

## **Kerry's Eye**

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

### **Crisis in lack of respite facilities**

The crisis with regard to the lack of respite facilities for older people taking care of young adults was raised in the Dáil by Independent Deputy Michael Healy-Rae.

“We have situations where people of 70 and 80 years of age are taking care of young adults, whom they are trying to mind at home,” he said. “They are desperately in need of respite but do not have it available to them. It is an awful situation and it is not just in my constituency, but in everybody's constituency. More resources need to be put into providing respite so these elderly people can take a bit of a break and a rest from caring for their loved ones.”

In response, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said he was very aware of this issue. “The difficulty in getting respite is a huge issue in my constituency, as I am sure it is in the Deputy's constituency,” he said. “There is the associated difficulty of people with disabilities who are perhaps in their 40s and 50s living with parents who are now in their 70s or 80s, and the need for them to move into a community home of some sort. It is a real problem and requires additional resources. There will be additional resources for it in the 2018 service plan and while I do not think it will be enough to meet all the needs that exist, there will be enough to make some real progress next year.”

### **Call for reduced tax on rental income**

If the Government is serious about the provision of housing, it should reduce the tax rate on rental income, Independent Deputy Danny Healy-Rae told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on private rented housing standards he said most landlords run a good show and operate their properties to a high standard. “Due to the lack of supply, rents are too high and many tenants are suffering the consequence,” he said. “Most landlords pay more than 50% tax on the rents they take, and many will not even think of renting their vacant properties because of it. A landlord who gets €150 is left with €75 for all of his or her trouble and regulation.”

Deputy Healy-Rae said the way that the people in the recent *RTÉ Prime Time Investigates* programme were treated was shameful. “The landlords involved should hang their heads in shame,” he said. “An animal welfare Bill was before the House a number of weeks ago. Around the country tonight, most cattle are bedded better than the poor people in those shameful conditions.”

### **Government trying to criminalise young drivers – Healy-Rae**

At a time when there are considerable waiting times for tests, the Government is criminalising ordinary decent young people who want to get educated and who are trying to go to work in cars but often unaccompanied, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae told the Dáil.

“The Taoiseach has talked about people getting up in the morning,” he said. “These are young students who are trying to go to work to better themselves and pay for their education. The Government is hurting these people as well as those who do not have public transport facilities in their areas. They have to use a car belonging to their mother or father or perhaps an uncle or aunt. Out of the blue and on a day when trains were not operating, the Government announced it would criminalise ordinary, decent, respectable people.”

In response, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said that provision, which is being brought forward as an amendment to the Road Traffic Act, was approved by the Cabinet this week. “I draw the Deputy's attention to the fact that 13 people with learner permits, mainly young men and women, have died on our roads so far this year and of these, 11 were driving unaccompanied. Perhaps if they had complied with the law and had been accompanied, they would still be alive today.”

### **Call for extension in time for cutting of hedgerows**

Fortunes are being spent on marketing and selling Ireland but it is all spoilt by the hedges being overgrown throughout the summer, Deputy Danny Healy-Rae told the Dáil. Speaking during a debate on a new Heritage Bill which would allow for the cutting of hedges for an extra month in March, he said places could sell themselves if the hedges were cut.

“People will recall that 50 or 60 years ago there were section men along every road,” he said. “The local authorities at the time knew the value of cutting their hedges. They had to cut them with scythes and slashers. It was hard manual work, but it was done. We have all kinds of saws and hedge cutters now, but no roadsides are cut. It is all left to stand and grow out across the road. There are now tunnels on many roads where one cannot see the daylight. The Minister knows that what I am saying is right. That must be addressed if we are to claim to do anything in this term of the Dáil.”

He said the Bill also refers to burning scrub and provides that farmers will be allowed to burn scrub in the month of March on a trial basis. “At the same time, the farmers are being penalised if their lands are overgrown,” he said. “These lands cannot be cut with a forage harvester, lawn mower or any type of mechanical equipment. The only way to put the place in order and keep it that way for the Department's officials who come out to check the land is to burn it off.”