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DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*

(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Wednesday, 7 *May* 2008.

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

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Dé Céadaoin, 7 *Bealtaine* 2008.
Wednesday, 7 *May* 2008.

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Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

———

Paidir.
Prayer.

———

Resignation of Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: Iarraim ar an Taoiseach Gníomhach fógra a thabhairt mar eolas don Teach. I call on the Acting Taoiseach to make an announcement for the information of the House.

The Taoiseach: A Cheann Comhairle, tá orm a chur in iúl duit gur éirigh mé as oifig mar Thaoiseach inné trína chur sin in iúl don Uachtarán de bhun an Bhunreachta.

Yesterday, I resigned from the office of Taoiseach by placing my resignation in the hands of the President, pursuant to the Constitution.

Business of Dáil: Motion.

An Ceann Comhairle: The next business is the arrangements for the nomination of Taoiseach. I call the Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach, Deputy Tom Kitt.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Tom Kitt): I move:

That, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, (i) the proceedings on the nomination of the Taoiseach shall be brought to a conclusion at 3.30 p.m.; and the House shall suspend immediately thereafter until 6 p.m.; and (ii) all divisions demanded in the House today and tomorrow shall be taken manually; and Private Members' Business shall take place tomorrow, immediately after Order of Business and shall be brought to a conclusion after 3 hours, if not previously concluded.

Question put and agreed to.

Nomination of Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is é an chéad ghnó eile ná an Taoiseach a ainmniú. Glacfaidh mé le hainmniúcháin anois.The next business is the nomination of Taoiseach. I will now receive motions.

The Taoiseach: Tairgim:

Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Brian Ó Comhain chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.

[The Taoiseach.]

I move:

That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Brian Cowen for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.

Deputy Brian Cowen is immensely well qualified to undertake the duties of the office of Taoiseach. First elected to Dáil Éireann in 1984, he has been re-elected in every election since. In addition to his having extensive experience of local government, he has been a member of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body and an Opposition spokesperson on agriculture, food and forestry. He has shown ability and leadership in a succession of demanding ministerial positions, as Minister for Labour, Minister for Transport, Energy and Communications, Minister for Health and Children and Minister for Foreign Affairs, including a critically important role during our successful Presidency of the European Union. He has been Minister for Finance since 2004 and Tánaiste since June 2007.

Deputy Brian Cowen's extensive experience across his ministerial career, his deep involvement with Northern Ireland and the peace process and his skilled and widely admired engagement in Europe on behalf of the European Union during our Presidency all equip him to undertake the obligations of office of Taoiseach with flair and capacity. Furthermore, as a most successful contributor to partnership Government over recent years and as one who had an active role in the negotiation of the current programme for Government, he is well placed to lead a Government that will enjoy the support, commitment and energy of all three parties, in addition to those Independent Members of the House who support our programme.

Throughout his career, Deputy Brian Cowen has been a fair-minded and straight-talking participant in the social partnership process and has all the necessary skills to lead the process towards the next stage of development in line with the needs of our economy and society. In short, I consider him to be a uniquely well qualified candidate to succeed me in the position of Taoiseach and to lead the country towards the realisation of our shared objectives and through the challenge we face in the period ahead.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Cuireann sé áthas orm cuidiú leis an moladh. On behalf of the Government, I second the nomination of Brian Cowen for the position of Taoiseach.

During the protracted and sometimes tense negotiations that led to the formation of the Government, I got to know Brian Cowen the politician and the private man. The Brian Cowen I know is tough but fair minded and gregarious but thoughtful. He is relaxed but always focused on the task in hand. He knows the task he now faces as Taoiseach is onerous. He knows that, to complete this task successfully, there must be a strong and unified Government — a lesson he has learned so well from former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, a man to whom this country owes a great debt of gratitude.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Gormley: We now enter uncertain times, with rising oil and food prices, the credit crunch and climate change all posing major challenges to governments all over the world. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Cowen, is ideally placed to tackle these challenges and to turn them into real opportunities for this country. He has the ability to harness the energy and innovation of the Irish people to embrace this transformational agenda. The decisions we take now will have profound consequences, not just for five or ten years but for 25 years and for future generations.

It is with a sense of pride and hope that I ask the House, on behalf of the Government comprising Fianna Fáil, the Green Party, the Progressive Democrats and the Independents, to support the nomination of Deputy Brian Cowen. Dá bhrí sin, cuireann sé áthas orm tacú leis an moladh.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move: "That Deputy Enda Kenny be nominated for the position of Taoiseach."

Today we come as 165 equal people elected by the electorate to make decisions about the future of this country in a very changed economic environment. We must decide what our priorities are and whether we will just go on as we have done or opt for radical change.

In nominating Deputy Enda Kenny for the post of Taoiseach, Fine Gael makes it clear it is opting for a path of radical change. In Deputy Kenny, we have had a leader who has listened, who has understood and who has radically changed the way in which this party works. He has renewed Fine Gael. He has gone to the country and proposed to people a contract for a new Ireland. He has helped to build an alliance for change that came up just short in the last election. This interest and commitment to change has not waned but has intensified in light of the changes this country has seen in recent months.

Only 12 months ago, a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach was elected in this House with new sources of support and a programme for Government was put together. While I am sure it was well meant, Members know that programme for Government now is in tatters as the resources on which it was built will not materialise. Members must ask themselves whether they will stand in denial, pretend that matters have not radically changed and that the programme is deliverable. I believe it would be a betrayal of those people who Members are elected to this House to represent, were they to pretend nothing has changed, fail to face up to the fact that priorities must now change or to pretend that bureaucrats can continue busily working on projects for which there will not, in the words of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, be a red cent for delivery. I believe this would constitute a betrayal of the people who sent Members here.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Honesty also demands that Members do not pretend the difficulties the economy now faces are of an international making. An international crisis did not build huge spending programmes on the back of property revenues that never were sustainable. An international crisis did not make Ireland the most expensive country in Europe. International forces have not caused Ireland to slide 17 places in the competitiveness rankings or have not seen our exports lose market share for five consecutive years. The outgoing Government simply has lost sight of what it takes to survive as a small open economy trading overseas in tough competitive markets. This is the reason change is on the agenda and should be on the agenda of every Member who will vote on what is to be done later today.

Ireland combines areas of outstanding achievement side by side with massive unfulfilled potential. The perpetuation of a certain style of Government is at the heart of our problems. Ireland does not lack for talent, least of all in the public sector. The shortcomings on view today stem from a failure to change a system that was designed for an Ireland that passed away 50 years ago. The Ireland this style of Government has created is not a good place in which to be homeless, autistic, suicidal or chronically ill and in need of a bed. It is not a good place in which to be black. Members must confront the reason such people are let down by the State.

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

It is a betrayal to pretend that failings that have happened far from the centre of Government Buildings are not ultimately political failings for which this House must be accountable.

It would be facile, to quote the Minister for Finance, to stand up in this House and list all the money spent and all the extra staff employed without asking the reason that today, frail sick people are sitting in trolleys in the Mater Hospital in cramped, crowded and unacceptable conditions. It would be facile not to ask the reason a bewildered family with a child racked by depression can get no help. Members must ask such questions today because this is the day on which they set out their priorities for the future.

How can a public service, which Members are told is so well endowed with resources, turn its back on such people? It is not because knaves run our public services but because we have trapped compassionate people in a system that is failing them. How can one consider this record of so many people having been let down without feeling there now is a need for a new vision, radical change and total renewal? It is delusion to talk of parties being the embodiment of the nation and not clamour for a new direction now in the face of those difficulties. It is hollow to elevate the virtue of loyalty and ask us to persist along the same road. In the face of persistent refusal to recognise and make changes, loyalty is a much diminished virtue in my book.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Where will the mandate for change come from? Where will the mandate for renewal come from? It has to come from us. We are the tribunes of the people, elected to represent the public. The decisions we make today will make a difference. Will we give a mandate for real change to someone? Will we commit to genuine change in the way we behave? The reforms we demand, the standards we insist on, the solidarity we espouse and the priorities we set will determine the direction this country takes. If the ground for change is not staked out today, it will not happen tomorrow and it will not happen the day after. We cannot persist with the style of government we have got used to in this House. It involves taking the lazy option of creating new agencies for every problem and putting hacks on such boards without regard to the skills needed. The budgetary system being used does not hunt down waste and does not reward performance. When times get tough, the weak and vulnerable have to take the hit.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We cannot persist with a system of government that feels it can move public servants around like pawns on a board, without devolving real power to the regions clamouring for an opportunity to develop. We cannot persist with Ministers who preen themselves at glitzy launches but are not to be found when it is time to take responsibility for those things that were not delivered. We have had a style of government that has involved big talk, which in turn has engendered big hope. At a time of big opportunity, all we have seen is big disappointment. We have become used to empty ritual in this House, but it is now time for political seriousness. Under the leadership of Deputy Kenny, Fine Gael has a vision for a better Ireland. The vision, which is built on a hard-headed realism, renews politics, reinvents the economy and restores community. Tough decisions will have to be made to make it happen. Big bureaucracies will have to be broken up, diversity of provision will have to be fostered, information on performance will have to be released and success will have to be rewarded. Agencies will have to stop defending their turf — instead, they will have to merge their work with others to maximise effectiveness. Today should present us with an opportunity to bring about the change in direction this country needs. Most likely, that will not happen, however.

The problems that require change will not go away. They will be here tomorrow and the day after. Regardless of what happens in today's vote, Deputy Kenny will continue to build a case for change and to offer Irish people a different way of doing business.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: It is with great pride that I second the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny for the position of Taoiseach. He has achieved what was deemed to be impossible five or six years ago. He has reinstated Fine Gael as the dominant leading Opposition party in this House. He presided over the party's fortunes at last year's election, in which we gained 20 seats in this Chamber. Deputy Kenny's calm and decisive leadership is a quality that the next Taoiseach will badly need. His strength of character and courage of conviction make him the ideal choice to lead the country as we face difficult economic times. The challenges that lie ahead require the calm and considered leadership of a man who is not afraid to make tough decisions. We need to stem the tide of rising unemployment, reduce the rate of inflation, improve the competitiveness of our economy and reform our public services. I commend the nomination of Deputy Kenny to the House.

Deputy Joan Burton: I move: "That Deputy Eamon Gilmore be nominated for appointment as Taoiseach."

It is an honour for me to propose Deputy Gilmore to be Taoiseach. The Taoiseach we elect today will lead our country in testing times. There will be hard choices to make but also opportunities to seize. Today is like the changing of the guard. The traditional ritual seems to offer reassurance; things change but everything remains the same. We know that is a fantasy because things have changed fundamentally. Since we went though this ceremony last June, tens of thousands have lost their jobs, businesses have closed, the cost of living has risen steeply and the State finances have slipped rapidly into deficit. What the country is getting is a changing of the guard. What the country needs is a change of Government.

So much depends on leadership. Deputy Eamon Gilmore can provide that leadership as a man in touch with the rural Ireland of his upbringing. He has spent his life representing working people and their families, and is known for his commitment to the vulnerable. He is a man who believes in equality and solidarity as real and realisable political goals.

Today, Ireland has a crisis of confidence in the way our country is run, in the political process and in the power of vested interests. Trust has become a rare commodity. Bravado statements that everything is fine and an election that was won on deception about the economy have led to this collapse of confidence.

Ireland faces a leadership deficit because those about to take charge cannot bring themselves to recognise just how serious the situation is and just how responsible their actions have been for the state we are now in. The result is likely to be a downturn longer and deeper than needs be and the whole country will suffer.

I know that the Tánaiste, Deputy Brian Cowen, has the confidence of his party, which is well and good. He will have a fair wind from the country for a while to see if he can get to grips with current problems in a fresh and imaginative way, but, frankly, I doubt it. Everything suggests that the people of Ireland will need to look elsewhere for the kind of leadership that can offer honest government in turbulent times as an alternative to one that is tied hand and foot, as this one is, to the vested interests of speculators, developers and reckless bankers.

Time and again the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen, waved away warning messages that flashed as brightly as neon signs. Every time, however, vested interests won the argument. The casual reaction of Deputy Cowen to the decline in the public finances is ominous. That was directly

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

under his control. He cannot blame the European Central Bank in Frankfurt or the Federal Reserve in Washington for all that has happened. It was his call to steer a correction course but he did not do so and this begs a critical question. Is this Minister for Finance the person to guide the country as Taoiseach through the more difficult times ahead? We need to go back to the basic values that put Ireland and her people first, that put need before greed and people before profit.

