozers arrive the next day. So Palestinians are forced to buy their own water back from Israel at arbitrarily high prices.

This is not a secret. It is happening out in the open, and the farmers I spoke to know it all too well. For them, the USAID sign only adds insult to injury. It's not that they lack water, as USAID implies; it's that the water has been stolen from them. And it has been stolen with US support. In 2012, just two months before my visit, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 66/225, calling for the restoration of Palestinians' rights to their own water. One hundred and sixty-seven nations voted in favour of the resolution. The United States and Israel voted against it.

I tell this anecdote not just as an example of how aid often misses the point, but to illustrate a much larger truth. Poor countries don't need our aid; they need us to stop impoverishing them. Until we target the structural drivers of global poverty - the underlying architecture of wealth extraction and accumulation - development efforts will continue to fail, decade after decade. We will continue to watch the poverty numbers rise, and the divide between rich and poor countries will continue to grow. This is a difficult truth to swallow for the millions of well-meaning people who have been sold on the development story.

I will conclude by making a point I raised with the Tánaiste about a month ago. I was highlighting the unbelievable humanitarian crisis in Yemen in which the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and European countries, mainly France and the UK, are involved. Up to 13 million people are at risk of starvation and up to 100,000 have been killed. It is a war crime of the worst type. The Tánaiste told me that the Government was giving extra aid to them. It should close the facility at Shannon Airport instead and not bother giving them aid. Stop facilitating their destruction. The Government can keep the aid.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I thank Deputies for their powerful and fascinating contributions. It is heartening to hear absolute consensus across this Chamber as to Ireland's proud track record in terms of our aid programme internationally and also our utter commitment to reaching the target of 0.7% of GNI.

I do not discount for a moment that the book from which Deputy Wallace quoted is excellent - I might look at it myself - but I have just finished reading another book, namely, *Factfulness* by Hans Roslin. The book to which Deputy Wallace referred seems to outline a particularly pessimistic view of the world while Hans Roslin has outlined a far more optimistic view. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between but one incontrovertible fact is that in 1965, the year in which I was born, 50% of the world's people lived in absolute poverty. Last year, that figure was down to 9%, so we are making significant progress. That is not to say we do not have to redouble our efforts constantly-----

Deputy Mick Wallace: They have changed the measurement.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: No. It is the same measurement.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I will give the Minister of State the evidence of that.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: Okay. There were many references in the discussion to the target of 0.7% of GNI. We, as a Government, are committed to that. It was restated at the launch of the policy by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and myself, which Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan attended. There continues to be consensus on that target at the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, in the most recent budget, allocated an additional €110 million to our budget, the largest such increase in

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more than a decade. That is in the order of the figure we need to achieve and increase by approximately €100 million every year between now and 2030. Thankfully, we have complete consensus on that. If it transpires that such consensus begins to unravel, and I do not expect it would, I ask that those who have been most vocal in supporting it will continue to support it. I am confident that is exactly the case that will be apply in the future.

Having produced the policy, we have, as Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan stated, talked the talk; we must now walk the walk. We move to the next phase of the journey, which is positioning Ireland to deliver on that ambition outlined in the policy, A Better World. As we look to 2030, maintaining our high standards and consolidating the quality for which we are known will continue to be at the heart of what we do.

Achieving our vision to see that better world is also about achieving commitments at home. Many Deputies rightly raised the issue of climate action. Thankfully, we are close to seeing a consensus, with the absence of Sinn Féin and perhaps one or two others, emanating from the Joint Committee on Climate Change, chaired by Deputy Hildegard Naughton, on what exactly we need to do to honour our commitments and show that we have that absolute policy coherence when it comes to advocating for climate change actions internationally.

That is a commitment and an agenda for many Departments, including mine, responsible for delivering on the sustainable development goals which, ultimately, will help to achieve that better world. In that regard, I look forward to continued strong collaboration across all Departments in positioning Ireland to strategically contribute to addressing key global challenges. There can be no doubt that those global challenges are absolutely immense.

It is a simple fact that our people’s vision of a more peaceful, equal and sustainable world will not be possible without ensuring equal rights and opportunities for half the world’s population who are women and girls. Gender equality is both a basic human right and fundamental to sustaining peace, building a strong economy and a prosperous and healthy society. However, we are seeing a rolling back of some of the hard-won gains in achieving gender equality in recent years. The challenges we are facing highlight the central and fundamental necessity of inclusive and resilient governance institutions that can underpin the social contract, foster collective action and deliver better outcomes for all our citizens.

Ireland remains absolutely committed to being at the forefront of global efforts to deliver on the vision of the sustainable goals and a better world for those most vulnerable and for future generations. We remain committed to playing a leadership role in ensuring that Ireland embraces change, invests in innovation and reorients our interventions as we work to build the more equal, peaceful and sustainable world we want to see and of which we want to be part.

Embracing technological innovation - we had a wonderful discussion on this matter, hosted by UNICEF, at Facebook’s headquarters this morning in the context of exactly how to proceed - holds the promise of innovative solutions central to our work in working towards a better world in the future. We will work to ensure that the benefits of that innovation will extend to everyone, especially women and girls.

I again thank Deputies for their contributions. I look forward to working with all of them as we redouble our efforts in pursuing that vision outlined in a policy for international development, A Better World.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I acknowledge the contributions of the

Minister of State and the Deputies who took part in the debate.

Treatment of Cancer (Advertisements) Bill 2018: Second Stage [Private Members]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I thank Deputy O’Connell for introducing her Bill and I welcome the opportunity to address the House on behalf of the Minister for Health. The Deputy’s Bill has much merit, particularly as its purpose is to protect cancer patients and their families from being adversely influenced or offered false hope by so-called fix-all treatments and cures. Patients recently diagnosed with or undergoing lengthy and painful treatment to fight a life-threatening disease such as cancer feel vulnerable and possibly fearful. They need positive, accurate and correct advice from the clinicians and other health professionals treating them. Above all, they must have confidence in what they see, read and hear about their condition in the press and on the radio, television and particularly social media. They may look for opportunities to increase their chances of recovery or to alleviate the side effects of their treatment. This desire can leave them open to being taken advantage of through claims made for alternative treatments that it is claimed provide a cure for cancer. Patients can be left open to abuse from these advertisements. As the Irish Cancer Society stated last December: “such dangerous advice leaves them at risk of harmful side effects and even death”.

As Deputy O’Connell has informed us, there is potential for spurious claims to be made around costly and non-evidence-based treatments or diets for curing cancer. Indeed, they are often made. There is much public concern about such underhand and nasty attempts to exploit decent people and give them unfulfilled hope that they may recover without going near a professional clinician. Such advertisements generally come at a financial cost, as those making them seek payment with the intention of making a fast buck. By using social media and online platforms these people can easily hide their identity, leaving cancer patients acting on these offers in a worse place physically and mentally, and possibly at considerable financial loss.

In the treatment of cancer or any disease, patients should only receive competent medical advice and treatment from qualified medical or other healthcare professionals. We must always ensure that this high standard of care and advice is provided. While the Government is supportive of the objectives of the Bill, there are some areas that the Department of Health believes require further work. The Bill is potentially very broad and may overlap with some existing legislative provisions. We must also ensure that, if enacted, the Bill does not offend free trade rights, such as advertising by private hospitals. However, the Minister for Health believes there is significant merit in Deputy O’Connell’s Bill and is pleased she has agreed to work with the Department before Committee Stage.

The Deputy has brought to our attention an issue that allows unprincipled people, for purely commercial reasons, to prey on ill and vulnerable people and offer hope that is not founded on medical or scientific evidence. If such advertisements are taken up, it may place patients in the hands of those who are not suitable or qualified and who ultimately may cause more harm. The issue is broad and complex and crosses multiple fields of regulation, including medical treatment, advertising through multiple media, food safety and possibly more. I sincerely thank Deputy O’Connell for and commend her on taking on the advertising of inaccurate and misleading cures and treatments. She is standing up to faceless people who hide behind the Internet or

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social media for personal and criminal gain.

Deputy Kate O’Connell: This is important legislation that I am proud to sponsor and delighted to have the opportunity to progress. It has the support of the Irish Cancer Society, the Irish Association for Nurses in Oncology, the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute and the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Furthermore, it has the backing of many cancer survivors, brave patient advocates who have battled various types of cancer ranging from melanoma to prostate and breast to testicular. They have seen at first hand how the legislative void in our laws can be filled by unscrupulous individuals touting falsehoods and dangerous lies to make a quick buck. On RTÉ’s “Prime Time”, Conor Wilson did great work exposing many of these practices in a special show aired a few months ago. It was an excellent example of public service broadcasting, although it had a deeply upsetting narrative. The families left behind and their pain, loss and suffering were harrowing to watch.

People in desperate situations following a cancer diagnosis are at a vulnerable point and need the protection of the law from those who would prey on them at that difficult stage in their lives. It is over 300 years since he said it, but the famous satirist Jonathan Swift was in many ways prescient when he wrote:

... as the vilest Writer has his Readers, so the greatest Liar has his Believers; and it often happens, that if a Lie be believ’d only for an Hour, it has done its Work, and there is no farther occasion for it. Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it; so that when Men come to be undeceiv’d, it is too late; the Jest is over, and the Tale has had its Effect.

Currently, there are no adequate safeguards to protect patients against unproven, and at times very dangerous, treatments being offered to them. Falsehoods fly around on the Internet and the truth is lost, dismissed or simply shot down by conspiracy theorists who think anecdote is the plural of fact. With the advent and proliferation of social media platforms, it is now imperative we bring forward this legislation to protect people from so many of these lies, false claims and alternative facts.

The fake news headlines that try to promote miracle cures or dangerous alternative treatments are the worst, as they drive engagement on social media and gain attention and credibility. Some people are genuinely duped and do not set out deliberately to mislead others, while others are simply cruel enough to see a marketing opportunity for their snake oil in another person’s suffering. As long as there is profit to be made on these fake cures, this type of misinformation will continue until we establish some common-sense regulations. I welcome the statement from the fundraising site GoFundMe yesterday that it will no longer allow anti-vaccine campaigns to use its platform.

