

The Kilkenny People

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Frustration at lack of broadband now at boiling point

Carlow-Kilkenny Fianna Fáil Deputy Bobby Aylward told the Dáil he had representations that have been sitting in his office since his by-election victory in May 2015 from people living in rural communities and the outskirts of regional towns who cannot understand why he cannot give them updates on the progress of broadband services in their localities.

Speaking during a debate on a Fianna Fáil motion on broadband he said the frustration on the ground is reaching boiling point. “There is frustration for us as public representatives as well as we have no information with which to go back to our constituents,” he said. “When people contact me with their eircode postcodes and I check the national broadband plan map and their houses are classified as being in the amber area for State subvention, I cannot offer any solution whatsoever. Rural communities throughout the country have been kept waiting seven years for the roll-out of high-speed broadband by this Government. I get the sense that the Government is not really serious about rural Ireland and rural communities such as those in Carlow and Kilkenny.”

Broadband is not a luxury for schools, families, businesses and farmers; it is an absolute necessity, said Deputy Aylward. “If it is not delivered soon, the benefits may be lost forever as investment will not flow to rural and regional Ireland. Successive Ministers have failed miserably to bring this crucial national project to completion. I am sad to say I have serious doubts as to when, if ever, it will be delivered. It represents one of the greatest Government failures in living memory and demonstrates that when it comes to thinking big and delivering for rural Ireland, this Government always falls short.”

“We will never reopen the boarded up shopfronts, create jobs and sustain enterprise in our regional towns and villages if we do not have the equal platform of broadband services to compete with the larger cities,” he continued. “The current digital divide is completely undermining the economic viability of rural Ireland. SMEs are walking out of rural Ireland because they cannot rely on reliable broadband services. They are not expanding and growing their businesses or creating jobs in their localities because the services and infrastructure are simply not on a par with the larger population centres and cities.”

Replying to Deputy Aylward at Question Time, Minister Denis Naughten said there is a need to see fibre broadband being rolled out across the country as quickly as possible and it is actually happening. “The eir fibre broadband roll-out will bring high-speed broadband at speeds of 1,000 Mbps to 4,898 premises in Kilkenny and 3,390 in Carlow,” he said. “In less than two years, or less than 100 weeks, they will have access to 1,000 Mbps, meaning that potentially they could watch up to 200 high definition Netflix programmes at the one time without any drop-off in service.”

Economic recovery has broken down outside the M50

It is time for the Government to accept that the recovery that is taking place has broken down on the M50, Fianna Fáil Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor told the Upper House.

She said the people of Ireland beyond the M50 have yet to experience any recovery. "We need to spread the recovery across the country. Let us create an Ireland where a person works hard, earns well, saves well, gets equal pay for equal work and it does not matter where he or she comes from."

Senator Murnane O'Connor said she had recently attended a protest outside Gaelcholáiste in Carlow. "I gave my full support to the teachers and the Teachers Union of Ireland, TUI. The inequality in teachers' pay has contributed in no small way to the current shortage of teachers," she said. "The same situation has affected the crisis in nursing. Many of our graduates are choosing to go abroad."

"Right now, there are people in rural island holding their cap in their hand without hope in their heart or a future to look forward to," she said. "While there are parties, events, lights and glitter on the streets of Dublin, there are good people all over rural Ireland imprisoned in their own homes, unable to afford to travel and with no access to public transport. The ones who have a home to call their own are the lucky ones. God forbid if anything were to happen and people had to go to a doctor. They cannot afford to miss work. Then they are destined to spend years on a waiting list waiting for a diagnosis, not to mention the actual treatment."

People being refused acceptance into doctors' clinics

The growing issue of people not being accepted into a doctor's practice was raised in the Upper House by Fianna Fail Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor.

"I have come across this issue recently," she told the House. "I know that if one has three refusals from a doctor's surgery, one can write to the health board and it will assign a surgery, but this is becoming a serious issue."

Along with this, she said she recently read in *The Sunday Business Post* an investigation revealing "a staggering rise in the use of sleeping tablets, painkillers [...] and antidepressants". It referred to "a silent epidemic".

"The investigation revealed a 1,000% increase in the use of certain addictive painkillers over the past ten years with prescription drugs," she said. "It is said this is being called the new Valium, with use having soared from 54,000 to 652,000 in the past few years. I have massive concerns about this."