I nominate the Leader of the Labour Party, Deputy Gilmore, for Taoiseach because he is the kind of leader who will speak of a new principle for a new age. Deputy Gilmore has a vision for Ireland. He wants to re-establish a strong sense of direction in our national life, of who we are and where we want to go. I recall that Franklin D. Roosevelt led the United States out of the Depression by taking the core principles of social democracy on board. We have nothing like the difficulties of those times, but today we place those same principles of social democracy to the front and centre of the political agenda by nominating Deputy Gilmore for the post of Taoiseach.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Tá fíor-áthas orm an phribhléid a bheith agam an Teachta Eamon Mac Giollamóir a mholadh chun a bheith mar Taoiseach. Chun an fhírinne a rá, is ocáid mór é dom seans a bheith agam é sin a dhéanamh. Dá bharr sin, cuidim leis an rún. Ceapaim ní amháin gur maoineach Taoiseach atá ann, ach freisin go bhfuil na fiúntaisí pearsanta agus polaitiúla atá ag teastáil ag an am seo aige. Tá sé in ann seasamh ar son iad siúd a bhfuil saibhreas acu agus, go háirithe, ar son chosmhuintir na hÉireann atá ag fulaingt tar éis an fás eacnamaíochta a tharla i rith na blianta atá díreach imithe.

It is a great privilege and pleasure to nominate my colleague, the Leader of the Labour Party, Deputy Eamon Gilmore, for appointment as Taoiseach. What is taking place here today should never be reduced to a choice between personalities. It is a choice between political visions. I believe that fundamental change in Ireland will take place when, on occasions such as this, people will be given the choice that is available in most of the countries of Europe and throughout the world, a choice between a socialist or social democratic vision and its alternative.

The choice between political visions is important at this time, as the person we choose will be responsible for making choices in times of scarcity. Indeed, many people will ask whether those who have squandered the times of surplus and its opportunities are the people who are best equipped to steer the country in times of scarcity. What is important is that there be a reconnection between society and the economy in a way that allows for participation and equality, and offers guarantees to those who have suffered or who have gained little or even lost during the period of the country's greatest economic growth in recent times.

For that reason, it is a great privilege at a personal level to support the nomination of Deputy Eamon Gilmore, the Leader of the Labour Party. He is from a rural background and never lost his connection with it and its issues. He moved to an urban setting and has taken on the issues of that setting. He has a generosity of spirit and can listen to the voices that come from below while, at the same time, he is able to discount the raucous demands of the speculative voices of those who have destroyed the connection between our economy and society, eroded trust in politics and created so much disillusionment. In addition, he will be able to represent, in a conclusive way, the cultural prospects of our country.

Beidh sé in ann seasamh ní amháin don Ghaeilge ach do mhuintir na Gaeltachta freisin. Tá taithí aige. Sheas sé i gcónaí ar son na fiúntaisí atá tábhachtach agus a thagann ón dtraidisiún. Ag an am chéanna, is duine nua-aimsirthe é. It is with much pleasure that I nominate somebody with the personal qualities of Deputy Eamon Gilmore. He has experience of negotiation, the

real negotiation that counts when workers whose livelihoods and wages are being threatened by obdurate employers. That is the real negotiating experience he has. He also has experience in politics at every level. Most important, tá na fiúntaisí pearsanta aige i gcomhcheangal leis na fiúntaisí polaitiúla atá aige. It is when a person combines a political vision with fine personal qualities that one can have confidence that change can happen. Dá bharr sin, tá áthas orm cuidiú leis an moladh seo.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Ní bheidh Teachtaí Shinn Féin ag tacú le ainmniú an Aire Airgeadais mar Thaoiseach. Nílimid ag tacú leis an Rialtas seo. Tá sé in ainm agus a bheith ina comhrialtas, ach i ndáiríre is Rialtas Fhianna Fáil é a ligeann do Mary Harney agus do na Glasaí páirt a ghlacadh ann. Níl difríocht dá laghad idir pholasaí an Rialtais seo agus polasaí an Rialtais idir Fianna Fáil agus an Pháirtí Daonlathach idir 1997 agus 2007. Ba mhaith linn go mbeadh treoir nua le Taoiseach nua agus go dtí go mbeidh sin ann ní féidir linn tacú leis an moladh seo.

The Sinn Féin Teachtaí Dála will not be supporting the nomination of the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Cowen, as Taoiseach. The record of Governments dominated by Fianna Fáil since 1997 has been such that we cannot endorse them by voting for their nominee. The current Government, since its formation in June last, has shown itself to be essentially a Fianna Fáil Government, with the participation of the Minister, Deputy Mary Harney, and two Green Party Ministers. It is neither a partnership Government nor a coalition in any real sense. It continues the policies of the Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrats Governments led by the outgoing Taoiseach for over a decade.

3 o'clock

We see the results of those policies today in our crisis-ridden health service, poorly resourced schools, the worsening drugs scourge and violent crime, the deep divide between the privileged and the marginalised and the economic slump brought about by over-dependence on the property market. We could wallpaper the Dáil with Fianna Fáil election manifesto promises of more hospital beds, the end of hospital waiting lists within two years, a network of primary care centres, the extension of the full medical card to an additional 200,000 people, tens of thousands of social and affordable homes, zero tolerance of crime, protection of Irish neutrality and so on. All have been defaulted upon.

The outgoing Taoiseach and his Cabinet colleagues have shown themselves to be serial defaulters. That said, the incoming Taoiseach now has an opportunity, just one year after the general election, to change all that and to take Government policy in a new direction. We have always said that if a Government proves itself worthy of support, then the Sinn Féin TDs will give their support to such a Government and to the Taoiseach at its helm, irrespective of who he or she may be. What we require and, more importantly, what the people require is a Taoiseach and a Cabinet that place equality at the heart of Government. Such a Government would transform our health services, ending the two-tier system, putting patients first and allowing health care workers to provide care for all on the basis of need alone. It would ensure that every school, hospital and primary care centre was fully resourced and provided premium public services. Such a Government would base housing policy on the needs of the people for homes and not on the greed of a voracious market that has left tens of thousands of families without homes or in crippling mortgage debt. Such a Government would support communities and provide the means to tackle both the demand for and the supply of drugs that are causing such misery and mayhem in our society.

A Deputy: Who is supplying them?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This is the new direction we need to see. However, the signs are not good. Already we hear about belt tightening and tough decisions. Health cuts are again

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

hurting the old, the sick and the disabled. In what is supposedly one of the richest states in the world, classes are being taught in converted toilets. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul reports levels of demand on its services not seen since the 1980s. Are we to return to the so-called tough decisions of that era when the weakest in our society were hit most?

I urge the incoming Taoiseach to chart a new course. His talents and energy are undoubted and I wish him well. He has the leadership of his party and command of an apparently stable Government. We in Sinn Féin have worked with him in the peace process and he is now clearly in prime position to set a fresh agenda on all the issues that affect our people on a daily basis. If such a new direction was, indeed, forthcoming, Sinn Féin would revisit its voting position with regard to this Government, but until then we cannot support the Fianna Fáil nominee for Taoiseach.

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Progressive Democrats, to support the candidacy of Deputy Brian Cowen for Taoiseach. It is generally acknowledged that Deputy Brian Cowen has great intelligence and abilities. He uses those abilities very much to play as part of a team, which has been his hallmark. Notwithstanding his youthfulness — he is the youngest of the candidates nominated this afternoon — he has enormous political experience having held the Ministries of Labour, Health and Children, Foreign Affairs and more recently Finance and the position of Tánaiste. He uses the ability he has been given to work for his community.

We constantly hear the same speech from Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin. The fact is that a child born in Ireland today will live longer than a child born in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium——

Deputy Bernard Allen: Despite the Minister for Health and Children.

Deputy Mary Harney: ——the UK or Denmark.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister, Deputy Harney, to speak without interruption.

Deputy Mary Harney: I listened to Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: How long did baby Bronagh Livingstone get to live as a result of the Minister for Health and Children's disastrous policies?

Deputy Dermot Ahern: We listened to your raiméis.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister, Deputy Harney, to speak without interruption.

Deputy Mary Harney: I listened to Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin and I would appreciate if he would listen.

That is as a result of better medical interventions. For the first time life expectancy in Ireland is now ahead of the EU average——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: For some people.

Deputy Mary Harney: ——and has increased by three full years, which is the highest improvement in the entire OECD between 1999 and 2005.

Deputy James Bannon: A dying woman's grip.

Deputy Mary Harney: Children in Ireland with cancer have a survival rate that is top of the class worldwide. All our survival rates are improving. More people have free access to their general practitioner than was the case in the 1980s when unemployment was three times higher than it is today.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: That is not true.

Deputy Liz McManus: That is not true.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister, Deputy Harney, to speak without interruption.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Deputies opposite should show a bit of respect.

Deputy Mary Harney: I know people do not want to listen to the facts, but these are the facts. Some 400,000 more people are being treated in our hospitals today than was the case a decade ago.

Deputy Billy Timmins: More people are dying in them.

Deputy Shane McEntee: We have no hospitals.

Deputy Mary Harney: This Minister for Finance has been hugely supportive as a team player working with me as Minister for Health and Children.

Deputy Bernard Allen: Is that the Minister, Deputy Harney's, job application?

Deputy Mary Harney: Deputy Brian Cowen's experience goes way beyond the four Ministries in this country. When he was Minister for Foreign Affairs during Ireland's Presidency of the EU he advanced, promoted and succeeded in getting agreement from the EU that there would be no unilateral intrusion of borders between Palestine and Israel. That was a very significant agreement, agreed in Tullamore I understand. He was the first politician to meet Yasser Arafat after 11 September 2001, which was a very troubled time for the world and a time of great sensitivity. He used his enormous political skills to bring a calming influence. I have no doubt as captain of the team he will use his enormous ability for the benefit of the team.

Deputy Michael Creed: Will the Minister, Deputy Harney, be on the team?

Deputy Mary Harney: He will use not just his abilities but also his capacity to make tough decisions. In Deputy Cowen we have somebody who is capable of making the right decision——

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I hope he does.

Deputy Mary Harney: ——standing by it and defending it. That is particularly important at a time when we have enormous challenges and pressures——

Deputy P. J. Sheehan: Will he call Commissioner Mandelson?

Deputy Mary Harney: ——particularly from the differing circumstances arising in the international economic environment, I remind Deputy Sheehan.

Today is obviously a very happy time for Deputy Brian Cowen and his family. I know they are here in the environs of this House. Although he is the youngest of the three candidates, he

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

has enormous political insights and a great vision for the country in which he believes. In particular he believes in equality of access to services——

Deputy Bernard Allen: That will be different from the Minister, Deputy Harney.

Deputy Mary Harney: ——in equity and in ensuring that the resources this country can make available are made available to those who need them most. It is a great pleasure for me and my colleague Deputy Grealish to support the candidacy of Deputy Brian Cowen.

Deputy Bernard Allen: For how long more?

Deputy Mary Harney: I very much look forward to his election as Taoiseach later this afternoon.

Deputy Tony Gregory: Os rud é nach mbeidh an deis agam labhairt anseo níos déanaí i ndiaidh an toghcháin don Taoiseach agus os rud é go bhfuil sé soiléir go mbeidh tromlach sa Dáil ag an Teachta Brian Cowen agus go mbeidh sé ina Thaoiseach i gceann tamaill gearr, ba mhaith liomsa an deis a ghlacadh comhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis, go háirithe de bharr an seasamh láidir a ghlac sé ar son na Gaeilge, ár teanga náisiúnta, nuair a toghadh é ina uachtarán ar Fianna Fáil.

As my late mother was born and reared in County Offaly and as I spent my childhood holidays on a small farm on the edge of the Bog of Allen, in the shadow of Croughan Hill——

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Now we know.

A Deputy: It did the Deputy no harm.

Deputy Tony Gregory: I welcome the fact that County Offaly will shortly have the great honour, for the first time, of being the home county of a Taoiseach. Of course, this does not mean that I intend voting for Deputy Cowen.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Deputy is breaking my heart.

Deputy Tony Gregory: However, on this occasion I want to say that Deputy Cowen has my good wishes. This is a great occasion for him, his family and his county.

I hope that in his term as Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen will see the justice in taking steps to end the divisive inequalities that exist in Ireland today, particularly in our health service, in education and in housing. It is my view that the increasing social inequality of recent years is the major issue facing all of us elected by the people to this house.

I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to my constituency colleague, Deputy Bertie Ahern, for his recent kind words regarding my health and to wish him well. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Are there any other contributions?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Come on Jackie.

A Deputy: Come on Jackie.

An Ceann Comhairle: I should have known Deputy Healy-Rae would not let me down.

Deputy Michael Ring: He never did.

Deputy Jackie Healy-Rae: I am delighted to stand in this House this evening. The funny thing is I hope that around 6 p.m., when Deputy Brian Cowen has done his sums——

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy Healy-Rae hopes he will be made a Minister.