This short Bill is about being able to prosecute people who are making large sums of money by peddling treatments or cures that, at best, have no proven effect whatsoever and, at worst, increase suffering, cause even greater pain and often hasten death. It is important to point out that the patient will not be the one found at fault, but the people who provide, promote, publicise and advertise products of dubious or dangerous composition and efficacy will be. The choice will remain for the patient to opt for proven or unproven treatments. This Bill does not seek to remove that choice.

I do not pretend that the Bill is perfect and I am open to working with Members of this House and the Seanad, as well as patient advocates and qualified, recognised and valid medi-

cal practitioners and healthcare providers. Some would say the Bill should go further and be broader and more all-encompassing. Dodgy people making false statements are not unique to cancer care - they span a range of health issues. I urge people to engage with the legislative process and to help make the Bill as fit for purpose as possible by inputting their experiences and ideas. We must develop and maintain the best care and protection for our population's health and for cancer patients in particular. We must build on and improve the established standards in cancer research and treatment, ensuring we follow best practice in a peer reviewed and evidence-led manner.

I noted with concern this week the stark warnings about a projected increase in the number of people at risk of developing cancer in Ireland over the coming decades. I understand that the Department, the Minister and the Government as a whole are all working to try and resource extra services where necessary, allocate increased staffing and funding, broaden access to screening, especially in the area of mammography and promote the Healthy Ireland policy, as a policy to improve the health of our nation as a whole.

This legislation is an important element to consider in relation to those projected cancer rate figures, as the people who are predators upon the sick will also be looking at those figures too and seeing them as a potentially emerging and captive market for their bogus remedies.

One would not wish a cancer diagnosis on anyone, but modern medicine is showing remarkable and impressive improvements in survival rates. Thirty years ago, only three in ten people survived cancer. Today, that figure is six in ten. That is a credit to the investment in lifesaving research as well as the major improvements in cancer care under the cancer strategies. One in every two of us will be diagnosed with cancer in our lifetime. Make no mistake, the world is full of good people who will help with a diagnosis and do everything they can to help a person win his or her battle against cancer. For every one of those people, however, there are others who will see a person as a cash cow to be milked for all the person is worth. I hope the Opposition parties and Independents can support and assist in the passage of this Bill through the Houses, as it is not before time.

I would like to thank those people who have helped me with this Bill, who pulled me back on certain issues, the patient advocates who fed in their experiences, the medical professionals and the cancer societies. I see in the Public Gallery Dr. David Robert Grimes who helped me with this Bill and has fed in his expertise. I could not have produced this Bill - I am a pharmacist originally - without the help of the professionals who guided me. I hope that my colleagues in Fine Gael and across the Chamber will see the merit in this Bill. In this ever-emerging world of social media and new development with Facebook, it is timely how this Bill has arisen and that we will try to get it through the Houses in a way that is fit for purpose. The point of this Bill is to protect the most vulnerable people at a vulnerable point in their lives.

Finally, I thank the staff at my office and the many interns who have passed through and been involved in this Bill, in particular Theresa Newman and Etain Hobson, who have a personal interest in this Bill. I thank everybody for listening today and look forward to working with Members on this Bill over the coming months and will be happy to engage on all levels on it.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I acknowledge the work that Deputy O'Connell has done in bringing this Bill to Second Stage. I remember bringing my own first Private Members' Bill to the House in 2011. It is a great honour for those of us who are not Ministers and are not used to bringing legislation forward, as the Minister of State here is, to be able to come into the national

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Parliament and introduce one's own legislation.

The short answer is Fianna Fáil will be supporting this Bill through Second Stage but we have a number of serious issues with the Bill as drafted. That is the short version of the speech.

This is the slightly longer version. I want to decouple the intent of the Bill and the reality of the Bill as drafted. I strongly support the intent of the Bill, not all parts but most parts, and the core piece which is essentially to protect patients. That is my understanding of what Deputy O'Connell has just outlined and what is in her briefing notes. This is about protecting vulnerable people and their families from charlatans. It is the case that the organisations which support those patients and families are reporting growing incidents of charlatans targeting vulnerable people and trying to extract as much money out of them as possible.

Arguably, much more worrying is that in some reported cases, patients are encouraged to stop with their medical treatment. There should be the strongest possible sanctions for anyone who would encourage and succeed in stopping a patient who was being treated for cancer from medical treatment for the disease. We are moving into a new world of social media where regulation and we as legislators lag behind most of the time.

Pre-social media, it would be quite difficult for the snake oil salesman or woman to find and target these people. An ad might possibly be placed outside a local cancer support centre or in a newspaper to get to people but one would be shooting in the dark to a considerable extent. That is no longer the case. An online company can now be paid to identify and find people to a high degree of accuracy who are using keywords like "cancer" and "radiotherapy", people who either have cancer or are doing some research for friends of theirs who have cancer. One can advertise directly to them, to their screen at work or directly into their hand on a smart phone. We are in a completely new world. It is probably appropriate that we take a look at protecting people in that world.

Fianna Fáil will be supporting this Bill through Second Stage because we greatly support the intent of the Bill.

There are several issues I would like to raise for consideration by both the Minister of State and Deputy O'Connell in the current drafting of the Bill between now and the next Stage. The first is that the approach of criminalisation is not my understanding of how one tends to deal with these matters. The idea that someone might advertise something and not be able to meet a certain burden of proof, and potentially to be faced with five years in prison as a result of that, is not typically how these things work. False advertising and targeting in such ways are dealt with in a different way.

For example, the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute took a complaint two years ago to the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland in relation to exactly what Deputy O'Connell is trying to stamp out. A nutritional therapist was providing nutritional advice on a website and falsely claiming that it could cure cancer. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland ruled against the therapist and it was shutdown. The legal advice I have on the Bill is that approach - to begin with everything as a criminal offence but that there are exceptions to that criminal offence - is not how one approaches this type of enforcement or legislation. Perhaps the Government might consider making the approach more parallel to how similar activity is dealt with by the State.

One question I have is why just cancer. If this is where we are going, the Bill needs to be

pulled back quite considerably in certain ways but potentially expanded in other ways. Who else is being targeted? Are people with all sorts of other diseases being targeted? If we are doing this, then maybe we should consider doing it as a principle, rather than just for a specific disease, awful, obviously, as that disease is.

I would also like some consideration to be given to how genuine innovation is not deterred. There is the potential, because of the way this Bill is laid out and the provision for a criminal offence with up to five years in prison except in certain circumstances, for a chilling effect on innovation.

This has nothing to do with cancer, but as an example, I was talking to a GP this week who had a patient who had ulcers going down to the bone and who was facing double amputation of his legs. He had tried everything and nothing worked. There is apparently a very clever engineer in Ireland who has invented a type of hyperbaric chamber, the type of
5 o'clock chamber that divers are put into for the bends. The idea here is that the person is infused with pressurised, highly oxygenated air. The person sits in the chamber for however long and goes through several sessions. In fairness to the HSE, it funded the treatment and now Laya Healthcare has taken it on. Incredibly, the guy's skin began to grow again.

Super-oxygenated blood got pushed to where it needed to be and the man did not need amputation. That was an engineer doing something clever. It was not about cancer but we need to ensure that, whatever we do in making things illegal, we leave room for people to innovate and do amazing things and be able to talk about what they have done.

One matter I would like to be considered is the idea that people can only advertise to medical professionals. I think I understand why this is proposed. It provides a level of expertise and an expert filter for advertisements but I do not think patients need to be protected in that way. If advertisements are false, then they are false. The idea that someone could advertise to medical professionals but not to the public and that the public are incapable of absorbing this information or doing their own research is not the right way to go. If people are found to be falsely targeting vulnerable people, it does not matter to whom they are advertising. They simply need to be found, stopped and prosecuted for doing so.

There are other questions, including in respect of the prevalence of this issue. Perhaps Deputy O'Connell has provided this information in a briefing note. I have read what I understand to be the briefing note from her but I have not seen research suggesting that 100, 1,000 or 10,000 people are being targeted in this way in Ireland. Such information would be useful.

I have a basic question - I apologise if it a stupid one. Why is this needed relative to the law that is already in place? We have laws in respect of false advertising. I gave an example of the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland using existing legislation to stop someone selling false hope to cancer patients. I am not stating that the Bill is not required but I would like to know what the difference would be, particularly as we already have laws to prevent false advertising.

My understanding is that the Minister of State has laid out how the Department will take the Bill away and do some work on it. Is there a case for a report to come to the joint committee on the matter? There is a rich vein of thinking behind the Bill and perhaps we could go beyond cancer and apply the principle right across healthcare. I am unsure whether this is a matter for pre-legislative scrutiny. That would normally happen before Second Stage or between Sec-

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ond Stage and Committee Stage. That is normally when the committee would engage in pre-legislative scrutiny. If that is not suitable, then certainly an expert report from the Department to committee would be useful. Then perhaps we could discuss the Bill at the joint committee or informally among health spokespeople before Committee Stage. Otherwise we will simply be tabling amendments in the dark. If the Government is coming forward with major changes anyway, there is little point in those of us in opposition proposing amendments to what we can see now because it will all change in any event.

I acknowledge the work of Deputy O'Connell - well done to her. This is important work and I know it is not easy to get a Bill before the House. We support the intent behind the Bill. It sounds as if everyone is open to working together to figure out how to make it work. I have outlined some of my concerns and those of Fianna Fáil, as well as some ideas regarding how to pull some things back and perhaps be more optimistic or forthright in other areas to expand what is proposed.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I thank Deputy O'Connell for bringing forward this Bill. We are happy to support it. I want to say a word about some of the people who have criticised the Bill. Perhaps they were trying to muddy the waters a little. For us, the intent of the Bill is clear and we support absolutely the intent. I am pleased Deputy O'Connell has said she is willing and open to working with people and Opposition Deputies. That is a good thing. I agree with Deputy Donnelly that some form of committee scrutiny might be helpful, but that would simply be to strengthen it.

We have absolutely no problem with the intent of the Bill. Section 2(1) states:

No person shall take any part in the publication of any advertisement containing an offer to treat any person or provide any remedy for cancer, or any advice in connection with the treatment of cancer, or which suggests that a medical consultation, diagnosis, treatment or surgical operation is unnecessary for the treatment of cancer.

