

Connacht Tribune

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Failure of Apple Data Centre reflects a lack of political leadership

The apparent failure of Apple to proceed with a data centre in Athenry is a deep blow to the West of Ireland Green Party leader Eamon Ryan told the Dáil.

“Effectively, we cannot build anything in this country now as we have lost the public and part of the reason is a lack of political leadership, as the Citizens' Assembly indicated,” he said.

This is a real problem for the West of Ireland when it means this flagship project will not go ahead, he said. “It comes on the back of us already saying we will not build out the grid to the West of Ireland as it is a politically difficult decision. I know it is tough but that has consequences. Sometimes we must stand up to the public and be honest. We know nobody wants to build out the grid and it is not easy but if we pull back, as we have done, there will be consequences for Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and Donegal. Dublin is packed with data centres and we have no problem getting them because we have a grid and other infrastructure. If we do not provide the underlying infrastructure, the West will not develop and that is what happened because Fine Gael was asleep on watch. It stood back from the responsibility to provide infrastructure that would have allowed fibre cables and grid connections that allow modern industries to form.”

In response, Minister of State Pat Breen said the Taoiseach visited the US recently and met senior management from Apple. “He made it clear that the project has the full support of our Government and of the local community in Athenry,” he said.” He also stressed that Ireland is a country that values and supports technological investment like that being proposed in this case. Members, including the Deputy, will recognise that this is ultimately a commercial decision for the company to make. We know such decisions can be informed by a range of different factors but we will continue to encourage Apple to proceed with the data centre project in Athenry.”

It was incumbent on the Government to ensure that similar projects are not unreasonably delayed again in the future, he said. “The Government has already been taking steps to avoid a repeat of this situation. This may include the designation of data centres as strategic infrastructure developments for planning purposes. That would help ensure that future data centre-related planning applications can move swiftly through the planning process. Other measures to streamline the planning process may also be considered.”

No institution can be trusted - Connolly

No institution can be trusted, Galway Independent Deputy Catherine Connolly told the Dáil. This, she said she had learned in her professional life and on a human level.

If one looked at the record of the HSE in Galway city, on every single occasion on which there was crisis, the reaction was to close ranks in a most effective manner. “The unfortunate

case of Savita Halappanavar only came to light because of the persistence of a journalist,” she said. “If that tells us anything it is that we cannot trust institutions. Since then there have been a number of other inquiries in Galway, which I will not go into, but in which I have some personal involvement. From my personal experience I see absolutely no commitment from the HSE or from institutions in general to learn from mistakes, to acknowledge them and to actively involve the patient or the patient's family.”

Deputy Connolly said she found this particularly unacceptable given that, in the end, a lot more of taxpayers' money is spent on inadequate internal investigations, inadequate external investigations, investigations which pretend to be independent and, finally, the appointment of independent people.

“That has been my experience, both professionally and personally, over my lifetime,” she said. “Unfortunately, I have not seen any inclination on the part of institutions to learn. Ultimately, everybody makes mistakes, including institutions. A problem arises only when the institution does not admit a mistake. This costs the taxpayer more money in the end. Most people are not litigious. Most simply want to be part of a system, learn and have mistakes acknowledged.”