Deputy Jackie Healy-Rae: I will help Deputy Cowen to do his sums, just as I helped Deputy Bertie Ahern in 1997. I might hope that he will take his coat off, so he will have nothing on but his shirt, and come down to south Kerry to help me with potholes. The truth is, since he put that jacket on I have been awfully frightened down below. That is God's honest truth. If Brian would give me a hearing this evening, I would be delighted if he would pull off his coat, give it to another fellow and come down to south Kerry to help me. I am telling God's honest truth because the weather is getting very hot and I am under pressure.

I am here to support Brian Cowen this evening, as I did in 1997 when I planted the famous man Bertie as a seed. He held the position until yesterday evening and I wish him the very best of luck in whatever part of the world he operates. One thing is certain, nobody will have to ask his name when he goes on journeys. I wish him the best. I wish Brian many years of success and I will give him my number one when we vote in a moment. Good luck, I wish you many years of happiness and success.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: That was said straight from the heart.

Cuireadh an cheist: "Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Brian Ó Comhain chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach."

Question put: "That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Brian Cowen for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach."

Rinne an Dáil vótáil: Tá, 88; Níl, 76.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 88; Níl, 76.

Tá

Ahern, Bertie.
Ahern, Dermot.
Ahern, Michael.
Ahern, Noel.
Andrews, Barry.
Andrews, Chris.
Ardagh, Seán.
Aylward, Bobby.
Behan, Joe.
Blaney, Niall.
Brady, Áine.
Brady, Cyprian.
Brady, Johnny.
Browne, John.
Byrne, Thomas.
Calleary, Dara.
Carey, Pat.
Collins, Niall.
Conlon, Margaret.
Connick, Seán.
Coughlan, Mary.
Cowen, Brian.
Cregan, John.
Cuffe, Ciarán.
Cullen, Martin.
Curran, John.
Dempsey, Noel.
Devins, Jimmy.
Dooley, Timmy.
Fahey, Frank.
Finneran, Michael.
Fitzpatrick, Michael.
Fleming, Seán.
Flynn, Beverley.
Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
Gogarty, Paul.
Gormley, John.
Grealish, Noel.
Hanafin, Mary.
Harney, Mary.
Haughey, Seán.
Healy-Rae, Jackie.
Hoctor, Máire.
Kelleher, Billy.
Kelly, Peter.
Kenneally, Brendan.
Kennedy, Michael.
Killeen, Tony.
Kirk, Seamus.
Kitt, Michael P.
Kitt, Tom.
Lenihan, Brian.
Lenihan, Conor.
Lowry, Michael.
McDaid, James.
McEllistrim, Thomas.

Tá—*continued*

McGrath, Finian.
McGrath, Mattie.
McGrath, Michael.
McGuinness, John.
Mansergh, Martin.
Martin, Micheál.
Moloney, John.
Moynihan, Michael.
Mulcahy, Michael.
Nolan, M. J.
Ó Cuív, Éamon.
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
O'Brien, Darragh.
O'Connor, Charlie.
O'Dea, Willie.
O'Flynn, Noel.
O'Hanlon, Rory.
O'Keeffe, Batt.
O'Keeffe, Edward.
O'Rourke, Mary.
O'Sullivan, Christy.
Power, Peter.
Power, Seán.
Roche, Dick.
Ryan, Eamon.
Sargent, Trevor.
Scanlon, Eamon.
Smith, Brendan.
Treacy, Noel.
Wallace, Mary.
White, Mary Alexandra.
Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
Bannon, James.
Barrett, Seán.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Bruton, Richard.
Burke, Ulick.
Burton, Joan.
Byrne, Catherine.
Carey, Joe.
Clune, Deirdre.
Connaughton, Paul.
Coonan, Noel J.
Costello, Joe.
Coveney, Simon.
Crawford, Seymour.
Creed, Michael.
Creighton, Lucinda.
D'Arcy, Michael.
Deasy, John.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Doyle, Andrew.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.
Enright, Olwyn.
Feighan, Frank.
Ferris, Martin.
Flanagan, Charles.
Flanagan, Terence.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Gregory, Tony.
Hayes, Brian.
Hayes, Tom.
Higgins, Michael D.
Hogan, Phil.
Howlin, Brendan.
Kehoe, Paul.
Kenny, Enda.
Lynch, Ciarán.
Lynch, Kathleen.
McCormack, Pádraic.
McEntee, Shane.
McGinley, Dinny.
McHugh, Joe.
McManus, Liz.
Mitchell, Olivia.
Morgan, Arthur.
Naughten, Denis.
Neville, Dan.
Noonan, Michael.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
O'Donnell, Kieran.
O'Dowd, Fergus.
O'Keeffe, Jim.
O'Mahony, John.
O'Shea, Brian.
O'Sullivan, Jan.
Penrose, Willie.
Perry, John.
Quinn, Ruairí.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Shatter, Alan.
Sheahan, Tom.
Sheehan, P. J.
Sherlock, Seán.
Shortall, Róisín.
Stagg, Emmet.
Stanton, David.
Timmins, Billy.
Tuffy, Joanna.
Upton, Mary.
Varadkar, Leo.
Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Tom Kitt and John Curran; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis glacadh leis an gceist.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: I declare Deputy Brian Cowen to have been nominated by Dáil Éireann for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.

Deputy Enda Kenny: On my way to Arbour Hill this morning, I received a telephone call from a man called Mr. Gormley. My heart gave a jump because I thought it might be the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, to say he was interested in not supporting the Taoiseach elect, Deputy Cowen. When the traffic lights at Christchurch turned green four times in a row and the traffic did not move, I happened to notice the billboard which said we are spending €34 billion on the Transport 21 programme. I inform the House that the gentleman in question was not the Minister, Deputy Gormley.

Ba mhaith liom chomhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis an Teachta Brian Cowen, go pearsanta agus ar son mo pháirtí, as bheith tofa agus ainmnithe mar Thaoiseach le dul chuig Uachtarán na hÉireann chun bheith deimhnithe mar Thaoiseach ar mhuintir na hÉireann. Is cúis áthais dó, dá bhean chéile Mary, dá mháthair May, dá chlann, Sinéad agus Maedhbh, agus do mhuintir a dháilcheantair é a bheith tofa mar Thaoiseach. Tá cúis acu bheith bródúil as. Chas m'athair agus athair an Teachta Cowen, go ndéana Dia trócaire orthu, ar a chéile anseo go minic. Chas mise ar athair an Teachta go minic freisin anseo. Cé nach bhfuil sé linn inniu, bheadh sé mar cúis bhróid aige a mhac a bheith tofa mar Thaoiseach agus is onóir iontach mhór í sin duit. Is tú an úillín ór dod mhuintir inniu. Déanaim comhghairdeas leat arís, ar mo shon féin agus ar son mo pháirtí, ar an onóir mhór a bhronnadh ort anseo sa Dáil inniu.

Esto Fidelis is the motto of Offaly, the faithful county. The Taoiseach elect has epitomised that in his attitude to his party, his constituents and the previous leaders of the Fianna Fáil Party. He has always placed great store on political loyalty and spoke in this House on numerous occasions about the virtue that that is. The challenge facing Deputy Cowen when he receives his seal of office and names his Government is to balance that loyalty against the requirements of the national interest and all our people, whom he now represents.

The enormous privilege bestowed on Deputy Cowen by the Dáil today must be tempered by the enormous responsibility this position carries. That responsibility will sometimes mean the Taoiseach elect will have to make decisions in the loneliness of his own office and without the collective energy of those around him. Those decisions must be in the public interest and the national interest and must be justified from that point of view. It will require the Taoiseach elect to have far stronger and assertive management of our economy than was evident in recent years.

As Deputy Bruton pointed out, we are now in a position where there is a currency crisis for exporters with the fall in the dollar and sterling. There is a requirement for real intervention by Government to restore Ireland's competitiveness as a trading nation. There are clearly infrastructural inadequacies of road, rail, power, energy and broadband. There are almost 100,000 young couples facing the prospect of negative equity in the housing market next year. There are the consequences from the fall-out of a 50% reduction in house building and all it brings. There is clear evidence of the tax take being in freefall and public finances heading for an unprecedented deficit. There is also the evidence of a lack of development of a real world-class education system rather than a veneer of perfection, as we are painted with on a regular basis. Clearly there is a requirement to implement and enforce legislation passed by this House, particularly in the area of justice because of what we see happening on our streets.

We must play a greater part as a small nation in the bigger scheme of things on a global scale. As the Minister, Deputy Gormley, pointed out, we have obligations regarding climate change, energy and food security and in dealing with poverty. There is a requirement to build up confidence in our people.

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

From the perspective of the Taoiseach elect, I hope he will continue the work of all his predecessors in respect of the Good Friday Agreement and deal with the imminent threat of dissident groups planning to disrupt what has been achieved after so much hard work and commitment by so many people. This party has always supported the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in full. We stand and will continue to stand by that.

We are now five weeks from the referendum decision on the Lisbon treaty. This will be the first electoral challenge for the Taoiseach elect. He is aware that the Fine Gael Party for many months has been campaigning openly, publicly and strongly in favour of a "Yes" vote on the Lisbon referendum. I am sure that by now, if he has not done so already, the Taoiseach elect will recognise I am both qualified and able to make a judgment on a matter like that. If evidence of my commitment on that is required, if the Taoiseach elect is being driven past Westland Row in the morning, I will be there from 7.15 a.m. to meet customers and consumers as they go about their daily business.

Any other credits or plaudits being sought will have to be earned. The Taoiseach elect can start this evening at his first Cabinet meeting by indicating clearly his resolve and intent to lead a new style of Government for a country that needs a change in Government because of the challenges it faces. He can start with the first item on the agenda, the rejection of the ministerial pay increases. He should return with a different Minister for Health and Children and he should announce his proposal to develop a realistic programme for Government that can be delivered within the timescale of the Government he will lead.

I hope the Taoiseach elect will restore the primacy of this House and that he will ensure that major announcements are made in here.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Hear, hear.

Deputy P. J. Sheehan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: He should ensure Members get answers to questions.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I hope the Taoiseach elect's immediate predecessor as Tánaiste will provide a better quality of answers to written questions than Deputies on all sides of the House have done in recent years. I know the Taoiseach elect has an interest in reforming this Chamber and the way this House goes about its business, and I would like to see evidence of that.

I congratulate Deputy Cowen on his nomination for the position of Taoiseach. This party will continue to stand by the country, as the leaders of this party have done in the past. We will support issues we believe are in the national interest and that of our people. The Taoiseach elect should understand I am always encouraged by the enthusiasm of young people, irrespective of their backgrounds. I am encouraged by their endeavour and commitment. Given the responsibility the Taoiseach elect will carry on his shoulders, he also has an enormous opportunity. This is a challenge which I know the Taoiseach elect will not shirk. There is an opportunity here to lead decisively, inspire young people and enthuse our older folk in convincing them that politics really does matter. As a small country having travelled so far in a short time, we have the capacity to be world leaders in many areas of life. We can lead by example and Deputy Cowen can start that in his role of Taoiseach from this evening.

With regard to the issues concerning our country, we will not be found wanting where we believe issues should be supported. Where the Government — all these brilliant people waiting and doting on the Taoiseach elect's every syllable for the past month, hoping to come back in

changed suits after being given their seals of office — falls down on implementing the programme for Government, this party will pursue it relentlessly in this House. I am sure the Labour Party will agree. Ministers will not sleep easily for the next four years if they do not implement the programmes set out by Government or if they change from that. We will oppose and expose while promoting our own viewpoint strongly and vociferously in this Chamber, where I believe it really matters.

The Taoiseach elect is now and has been for some time the guardian of the people's money. He assumed the captaincy of the team for Ireland and he should use it wisely. He should use this opportunity wisely. He should not — I believe he will not — shirk his responsibilities. It was Ronald Reagan who said politics is not a bad profession. If one succeeds, there are great rewards and if one ends up in disgrace, one can always write a book. I do not believe this will happen to the Taoiseach elect and he would not want to write the book himself. I hope he leads by example and that his Government, when it returns this evening, will have an agenda that is clear, decisive and in the country's interest. The complacency and veneer that have obtained in recent years will not stand us in good stead in the future.

I began by saying that the motto of Offaly, the faithful county, is *esto fidelis*. Perhaps the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen, might extend it to *esto fidelis patria tua*. Congratulations.