It is difficult to argue against that. The idea is to prohibit someone from deliberately targeting a vulnerable person at a time in life when that person would be least able to avoid such targeting and when the person would in fact be absolutely desperate. It is really sad that people would do such a thing. It is shocking and horrible but the fact is that some people do this. I suppose bad things happen and maybe that is why we were sent in here to deal with them.

The Bill does not attack or ban complementary therapies such as acupuncture, massage or mindfulness when carried out alongside medical treatment as recommended by a doctor. It is important that we put that on the record. I have been contacted - I imagine others have as well - by people expressing disbelief that we were about to outlaw massage therapy and so on. Clearly, we are not going to do that and we are not trying to outlaw acupuncture either. It is important that we do not get confused about that. Many patients find those therapies helpful and useful and find that they have a real and serious benefit.

The intention behind the Bill is to focus on the publication of advertisements and to prohibit people from offering to treat or remedy cancer while suggesting that medical consultation or proper diagnosis or medical treatment are unnecessary. That is worrying but we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the person who would be targeted. Such a person may be highly vulnerable and at a bad time in life and may believe the medical profession has been a let-down because there is no sign of getting better. It is worrying that such people would be targeted but

I guess the fact is that we know they are.

I echo what has been said before about the evidence. We need to interrogate how serious a problem this is. Perhaps we need to look beyond cancer as a disease and look to other areas. I imagine someone deceitful enough to target a person with cancer would probably not decide to limit targeting to those with cancer and opt not to go after someone with a different condition. If such people are around, it is probably of some benefit to look beyond a single disease. I have talked to people in advocacy groups. They say they have seen an upsurge in such activity. Perhaps that makes the Bill necessary. I imagine Deputy O'Connell would say we have to start somewhere and that this is as good a place as any.

We have all heard the nonsense - especially those of us interested in the area of health - that there is a treatment for cancer and that doctors and big pharma are somehow attempting to cover it up or keep it out of the public domain. The story goes that the cure is out there and if we could simply get past the powers that be, we could get to it. Pseudoscience is really harmful. We saw that with the initial decrease in the level of vaccinations. Thankfully, there has been some resurgence. In any event, that is concerning. It points to an area where vulnerable people have been targeted, including people who get information from the Internet and social media but not from their doctors. There are serious consequences for people's health and lives when unsubstantiated claims are made with no medical or scientific basis. That is the perspective behind the Bill. It is a public health matter that we need to take seriously.

I welcome the fact that Deputy O'Connell has indicated openness to discussions because I believe that if we work together we can ensure we strengthen the Bill where it is needed. We know a good deal about fake news and social media. It has been referenced previously. Twenty years ago, people would have been unable to do this to the extent that it is being done now. That is why we need to ensure that we tackle this. The spread is almost uncontrollable. It is not a case of information going by word of mouth or by an advertisement in the local supermarket. It goes from home to home quickly and it makes its way around the world very fast. Before I came in, I received correspondence from the Irish Cancer Society. Very worryingly, it points out that patients are being urged to stop their medical treatment, to use alternative treatments that have caused harmful side-effects and, in some cases, even death. The Cancer Society has called for an end to the direct targeting of those living with cancer by people who are wholly unqualified to advise them. It is regrettable that it has had to call for that. For the avoidance of doubt, we are not attacking the use of complementary therapies such as acupuncture, massage etc. We are ensuring that those who are targeting people without a medical basis to do so can be prevented. It is important to say that those complementary therapies will not be impacted by this legislation because there is a significant number of people who believe that they somehow will be. It would be good to assuage those concerns.

There have been significant advances in surgical treatment, radiotherapy and chemotherapy in multimodality treatment. Much of this has been driven by the medical profession. I have seen it. I have spoken to surgeons, consultants, doctors and nurses and seen the real difference that those individual health professionals have made. We also have to be sure that cancer treatment in the health service as a whole is properly resourced. Furthermore, we need to make sure that the hard work of our dedicated medical professionals is matched with resources and funding. These things make a real and tangible difference, they improve outcomes and they save lives.

I thank Deputy O'Connell for introducing the Bill. I assure her of our support for its intent

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and our continued co-operation to ensure, whether on Committee Stage or informally, that we can strengthen this legislation and make sure that it is fit for purpose and provides the help and the sanction that might be needed.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I acknowledge the extent of work that goes into a Private Members' Bill, for the Member, the Member's staff and also for the Oireachtas staff. With the advances made in cancer treatment, cancer is not the death sentence that it once was. We see a range of treatments and medicines. I know from the experience of family and friends that they are discovering that if they have a cancer, if plan A does not work, there will be a plan B, and if plan B does not work, there will be a plan C. Certain friends of mine are great believers in the complementary therapies and how well they work alongside medicine. We have to respect the decision of a patient and cancer-sufferer if he or she decides that he or she does not want to go for medical treatment and wants to try something complementary. I understand that people who are ill are prepared to try any treatment and take up any suggestion in the hope of a cure. We know that exploitation of very vulnerable people is taking place and that is appalling. To have advertising for a product claiming a health benefit with no proof of that is damaging, especially if it impacts on a patient's already fragile health.

Looking at the overall picture, while I know that this Bill is pursuing one specific aim, it is important that other points are made. I would not share the confidence that the pharmaceutical industry always has a social conscience. It is a profit-making industry and that is what it does. It is appalling to see the prices that it is coming up with. I have been involved with groups such as Access to Medicines Ireland. It beggars belief that the industry can seek a certain amount for a medicine that it knows will save lives and barter and bargain. I think it has a responsibility to be more proactive on this. Having said that, there are delays which have to be taken into account too. Data were recently released by the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations regarding the availability of new cancer medicines in Ireland compared to the rest of Europe. I suggest that, with that delay, there is a vacuum where people will try anything else. They will try whatever suggestion is made to them.

Debate adjourned.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Thomas P. Broughan - to address and end the very serious illegal dumping in densely populated residential northern areas of Dublin city; (2) Deputy Eugene Murphy - to address the announcement in relation to the closure of the Rosalie unit in Castlerea, County Roscommon; (3) An Teachta Éamon Ó Cuív - chun a chinntiú go n-íocfar an deontas le haghaidh múineadh trí Ghaeilge; (4) Deputy Martin Kenny - to address the future of the Alzheimer's unit at St. John's Hospital, Sligo; (5) Deputies Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin and Joan Collins - to address matters in relation to the strike action by paramedics; (6) Deputy Michael Harty - to address the delayed ESB plans for Moneypoint power station; (7) Deputy Mattie McGrath - to address the transfer of Thurles post office; (8) Deputy Clare Daly - to discuss the crisis in Libya; (9) Deputy Maurice Quinlivan - to establish an independent clinical review of University Hospital Limerick; and (10) Deputy Mick Wallace - to discuss if Gorey, County Wexford should be designated a rent pressure zone due to the serious housing crisis that exists.

The matters raised by Deputies Eugene Murphy, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, Joan Collins, Thomas P. Broughan and Michael Harty have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Mental Health Services Provision

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I will say what I said before, that the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, is always pushed into these positions and I feel somewhat sorry for her.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): That is all right.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: The Minister of State is here and does her best to answer the questions. I expected that the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, would be here. This issue relates to the imminent closure of the Rosalie unit in Castlerea in County Roscommon. It is rather a sad evening for me to have to get to my feet once again to discuss this issue. The Ceann Comhairle has allowed me to raise this on many occasions since I became a Member of this House in 2016. The Rosalie centre had capacity for 33 people. It was a beautiful centre. They were people with mild mental health and disability issues, perhaps with Alzheimer's disease. They are people who very much needed somebody else to look after and care for them and to ensure that they were okay in life. Over recent years, little by little, the numbers were whittled down. It was at 34, it is now down to 12, and yesterday we had the announcement from the HSE's CHO 2 that it was to close.

This has been a bone of contention since 2016, when the HSE attempted to close the centre. The then Minister for Health, now Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, and the then Minister of State, Kathleen Lynch, gave commitments at that time that this centre would not be closed. Last year, the director we were dealing with, Tony Canavan, called the elected members to a meeting in Roscommon town and told them that it was the intention of the HSE to close this unit. We fought it on many occasions. This is a beautiful centre, not a run-down building, with amazing staff. One thing that upsets people greatly is that people who have been here for many years, who are happy in their surroundings with their families close to hand to visit them, are having their centre closed. Their home is gone and many of them feel it. The Minister of State can imagine if she moved into a strange room herself, with different colours and of a different size. There is no question of being well looked after, since I know they will be, but the surroundings will completely change for these people. The HSE has told us that two will be moved immediately. Many will be moved locally over the next months to a local centre which is not too far from this one. The message from the families and from me and other political representatives is please to have this decision reversed. It is causing a lot of hurt and anger. It is a fantastic centre.

The experts will tell us that these people do not need any psychiatric care any more and that care to deal with old age or such is needed. I have a problem with that. Are the Minister, the Minister of State and experts saying that the medical staff are wrong? I am not saying that they are wrong but people have been in their home for many years. I have no doubt that when the Minister of State changes that environment, she causes them great distress and pain. I would appreciate the best answer the Minister of State can give me.

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Deputy Catherine Byrne: I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister of State with responsibility for elder care, Deputy Jim Daly. The Minister of State would like to reassure the Deputy that the current and future care needs of the residents of the Rosalie unit have been paramount in all decisions and actions taken by the Health Service Executive, HSE. The Rosalie unit is located in Castlerea, County Roscommon. It is a continuing care facility for psychiatric and later-life patients. There are currently 12 residents in the Rosalie unit and the stated intention of the HSE is to continue to provide care for these residents in line with the needs identified in their individual care plans.

The Government committed to, and prioritised, the reform of our mental health services in line with A Vision for Change. The strategy set out a comprehensive policy framework for the development of these services. In line with the strategy, it is the HSE's position that there is an urgent need to improve mental health services in Roscommon and this was highlighted in the independent review of the services in 2017. As part of the improvement process and in order to best address the patients' care needs, the residents of the unit had clinical assessments carried out by the HSE consultant-led multidisciplinary team. The clinical assessments of the residents of the Rosalie unit indicated that their care needs had changed since admission, to include physical care needs, and that their individual future care needs would be best met outside the Rosalie unit.

