

## **Limerick Leader**

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

### **Forty-five Australian companies looking at Mid-West**

Up to 45 Australian firms have expressed an interest in locating their business in the Mid-West post-Brexit, Fine Gael Senator Maria Byrne told the Upper House.

She said she welcomed the good news from President Higgins in Australia, from where he confirmed, in an interview with Martin Shanahan of IDA Ireland, that many Australian companies are, because of Brexit, looking to Ireland's Mid-West as a potential spot for relocation and expansion, when traditionally their focus would have been on the UK.

“This development is being described as the boomerang effect, with members of the Irish diaspora in Australia helping these companies with their plans to come to Ireland,” she said.

### **Clarity sought on future unemployment figures**

The reason why the Government’s summer economic statement projects the unemployment rate to remain unchanged at 5.5% from 2019 to 2021 was sought in the Dáil by Limerick Sinn Féin Deputy Maurice Quinlivan.

He said page 13 of the statement refers to unemployment rates being expected to fall to 5.5% by 2019 and remaining at this level over the remainder of the forecast horizon, which is until at least 2021. “Using the unemployment figures provided, that would equate to circa 120,000 defined as unemployed each year,” he said. “Are these figures correct? Will the figures be revisited to ensure that more people are helped to get a job and get back into the workforce?”

Deputy Quinlivan said he appreciated there is a certain point which traditionally constitutes full employment. “I am concerned that many of the people affected are construction workers who are unable to re-enter the industry when they come back on-stream,” he said. “Others affected may be young people who graduated from school or college at precisely the wrong economic time. Such people are trapped in what we call long-term unemployment. This is reflected in the higher rate of youth unemployment and the fact that over half of those unemployed are categorised as long-term unemployed. These are the people to whom I was adverting. My concern is that they will be left behind if the projections indicate the same rate for four of five years. It is important to find new ways to get these people back into the workforce.”

In reply, Social Protection Minister Regina Doherty said the projections for 2020-21 in the summer economic statement are not targets but forecasts. They emerge from the overall economic analysis. “Any forecasts over the horizon are, by their nature, tentative and depend on the environment,” he said. “In particular, the impact of Brexit has to be factored into those figures. It is commonly accepted in a normal labour market that, as people move between jobs and new people are attracted into the labour market, full employment is probably the equivalent to an unemployment rate anywhere between 4% and 5%.”

This means in Ireland, she said, that a large number of people will be on the live register at any given time. “In a full employment situation, the experience of unemployment will be relatively short for most people,” she said. “However, on average there is still churn of 100,000 people at any given time during a year, even at full employment. Such people may be between jobs for a number of weeks or months.”

### **O’Dea seeks progress on legislation for persons on low hour contracts**

The current status of new legislation regarding protection for persons on insecure low hour contracts was sought in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil Deputy Willie O’Dea.

Speaking during Question Time, he said Fianna Fáil supports such a measure which it had inserted into and enshrined the ‘Confidence and Supply’ agreement which is now 18 months old. “We support it because of the increased casualisation of labour and the resulting insecurity,” he said. “Naturally, we are concerned to progress it as quickly as possible. I, therefore, ask the Minister to make every effort possible to have it brought to the House, at least on Second Stage, before Christmas. However, I realise the constraints.”

In reply, the Minister for social Protection Regina Doherty said the Bill is being drafted and she hoped to be able to publish it in December. “If there is not the usual rush here in the last couple of weeks in December, I might be lucky to have it started before Christmas,” she said. “I say this while acknowledging we also have the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 and will have the new Social Welfare Bill that will go to the Cabinet.”

### **The world is waiting – O’Dea**

The foreign policy section of the Programme for Government is grandly titled "Ireland and the world" and contains the following phrase: "We must articulate ourselves on the world stage, contribute to peace-building initiatives across the globe...", Deputy Willie O’Dea told Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.

“Did this statement trigger the recent proposed expedition to North Korea?” he asked. “Will the Taoiseach provide the House with an updated position on this expedition because the world is waiting?”

In reply, the Taoiseach said there will be no Government mission to North Korea. “Having said that, Members of the House are free to travel anywhere they like in their own capacity and at their own expense,” he added.