A Deputy: Jackie is back.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Ba mhaith liom chomhghairdeas a ghabháil leis an Taoiseach nua atá tofa ag an Dáil. Is onóir mór é don Teachta Cowen, a chlann, a chairde agus a chosmhuintir i gContae Uibh Fháilí. Glacaim leis gur duine an-chumasach agus an-chliste é. Guím ádh mór air go pearsanta i leith na dualgaisí Stáit agus phobail a bheidh aige amach anseo.

I congratulate the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen, on his election as Taoiseach. It is a great day and a great honour for him and his family, friends and community.

I travelled back to Dublin from south Galway on Monday evening last through his faithful County Offaly. I drove through Banagher and Ferbane and as I rounded the corner at Ballycumber and headed towards Clara, the pride felt by his local community was obvious. Posters had been put up in anticipation of his election as Taoiseach. There are many present from County Offaly. I do not recall being so overwhelmed by people from that county since the final moments of the 1981 All-Ireland hurling final.

I wish the Taoiseach elect well personally and in respect of the duties he will perform on behalf of the State and the people. He has come to office with the reputation of being a very capable and combative politician. I look forward to debating with him the issues that affect the people of this country.

The Taoiseach elect is entering office at a time of change. Many of those changes are of his own making. He is taking up his position when people are concerned about their jobs and businesses, about how they will pay their mortgages and about the services they receive from the State in hospitals and schools or in their communities.

A lot was done but not all of it has produced the best results for the people in the past 11 years. There are comments I wish to make about that matter but I will reserve them until the Taoiseach elect returns to the House later and we gain an idea of the bigger picture.

I wish Deputy Cowen well in the office of Taoiseach. I also wish him well personally. As already stated, I look forward to engaging with him in what I believe will be direct, honest and straight debate regarding different ways of serving the people.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Ba mhaith liom mo chomhghairdeas agus chomhghairdeas Teachtaí Sinn Féin a ghabháil leis an Taoiseach tofa. I extend my congratulations and those of the other Sinn Féin Deputies to the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen, on his election to the position of Taoiseach. I sincerely wish him well in his post and with the onerous responsibility attaching thereto. I also wish him well with the tasks that will present themselves in the months and years ahead.

I hope the Taoiseach elect will recognise that as an Opposition party, it is our responsibility to highlight the deficiencies in Government performance. I have done so resolutely, time and again. I will continue to voice my concerns in the hope that the Taoiseach elect, Deputy Cowen, and his colleagues in the new Cabinet will listen and act accordingly.

Many people are hurting and are fearful. Not everyone has benefited from the past decade of economic success. Earlier today, people from County Kerry protested outside the gates of Leinster House regarding the prospect of a deterioration in health service delivery in their locality. Those in each county have every right to be concerned that the template that has been devised in respect of the north east will be visited upon their communities in the future.

Irrespective of the protests of the current Minister for Health and Children and others within the Government parties, it is the absolute duty of other voices in this Chamber to represent the need for change not only in the context of individuals holding particular portfolios, but also in respect of policy direction. I respectfully urge that such change be made. I hope the Taoiseach elect, who has demonstrated an awareness of people's needs, will use his skills to bringing about real change in policy direction in the areas of health, education, public transport and housing provision, among others. We have a right to expect quality public services and people are waiting for them to be delivered.

I hope the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen's term in office will see the changes to which I refer come about. The first signalling of his intent will come in a few short hours when he announces his new Cabinet. I hope the Taoiseach elect, Deputy Cowen, will, at that point, have taken on board the appeals I have made on behalf of the people we all represent. In the event of his embracing the changes to which I refer, I look forward to working with him in a positive fashion in the future in the service of our people and the people of the island of Ireland as a whole.

Deputy John Gormley: Ba mhaith liom chomhghairdeas a ghabháil leis an Taoiseach, an Teachta Cowen, agus a chlann. This is a proud day for the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen, and the people of County Offaly, particularly those in Clara. I have no doubt that Deputy Cowen's late father, Ber, would be extremely proud of his son's achievement.

I referred earlier to the Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen's many fine qualities. I forgot to mention one that is very important, namely, his commitment to social justice. The latter became apparent to me when we, along with the Ministers, Deputies Dempsey and Brennan, were holed up in negotiations last year. I pay tribute to the Minister, Deputy Brennan, who played a leading role in those negotiations. We heard earlier about the health difficulties of Deputy Gregory. In a similar context, I wish the Minister, Deputy Brennan, and his family all the best for the future.

4 o'clock

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Gormley: Another thing that became clear from the negotiations in which we engaged is that the Taoiseach elect, Deputy Cowen, understands the "green vision".

Deputy James Bannon: He was on "Planet Gormley".

Deputy John Gormley: He informed me at the time that he has a good relationship with my colleague, Joschka Fischer.

It is clear that we have to work together on various issues. The problems we face can only be solved by the Government and the Opposition working together. I apologise to Deputy Kenny that it was not me who made the telephone call to which he referred.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Did Deputy Gormley use a carrier pigeon?

(Interruptions).

Deputy John Gormley: We have emerged from a period of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. I wish to acknowledge the role played by Fine Gael and the Labour Party in achieving that growth and prosperity.

(Interruptions).

Deputy John Gormley: The only way that we will achieve in Government on the issues of peak oil and climate change is by working together.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He might get the call yet.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Come back, all is forgiven.

A Deputy: They should have included him in the Mullingar accord.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Sort out those transfers.

Deputy John Gormley: That is why this Government has worked so well over the past ten months. We have set up, as Members know, the Joint Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security and appointed a member of Fine Gael to lead it.

Deputy Michael Ring: They know where the talent is.

A Deputy: They have made some mistakes.

Deputy John Gormley: I would be most anxious that we work together over the next while. I have no doubt that the incoming Taoiseach understands what consensus politics is all about.

A Deputy: Better than the Minister anyway.

Deputy John Gormley: He understands that if we are to tackle the major issues facing this country and our planet, we will have to work together for the betterment of this country.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Why does the Minister not just join Fianna Fáil?

Deputy John Gormley: I would hope Deputy Stagg would be more gracious in his approach as well.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to continue, without interruption.

Deputy John Gormley: I offer my congratulations to the Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, and the Fianna Fáil Party. It is a very important occasion for him personally. Again, I congratulate his family who are with us in the Distinguished Visitors' Gallery.

Deputy Mary Harney: I too would like to congratulate Deputy Brian Cowen on his election as Taoiseach in this House. Shortly, he will begin the journey to Áras an Úachtaráin to receive his seal of office. It will be a very proud journey for him and his family. It is great that he is joined here today by his mother, his wife, Mary, their two daughters and his family. They are perhaps feeling prouder than he is because I know he is beginning to take on board the enormity of the honour that has been bestowed on him.

I join Deputy Gormley in wishing our colleague, Deputy Seamus Brennan, a speedy recovery. I was nominated to the Seanad with Seamus Brennan in 1977. I believe I will be joined by everybody in the House in hoping that his current health problems will be a thing of the past very soon, which would be the wish of us all.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Harney: I said earlier that Deputy Cowen is a man of enormous ability and intelligence. I have no doubt that as captain of the team, a team to which he has been very loyal——

Deputy John Deasy: Who will be vice captain?

Deputy Mary Harney: I have had the pleasure of working with him for nearly 11 years as a member of the Government. I have found in Brian Cowen somebody who really understands the constitutional imperative of collective Cabinet responsibility. However, it is not just because it is a constitutional imperative. He is genuinely a team player.

Deputy James Bannon: He should put the Minister on the subs bench.

Deputy Mary Harney: Deputy Kenny mentioned that in this House on a number of occasions Deputy Cowen has spoken about loyalty being a political virtue. He will bring all of that to the benefit of the new Government of which he will be Taoiseach later this evening. He not only has my good wishes but, I know, the good wishes of the vast majority of the people of this country in the challenging and daunting but no doubt very rewarding task he must now take on as leader of the Government and Taoiseach of our country.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: I welcome the opportunity to congratulate my fellow Offaly person on his election to the highest political office as Taoiseach. In warmly congratulating the Taoiseach elect, I want to also congratulate his wife Mary, his daughters Sinead and Maedhbh, his mother, Mrs. Cowen, the Cowen and the Molloy families and the friends and supporters of Brian who are here today.

It is an extremely proud day for everyone in the county of Offaly and the constituency of Laois-Offaly. Brian has served the constituency since 1984 and worked with my father in the past, as my father worked with his father at times. While we are obviously both of different political persuasions and both passionately believe in our respective parties, the one common aim we have is to address the needs and concerns of the people of Laois and Offaly.

I cannot promise I will go down the route of consensus taken by the Minister, Deputy Gormley. However, I look forward to having a constructive relationship with the new Taoiseach and I look forward to working with him in the coming years. He has a unique opportunity to deliver. My task is to provide constructive opposition and we in the Fine Gael Party under Deputy Enda Kenny will certainly do that. I again congratulate the Taoiseach elect, Deputy Cowen, and look forward to working with him in the years ahead.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I rise as a constituency colleague of the Taoiseach elect to wish him every success. Deputy Gilmore mentioned that he had met many Offaly people around the plinth and the Houses. That is true, but on behalf of the 29% or 30% who are not here, I offer my good wishes from a personal point of view. It is great honour for yourself and your family — for Mary and the girls, your mother and the proud town of Clara and beyond. It is a great day for the midlands. I wish you well.

Reference was also made to previous campaigns. I can remember the three elections of the early 1980s which were a pressured time in political families in Laois-Offaly. The first occasion on which I encountered the Taoiseach elect was outside a church in Kilcormac. He had a silver IR Golf and I had a gold CI Golf. A Cheann Comhairle, the rules of parliamentary procedure would not allow me to recount any more of that story but it was a good one.

I wish the Taoiseach elect well in the very serious challenges that lie ahead. Finally, I wish to quote somebody who I have never quoted before, Deputy Jackie Healy-Rae. He said he had a few pet projects. I too have a few pet projects from the constituency. No doubt I will have ample opportunity to discuss them with the new Taoiseach in the near future. I wish you well.

Deputy Seán Fleming: I join in offering congratulations to my constituency colleague, Deputy Brian Cowen, from the Offaly half of the Laois-Offaly constituency. I made the mistake of referring to him as a Laois man recently and every Offaly person has taken me up on it since, but I think they all know it was a genuine mistake. I wish every personal happiness to Mary Cowen and all the Cowen and Molloy families. As a constituency colleague, I can say that within our party, ours is the most peaceful constituency in Ireland for a five-seat or multi-seat constituency. It would be a lesson for other areas. All the party works as a united team.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Since he became Taoiseach.

Deputy Seán Fleming: People will know the reason we get such a high vote is because we operate as a team. We are together every day except when Laois and Offaly are playing against each other.

Deputy Charlie Flanagan mentioned he has a few pet projects. He should not worry about it. I have them all in hand.

Deputy John Moloney: This is a very difficult speech to make lest somebody might think one was saying something for some other reason. However, as a member of the party of reality——

An Ceann Comhairle: As the Roman general Sulla said to the ageing Pompey the Great: "More worship the rising than the setting sun."

Deputy John Moloney: I cannot beat you on that, a Cheann Comhairle. I join with everybody in the House in my congratulations. I want to be realistic. My main worry is not 19,000 votes the next time but possibly twice that number because of what is happening here today.

I am delighted to be in the Chamber as a Member of this Dáil to see our colleague from Laois-Offaly, Deputy Brian Cowen, becoming Taoiseach. I am glad to see his family here, his wife, his mother in particular, his brothers, Christy and Barry, and his daughters. The only pity is that Ber Cowen himself is not here today. More is the pity that his uncle Vinny only died in the past three weeks, who I think was the real politician in the Cowen family.

I was surprised Brian Cowen only got 88 votes. There was so much praise for him in this Chamber in the past few weeks that I expected Members on the Opposite to come over and

[Deputy John Moloney.]

vote with us on this occasion. To quote my colleague, Deputy Seán Fleming, we are united in Laois-Offaly. My hope is that from this day on we would remain so loyal and friendly.

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): Aithním gur mór an onóir dom oifig an Taoisigh a ghlacadh inniu, nuair a rachfaidh mé go dtí Áras an Uachtaráin, agus glacaim go humhal leis. Is ócáid mhór é do mo chlann, mo chéile Mary, mo bheirt iníon Sinéad agus Maedhbh, mo mháthair May, mo chlann agus mo ghaolta uilig. Táim fíor-bhuíoch do lucht tacaíochta an Rialtais — Páirtí Pharlaiminte Fhianna Fáil, an Chomhaontas Glas, an Páirtí Daonlathach agus na Teachtaí Neamhspleáigh — a roghnaigh mé don phost mórchúramach seo. Nuair a chaithim súil siar ar na hiartaoisigh a bhí i réim sa tír seo ó bhunaíodh an Stáit, is maith is eol dom an dea-obair a rinne siad i leith na tíre. Tuigim go maith go bhfuil an cúram céanna ormsa agus ar mo chomhghleacaithe sa Rialtas. Táim an-bhróduíl as na gaiscí atá déanta ag saoránaigh na tíre seo sa saol i gcoitinne. Tá clú agus cáil ar ár scríbhneoirí, ár gceoltóirí agus ár luthchleasaithe, srl. — na mílte ón dtír seo a thaisteal an domhan agus a thaispeán a gcuid talann. Tá daonra an-óg againn sa tír seo agus tá cumas iontu. Tuigimid go bhfuil fadhbanna agus deacrachtaí le réiteach againn. Geallaim don Teach go ndeánfaimid ár seacht ndícheall chun fadhbanna na tíre seo a shárú. Is dúshlán é dúinn go léir.