This assessment was reaffirmed by independent clinical assessments. Specialist consultant psychiatrist of later life, Dr. James Anderson, was engaged to carry out the assessments of the Rosalie unit residents in December 2018 to determine their clinical needs, dependency levels, and optimum care setting. As part of the process, next of kin and relatives of the residents were invited to attend at the clinical assessments, so that their views could be taken on board. Independent advocacy was provided to residents and their relatives throughout the clinical assessment process. Dr Anderson's independent report concluded that at the time of assessment, a number of patients required inpatient psychiatric care in a different setting, and that the remaining patients' needs require general nursing care. Individual plans in respect of the future care arrangements for each resident of the Rosalie unit will be discussed thoroughly with the residents and their next of kin, in order that their individual needs can be met in the most comprehensive way, and in the most appropriate setting.

The clinical team and an independent advocate will be available to support them through this process. The Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, wants to assure the Deputy that the focus has always been on the well-being of residents throughout this process, and it will remain so. Clinical advice that has been independently verified has stated that the current residents' care needs would be best met in a more appropriate setting, and the HSE has a duty to act on this advice.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: The Minister of State is right to refer to Dr. Anderson's independent report, as it is called. I should have stated that the report suggested that two of the patients require inpatient psychiatric care and the rest of those patients require general nursing care. To go back two years, I was in that centre and it is possible to have a debate with some of the people there. When one of them stands at a doorway and says "I don't want to move out of here", that causes me fear. It disturbs me. We are forcing those people out to a different environment.

I have no doubt they will get excellent care and be well looked after but why move those people out of a place that has become their home over many years? Irrespective of what psychiatrists or psychologists tell us, common sense would tell me not to take people out of there.

It is like taking a person out of their home who is not suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia and telling them they have to go into a nursing home. People do not like being taken out of their own corner in general.

County Roscommon has the highest incidence of Alzheimer's in the country per head of population. We will also have more older people per head than any other county. Rather than close any of those facilities we should be opening them. Rather than getting rid of the ten patients there we should bring that centre up to full capacity. The Minister told me at a meeting this morning that it will be a residential care setting. If it is to remain as a residential care unit, why not leave these, mainly elderly, people there to live out their lives? It is not much to ask. I ask the Minister of State to go back to the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, and the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, and plead with them to ask the HSE to reverse this decision.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I am not familiar with the setting but I take on board the Deputy's concerns and compassion. Change is very difficult for anybody. It is even more difficult for an older person. Moving from an environment where they live can be very stressful.

I was given a response to the Topical Issue matter and had to read it. However, I will take on board some of the issues the Deputy raised, particularly why, if the service is to remain, the patients are not allowed to remain. I cannot answer that because it is a medical decision. Improving all aspects of policy and services in mental health is a priority under the HSE plan for 2019. This relates to all areas nationally, including Roscommon. The Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, encourages public representatives and the media to take responsible approaches when commenting on the HSE decision to transfer patients currently residing at the Rosalie unit. Roscommon has more appropriate health facilities to better meet their health needs and care. The Rosalie unit will not close as has been reported. However, it is highly likely that the psychiatric service currently provided at the centre will cease in due course and a new service will be provided to best cater for the health and care needs of the local community based on demographic evidence. The Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, will continue to liaise with the HSE to monitor all aspects of the mental health service care, including health services in Roscommon. I assure the Deputy I will bring a very clear message back to the Minister of State and I apologise again that he could not be here.

Industrial Disputes

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Ambulance personnel who are members of the Psychiatric Nurses Association, PNA, mounted a sixth day of action yesterday in their continuing campaign to be able to join and be represented by the PNA as their union of choice. The next step of their campaign will be determined when the PNA ambulance branch, the National Ambulance Service Representative Association, NASRA, holds an extraordinary meeting on Thursday, 18 April to consider a further escalation of its industrial action. There are more than 500 PNA ambulance branch members including paramedics, advanced paramedics and emergency medical technicians, all of whom are determined to achieve their goal, namely, the fundamental right to be represented by the union of their choice. These members totally reject the continued efforts by the HSE to force them to be members of unions they do not want to join. Individuals and groups have a right to choose the trade union they want to represent their interests and to engage in collective bargaining on their behalf.

The Taoiseach has attempted, sadly, to characterise this issue as an inter-union dispute. That

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is false. The Taoiseach is purposely seeking to misrepresent this dispute. The PNA and NASRA are not in dispute with any other trade union. Nine years ago ambulance personnel decided to organise a branch within the PNA to represent them and this number now stands at greater than 500. What steps have been taken by the Government and the HSE leadership to resolve this dispute? Is the Minister for Health going to allow a situation continue where ambulance personnel have been forced out on strike due to a very solvable dispute? The Minister should talk to the HSE and do the right thing and we have far more pressing issues within the health service to deal with. He should recognise the PNA and NASRA, let these workers pack away their picket line banners and placards, and let them return to their ambulances, proud of the job they do and proud of the union that represents them.

Deputy Joan Collins: This issue has been brought up on the floor of the Dáil possibly every week in recent weeks. That is reflective of how unjustifiable Members feel it is that these workers are not getting the chance and the recognition to join the union of their choice. The PNA branch went on strike yesterday, which was the sixth strike it has had in recent months and it had an action day on 27 March outside the Dáil. It has full support right across the board from other trade unionists to the wider public. Prior to this strike, the HSE ignored the clear indication from the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, in the Dáil, that he wanted this issue dealt with by negotiation rather than by confrontation. A number of Deputies, namely, Deputies Ó Caoiláin, Barry, Broughan, Pringle, Gallagher and myself, wrote a cross-party letter to the Minister looking for a meeting to try to tease this out with him. We have not had that meeting yet and I have been asking the Minister over the last week and a half to have that meeting to try to move it on in order to have some sort of resolution to this. The HSE has no right, legally or otherwise, to not recognise this union. It is not an inter-union dispute. The NASRA branch of the PNA is not having a dispute with any other union but 500 members were out on strike yesterday. That is more than what the Service, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union, SIPTU, or Fórsa, the other two unions, have in their membership. This is a basic right for the workers to be represented by a union of their choice. We need that to be recognised. I would urge the Minister to do what he did in the background with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, INMO, and the PNA and instruct the HSE. The HSE has been invited by the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, three times to have discussions and it has refused to do so. It has refused to speak to the workers on the dispute as well.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: On behalf of the Minister, I thank Deputies Ó Caoiláin and Joan Collins for raising this issue today. As we all know, this matter relates to a branch of the Psychiatric Nurses Association called the National Ambulance Service Representative Association, NASRA. This group has engaged in industrial action on five dates since the action initiated on 22 January. NASRA members again engaged in industrial action for a sixth day yesterday. By way of background, members of NASRA represent approximately 350 front-line ambulance personnel out of a total National Ambulance Service workforce of 1,800. I understand that they are mostly based in Cork, the south east and Tullamore.

The HSE and the National Ambulance Service, NAS, have confirmed that again, robust contingency was in place to ensure that there was no risk to the health and safety of our health service users yesterday. The HSE has confirmed that full emergency cover was provided during the action. This means that all emergency calls were responded to. In addition, the National Ambulance Service put robust contingency arrangements in place to provide additional emergency cover. The Defence Forces also made crewed ambulances available, 15 of which were deployed. The intention, as previously, is to minimise any disruption and to ensure that patient

safety is not compromised.

As with the other dates of industrial action, National Ambulance Service management closely monitored service demand and delivery. The NAS has confirmed that there was no negative impact on the ability of the service to provide patient care and service delivery during the industrial action. What this means is that there were no adverse incidents. It is important to again state the factual position in relation to this dispute. The National Ambulance Service Representative Association, which is affiliated with the PNA, is a group which is not recognised by the HSE and, therefore, does not have negotiating rights. Also, the PNA does not have negotiating rights for ambulance personnel. The legal position is very clear. The HSE and the National Ambulance Service have no obligation to recognise NASRA or the PNA for ambulance personnel. The PNA, which is a non-Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU, affiliated union, has negotiating rights for nurses working in psychiatry and intellectual disability sectors.

The main union which is recognised by the HSE for ambulance front-line grades is SIPTU. Fórsa and Unite the Union also represent ambulance grades. The HSE deducts subscriptions at source for those ambulance staff who are members of SIPTU, Fórsa and Unite the Union. This is consistent with the fact that these are the unions that are recognised as representing ambulance grades. The HSE does not carry out deductions for subscriptions to NASRA, as it is not recognised. It should be noted that facilitating deductions at source is not a legal right, rather it is a concession granted to recognised unions.

Of course, individuals have a right to membership of any trade union. However, they do not have a right that such membership is facilitated or recognised by their employer. The Minister, Deputy Harris, has asked his officials to engage with HSE management to explore ways forward to see if a resolution to this dispute can be progressed. These discussions are ongoing. However, as of today, the fact remains that the PNA does not have negotiating rights for ambulance grades.

The last paragraph of the reply is on how officials are engaged in exploring the dispute. This is the answer I have been given but I will revert back to that in a moment.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Thursday is the Minister of State's day.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: It is.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: RTÉ has "Claire Byrne Live" but Leinster House has the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, show every Thursday for Topical Issue matters. I do not say that in jest, I say it because it is wrong that the Minister himself has not presented to deliver his own script. I have to say I am exasperated reading what we already know and the points we have already made. We heard that the National Ambulance Service Representative Association, NASRA, is a group which is not recognised by the HSE, that the legal position is very clear that the HSE and the National Ambulance Service have no obligation to recognise NASRA or the PNA for ambulance personnel, that the Minister has asked officials to explore the way forward and that the fact remains that the PNA does not have negotiating rights for ambulance grades. The bottom line is that this response tells us nothing that we did not already know. What we are asking for is the Minister to make a direct intervention to recognise that the NASRA branch of the PNA represents at least the second largest body of ambulance personnel in this State and they deserve respect and recognition, full stop.

