

## **The Southern Star**

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### **Collins criticises Budget inadequacies**

It is scandalous that children over 18 who are in education and costing parents huge amounts of money are not even entitled to Child Benefit, Deputy Michael Collins told the Dáil. That is wrong.

Speaking during a debate on the Social Welfare Bill, which implements the provisions of the Budget, he said it is hurtful for many parents as it is a huge financial burden for many families. “Second level education is very expensive and the back to school allowance does not extend far enough to cover the year-long costs that face older students, especially as many might need additional classes or grinds in the Leaving Certificate cycle,” he said.

Another matter that comes under the Minister's brief and which should be discussed is the death benefit, he said. “It is a huge issue for many families at a very difficult time. I and other Deputies get a huge number of calls when somebody has lost a loved one in the family asking whether there is some form of benefit to pay off the funeral bill. It was a savage and brutal cut for many families and it must be addressed.”

The treatment of people on social welfare in this country is becoming appalling, he said. “Somebody rang me the other day after going to see a community welfare officer in West Cork,” he said. “The person came out of the meeting crying. They are no longer community welfare officers but community “get rid of you” officers. The Minister must stand by the people. She must stand up to these people and accept that some people are in difficult circumstances and that in some rural areas there is not as much employment as there is in the bigger cities. There is an assumption that people must get off welfare, but that is not good enough.”

### **Budget does not take into account cost of disability**

While the €5 increase in payments across the board in Budget 2018 is welcome, it does not take into account the expenses incurred by those with disabilities, Fianna Fáil Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony told the Dáil.

Disability makes many things more expensive for the person with the disability than for someone who does not have a disability, she said. “The *Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, SILC, data show that the at-risk-of-poverty rates, poverty rates and deprivation rates of those with disabilities are all increasing,” she continued. “The obvious result of this is extreme poverty and social exclusion. Clearly, the additional costs associated with disability were not factored into the Budget, and this creates huge hardships for the most vulnerable in our society.”

Deputy Murphy O’Mahony said the inequity in the pensions system must be addressed, the first step being to reverse the changes introduced in 2012 and it must be done sooner rather

than later. “My constituency office is inundated with people presenting with their pension contributions history record, utterly perplexed to discover they will be penalised for giving up work to raise children or because they left Ireland to seek employment abroad when work was not available at home,” she added.

### **Lombard outlines challenges of carbon emissions**

There were 2,500 hectares in tillage up to three years ago but it could be as low as 1,500 this year and this will have a huge impact on carbon emissions from the transition from tillage to beef and, especially, to dairy, Cork Senator Tim Lombard told the Upper House.

“These are challenges that need to be taken on board by the Government as a whole and I have spoken to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine about them,” he said. “We have to be proactive and find solutions. The Minister (Denis Naughten) rightly mentioned genomics in the beef industry, which is a very important scheme that shows the potential of putting science into the industry. We have to promote science and the interaction among all agencies.”

Speaking during a debate on Climate action, Senator Lombard said electric cars will be one of the big things in the next few years and we have to work on the move away from diesel. “It has to be done through monetary proposals and by encouraging people and educating them as to the benefits of electric cars. We have to change our view of what is an appropriate method of transportation.”