



PAT THE COPE GALLAGHER TD

Gweedore Road, Dungloe, Co Donegal

Tel: 074 95 21364 Mob: 087 2238925

Email: coper@eircom.net

www.patthecope.com



Pat TheCope Gallagher



FIANNA FÁIL
THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Submission on Dáil Reform

“Empowering the Members; creating a genuine Parliamentary Culture”

The shape of the 32nd Dáil is radically different from any of its predecessors and contained in that change of configuration, is a challenge for all political parties and independent deputies. The option of doing business as usual is simply a non-starter, the diverse make-up of the current Dáil, the varying political views and different strands of political option dictates that we must comprehensively overhaul existing and previous structures, procedures and practices.

My proposals for reform are based on two principles:

1. Increase the role of the TD - strengthen the role / rights of the individual TD's accompanied by the required services
2. Increase the power of the Dáil – provide for full and meaningful involvement of Dáil Éireann at all stages of the legislative cycle.

Inspiration in leading this reform agenda can be drawn from Parliaments that exercise genuine legislative power as opposed to being a rubber stamp or just exercising the power to scrutinise the executive (whilst that is important), many Nordic parliaments in addition to other European Parliament's exercise the model I propose.

To further elaborate on my proposals:

1. Strengthening the role of the individual T.D.

- The Irish electoral system unlike most EU countries provides the citizen an opportunity to vote for the individual TD as opposed to a party list system. This means that the citizen expect their TD to be accessible and to represent their views and concerns in the Dáil – the current house structures/procedures does not allow this to happen
- The Government /opposition, majority / minority systems means that TD's not in power, have had limited opportunity to make their voices heard, firstly and secondly to shape Government decision or new legislation and laws which affect all our citizens directly
- In order to change the current system a number of organisational and procedural changes must be made in Dáil Éireann:

- (A) Establish a “Presidium” which would include the Ceann Comhairle, Leas Ceann Comhairle, leaders of each of the political groupings (or their nominees) in addition to nominated representatives of independents (non attached).
- (B) The threshold for membership as per grouping would be reduced from 7 to 6.
- (C) This body would set the annual calendar of Dáil Éireann sessions, in addition set out the weekly business of the house. This is to replace the current practice whereby the Government through the Government Chief Whip sets the agenda for the house alone, with limited consultation.
- (D) This body would also have responsibility for assisting and enabling individual TD’s or a group of TDs who have drafted legislation, or formulation of policy to get through the House structures and procedures. Currently the system stymies any such legislation on the part of individual TD’s. A procedural timeframe whereby once a piece of proposed legislation is brought to the house and approved – then that “draft” piece must be placed on a “conveyer belt” whereby it automatically moves through the next phases without being sidelined, lost or ignored by the Government of the Day. This structure which is common practice in most other European parliament’s will greatly strengthen and enhance the role of the individual TD as a legislator.
- (E) Greater constituency support should be offered so that our local constituency offices are able to avail of all resources and services available in Leinster House including IT, support, training and drafting advice.
- (F) Greater opportunity for individual TD’s to raise issues that directly concern their constituency and constituents and that the line Minister in question be present to address the issues raised.
- (G) The Government of the day must be made more answerable to Dáil Éireann, no reform will be complete without making provision for this core principle of democracy. Every Government must be answerable to its Parliament.

2. Dáil Éireann involvement in all stages of the legislative cycle

- Hitherto the Dáil has only been involved in the legislative phase and essentially excluded from the programming, impact assessment and consultation that takes place upstream and the evaluation of the implementation on the ground that takes place downstream, this is despite the fact that directly elected TD’s are very well placed to participate in the decision making in these areas.
- Strengthen the role of the committees in pre legislative scrutiny, this role has been virtual rather than real up to now as each committee has had an in-built government majority. What is envisaged here is when a Bill is proposed, the relevant committee should have an opportunity to examine its possible social, economic, regional and other impacts. Ideally substantial legislative proposals should be accompanied by an independently conducted assessment which each relevant committee should then consider.
- D’Hondt System be used in the filling of committee positions to provide for fairer participation of groupings and view points across the Dáil, including the position of Chair.
- Committees should be empowered to conduct stakeholder consultations and hold public hearings for that purpose. The recently created lobby register could be used to determine which groups would be invited to consultations ensuring a far and transparent process.

- The Oireachtas needs to develop a world class research services drawing from other parliaments / democratic systems and that TD's have access to high quality non partisan expertise across all areas.
- In this respect, there should be a specific emphasis on legislative drafting assistance so that TD's will be empowered with staff assistance to draft legislative proposals and amendments in addition to policy formulation.
- Legislative proposals should be accompanied with proper independent costing and TD's should be provided with access to such services and expertise. That this service be non partisan and independent of the civil service if possible.
- Likewise, an office of Legal Advisor to the Oireachtas should be established in order to assist TD's with independent legal advice and opinion on matters related to their role as a legislator.

In conclusion, the next Dáil, must alter its ways in which it conducts business, the electorate will not tolerate more of the same. We must champion a new way in which the Oireachtas conducts its business on behalf of its citizens. "Better law making" is better for An Ireland for all, better for all of its citizens.

Le gach dea ghúí,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat the Cope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pat the Cope Gallagher TD