Deputy Joan Collins: I am also very disappointed. It is the standard reply that we have

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been getting even though we were hoping that this was moving on behind the scenes in at least having some sort of negotiation with the officials and representatives from the PNA.

NASRA represents nearly 500 members. When the HSE stopped collecting the dues from members' pay, it had about 350 members. Another 150 to 200 joined since but cannot be recognised by the HSE. NASRA has been in with the WRC up to the last number of weeks, negotiating and representing members but the HSE has not even spoken to the workers, the branch or the PNA about contingency plans. Those workers have put those contingency plans in place themselves, without the HSE engaging in any shape or form. This needs to be moved on and, as has been said by Deputy Ó Caoláin, there has to be direct intervention by the Minister into this dispute to try to resolve it through negotiation and not confrontation.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I was going to read the concluding points from the reply but there is no point because they are basically part of what I said at the outset.

I assure the Deputies that while it might be Thursday and it might be my day, I willingly take on the duties on Thursday. I happen to be here and I apologise that the Minister could not be here. I will go back to the Minister and reiterate some of the questions the Deputies have asked, particularly around the fact the Minister has asked officials to engage with the HSE and management to explore a way forward. I do not know whether or not that has happened as I am just reading what is in the reply. I would have thought it would have happened by now if the Minister has asked for it to happen. Having said that, I note also that Deputy Joan Collins said representation had been made to the Minister, Deputy Harris, to meet some of the Members here as well. I will bring that back to him but that is as much of an answer as I can give. I apologise again to the Ceann Comhairle and the Deputies but my script does not allow me to make any other interventions.

Illegal Dumping

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Broughan wishes to address and bring to an end the very serious illegal dumping in densely populated residential areas in the north of Dublin city.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Last week, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, increased the national funding for measures to prevent and respond to illegal dumping from €2 million in 2018 to €3 million this year. Applications are open for this fund, which is supposed to focus on prevention, education, awareness, abatement and enforcement. However, €3 million is a tiny sum in the context of this massive problem. Most of it could be used just to address the very serious problem in the constituency of Dublin Bay North, which the Minister and I share.

In the past few years, I have received an increasing number of complaints from constituents who are very upset by the sheer volume of illegal dumping and littering across the north fringe of Dublin Bay North, which includes the south fringe of Fingal. These include bitter complaints from civic-minded constituents and environmental enhancement groups at repeated dumping and serious littering on the R139 or N32, which is a gateway to Dublin for visitors arriving at Dublin Airport. Further east, residents of the new north fringe estates are also aghast at the amount of littering and dumping, especially on open spaces that are undergoing or awaiting development.

As the Minister will be aware, the most distressed of our constituents are those who have watched with horror as a tsunami of rubbish and clay in a huge illegal dumping operation has moved steadily across an amenity open space towards their homes in the past 18 months or two years. An adjacent city park much loved by local residents, sports teams and Saturday runners is also steadily being littered and engulfed by this huge illegal dump. At regular local meetings and meetings of Dublin City Council and the north central joint policing committee, the growing presence of this illegal dump has been described as a blatant commercial operation which the authorities seem powerless to stop and remove from our area. As the Minister knows, civic enhancement groups are, thankfully, highly active across our constituency. In telephone calls and emails to my office and on visits to my information clinics, they express exasperation that these anti-social and criminal behaviours are not being brought to an immediate end. They feel they are being badly let down by the Minister, who is a Deputy for the area, the management of Dublin City Council and the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan.

It is clear that the Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Licensing) Regulations 1997 would never permit the creation of a commercial dump adjacent to family homes, precious amenity open spaces and an important Dublin city park. Despite this, it seems that no fundamental measures have been taken to tackle this outrage and restore the lands in question. The problem is greatly exacerbated by the fact that a number of small housing estates near the location do not have a weekly waste collection service. I note moves recently by Laois County Council and other county councils to ensure that all households are accountable for their residual waste after recycling. We would all welcome similar measures in our localities. It is astonishing that the Dublin City Council manager, Mr. Owen Keegan, and the council's housing manager, Mr. Brendan Kenny, do not ensure there is a bin collection service from the city in the small areas to which I refer. Surely all households have the right to a waste management collection to encourage the avoidance of litter and illegal disposal of waste. The absence of such a regular waste collection service cannot be used as an excuse and should not be exploited by illegal businesses to wreak havoc on local residents, destroying their environment and endangering their health.

The Minister recently told me that under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, he was precluded from exercising any power or control in respect of the performance by a local authority or a statutory function vested in it. This appalling situation, which affects several parishes in the north fringe, is an environmental and public health disaster. On behalf of our constituents, I appeal to the Minister to set in motion a system to direct Dublin City Council and An Garda Síochána to bring this dumping to an end and restore these amenity lands and boundaries that have been vandalised and disgracefully abused.

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I assure Deputy Broughan that I am acutely aware of the concerns he has raised. I thank him for his acknowledgement that we are increasing our funding in this area. The €3 million fund I announced is only a small part of the funding we provide to support enforcement activities. I am very conscious of the concerns Deputy Broughan has expressed. I recently visited the amenity open space and park and I am aware that constituents are very angry and frustrated at what has transpired there, with systematic illegal and criminal dumping.

As the Deputy acknowledged, I am precluded under law from exercising power in these matters in respect of a local authority because these are statutory functions of local authorities, which are enshrined in the Waste Management Act 1996. Nonetheless, in light of the concerns the Deputy and I share, I have used the powers available to my Department to help to address

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the issue. I hope he will recognise that far from seeking to let people down, I am seeking to find collaborative responses with the responsible agencies. My Department chairs the national waste enforcement steering committee through the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, another agency of my Department. The EPA plays an effective role on the committee and in other enforcement activities. I also provide funding for enforcement supports. Through these structures, the particular problems of the site on the R139 are being examined. Part of a wider drive enshrined in the 2019 strategy of the national waste enforcement steering committee is to target these consistent and persistent illegal dumping sites.

Officials from my Department recently visited the site and are working with the local authority and the EPA to examine the scope for a multi-agency response to this matter under the national waste enforcement steering committee. At the same time, Dublin City Council has established a task force from across its service departments with the aim of preparing short, medium and long-term plans for the site. This will include the use of relevant enforcement actions. Between these two initiatives, I hope a coherent response can be developed to address the very persistent and long-standing issues on the site.

As Deputy Broughan acknowledged, I launched a fund of €3 million and visited the area-----

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Does the Minister know that we did not get an invitation?

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----because I felt it was appropriate to do so. Applications for the fund are open and we expect to support more than 300 individual projects, some of which offer innovative ways of addressing enforcement, while others support public community projects. We will consider how we can use the fund to support initiatives directed specifically at this site.

We are acutely aware that this is not an isolated issue. Unfortunately, there are similar operations in many other constituencies and parts of the country. We have made it a priority this year to address this type of activity and bend our resources to have a more coherent and multi-agency response to it.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: With all of the stakeholders working together, I hope we will see real action because this problem has been going on for too long. This type of activity is very disheartening for residents who have organised and submitted their streets to the tidy districts competition. It completely destroys their confidence.

The Minister must direct Dublin City Council management to immediately remove all of the illegally dumped rubbish and the huge mounds of earth moving like a tsunami towards our constituents' homes. An Garda Síochána needs to immediately enforce the 1996 Act and the 1997 regulations. The Minister indicated he visited the site and I know his constituency did not include the area in question until three years ago. The amenity open space and estate boundary concerned need to be restored. This area was an amenity open space and park. We all worked very hard to create the park and some of the nearby community bodies and facilities. It is outrageous that these are being threatened by this particular outbreak of dumping in the past year.

I have visited the site several times in recent months and the dumping seems to be spreading, rather than decreasing. One of our constituents told me that Dublin City Council appears to be allowing the area to turn into a *favela*. We do not want any *favelas* in our city. I have also had complaints from other parishes across Dublin Bay North about the growing menace of littering and illegal dumping. Our constituents are very upset that bags of rubbish are dropped at

amenity areas such as the city and county parks and the wilderness areas along the bay area and on the Howth Peninsula. Many people are complaining about littering caused by posters being put up for emergency meetings outside of election times. I am sure the Ceann Comhairle will echo that view. There is so much social media now it is hard to know why we need posters for every event, week in and week out throughout non-election periods.

The Minister's predecessor established a price monitoring group, PMG, in order to monitor the cost of residential waste collection when the flat rate structure was phased out. The PMG monitors 26 service providers and produces monthly reports, which I know the Minister studies. The February report showed continued increases in monthly costs for household waste collection. Six monthly comparisons showed that just two operators decreased costs while six companies increased them. The Minister supported the privatisation of waste collection services at the beginning of the household waste collection era. We have ended up with a system run by companies which are based, in many cases, off shore, and with pricing systems which are completely opaque and prices are steadily rising. It is time to end the talk; we need a bit of action.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I met staff from Dublin City Council as well as staff from the national committee which is driving these initiatives. We should not be directing all of our anger at Dublin City Council staff. Many of them are trying really hard to contain this dumping and to maintain high standards in the park that the Deputy has rightly said is a major amenity for the public. The staff of Dublin City Council are not causing this persistent problem.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Perhaps management should act more vigorously.

Deputy Richard Bruton: This is a serious problem for many communities-----

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Many chief executives would not put up with this.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----and we have to work with the very dedicated people in Dublin City Council to fix it. That is what I hope to do. A coherent plan from the city council must be in place, and a taskforce is working across its different departments, which is really helpful. At a national level we want to take a multi-agency approach in addressing this. That is the right way forward. I understand the frustration of the Deputy and our constituents, but it is unfair to turn our guns on people who are doing their best to-----

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I am not doing that. I am asking-----

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----help the situation.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I am talking about leaders who do not lead.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We do see some leadership being-----

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: It would not be tolerated in the private sector. We need leadership.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----taken in that the council is establishing a group-----

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The country needs leadership as well.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----to work across its key service providers, and the national authority is seeking to work across the key agencies, from the criminal enforcement agencies, the

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EPA and the council itself. There will be a combined approach on this and I am there to support the work rather than just to criticise it.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Our constituents feel abandoned. We have a responsibility to them.

