

Submission on Dáil Reform- Jack Chambers TD, Fianna Fáil Dublin West

We are at a fundamental crossroads in Irish politics where we can embrace proper, real and substantive Dáil reform to restore the spirit and capacity of the Irish parliament to provide the counterbalance to the Irish executive. We must not present anaemic, minor or symbolic reforms which will make little or no difference to the workings of Irish democracy. Now is the time to make the fundamental change and shift to uphold the respect and potential of Dáil Éireann. The reforms in the coming weeks must alter the nature and quality of Irish politics and debate. I have outlined 9 points of suggested reform below. I hope the committee on Dáil reform will analyse and positively embrace the reforms required so we can progress real solutions to the current policy challenges that this country faces.

Dáil Reform:

1. Quorum & Attendance. The public and the citizens of Ireland very often witness debates in the chamber of Irish democracy with little or no TDs present. Whilst TDs have demanding schedules there should be a greater presence, input and attendance from all sides. Standing orders under section 19 currently require between 10 and 20 members for part 1 and 2 of this section. This should be amended to require a minimum of thirty members present to ensure greater levels of physical oversight and presence in the Dáil
2. Special Summons & Postponement of the Dáil...amend section 24(1) to include: *"on the request of the Taoiseach and the majority of the Dáil, the Ceann Comhairle may summon"*. For matters of public importance or for whatever reason necessary, the majority of TDs and members of Dáil Éireann should be collectively empowered to summon the Dáil from any adjournment that may have been imposed by the Taoiseach or the executive. This would help to balance the degree of control on our parliamentary democracy.
3. Amendments to standing orders to ensure the majority of the Dáil agrees to the schedule of Dáil business and the agenda. Submissions requested by Ceann Comhairle for Dáil schedule of business for week ahead from all whips with deliberative and reasoned consensus achieved to ensure substantive input for all deputies and parties.
4. Prevention of guillotined legislation by raising the democratic threshold, requiring the agreement of the Ceann Comhairle and requiring 2/3 support of members present. There is an absolute need for democratic consensus around guillotined legislation and if legislation is of national importance and must be expedited through the Dáil then it will need a higher democratic threshold to be progressed. This would increase the level of debate, oversight and input on matters of national importance which require an accelerated progression through Dáil Éireann.
5. Increase pre-emptive deliberation, consultation and oversight of bills and legislation at Dáil committees to increase and widen the democratic input of parliamentarians

6. Reform of Dáil committees chairpersonships by having a secret ballot for the selection process
7. I propose the expansion of debate for topical issues to limit the current formal tit for tat to ensure a greater depth of debate and accountability for government. This Dáil committee must end the current archaic process of Ministers without any real or substantive knowledge failing to go beyond the pre-prepared departmental answers with many then refusing to debate the relevant issue when an opposition deputy probes the issue with further questions. A government Minister should be able to engage beyond the initial formal response to allow a greater depth of accountability for issues raised within the Dáil relating to their department. It might be advisable to extend powers to the Ceann Comhairle to ensure Ministers who appear for topical issues are accountable for the questions asked and if any further questions are asked which are not reasonably responded to, such questions should be followed up with a new extended Topical Issues session perhaps the following week where Ministers can respond to such questions which they have not adequately answered on initial questioning the previous week. This extended topical issues session relating to questions in a previous week should be added to the current Dáil schedule with new additions to the current standing orders.
8. The committee on Dáil reform should explore the possibility of empowering Ceann Comhairle to stop the practice of Ministers simply delivering and reading formal scripts in the chamber, with notes allowed, to increase the level of debate and interaction in the chamber.
9. All major government announcements, exchequer returns and departmental initiatives should be formally announced in the Dáil chamber before any public announcement. This would allow debate and oversight on such announcements where they can then be teased out. Prior leaking of such announcements should be sanctioned and investigated by parliament so the respect of the Dáil is ensured.

I hope this submission as well as the proposals from other parties and deputies all provide a collective platform to achieve the Dáil reform that we are all striving to achieve for our people and our parliament.

Yours sincerely,



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