Tá an-chuid cainte faoi drochstaid eacnamaíochta na tíre seo, ach an bhfuil dearmad déanta againn ar an bhforbairt tá déanta againn le blianta anuas? Caithfimid a admháil go bhfuilimid níos fearr as ná mar a bhíomar. Caithfimid bheith réalaíoch, áfach — níl aon amhras orm ach go bhfuil sé de dhualgas orainn na mór-fadhbanna sóisialta atá againn a réiteach. Beidh sé mar ceann spíce againn cabhair a thabhairt dóibh siúd atá ar imeall ár sochaí. Ní mór duínn aire, urraim, meas agus cion a thabhairt dár seanóirí agus a chinntiú nach mbeidh saol ainnis, dearóil, uaigneach acu amach anseo. Fadó, bhíomar ag brath ar eachtrannaigh chun an tír seo a fhorbairt, ach anois tá pobal oilte againn agus níl drugall orthu a dtalann a léiriú. Deirtear go bhfuil mí na meala thart dom anois — is fada an lá ó bhí mí na meala agam agus nílim ag súil leis sa saol polaitíochta. Tuigim go bhfuil jab le déanamh ag an bhFreasúra agus fáiltímid roimh cháineadh dearfach. Is beag maitheas atá i gcáineadh diúltach. Táimid uilig ag obair ar son na tíre. Tabharfaimid gach cabhair dos na meáin. Níl ach rud amháin ag teastáil uainn, sé sin cothrom na féinne a thabhairt dúinn inár saol poiblí agus go háirithe inár saol príobháideach. Glacaimid le cáineadh ach iarraim é a bheith féaráilte.

Thosnaigh mé m'óráid i nGaeilge mar is é mo bharúil ná gur seoid luachmhar í ár dteanga. Caithfimid í a chaomhnú agus a fhorbairt. Cé go mbeidh lucht na díspeagach againn i gcónaí, measaim go bhfuil dea-mhéin i leith na teangan i measc an phobail anois. Níl aon bhata draíochta agam, ach tá spriocanna ós ár gcomhair. Ní folaír dúinn misneach a thabhairt do mhuintir na Gaeltachta agus na Galltachta agus a chur in iúl don phobal go bhfuilimid bródúil as ár dteanga. Ní ceart go mbeadh náire orainn í a labhairt go poiblí. Cén fáth nach féidir linn bheith dhá-theangach? Níl bás na teangan mar rogha againn. Deánfaidh an Rialtas gach iarracht ár dteanga a choiméad beo agus í a chothú.

I am deeply honoured by my nomination for the position of Taoiseach. A number of weeks ago, my parliamentary colleagues chose me to lead Fianna Fáil — that was a great honour in itself — and today this House has elected me as Taoiseach. I am the 12th person to have bestowed on him the honour of being nominated leader of the Executive since the foundation of the State and I accept the honour with a genuine sense of humility. That sense is engendered in large part from a love of Ireland. This is a wonderful country and we are a fortunate people.

We live on an island which has come to enjoy the richness of full peace, with no strife or agitation born from past hostilities. Yesterday's proceedings at the site of the Battle of the Boyne reinforced that fact in a very real and visible way. I commend the outgoing Taoiseach,

Deputy Bertie Ahern, and the outgoing First Minister, Ian Paisley, on the sentiments expressed in their respective addresses at the site of the battle yesterday, and I commend Mrs. Paisley also.

The scale of the challenge I face is expressed in the quality and achievements of all those who have gone before me in this high office, not least my immediate predecessor, Deputy Bertie Ahern, whose outstanding contribution to the life of this country has rightly attracted praise and acknowledgement from far and wide and continues in the tradition of a great line of Taoisigh before him. Summarised most eloquently in the message he brought to the United States Congress in recent days, his is an inspirational example. I salute him and wish him happiness and fulfilment in the contributions that he will doubtless make over many years ahead.

Tomorrow I will have the privilege of addressing the investment conference for Northern Ireland with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown. It is appropriate that, on my first working day as Taoiseach, I will have the opportunity to advance relationships and deepen engagement, on a North-South and an east-west basis. Consolidating the peace through economic development and mutual understanding will have my full engagement and whole-hearted support. Tomorrow's conference is a timely reminder that our destiny on this island cannot be secured in isolation from the rest of the world.

We share too much history and culture with our neighbouring island not to work for the deepest friendship and the most fruitful engagement. Our economic success on this island owes much to the strength and depth of our relationship with the United States, through the very many investors who have found here a successful partner for investment and through the scale of the trading relationship between the two economies.

However, it is in the context of our European identity and membership of the European Union that our place in the international arena and our relationships with other nations, near and far, find their proper perspective and most potent context. As a member of the European Council, I will strive to ensure that our European vocation is a live, engaged and creative thing, not a passive recipient of the fruits of the labours of others. In the same spirit, I look forward to leading a campaign in the coming weeks to assure the Irish people that ratification of the EU reform treaty is in our interest. Far from damaging our interests, the treaty will enhance our capacity to shape developments in line with our perspectives and principles. There is no more urgent or important task ahead of me in the immediate future.

In considering my role as Taoiseach, I have thought a great deal about Ireland's place in the world today. Where does Ireland stand as we approach the closing years of the first decade of the 21st century? We know it is very different from what it was ten years ago when we were heading towards the millennium.

Our economic success, which was in its early years a decade ago, has been sustained. We have settled our relationships on this island and reached accommodations that had been inconceivable for generations. With our increased confidence we explore and exploit new opportunities overseas. The movement of our people is now by choice; in the past, it was by force of circumstance. Perhaps most strikingly of all, we have accommodated tens of thousands of migrants who have come to our shores to help us sustain our economic success.

All this represents considerable change in a short period. It would be challenging for any society, but it is particularly challenging for us given our location and history. We have adapted well and established many common values with the rest of Europe. They are largely positive values. We have matured through the process and learned from our new experiences how to right some of our failures of the past.

The influence of the EU project has been all-pervasive across every aspect of our lives. We have availed of the full range of opportunities of membership better than most. The political,

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

economic and social landscape has been utterly transformed for the better in this country because of our participation in the European Union. The greatest mistake we could make now would be to move away from the opening out to the world that has brought such benefits to our nation. I have been reading Des Geraghty's excellent book *Forty Shades of Green* in recent days and his thesis is that we are now in a new space. What was once one of the most dispersed nations in the world is now becoming one of the most diverse nations and the change is visible and real.

We are now redefining ourselves in terms of mending relationships with those of other traditions of long standing on the island and establishing relationships with the new Irish and migrants who have come to our shores to share in the economic miracle of the Celtic tiger economy.

We also are connecting in a myriad of ways through economic, social and cultural lines with many peoples on the Continent of Europe and further afield as the economic reach of our society is becoming truly global.

Our Celtic heritage has helped us, as a modern Republic, to take our place as a leading nation within the European Union. We are admired and respected as a progressive country throughout the wider community of the developed world. Moreover, in the developing world, our forefathers' tradition of giving has been maintained by the contemporary missionary and development work of today's Irish men and women who toil there as a vocation.

In the first budget I presented to this House, I talked of economic activity as a servant of society. The statistics speak volumes for what has been achieved in the past 15 years. They also might receive too much attention. Some might ask what year on year growth amounts to if it does not improve some people's lives. However, Ireland in 2008 is a much better place to live for more of our people than ever before. Far fewer of our people are struggling on the margins of our society. We have moved from a Third World infrastructure to one that is progressing well and will be the match of many of our European peers in the years ahead.

One of the challenges we face today is to temper a rising tendency towards individualism within Irish society. We rightly have encouraged a culture of the individual taking personal responsibility for his or her well-being. We have reaped benefits from the more confident Ireland as presented by its most successful people forging new opportunities at home and abroad. Overdone however, this carries risks. Not correctly harnessed, this can sap the energy of our sense of community, which still is strong and visible in many ways. We must prioritise turning the benefits of individual flair to the benefit of the community as a whole.

This is what the Government wants and needs. Its responsibility is to fuel the engine of community and to lead the charge away from the promotion of exclusive self-interest towards a superior value of a wider community interest. The pre-eminence of community and participation over self promotes social harmony and a better quality of life for all. This is what will allow us to develop a society of social inclusion.

Our particular charge is to represent the interests of our young. The character of the generations that will build this century still is being formed. These generations will decide the shape of the future. It is the job of the Government and of parliamentarians to take the steps that will make it clearer for that generation to help shape this Republic in a way that realises its greater potential.

I have referred to our economic progress and how it has translated into significant social enhancement. While we have made great gains, we also face great challenges. Our job as legislators is to provide leadership to society at this time of change. However, society must engage with us in this process. Change of this nature cannot simply be driven by the Govern-

ment. The common good is enshrined in the Constitution and should have special relevance in Ireland at the beginning of the 21st century. The ultimate test of our progress will be the extent to which we can mobilise all of the people to think and behave in a manner that puts the interests of society as a whole ahead of our own private interests. As Seán Lemass observed, all "national progress . . . depends . . . on an upsurge of patriotism" among the people. It is the job of government to lead on this issue but that of society as a whole to address. My Government will pursue this agenda to lead change and I will return to this theme when I bring forward the nominations to the Government to this House later this evening.

I wish to reflect on what this means to me. On assuming the position of leader-elect of Fianna Fáil, I stated that I was excited if not a little daunted. I have assumed the position of Taoiseach with an even greater sense of responsibility. I have been overwhelmed by the good wishes I have received from people the length and breadth of the country, as well as from abroad, of all political persuasions and none. In particular, I thank my family. I received my grounding in politics from my father Ber, who in turn received it from his father, Christy, a founding member of the Fianna Fáil party. Politics is about public service above all else. This is a great day for my wife Mary, my daughters Sinead and Maedhbh, my mother May, my brothers Christopher and Barry and all other members of the families of Mary and me. I also am joined by many friends who have made this political journey with me and mine for many years. Their presence fortifies me today.

I thank the men and women of this House for the generosity of their support and good wishes. I look forward to them extending that blanket of goodwill for many months to come. All of these greetings from within this House and without are most welcome although in some respects they add to the sense of expectation. I will commit myself completely to meeting those expectations. I sincerely hope I can do so in full.

It is now necessary, a Cheann Comhairle, to inform the President of my nomination so that she may appoint me as Taoiseach. Accordingly, I suggest that the Dáil be suspended until 6 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 6 p.m.

Allocation of Time: Motion.

An Ceann Comhairle: Iarraim ar an Taoiseach an tairiscint a dhéanamh.

The Taoiseach: I move:

That, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, the proceedings on No. 2, nomination of members of the Government, shall be brought to a conclusion at 8.15 p.m. and the following arrangements shall apply:

(*a*) the speech of the Taoiseach and the Leader of the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, or a Member nominated in his or her stead, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case;

(*b*) the speech of each Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case;

(*c*) Members may share time;

(*d*) and a member of Government shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed five minutes.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the motion agreed?

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is not agreed. There are some changes but there is no real change about this. We have already lost 15 minutes from the appointed time at which this House was to reconvene and debate the members to be appointed to Government. Since the foundation of the State there have been eight occasions when the debate on the formation of a Government was of one, two or three days' duration. In some cases the motion was for four days, including the transfer of power from Charles Haughey to Albert Reynolds, and from the latter to John Bruton in 1994.

The allocation of time proposed by the Taoiseach, to 8.15 p.m., is insufficient. This country faces a whole range of issues and challenges, which Deputies on this side of the House want to debate in respect of the persons who are being either appointed or reappointed to Departments. Therefore, I respectfully propose an amendment to the Taoiseach's proposal that the discussion on the nomination of members of the Government conclude at 9.15 p.m. and that a vote be taken thereafter.