Electricity Generation

Deputy Michael Harty: My question concerns the future of Moneypoint electricity power station on the Shannon Estuary in west Clare. It is the only coal burning station in Ireland. It opened over 40 years ago and is coming to the end of its natural lifespan. It is due to cease burning coal and producing electricity in 2025, which is just six years from now. It is an important part of the national grid and is an important installation for electricity production. It produces, at its maximum, 900 MW of electricity, which is up to 20% of the national requirement. It is also a very important employer in west Clare. What is the future of electricity production in Moneypoint and what is the long-term future for the plant?

On 5 December I wrote to the Minister asking him to clarify exactly what is planned for Moneypoint when it comes to the end of its operational life in 2025 as a coal burning station, and asking him to engage with the ESB in order to inform the public about the company's future intentions for the site. The Minister replied, saying that it is settled public policy that electricity generation from coal will cease not later than 2025. The position has been outlined in a number of public policy documents. The national mitigation plan, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the 2015 energy policy paper concerning Ireland's transition to a low-carbon energy future were all mentioned. A Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to moving towards a sustainable and suitable low-carbon technology to replace coal burning in Moneypoint in 2025. The Minister committed to asking ESB to provide a paper on the options for the replacement of coal burning in Moneypoint. I understand that paper has not yet been provided. Does the Minister know when it will be available?

The experts in Moneypoint would be the best people to identify what is the future of Moneypoint. Will it be phased out gradually when 2025 comes along? Will it be kept in reserve for use in times of extraordinary need? Will it be converted to alternative energy sources such as gas or biomass? Will it act as a terminal for providing off-shore wind and tidal energy production if the technology is available?

There is some commentary on Moneypoint in the climate action cross-party consensus which was published in March this year. The committee recommended that the active use of Moneypoint should be kept to a minimum and looked forward to examining the future proposals for that site. The committee was also cognisant of the impact on those whose livelihoods are dependent on Moneypoint and said that engagement with those whose employment will be affected by the closure of Moneypoint should commence at least three years prior to any proposed closure. The time for that is really now, because we are in the middle of 2019; 2025 is less than six years away. Moneypoint sustains 400 jobs, both directly and indirectly in west Clare. What is the future for those jobs? What is the Minister's view on the future for Moneypoint?

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy has quoted much of the substance of my reply so I will not repeat it for him. It is settled Government policy that coal firing in Moneypoint will cease by 2025 at the latest. That has been well sign-posted. My predecessor wrote to ESB in

order to start engagement about the future for Moneypoint. ESB has provided some response, but more work needs to be done in this area to provide a clearer roadmap. The response of ESB deals with key issues relating to the cessation of the use of coal for electricity generation. It raises issues around the security of supply, competitiveness and the sustainability of the company, as the Deputy pointed out. It also deals with the possible technologies to replace it. At this point a range of options is being discussed which will not surprise the Deputy as he mentioned them in his comments. Those options include off-shore wind, biomass, combined cycle gas, gas peaking plants and other combinations of those. Certainty about the future use of Moneypoint cannot be given because the decisions have not yet been made in that regard.

It was pointed out that market dynamics and wholesale market mechanics will ultimately decide who gets to build and what generation technologies will replace the coal capacity. There is a market within which the ESB, as a commercial entity, must operate when considering future generation. In this regard, ESB points out that the exact details of the issues created by the closure of Moneypoint coal-fired power units are commercially sensitive, particularly in the context of the “T-4” four-year-ahead capacity auction completed recently by EirGrid and SONI, the equivalent body in Northern Ireland. The new capacity mechanism auctions are conducted by EirGrid and SONI, operating under the regulatory supervision of the single electricity market committee, in a fully independent manner.

Apart from obtaining the necessary state aid approval and ensuring ongoing compliance with EU energy and state aid policy, I have no function in these matters.

Its new capacity mechanism, which is in line with EU state aid rules, is competitive and focused on delivering the generation services customers need at least cost. The process has been structured, clear and transparent, and has been well signalled to industry players. This latest auction, known as T-4, is for the delivery of capacity in 2022 and 2023. In broad terms, the results show the Irish generation portfolio is on the path towards its ambitious decarbonisation targets. The auction has facilitated the entry of new wind, demand-side and battery technology, supported by flexible gas plants required in the energy transition, with some fossil fuel plants or units being unsuccessful. These results are consistent with our overall long-term decarbonisation policy goals.

ESB is committed to playing a leading role in the transition to a low-carbon society, powered by clean electricity. It has confirmed in its response that coal-fired generation will cease no later than 2025. The response also confirms ESB’s intention that the Moneypoint site will be used for electricity generation post 2025, using some or all of a range of low-to-zero carbon technologies. In the coming years as we move decisively to confront the challenge of global warming and decarbonise the electricity heat and transport system, Ireland and particularly the west of Ireland is blessed with an abundance of potential renewable energy sources. There will be a need to harness this energy for the benefit of the State.

I look forward to the input of all parties to meet this challenge as part of the plan we are working on.

Deputy Michael Harty: The Minister has not addressed the issue of what will happen at Moneypoint. I know ESB and the Minister are considering a number of options, but time is running out. It is five and a half years to 2025 and decisions need to be made on the future of Moneypoint. I invite the Minister to visit Moneypoint. The previous Minister, Deputy Naughten, visited Moneypoint about two years ago and it would be very important for the Minister to

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come and see the site which is quite extensive. It would be important to meet the staff and see the substantial infrastructure there. We cannot allow it to wither and die; we need a plan for Moneypoint.

Moneypoint is also a deep-sea port and its future may be in maritime traffic as well as in electricity generation. It has potential in that regard. I would certainly like the Minister to visit Moneypoint and see the infrastructure there.

We all understand that we need to move to a low-carbon future and Moneypoint is what one would call a dirty station. While it produces very cheap energy and is important, it needs to be replaced. We need to know if it will be some alternative low-carbon fuel, wind or tide. The people, who work at the station and those who support it, need to know what their future will be. There is great potential for developing wind and wave energy. It has a sizeable site and could be used as a hub for developing such technology.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister has an invitation to west Clare.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I will try to summarise what was a rather long-winded reply. ESB has plans to replace coal burning with alternative generation, but it is in a marketplace with many other players competing for generation capacity in what is a rapidly growing generation market.

The market framework is now becoming clearer and, as I said in the reply, includes the sorts of options ESB is considering. It includes combined cycle gas, gas peaking plants, battery technology, wind capacity and so on. The option framework covers the options ESB is considering. At this stage for commercial reasons it cannot commit to any one position; it will not outline a track that would give its competitors an advantage. I admit that is not an ideal situation.

I will further explore what certainty we can seek to give to workers. As the Deputy rightly said, a large part of the Oireachtas's work is to talk about the transition and supporting people in that transition. I am conscious of the balancing required, with a company competing with others trying to develop a strategy while at the same time communicating with it in a way that allows people to plan ahead. I will explore this further to see if we can get greater clarity. I am very conscious of the constraints within which ESB is working as one of a number of competitors for the opportunity to provide additional generation. As the Deputy rightly said, it has, in Moneypoint, a very valuable asset and one I will seek to visit. That asset clearly has significant value not just for ESB but for the entire grid system.

Finance (Office of Tax Simplification) Bill 2018: Second Stage [Private Members]

Deputy John Lahart: I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am happy to speak on the Finance (Office of Tax Simplification) Bill 2018. The principal purpose of this Bill is to simplify the tax code for individual taxpayers, for companies and for the Revenue Commissioners.

Ireland has by and large a simple, consistent, efficient and fair tax system. Our tax system as it is currently configured increases tax compliance, encourages investment and growth, and attracts foreign direct investment.

The tax cost is not a simple matter of rates. For a company, large or small, there are two costs. There is the tax actually payable on profits, income and gains, and there is the administrative burden of complying with the tax code. For large companies, including the multinationals, a more complex tax structure means more administrative costs and a greater risk of non-compliance. For small businesses the complexity leads to either the failure to take up useful tax reliefs or the engagement of exceptionally expensive tax consultants.

Foreign direct investment, domestic indigenous companies and SMEs are all attracted to Ireland because of our competitive tax rates and the way our tax code is administered. This aspect is very important. Multinational companies employ approximately 230,000 people. The number employed by SMEs stands at around 970,000 according to the Central Statistics Office. These companies are the bedrock of Ireland's industrial policy. It is crucial that we stay ahead of the curve and do not gradually take our eyes off the ball. Too many other countries are targeting the business and investment we receive. As a small open economy we cannot afford to be complacent. This is effectively the essence of the Bill. We need to ensure that our tax system remains consistent, transparent, efficient and fair.

In previous years we have seen various tax initiatives being established to encourage investment, employment, growth, and research and development. However, these initiatives have not proved as successful as they might have been. Let us consider the knowledge development box, KDB, to encourage research and development, particularly for smaller businesses. On the face of it, the KDB is an attractive prospect. Qualifying profits from patents, computer programmes and certain certified intellectual property can be charged at 6.25%.

However, the uptake is very poor. According to a response to a parliamentary question, only 11 companies have availed of it, costing the Exchequer just €9 million. It was originally budgeted to cost the Exchequer €50 million. While this seems good for the Exchequer, it is bad for business.

The key employee engagement programme, KEEP, was announced in budget 2018. It was established to enable smaller companies, particularly tech companies, to compete against the larger tech companies for key employees. However, again the uptake was very disappointing and this necessitated changes in budget 2019 to improve the uptake. It is too early to predict how these changes will impact the take-up.

There have been similar problems with the employment incentive and investment scheme. That scheme was designed to encourage investors to invest in indigenous companies similar to the old business expansion scheme. It is designed to encourage investment and employment. It too has been marked with delays and complexity. That simply puts off businesses.

Another example of complexity that this newly established office could examine is the tax treatment of food supplements. There has been a long-standing problem on what products are taxed exempt and what products are liable for VAT. The Revenue Commissioners made a decision that would have had extensive impacts on customers and then at the last minute they postponed their decision so that the Tax Strategy Group could examine the issue. That is yet another prime example of why such an office would be beneficial.

