

Liffey Champion

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Fitzgerald honoured to continue to serve in government

It is great privilege once again to serve in government, a Government of purpose that will work towards a prosperous nation for all and in every community, Tánaiste and newly appointed Minister for Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, Frances Fitzgerald told the Dáil.

“It has been an honour to serve as Minister in two Departments,” she said. “Throughout my time as Minister for Justice and Equality, there have been major changes in significant areas of public life. I am very proud of those changes for which I have campaigned my whole life. I believe the Commission on the future of policing will represent a seminal moment when it comes to the future of An Garda Síochána.”

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

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

Unemployment is falling, she said and there are challenges on the horizon. “Unemployment has reduced from 15.4% to 6.2%. That represents a major change in the lives of so many of our citizens and it is what they want to see. The task now is to create and innovate, to spread opportunity in enterprise far and wide, as the Taoiseach said, to the four corners of the country and everywhere in between. We now have the green technology, the artificial intelligence and the economic foundations on which we can build the future of Irish industry with endeavour, creativity and investment.”

Murphy cautious about expectations of new Taoiseach

Just because someone comes from a diverse background does not mean that he or she has empathy with others of similarly diverse backgrounds, Social Democrat Deputy Catherine Murphy told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on the nomination of a new Taoiseach she said during the 2016 election campaign where Fianna Fáil was blamed for breaking the economy, the last Government was very much blamed for breaking Irish society. “People felt there was a point below which a society should not fall,” she said. “People were looking at families with children becoming homeless. We had never seen it before yet it has got worse, if anything,

and not better. They reiterated the point relating to our health services. They wanted this country to be reformed. They wanted this country to be rebuilt.”

“Diversity comes in a whole lot of different packages, but privilege is one of those diversities that Deputy Varadkar could not say he has not enjoyed,” she said. “That has helped him to overcome the diversities that are part of his make-up.”

There are diverse voices in this House, she said. “I have a hope for those diverse voices. The housing crisis, whistleblowers, NAMA and the IBRC were all things that were brought to this House by diverse voices. Please do not silence us. Please do not make that the first thing you do. That would be a big mistake.”

Speaking during a later debate on the nomination of the new Cabinet members, Deputy Murphy said the Dáil had watched as someone who had been the subject of the gravest findings by the Moriarty tribunal became Fine Gael's kingmaker. Deputy Michael Lowry, she said, now has access to the Government and the highest political office in the land because the Taoiseach can count on him.

“The Moriarty tribunal ran for 13 years and cost the State in excess of €55 million, yet its findings have not been acted on,” she said. “We find ourselves in a situation where the election of a Fine Gael Taoiseach is being facilitated by one of the key players in that tribunal, while a controversial company, Siteserv, now known as Actavo and owned by the other person against whom the tribunal made its findings - they were about corruption - was the supplier to the Houses of the Oireachtas of the barriers used for the Taoiseach's walk of honour in the grounds this afternoon. It beggars belief and serves only to remind us why trust in government and politics has been decimated. If the Taoiseach believes in the phrase "Start as you mean to go on", the events of today mark an inauspicious start for the Government.”

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