This is a reasonable request in view of the fact that this is not the appointment of a new Government, but the reappointment of persons who are already jaded and who have proven themselves to be failures in dealing with the many challenges the country faces.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Wishful thinking.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I support Deputy Kenny's proposal. What we are doing here concerning the election of a Government is a very important constitutional function whereby the elected Members — the 166 people who have been sent to this House by the people of the country — effectively transfer executive authority from the Dáil to the members of the Government. We have spent the last month paying tributes and giving congratulatory speeches, yet two hours is all the Taoiseach is proposing in order to debate the formation of this recycled Government.

A Deputy: Shame.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I therefore support Deputy Kenny's proposal that the time be extended by one hour. It is a reasonable request and one to which the new Taoiseach could readily agree.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I wish to support the other Opposition party leaders in an appeal to An Taoiseach to extend the time so as to allow a greater number of Members to comment on the announcement of a new Cabinet this evening. It would indicate a much more constructive way of moving forward if agreement could be presented by the new Taoiseach and his new Chief Whip to this reasonable request from the collective Opposition voices.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must put the question concerning the amendment in the name of Deputy Kenny.

Deputy Dan Neville: Let us hear from the Taoiseach.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: It is like Zimbabwe, a dictatorship.

An Ceann Comhairle: As regards the amendment in the name of Deputy Kenny——

(Interruptions).

Deputy Dan Neville: Shame.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: We still have a Parliament. They will not shut us up.

Question put: "That the figures proposed to be deleted stand."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 71.

Tá

Ahern, Bertie.
Ahern, Dermot.
Ahern, Michael.
Ahern, Noel.
Andrews, Barry.
Andrews, Chris.
Ardagh, Seán.
Aylward, Bobby.
Behan, Joe.
Blaney, Niall.
Brady, Áine.
Brady, Cyprian.
Brady, Johnny.
Browne, John.
Byrne, Thomas.
Calleary, Dara.
Carey, Pat.
Collins, Niall.
Conlon, Margaret.
Connick, Seán.
Coughlan, Mary.
Cowen, Brian.
Cregan, John.
Cuffe, Ciarán.
Cullen, Martin.
Curran, John.
Dempsey, Noel.
Devins, Jimmy.
Dooley, Timmy.
Fahey, Frank.
Finneran, Michael.
Fitzpatrick, Michael.
Fleming, Seán.
Flynn, Beverley.
Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
Gormley, John.
Grealish, Noel.
Hanafin, Mary.
Harney, Mary.
Haughey, Seán.
Hoctor, Máire.
Kelleher, Billy.
Kelly, Peter.
Kenneally, Brendan.
Kennedy, Michael.
Killeen, Tony.
Kirk, Seamus.
Kitt, Michael P.
Kitt, Tom.
Lenihan, Brian.
Lenihan, Conor.
Lowry, Michael.
Mansergh, Martin.
Martin, Micheál.
McDaid, James.
McEllistrim, Thomas.
McGrath, Finian.
McGrath, Mattie.
McGrath, Michael.
McGuinness, John.
Moloney, John.
Moynihan, Michael.
Mulcahy, Michael.
Nolan, M. J.
Ó Cuív, Éamon.
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
O'Brien, Darragh.
O'Connor, Charlie.
O'Dea, Willie.
O'Flynn, Noel.
O'Hanlon, Rory.
O'Keeffe, Batt.
O'Keeffe, Edward.
O'Rourke, Mary.
O'Sullivan, Christy.
Power, Peter.
Power, Seán.
Roche, Dick.
Ryan, Eamon.
Sargent, Trevor.
Scanlon, Eamon.
Smith, Brendan.
Treacy, Noel.
Wallace, Mary.
White, Mary Alexandra.
Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
Bannon, James.
Barrett, Seán.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Bruton, Richard.
Burke, Ulick.
Burton, Joan.
Byrne, Catherine.
Carey, Joe.
Clune, Deirdre.
Connaughton, Paul.
Coonan, Noel J.
Coveney, Simon.
Crawford, Seymour.
Creed, Michael.
Creighton, Lucinda.
D'Arcy, Michael.
Deasy, John.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.
Feighan, Frank.
Ferris, Martin.
Flanagan, Charles.
Flanagan, Terence.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Hayes, Brian.
Hayes, Tom.
Higgins, Michael D.

Níl—*continued*

Hogan, Phil.
Howlin, Brendan.
Kehoe, Paul.
Kenny, Enda.
Lynch, Ciarán.
Lynch, Kathleen.
McCormack, Pádraic.
McEntee, Shane.
McGinley, Dinny.
McHugh, Joe.
McManus, Liz.
Mitchell, Olivia.
Morgan, Arthur.
Naughten, Denis.
Neville, Dan.
Noonan, Michael.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
O'Donnell, Kieran.
O'Dowd, Fergus.
O'Keeffe, Jim.
O'Mahony, John.
O'Shea, Brian.
O'Sullivan, Jan.
Perry, John.
Quinn, Ruairí.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Shatter, Alan.
Sheahan, Tom.
Sheehan, P. J.
Sherlock, Seán.
Shortall, Róisín.
Stagg, Emmet.
Stanton, David.
Timmins, Billy.
Tuffy, Joanna.
Upton, Mary.
Varadkar, Leo.
Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and John Curran; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I advise the Ceann Comhairle that 15 minutes of Dáil time were lost before the Government came into the Chamber.

(Interruptions.)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now——

Deputy Enda Kenny: That is a fact and we should continue until 8.30 p.m. in any event, because that time was not lost due to the action of the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, Deputy Kenny, but I have strict procedures here. I must ask whether the main motion is agreed to.

A Deputy: Abuse of the House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: In that context, some 15 minutes were lost because the Government was late coming in, whether because of traffic or whatever. The debate should then continue until 8.30 p.m. The 15 minutes were lost, not because of the House's actions, but owing to the Government's failure to come in on time. Is that 15 minutes being allowed now?

An Ceann Comhairle: This is in the context of the main motion being agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Yes, it is.

The Taoiseach: I agree to that.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: That is the first consensus from the new Taoiseach.

Motion, as amended, put and agreed to.

Appointment of Taoiseach and Nomination of Members of Government: Motion.

The Taoiseach: Tairigim: "Go gcomhaontóidh Dáil Éireann leis an Taoiseach d'ainmniú na dTeachtaí seo a leanas chun a gceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar chomhaltaí den Rialtas."

I move: "That Dáil Éireann approve the nomination by the Taoiseach of the following Deputies for appointment by the President to be Members of the Government:

Máire Ní Chochláinn	Mary Coughlan
I also propose to nominate her as Tánaiste.	
Brian Ó Luineacháin	Brian Lenihan
Máire Ní Áirne	Mary Harney
Nollaig Ó Díomasaigh	Noel Dempsey
Diarmuid Ó hEachiarn	Dermot Ahern
Micheál Ó Máirtín	Micheál Martin
Máirtín Ó Cuilinn	Martin Cullen
Éamon Ó Cuív	Éamon Ó Cuív
Máire Ní Ainifín	Mary Hanafin
Liam Ó Deaghaidh	Willie O'Dea
Seán Ó Gormlaigh	John Gormley
Éamon Ó Riain	Eamon Ryan.
Breandán MacGabhann	Brendan Smith
agus	and
Parthalán Ó Caoimh	Batt O'Keeffe

They will be assigned Departments of State as follows:

An Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Fostaíochta	Máire Ní Chochláinn
An Roinn Airgeadais	Brian Ó Luineacháin
An Roinn Sláinte agus Leanaí	Máire Ní Áirne
An Roinn Iompair	Nollaig Ó Díomasaigh
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe Dlí	Diarmuid Ó hEachiarn
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha	Micheál Ó Máirtín
An Roinn Ealaíon, Spóirt agus Turasóireachta	Máirtín Ó Cuilinn
An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta	Éamon Ó Cuív
An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh	Máire Ní Ainifín
An Roinn Cosanta	Liam Ó Deaghaidh
An Roinn Comhshaoil, Oidhreachta agus Rialtais Áitiúil	Séan Ó Gormlaigh
An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádúrtha	Éamon Ó Riain
An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Iascaigh agus Bia	Breandán MacGabhann
An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta	Parthalán Ó Caoimh
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Mary Coughlan
Department of Finance	Brian Lenihan
Department of Health and Children	Mary Harney
Department of Transport	Noel Dempsey
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	Dermot Ahern
Department of Foreign Affairs	Micheál Martin
Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism	Martin Cullen
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	Éamon Ó Cuív
Department of Social and Family Affairs	Mary Hanafin
Department of Defence	Willie O'Dea

[The Taoiseach.]

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	John Gormley
Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	Eamon Ryan.
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Brendan Smith
Department of Education and Science	Batt O'Keeffe

I propose to nominate Paul Gallagher, S.C. for appointment by the President, to be the Attorney General.

In putting forward these names for the approval of the House for their appointment by the President, I should like to indicate my thinking about the priorities which my Government will observe.

We meet at a time of considerable global uncertainty. This applies to international economic conditions, reflecting the impact of turbulence in financial markets, inflationary pressures associated with the market for commodities, especially oil and food and the economic consequences of significant realignments in the geopolitical order. We face the more strategic challenges of climate change and the appropriate response to be made across all sectors of the economy, both domestically and internationally. We face the reality of international migration flows, and the human disaster of under-development which gives rise to them.

More immediately, at home we have the reality of an economy in transition to lower levels of growth: from an unsustainable level of activity in the housing market to a more balanced provision for a mature but growing population, with housing needs which will continue to require levels of housing output that are relatively high by European standards. That has had a direct impact on employment and tax revenue. However, the pace of activity across the economy is otherwise very resilient. Significant investment decisions are being announced which reflect the reality that Ireland is a good place to do business, and to make and renew investment. Our underlying competitive advantage is being strengthened by the rapidly improving physical infrastructure available to service the needs of our economy and society. Our research capacity and the scientific base for innovation across all sectors of the economy are being transformed through the policies and investments of the Government, and the growing commitment of business, both domestic and foreign, to deepening their research presence here.

In short, we have every reason to be confident about our economic future and about the social development which it makes possible. My Government will pursue the strategic direction set out with great clarity in the programme for government adopted last year. That programme, in turn, acknowledges and reinforces the importance of the agreed framework with the social partners contained in Towards 2016. In line with that agreement, we recognise the importance of the interdependence between economic and social development. We accept the value of ambitious goals to drive our performance over the years ahead. We are committed to deepening the sources of competitive advantage for Ireland in the changing and globalising economy. We recognise the importance of innovation and skill development at all levels, and not just in our universities and research centres. We acknowledge the importance of social development, of enabling all of our citizens and especially our young people to achieve their full potential at each stage of the life cycle. We assert the imperative of environmental sustainability in what we do as an economy and as a society.

In particular, we are committed to public services which are effective in meeting the needs of a more diverse and more demanding society, and which provide value for money through the flexibility and accountability appropriate in a modern democracy. These will be public services that place citizens and their needs at the centre of all that is done and planned, that are designed and delivered with the consumer rather than the provider in mind, and that apply new technology and new ways of doing things on a par with the best in the world.

Let us be clear about where we are going as a society. Let us be equally clear about how we will achieve our goals. We will do it, first of all, by avoiding the mistakes of the past. We know only too well from our relatively recent economic history that the wrong policies, the wrong decisions and the wrong behaviour can carry a very high price in an economy as open and dependent on international trade as we are. Therefore let us be realistic about how we manage short-term challenges so as not to prejudice our medium to long-term prospects.

The first lesson I draw from that is the need to secure our place at the heart of Europe, as a shaper and influencer of policies that will benefit our people. Failing to ratify the European reform treaty because of some misguided attempt to send a message about issues, which have nothing whatever to do with the treaty, can only weaken our position of influence. For that reason, my first priority and that of the Government will be the ratification of the treaty on 12 June.

The Government is being formed at a time when the terms of Towards 2016 are being reviewed with the social partners and talks on a new pay agreement within that framework have begun. I look forward to working with the social partners to chart a course for the period ahead which is in line with our shared objectives, which reflects the realities of the situation in which we find ourselves, and which enhances rather than diminishes our capacity to secure jobs and living standards for tomorrow and for the long term. There is urgency in moving towards an agreement since the conclusion of an appropriate agreement would, in itself, convey the strength and confidence of the economy in an uncertain world. I look forward to engaging with the social partners on these issues in the period ahead.

One important dimension of the partnership process has been its application in the public service. The recent report from the OECD shows clearly that the Irish public service performs strongly across a range of dimensions of both efficiency and effectiveness. However, it must be acknowledged that there are problems that need to be addressed. There is, overall, insufficient focus on performance that delivers outcomes in line with the needs of citizens. Even our public service reform process has correctly been categorised by the OECD as too inward facing without sufficient engagement with the complex and diverse needs of citizens in an integrated and flexible manner.