Issues have arisen for individual taxpayers. There are many tax reliefs, allowances and credits for them. They are put in place to provide supports for individuals and families. For example, the home carer tax credit of up to €1,500 is not being claimed by everyone. It is de-

signed to help families where one parent works in the home to care for one or more children or a dependant. Many people are not aware of this tax credit and may be missing out on it. According to the Central Statistics Office, there are currently 146,698 family units where one parent stays at home to care for children. The figure is likely to be higher than this when one factors in those who are caring for a dependent person. According to details published by the Department of Finance, only 85,900 families claim the home carer tax credit. It is likely that many families are not benefitting from this credit because they are simply not aware of it. This is yet another example of what the office of tax simplification could examine. There is no point in reliefs being put in place if people are not aware or unable to apply for them.

The tax system is particularly complicated and exceptionally hard to navigate for older people who are bamboozled by all the different rules. This serves only to place them under undue pressure and stress that they can well do without.

Simplifying the tax code could also increase compliance among taxpayers. Some taxpayers are underpaying tax simply because they fail to fully understand their tax liability. Ignorance is not a defence but one simply needs to read the business section of the newspapers to see countless letters being written in to find out the tax implications for people's circumstances. Behavioural economists have long stated that if one wishes to get people to do something one first needs to make it simple. Tax cannot always be simple but I am sure there are areas that can be improved, and that is what this proposed office would be for.

Other areas where the proposed office could bring forward useful recommendations include inheritance tax and the tax on pensions. Inheritance tax is liable often at a difficult time when a loved one has been lost. It has been said by various tax advisers that this system puts undue stress on people suffering the loss of a family member. The office we propose should be established could examine ways of making this particular tax more user-friendly for people. The UK office, upon which this Bill is based, has been instructed to examine this very issue.

The tax treatment on pensions is also a challenging aspect for taxpayers and often deters people from investing in pension funds. Many people are not sure of the tax incentives for contributing to pension funds and are unsure of the tax penalties for the early extraction of funds from a pension fund. This is a key reason many people do not invest in a pension fund. It has been acknowledged that fewer than 47% of workers invest in a private pension. This will have a profound impact and tax plays an integral part of the problem.

As I alluded to earlier, the core reason for this Bill is to simplify the tax code and the administrative burden on taxpayers and companies. In an ever changing global environment it is essential that Ireland remains ahead of the curve when it comes to a consistent, simple and efficient tax system.

The Bill would establish an office of tax simplification, which would examine areas of tax, both the laws and the administration, and report on ways in which the tax system can be made simpler for the users. Currently, the Tax Strategy Group is in place and it publishes its work in the lead-up to the budget every year. The work of this group offers a valuable insight into possible changes in the tax regime, from income tax to corporation tax to value added tax. This Bill does not seek to replace the group, simply to complement it. While the group will continue its work on areas of general taxation, the office of tax simplification would specifically look at making the tax system easier for all users concerned, including the Revenue Commissioners. The office would also be able to report at any time and multiple times in any one year. This is

contrary to the Tax Strategy Group which reports only once a year.

The newly established office would bring forward recommendations on how the tax code could be simplified. Crucially, this Bill has a time bound element to it so that the office would not simply turn into another quango. A similar office was established in the UK. Currently, that office has been asked by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to recommend ways to simplify inheritance tax in the UK. The current tax director of the office in the UK spoke regarding inheritance tax and said: “Some of those who deal with inheritance tax will be private individuals who are already dealing with difficult circumstances, so the complexities of the administrative aspects of this tax may be particularly challenging.” This particular case sums up perfectly the role of the proposed office of tax simplification and how useful it could be in an Irish setting.

The cost of doing business in Ireland must be monitored closely at all times. We are a small open economy on the periphery of Europe and it is imperative we remain competitive in an ever more competitive global environment. Simply put, if another country has a better offering, it will get the investment and the jobs.

It is important to note the benefits a simple code would mean for the Revenue Commissioners. It would be easier for them to determine whether an individual or company is tax compliant. A simpler tax code would serve to improve compliance and assist them in focusing on the real tax cheats in our society.

I will summarise the sections of the legislation. Section 1 provides a number of simple definitions for the Bill. The key one is the definition for the office of tax simplification or OTS for short.

Section 2 simply refers to the Schedule which outlines the operational aspect of the office.

Section 3 outlines the functions of the OTS. The OTS must provide advice to the Minister for Finance on request of the Minister. It can also report to the Minister upon its own volition. This section defines the tax system as the law relating to, and the administration of, relevant taxes. This is important as the office does not simply have to focus on the tax code but also the administration of the tax code. The relevant taxes that the office can report on are the taxes collected and managed by the Revenue Commissioners. PRSI and other national insurance contributions collected by the Revenue Commissioners are also included.

Section 4 outlines further functions of the office, particularly surrounding reviews and reports. At the request of the Minister for Finance, the office must conduct a review of an aspect of the tax system with a view to how the tax system could be improved. After being sent to the Minister for Finance, he or she must lay a copy of the report before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Section 5 stipulates that the office must produce an annual report on the performance of its functions. This annual report needs to be sent to the Minister for Finance and be published. The Minister must lay the report before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Section 6 states that the office will cease in five years ensuring that it does not become simply another quango. If the office proves successful after five years, the then Government can seek to extend it through legislation.

Section 7 simply outlines the Short Title and the commencement powers of the Minister for

Finance.

The Schedule outlines the operational rules of the office from the membership to the term of office. The office shall have a representative from the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Finance. It must also have a tax director. Members of the office are to be appointed by the Minister for Finance and the term of office shall be five years. The Schedule outlines various other stipulations that I will not go into now but they cover areas such as remuneration and the prohibition on disclosure of confidential information.

To sum up, this is not revolutionary legislation. It is straightforward in its objective and it tackles a specific issue. I hope the entire House will get behind and support this Bill in order that we can obtain a simple, efficient and consistent tax code that is more competitive than is currently the case.

An Ceann Comhairle: In light of the number of Members offering, I suggest we hear now from Deputy O'Reilly and then from the Minister of State before Deputy Cassells wraps up. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I welcome Deputy Michael McGrath's Bill. The tax system has become far more convoluted in recent years as a result of the introduction of USC and its interaction with other tax rates. The average worker's payslip now has PRSI, USC and income tax, and that is before we get into credits and reliefs. The worker might be confused but he or she has every right to be more confused about what is coming down the line. Fine Gael's "Abolish the USC" posters may have led some naive people to believe it intended to abolish the USC without any plan at all as to what to replace it. Thankfully for our public services, that was only an election promise and was never meant to be followed through on. Then, the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, won an election on a promise to merge USC and PRSI, something we have heard exactly zero about since. They are two fundamentally different taxes on different bases, and while it might have made for a clever sounding policy, it was in fact meaningless. At the most recent Fine Gael Ard-Fheis, we had a new policy out of the blue, namely, to increase the higher rate threshold to €50,000. I am not sure what the policy is this week, so it is no wonder the tax system causes some confusion.

We support the Bill and especially the concept of a time-limited mandate. Five years is a significant amount of time and I am unsure as to how the office of tax simplification, OTS, would work because tax could change significantly at each budget. There could be extremely significant changes coming down the line in our corporate tax system in regard to international developments. The Government gambit of waiting for the OECD to bring forward proposals might actually be called in sooner rather than later, and it has been estimated that the mooted changes could mean €2 billion less in corporation tax receipts each year for the State. That would be a very significant challenge, although current corporation tax receipts have exceeded projections by billions, so long-term planning should accommodate the drop, if it happens. The impact might be more felt by the Department of Health when it goes looking for its annual bailout.

In terms of income tax, Sinn Féin has shown how a progressive tapering out of credits for high earners can bring in revenue in a fair way. Crucially, the Revenue Commissioners now provide individual incomes, allowing for individual taxation. This type of transparency and granularity, allowing for better tax policies, is coming about simply because of Sinn Féin pressure.

What do the figures tell us? The top 10% of earners take home a third of all income, while the top 1% of earners now take home 11% of income. Overall, the highest earning 10,000 citizens in the State took home €5.6 billion between them. That means that, on average, 10,000 people took home more than €500,000 each in gross pay. That is the scale of inequality. Yes, there are progressive parts to the tax system but it should be more progressive. I am also deeply concerned at the planned ending of the flat-rate expenses scheme for thousands of workers next year. At the stroke of a pen, thousands of workers will lose the automatic entitlement to a relief. Yet, when we try to curb the tax relief under section 110 or for vulture funds and REITs, it is incredibly difficult to do so. The tax system still favours the capital class; there is no doubt about that.

I wonder if Deputy Michael McGrath's proposed OTS should have its mandate extended to include reports on the transparency of the tax system to see if it can shed light on dark places, like the tax affairs of multinationals or on the investment bodies buying up so much of our housing supply. That would be a very worthwhile exercise. I reiterate our support for the Bill. We look forward to working with Deputy Michael McGrath.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): It would be useful to consider the proposed Bill in the context of the principles and general concepts that underpin tax policy and legislation. The OECD, in its Fundamental Principles of Taxation, notes that there are a number of broad tax policy considerations that have traditionally guided the development of taxation systems, and these include certainty and simplicity. The OECD explain that a simple tax system makes it easier for individuals and businesses to understand their obligations and entitlements, and the Government agrees. However, the OECD lists other principles which should also underpin the design of tax systems, and these concern neutrality, efficiency, effectiveness and fairness, as well as flexibility.

If a statutory body existed to promote simplicity or simplification, this would imply that this was the most important consideration and, often, this may not be the case. There needs to be an interaction between the principles and, at times, there may be tensions and, therefore, an appropriate balance will need to be achieved. For instance, complexity rather than simplicity may result in efforts to achieve equity and to avoid unintended consequences. Therefore, where the focus of tax design or review is purely or primarily on simplification, this could reduce the focus on equity, efficiency or neutrality in the tax system.

Administrative complexity is often a direct consequence of legislative complexity, particularly where Government seeks to advance a range of policy objectives through the system of taxation. Therefore, any proposals for administrative simplification will need to have regard to the potential impact on the range of policy options. Some considerations may include progressivity, ability to pay, revenue raising measures and measures to address externalities, for example. Therefore, any proposals for simplification will need to have regard to any intended or unintended consequences to constrain the policy options available. The present arrangements, where all relevant principles are taken into account in the design or modification of the tax system, including the principle of simplicity, is a balanced and fair way of approaching the formulation of tax policy in complex environment. In addition, it would seem important to note that the Commission on Taxation did not recommend such a body. To the extent that it commented on simplicity, it was to identify it as one of a number of principles that ought to apply in the design of tax expenditures.

There is another very important point and, indeed, a distinction to be made here: tax law is

the responsibility of Minister for Finance and the Oireachtas, whereas the administration of tax law is primarily the responsibility of Revenue. This distinction should not prevent the proposed OTS from making recommendations regarding both law and administration. In addition, the Bill as drafted would require the Minister for Finance to provide formal comment on any report carried out by the proposed OTS and we could have a situation where the Minister is commenting on issues that legally and correctly fall within the remit of Revenue. It is not clear how this is appropriate or how it could be accommodated. Therefore, it is important that the distinction is understood and any recommendations are appropriately directed. This means there would be significant issues to be considered in order to ensure that the proposed OTS could fulfil its mandate.

For example, the issue of taxpayer confidentiality would need to be resolved. Conducting effective reviews of administrative processes might necessitate some access to Revenue systems and records. This would need to be managed carefully and within a precise legal framework that protects taxpayer confidentiality at all times. Taxpayer confidentiality is provided for in section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. That section allows some disclosure of taxpayer information, for example, to the Department of Finance solely to support the policy making process, and the powers of Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General also allow access to Revenue systems. These accesses and disclosures are managed very carefully, and the relationship with the proposed OTS would need to be similarly legislated for and managed.

On the issue of simplification, we would see a potential risk in that if we make returns as user-friendly or business-friendly as possible, such simplification may see the level of information to be submitted with the tax payment reduced. This has consequences in terms of reducing data available to inform evidence-based policy decisions. This is an unintended consequence of making our tax administration system more friendly.

There are a number of studies that can be pointed to that show Ireland already fares very well on the tax compliance burden by international standards. Most obviously, in the World Bank-PwC annual report on paying taxes, Ireland ranks consistently number one in Europe for ease of paying taxes. It is questionable, therefore, how much scope there is to reduce the compliance burden further without sacrificing the ability to collect the data required to maintain accountability and performance systems in regard to tax collection and to inform policy design and implementation. Added to this is the risk that it is unlikely that any policy-neutral simplification could be achieved. It is very likely that there would be winners and losers and a potential cost to the Exchequer.

Next is the question of value, specifically, what the proposed OTS would add to the policy making and tax administration processes already in place. The proposed legislation appears to mirror the ends and objectives of that agency. The role of the UK equivalent is to seek to reduce tax compliance burdens on both businesses and individual taxpayers. It reports to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who retains control of policy.

From the external output of the UK agency it is not immediately obvious that specific issues of the kind it addresses could not be addressed here by the Department, Revenue or both. The proposal essentially to mirror the UK example here may mean an additional process without any improved output. The establishment of the proposed office of tax simplification, OTS, here in Ireland would certainly seem to add yet another means by which the Government would interact with tax stakeholders. Therefore there would seem to be a high risk of both overlap and duplication.

The Department of Finance already runs a number of public consultations each year. This contributes significantly to ensuring stakeholder views are considered in policy formation and development. There are also *ad hoc* independent reviews, several of which are under way or have recently been completed. The Department also engages in the tax strategy group process and facilitates pre-budget submissions and finance Bill submissions from interested parties. On the implementation side, Revenue also engages in the tax administration liaison committee process. During all stages of the finance Bill process there is significant discussion in the Oireachtas of the operation and shape of the taxation system, including any issues of simplification. This allows Deputies and Senators to raise specific points. Given all the mechanisms already in place it is difficult to see what real value would be added by a group narrowly focused on reports about reducing compliance burdens or simplifying legislation.

It is also possible to point to concrete examples of changes that have already taken place and improvements that have already been made. A good example is the pay as you earn, PAYE, modernisation project. The new real-time PAYE reporting system started on 1 January 2019. This significant reform of the PAYE system brings improved accuracy and transparency for Revenue, employers and employees. It reduces the administrative burden on employers and will ensure that employee tax deductions and contributions are correct and are reported to Revenue on time.

Finally, I would like to turn to how the proposed OTS would work. In that context I would like to make some comments on the detail of the proposed Bill. Our first issue centres on the exact context in which the proposed body will operate. The Bill suggests that the proposed OTS will be established but how exactly it would interact with the Department of Finance and Revenue is unclear. In addition, section 6(1) states that the proposed OTS must provide advice to the Minister on request. This may seem reasonable but the Bill adds that such advice must be provided “as the OTS considers appropriate”. This raises the question of whether it should be open to the OTS to provide advice whether the Minister requests it or not. We do not have a definition of exactly what “simplification” could involve, beyond noting that it could include improving the efficiency of administration. It is open to interpretation and potential confusion as to the exact role of the proposed agency.

The Bill proposes that the OTS is to consist of not more than eight members, to include a chairperson, a tax director, a representative of the Revenue Commissioners and a representative of the Department of Finance. Additional members, if any, are to be nominated by the chair. The members of the OTS are to be appointed by the Minister for Finance and a person may be appointed as a tax director of the OTS only if the Minister for Finance is satisfied that he or she has the necessary qualifications and experience to direct the manner in which the OTS discharges its functions. The Minister for Finance would be required to consult the chair of the OTS before appointing a person as a tax director. As only two of the eight potential members are likely to be civil servants an additional salary cost may well be incurred, unless it is envisaged that the other members will be retained on a *pro bono* basis. This also seems like quite a large number of members when contrasted with Revenue, for instance, which only has three Revenue Commissioners including the Chairman.

Regarding staffing, the Bill states:

The OTS may appoint such and so many persons to be members of the staff of the OTS, and on such terms, as may be determined by the OTS with the prior consent of the Minister given following consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

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This administrative structure seems somewhat elaborate and could absorb scarce resources in pursuit of a potentially duplicated or even unnecessary goal. It therefore appears that quite significant costs would be incurred in setting up the proposed office and in the provision of any staff or facilities deemed necessary for it to function. To these could be added the costs that would presumably be incurred both by the Department of Finance and by Revenue in their engagement with the new body. There may also be implications for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, as section 3(2) states that the definition of taxes envisaged by the OTS would include insurance contributions. While Revenue acts as a collection agency for social insurance contributions, it should be noted that policy formulation and administrative arrangements in this area are the responsibility of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. It is surprising that the proposed lifespan for the proposed OTS is specifically set at five years in section 6 of the Bill. Simplification is a process of continuous improvement and regular review rather than one lasting just for a specific period.

In conclusion, while I recognise that the intentions of the proposed Bill are laudable there are significant concerns. I have outlined some of the pertinent issues. We consider that there are better and more efficient and effective ways of dealing with the issues that the proposed office is intended to address.

Deputy Shane Cassells: I wish to thank the long list of speakers who contributed. One wonders about the complaints the Ceann Comhairle gets about Members being unable to get speaking time.

This is an important Bill. My colleague, Deputy John Lahart, spoke about the various areas where an office of tax simplification could be of assistance. I know of many elderly people who are often overwhelmed by the complexity that seems to be inherent in various State organisations, whether concerning social welfare, taxation or their local authorities. The Minister of State knows that from his work in his own constituency office. I know that and Deputy O'Reilly knows it too. This simply adds undue stress to their lives, which they could well do without. We only need to consider areas such as pensions, inheritance tax and probate to see this point.

An office of tax simplification can improve the experience for all users, including the self-employed worker, the stay at home carer, the pensioner, the PAYE worker, the SME owner and indeed the Revenue Commissioners themselves. This is something I have raised with Revenue on its numerous appearances before the Committee of Public Accounts. Everyone benefits from a simple and user-friendly tax system. A consistent and straightforward tax code is only part of the equation. The administration of tax is also a crucial element. This Bill will seek to simplify all this. An office of tax simplification will look at the entire tax system, including both the code and the administration.

As Deputy Lahart noted earlier, to support small businesses we have the knowledge development box, the key employee engagement programme, KEEP, the employment and investment incentive, EII, scheme and various other tax incentives. These schemes are not being taken up simply because the application processes are too complex. Complexity leads to added administrative expense. The greater the expense, the lower the take-up.

There is far too much complexity for individuals as well. I refer to inheritance tax. Let us suppose that a parent suddenly passes away and the family home is to be passed onto the child. At a time when an individual is already grieving and going through a very difficult time in his or her life, the inheritance tax system kicks in. There is a possible tax liability of €30,000 or

€40,000 at a time of immense sadness. The system is complex for those who are not versed in tax law and are not party to the legislative debates that happen in this Chamber. It is intimidating. People are vulnerable and at the end of it all there could be a substantial tax bill, which adds yet more stress. It is in these areas that an office of tax simplification could play a vital role. It could look at all these areas objectively and provide recommendations to the Government, the Oireachtas and the public on how we can do better for our citizens. Nobody likes paying tax. By making the tax system simple for the taxpayer we would perhaps make the experience of paying tax less stressful.

The tax strategy group does great work each year. It plays an important role in policymaking. It brings various options on complex tax areas together and adds crucial insights in the various tax policy debates in every budget cycle. This Bill does not replace the tax strategy group but rather complements it. The tax strategy group is restricted in when it can bring issues forward. The office of tax simplification could report on any matter and would be able to look at every area of tax.

To conclude, a simple tax code benefits us all. Of course there is often a reason for complexity, such as to close off loopholes or to make sure reliefs are targeted at those who really need them. However, I am convinced that there are areas that are overly burdensome and complex and that is where the Bill comes in. The Bill is not revolutionary. It is straightforward in its objective and it tackles a very specific issue. I appreciate the comments of Deputy O'Reilly and I hope that the entire House will get behind and support the Bill in order that we can obtain a simple, efficient and consistent tax code that is more competitive than is currently the case.

Question put.

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 70(2), the vote is postponed until the weekly division time on Thursday next.

The Dáil adjourned at 6.40 p.m until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 16 April 2019.

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