There are several initiatives in place which are already addressing many of the challenges identified by the OECD. I intend to pursue a comprehensive programme of renewal which integrates these initiatives and moves us forward together towards a world-class public service equipped to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. I am heartened by the comments of several leaders of public service trade unions about the importance and urgency they attach to this task. I look forward to working with them to realise our shared ambition for a renewed and flexible public service that can continue to command the respect and confidence of our citizens and taxpayers. I will shortly announce the appointment of a task force on the public service to report to Government before the summer break with a comprehensive programme for action.

Nowhere is the need for a new approach more acute than in the health service. Despite the vast sums of money invested in the provision of health services over the past decade we continue to face massive challenges. We all want better outcomes but the last decade has shown that money on its own will not achieve them. Government must take forward the case for accelerating reforms in the system to allow the modern advances in the provision of medical treatment to flourish. It may not be a uniformly welcome approach. In the past the local county hospital was the centre of the medical universe. There was quite understandably a great affinity with that model of health service provision. It served us well then. However, today, if we want

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to ensure better and more comprehensive and sophisticated levels of care and better outcomes, we must change the mind set. The *status quo* plus just will not work.

Across the public service all the Government wants on behalf of the people it serves is better outcomes for its citizens. In the case of the health service, it is about properly organising to international standards of safety what services we can provide to help save lives, not where we can provide them. We need to view hospitals as networks not stand alone institutions. Clinicians working together in line with best international practice will be the best guarantee for better health outcomes for our people.

Similarly, primary care teams led by GPs and working with an increased out-of-hours service are critical if we are to off-load unnecessary service pressures in accident and emergency departments of hospitals where inappropriate attendance takes place for ailments that can easily be handled if a co-ordinated primary care service is simultaneously in place. I understand this is challenging. It can be emotive. However, doing things in new ways will help us sustain and deliver better outcomes for patients. Experience elsewhere tells us this.

Recently I visited the Cuisle Centre in Portlaoise where I met women recovering from cancer. It is a remarkable place and they are remarkable women. I left there reassured that — in spite of all of the serious problems we still have with the reform of the health service — we are making progress. I talked with women that day who had suffered with serious cancer. Their concern was the quality of their treatment. No one should ever play politics with people's lives. The dignity of the women I met there reinforced me in that belief.

My appeal to all Members of this House is that when it comes to the provision of public services generally and to the health services in particular let us keep the debate on what matters — outcomes and delivery. Dressing up sectional arguments to reinforce the *status quo* or the existing positions of well-established vested interests does not serve the real needs of the people in the short or the long term.

I have decided not to make any significant changes to the allocation of functions between Departments at this time. There are some adjustments I will mention in a moment. However, it is right at this time that the focus should be squarely on the successful management of the immediate challenges we face and which I have already described. Ministers and their Departments have a clear framework for action and will have an explicit set of priorities from our programme for government. However, we should give consideration to the way in which the business of Government is structured and organised. The report of the OECD sets out some useful pointers in that regard. The Government will consider this issue in due course and I anticipate that some changes in departmental responsibilities, planned and managed in an appropriate way and implemented at the right time, could enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in the years ahead. This will be an evolutionary process.

For the present, there are two adjustments that should proceed with immediate effect. The first is that the responsibility for producing an action plan for the knowledge society will be co-ordinated by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Eamon Ryan. The impact of converging communications technologies creates a new context and our strategy for success in the knowledge economy should be developed and co-ordinated in close association with that branch of policy. The action plan will take account of the responsibilities of all of the relevant Departments and will, I expect, be published over the summer. Responsibility for e-government will be consolidated in the Department of Finance, to which responsibility for the public service broker project has already been transferred.

The second adjustment I am making is that the Office of the Minister for Children will now be re-styled the Office of the Minister for Youth and Children, and responsibility for youth

affairs in the Department of Education and Science and for the young persons' facilities and services fund in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will be integrated into the office. I intend this as a clear signal that a focus on young people and their needs will be a particular priority for the Government.

Co-ordinating policy and implementation across departmental boundaries is one of the great challenges of modern government. Pending any realignment of functions between Departments which may be appropriate, I intend to review the operation of Cabinet committees and their supporting cross-departmental teams of officials, and to assign functions to Ministers of State in ways that stress the importance of links across organisational boundaries and the pursuit of a more integrated approach to policy development.

While our economic growth path has been the envy of many, now is the time to broaden our definition of the success of the nation. Economic growth must progress two pillars of sustainable development: society and the environment. The world faces serious challenges to redress the human impact on the environment, none greater than in the area of climate change. Scientific evidence tells us to act now or face serious consequences. As a father I feel an obligation to make Ireland a better environment for my children. As Taoiseach I must provide leadership so we deliver on this for all of our children and future generations.

For a small country, Ireland has always punched above its weight in the international community; we must now be proactive in supporting and building upon the leadership shown by the European Union in policy measures to address the threat of climate change. Nobody should underestimate the enormity of the specific challenge faced by Ireland in meeting its post-Kyoto commitments. It will require a major alteration in the way we approach business at all levels of Government and across the economy and society. I am fully committed to leading this change.

I will introduce a comprehensive process of integration of policies across all Departments to address the major environmental challenges faced by Ireland in the wider world. Our policies must be examined from the perspective of environmental impact and the emphasis of the policy agenda needs to enhance the quality of life of our people and promote the pillars of sustainable development.

We must no longer see the environment as something that limits our development. Rather, the environment and economy are interdependent — progress in one area cannot be sustained without securing the other. The market economy need not be the enemy of the environment. Our commitment must be to use the market to mobilise people to think and behave in a way that puts the best interests of society as a whole ahead of their own private interests. This Government will explore a range of market-based policy instruments to effect this change while securing the economy.

While the Government can lead change in respect of the environment, the scale of the challenges we face requires a major response by all our people. This Government will be actively committed to providing the context within which people themselves can effect the change necessary to improve our environment and ensure a high quality of life for our future generations.

It is the youth of this nation who will determine that our peaceful island remains a safe and secure place for all our people to live. It is our youth who will determine how 21st century Ireland meets the challenges of an increasingly globalised economy. It is our young people who will help to shape the environmental destiny of our island, this Continent and the wider world.

It is customary at this time to announce the intention to nominate for appointment by the Government a number of Ministers of State. I take pleasure, therefore, in informing the House of the nomination of Deputy Pat Carey as Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach, with special responsibility as Government Chief Whip. He will also be Minister of State at the

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Department of Defence. I also intend to nominate for appointment by the Government Deputy Barry Andrews as Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, with responsibility for children and youth affairs. I will also nominate Deputy Trevor Sargent as Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with special responsibility for food and horticulture. I nominate Deputy Dick Roche as Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, with responsibility for European affairs. The Minister of State, Deputy Roche, has a tremendous record of work in furthering Ireland's engagement with the European Union. His enthusiasm and commitment will continue to serve us well in the immediate and vital task of promoting a "Yes" vote in the forthcoming referendum on the Lisbon reform treaty.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I would not bet on it.

Deputy Enda Kenny: To serve in Government is a great and unique honour and privilege that carries a great responsibility. I congratulate all of the new Cabinet appointees, in particular Deputies Brendan Smith and Batt O'Keeffe. I also congratulate Deputies Barry Andrews and Pat Carey on their appointments as Ministers of State. Deputy Carey stopped me on many occasions in the corridor and asked whether I thought he would ever have a chance. His hour has come.

This is a great day for everyone who has been newly appointed to the Cabinet or moved in a reshuffle and also for their families and constituents. I fully appreciate their enthusiasm and excitement and the daunting challenge faced by those who walk across the corridor to the office at the far end. This will be a day to remember and celebrate.

This is also a day of loneliness for those who leave the Cabinet. I sympathise with Deputy Tom Kitt, who will no longer be in the Whip's office, and I add my voice to those who have expressed the hope that Deputy Séamus Brennan will successfully meet his personal difficulties and go on to play a full part as a political figure and a citizen.

I congratulate the new Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Mary Coughlan, on her appointment; to be Tánaiste is a wonderful opportunity and honour. Commissioner Mandelson has already been on the telephone saying he is somewhat intrigued that she has been moved. He will now be faced with the daunting prospect of Deputy Brendan Smith as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food before the World Trade Organisation talks. I recall Deputy Rabbitte saying the new Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, is inclined to pour treacle on the works. He will need a lot of treacle to deal with the economic situation he now faces. I have had my rows with the incoming Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Hanafin, and I do not believe that the proportion of social welfare recipients in her constituency is that high.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: It will be now.

Deputy Enda Kenny: She will probably have to deal with policy issues anyway.

As Leader of the Opposition, it is a privilege to congratulate all of the new appointees and wish them the best of luck. However, it is also my duty to point to the fact that the appointees come into this House with new seals of office from the President at a time when the Fianna Fáil slogan "a lot done, a lot more to do" has become a sick reminder of riches squandered and hopes dashed. Perhaps they can tell the 100,000 families, including many young couples, who now face negative equity on houses worth far less than they recently paid that a lot has been done. Two years ago, young couples could not buy houses because of stamp duty. The then Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen took action but it was too late for it to be useful. Right now, stamp duty is not the issue. For many house purchasers the issue is a constant

nagging dread that they will not be able to meet the repayments on the dream house that in some cases has turned into a nightmare.

Fianna Fáil is always quick to seek credit for economic success and economic failure is always somebody else's fault. It deflects blame at all costs and at every opportunity and never minds the inconvenient truths. Never mind that international factors did not force the then Minister, Deputy Cowen, to talk up the housing market in 2005 and 2006, when the advice he was getting from international experts was that Irish house prices were massively over-valued. International factors did not force the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, in his four budgets as Minister for Finance, to massively ramp up day-to-day public spending by two and half times the underlying growth rate of the economy. International factors have had nothing to do with the fact that since 2001 we have been steadily losing the share of foreign export markets we built up during the 1990s. International factors cannot explain why Ireland has had the biggest increase in unemployment of any EU country in the past year, when unemployment fell in 24 of the 27 EU member states. International factors are not responsible for Ireland having the highest cost of living increases in the eurozone since 2001. By assigning blame for our economic woes on foreign factors alone, the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, and his new Government encourage a dangerously complacent attitude, suggesting if we stay the course and wait for the storm to pass we will be all right on the day.

I have promised the new Taoiseach the wholehearted support of Fine Gael for innovation, initiative and empathy with the Irish people, and I will deliver that support where appropriate. However, I cannot and will not allow the good feelings on the Government benches to distract from reality. The reality is that, out of the best times any Irish Government was ever handed, Fianna Fáil has created catastrophe and chaos. Under the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen's, stewardship as Minister for Finance, the Government mismanaged the public finances and the housing sector. The Government did nothing about economic and public sector reform. We know this because just two weeks ago in this House the then Tánaiste, Deputy Cowen, described my raising of the tragic case of a hospitalised woman as simplistic and facile. The implication of this is inescapable; he has to deal with more complex and difficult issues. This contradicts his speech this evening

However, up to now, he has not dealt with more complex and difficult issues. He talks impressively about public service reform but we need look no further than the monolith that has been created in the Health Service Executive, HSE. It is now entirely dysfunctional and is being consistently talked up by the Minister for Health and Children.

As pointed out by Deputy Leo Varadkar, the country is awash with quangos, so the citizen gets bounced from one to another to a third, wasting time and money. Deputy Brian Cowen, as Minister for Finance, did not cut back on any of this. He had a decade to do it in the very best of times. For many, however, they are becoming the worst of times.

They say the Taoiseach is a clever man, which is undoubtedly true. He has no problem spending money. Some €15 million is being spent on a vanity public information campaign for the Green Party. Up to €20 million is being spent on a campaign to advertise Transport 21.

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Does any Member on that side of the House understand how these public relations activities nauseate people? These advertisements on national television and billboards are for programmes people expect to be delivered by a competent and decisive Government. This €35 million is wasted on public relations promotional programmes that will not insulate one single house, deliver one single school, put one bus on the road or keep one extra hospital bed open. Some €35 million is wasted on billboard campaigns when people know the cost of living increases every day. They know the cost of making-do when schools are turned into charitable organisations and where communities are expected to

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fork out to keep theirs going. I hope the incoming Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, will change this for the good of the parents and the children of the nation.

Deputy Michael Creed: Gaelscoil Ballincollig.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is time to update Deputy Brian Cowen's famous one-liner. When in doubt, pay it out — as long as the money makes it look like the Government is actually doing something. Never mind the reality. Enjoy the ad. campaign for €35 million.

Deputy Brian Cowen knows well 4,000 children in the Dublin area are waiting on speech and language therapy. The State has gone through the process of training speech and language therapists, yet there are no jobs for many of them who have graduated. Deputy Brian Cowen is aware that for children with Down's syndrome, to take one example, speech and language therapy must happen early in their lives or their potential is forever damaged and diminished.

The programme for Government promises that any child under five years waiting more than three months for occupational or speech and language therapy will access these services automatically through the National Treatment Purchase Fund. It is not happening. It is a disgrace that adds to the anxieties of their parents. Radical change in Government should be about addressing this.

If spending €35 million on vanity advertising were in a novel, no one would believe it. Neither would anyone believe that a Minister for Education and Science would spend millions of euro on legal fees to deny to children education which should be their right.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: No one would believe that a Minister for Education and Science would drive loving parents to despair, that she would fund the lawyers to pummel good people to the verge of bankruptcy — and beyond in some cases- to prove a point.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Máire Hoctor: That is not true. Deputy Enda Kenny should check his facts.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: It did happen.

Deputy Enda Kenny: No one would believe an entire Cabinet could become so disconnected from the people it is supposed to serve.

Up to 200,000 people may have died in a cyclone in Burma this week. Its ferocity may be as a result of global warming. Global warming or climate change, however, is not new. We have known about it since Fianna Fáil came back into power in 1997. The Government eventually took notice of it, producing a climate change strategy in 2000. It was, however, all bells and whistles with not one single Kyoto target met so far. The opposite is the case. Failure to implement that strategy by successive Fianna Fáil-led Governments means Ireland now has a mountain to climb, rather than just the hill that was ahead of us a decade ago. I am sure the incoming Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, will understand that soon.

During the best of times, Fianna Fáil delayed the upgrading of housing energy efficiency standards. More than 650,000 new houses were built using antiquated technology. Those new houses leak heat, costing their owners more in energy than they should. The 2000 climate change strategy was all about promises and publicity. It was just the beginning of the Government's environmental policy failures.

Fianna Fáil failed to open up public transport services to competition and delayed reforms to VRT and motor taxation for eight years, resulting in 2 million new vehicles on the road making our greenhouse gas emission levels the highest in Europe. This should be unacceptable to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Planet John.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Chairman of the Oireachtas Committee on Transport, Deputy Frank Fahey, announced recently on radio that it takes 50 minutes to travel by bus from Mountjoy Square to St. Stephen's Green. He now intends to close down the whole of Dublin city centre to traffic without discussing it at the relevant committee.

The Taoiseach is a clever man. I assume he and the incoming Minister for Finance, will have no problem finding taxpayers' money to buy their way out of Ireland's Kyoto's targets and whatever emerges from the Bali talks. It is a case of the Taoiseach's problems but our money.

I again congratulate Deputy Brian Cowen on his appointment as Taoiseach and wish him well in the job. However, we must get real. His record in the ministries held to date does not indicate a sense of endeavour, drive or the sense for change of which he spoke earlier. There is no trace of achievement when he was in the Departments of Labour or of Transport, Energy and Communications. Neither is there a trace of achievement when he was Minister for Health and Children. A former master of the National Maternity Hospital at Holles Street described the Taoiseach as hopeless when he was in the Department of Health and Children. It was all just talk, promises and publicity. Ten years ago, he told *The Irish Times* he was driving fundamental restructuring in health services. Ten years later, it still has not happened. Deputy Brian Cowen moved on before his failures could be nailed to him in that Department.

Deputy Mary Harney should not be reappointed Minister for Health and Children. She has lost the confidence of the people. She also seems to have lost the drive and energy that made her a formidable politician in the House and on the national stage for many years. I agree with her argument for networks but how can one have them when hospitals services are stripped away? A woman recently wrote to me asking what is the policy for those with long-term, terminal and non-glamour illnesses, the aged, those with a mental illness or those suffering from neurological conditions. She asked if it were policy that they should be considered no-hopers and — like alcoholics, the homeless, drug addicts — they are nothing but an underclass to be locked away. That is why a change in the Minister for Health and Children is needed.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: We should be also concerned with the current round of pay talks. These talks could make or break the economy for the next ten years. The first Cabinet meeting in Áras an Uachtaráin is always short and convivial. Tonight's meeting is also a great time for the Taoiseach to hit his Ministers for six and reject the proposed ministerial pay awards. All Cabinet members will agree because they love their old ministries and want to get back to the bonfires in their constituencies.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It provides the new Taoiseach with the opportunity to show real leadership. If he were to do it later this evening, it would stand to him in the times ahead.

The economic challenge cannot be under estimated. Taxes will be at least €10 billion short of target by 2012, making the programme for Government redundant. It will be just "a tattered

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rag upon a stick". The Taoiseach must give the programme its P45 and come back to the House with a realistic and achievable programme.

I hope Deputy Brian Cowen spent the past few weeks hammering out a new programme for Government, to take account of the tragically changed circumstances in which the nation finds itself. If he does that in the areas where it is in the national interest, we will offer support. If he does not and his Ministers fall, we will pursue them in the House relentlessly and expose their political inadequacies.

I look forward to the changed environment of politics. I assume there will be more direct answers and a return to conventional politics, with the legal implications of the other issue out of the way in so far as the primacy of the House is concerned. I look forward to constructive political debate so that we can enthuse and inspire our young people and show them that there is a value to politics, that we mean what we say and that what we do is in the interests of the country's future.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I congratulate the Members nominated for appointment by the President to the Government. In particular, I congratulate the new Ministers, for whom it is a great day. I congratulate my constituency colleagues, the Minister, Deputy Hanafin, who has retained a position in the Cabinet, and Deputy Barry Andrews, who will be appointed. I join in the tributes paid to the former Minister, Deputy Brennan, and the former Minister of State, Deputy Tom Kitt, Galway men who represented a neighbouring constituency in south Dublin.

However, this is not a new Government. It is a recycled Fianna Fáil Government that has been in power for 11 years. The captain's armband has been passed to a new Taoiseach and there have been a few substitutions and some position switches, but this is essentially the same team. In its composition, it is more of a Fianna Fáil Government than has been the case for a long time. It is the closest we have been to a single party Fianna Fáil Government since Charles Haughey was defeated in a general election in 1981. It is an exaggeration to call it a coalition.

It saddens me to see what has happened to the Green Party, as I identify with its politics and philosophy, and the extent to which its Members sacrificed what they stand for to obtain office. When the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, seconded and poured praise on the newly nominated Taoiseach, all that came to mind was Stockholm syndrome, a psychological response sometimes seen when an abducted hostage shows signs of loyalty to the hostage-taker regardless of the danger or risk in which the former has been placed.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The relationship between Democratic Left and the Labour Party was the same.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It was not.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is a condition in which small acts of kindness by the captor are magnified by the one who has been captivated. An untold story of the formation of the Government is that of the shameful collaboration by the Green Party on the day the Government was formed in putting in order the paperwork for a motorway through Tara.

Deputy John Gormley: That is a blatant lie.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Minister and his people telephoned the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government repeatedly.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: On a point of order——

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Minister should withdraw his remark.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will chair this debate.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Minister could not wait, he was in so much contact with the——

An Ceann Comhairle: I cannot allow the——

Deputy John Gormley: I will correct the comment. Deputy Gilmore's statement was an untruth.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: The Minister should withdraw the comment.

Deputy Brian Hayes: He is winding back.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Minister withdraw the word "lie"?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He should.

Deputy John Gormley: It was an untruth. The Deputy should substantiate his assertions.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Did they hurt the Minister?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Is the Minister withdrawing the comment?

Deputy Joan Burton: He must.

An Ceann Comhairle: To clarify, is the Minister withdrawing the word "lie"?

Deputy John Gormley: Absolutely. It was an untruth.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I can understand why the Green Party did not manage to stop US military aeroplanes landing in Shannon Airport, but I cannot understand why it did not get an inspection regime.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: There is some irony in the fact that, while the former Minister, Mr. Michael McDowell, a free marketeer, managed to keep the incinerator out of Ringsend, it will now be built on a Green Party Minister's watch.

Deputy John Gormley: The Labour Party voted for it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore without interruption.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Methinks the Minister doth protest too much.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: What is new about this Government is not its composition, but the circumstances in which this phase of single party Fianna Fáil rule is taking office. When the Labour Party left office in 1997, the economy was growing at a rate of 10%. Now it is growing at less than 2%, the lowest rate in 20 years. In 1997, jobs were being created at a rate of 1,000

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per week. To date this year, jobs are being lost at a rate of 1,600 per week. When we left office in 1997, inflation was at 1.5%, but it is currently 5%. There was confidence and optimism among the people when the Government took office, but the latest ESRI consumer confidence index is at its lowest level since the index was invented. The recycled Government has led the country from boom to gloom in an 11 year period. The new Taoiseach would have us believe that this is due to international conditions. While I accept that the global economy, particularly the situation in the United States, has an effect, the new economic circumstances in which we find ourselves are due in no small measure to the poor domestic management of the economy by the man elected Taoiseach by the Dáil a few hours ago.

For the past 11 years, Fianna Fáil and its allies in the Government have ridden the crest of an economic wave. Ministers have claimed political credit for every economic achievement of enterprising businesses and a productive workforce. Deputy Bertie Ahern, who led the Government for 11 years, spent his time going around the country, looking into people's eyes and, as the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Ryan, stated last week, asking them "how is the hard working man?". I will tell the House how the hard working man and woman are. They pay an additional €400 per month for the mortgage they took out to buy their home a few years ago.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: In many cases and if they can find a buyer, that property is worth €100,000 less than what they paid. If the home is an apartment or in a mixed development, they may pay €2,000 per year in rip-off charges to a developer under the masquerade of a management company because the Government has repeatedly refused to accept this side's calls for the regulation of property management companies. If the home is in some of the housing estates sprawling around our cities, it may have been left unfinished by a builder who, like many others, has fled.

The hard working man and woman may live 20 miles or 30 miles from work, for which reason they will need to pay much travel money. After paying petrol costs of €1.30 per litre, they may need to pay €25 or €30 in tolls on the M50 or this city's other approach roads. As they sit in the worst traffic congestion in Europe, they have plenty of time to reflect on and worry about the security of their jobs or the future of their businesses. On their car radios, they listen to stories such as those we heard last week of the good high-level jobs being lost at Dell in Loughlinstown in my constituency at what is supposed to be the top end of the information economy. That causes them worry about whether they will have employment or how well their business will succeed in the future. No doubt the newly elected Taoiseach will tell us that he has cut their taxes. He cut the top rate but we should look at all the additional taxes and charges that have been heaped on the hardworking men and women of this country. In 1997, when Fianna Fáil returned to power, waste collection was a public service. Today it is commercialised and, in most parts of the country, run by private businesses. Families are now paying between €300 and €500 per year simply to have their bins collected.

The hardworking man and the hardworking woman are paying nearly €2,000 per year after tax for plan B health insurance to cover themselves and their two children. If they bring their sick child to the accident and emergency unit, they will pay €66 for hospital admission, a charge that has more than doubled since 2002. If they have to purchase medicine for the child, the limit on the drugs refund scheme has increased from €53 to €90. When their children begin their education, they must pay or collect money for the school's running costs because the promise made by this Government at the last election to double capitation fees in primary schools has not been delivered. If they have an elderly parent, they must wonder where they

will get the money to pay for nursing home charges and care, again because the legislation providing for a new regime on nursing charges, which we were promised on numerous occasions, has not been delivered. It does not end there. Supermarket prices have increased significantly on last year's figures. The price of a loaf of bread is 20% higher than this time last year, a litre of milk has increased by 30% and a kilo of flour is 40% more expensive.

How, then, are the hardworking man and the hardworking woman? They are under pressure from the increased cost of living and they are worried about their future employment and incomes. It will be cold comfort to families who are coming under financial pressure to suggest this is the fault of the Government and that they should wait three and a half years until the next general election before passing their verdict. I agree with Deputy Kenny that one of the actions the Government can take is to forego the huge salary increases it decided to pay Ministers earlier this year. The €38,000 increase for the Taoiseach is more than the incomes of 1.5 million taxpayers.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I was struck by one of the comments made by the Taoiseach in proposing this Government. He stated: "Nowhere is the need for a new approach more acute than in the health service." If that is the case, he has made a bad start because nowhere should he have exercised his authority as Taoiseach to effect a change of ministerial responsibility more than in respect of the Department of Health and Children.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: There are plenty of jobs in Government which the very able Minister for Health and Children could do. What was clear from last year's general election, however, was the absence of a public mandate for the strategy and approach to the health services being taken by this Minister.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: A clear majority of the people, including many of those who voted for candidates who are now in Government, rejected the approach to health services being taken by the Minister, Deputy Harney. If the Taoiseach really wanted a new approach in health, that is a ministerial change he could and should have made. He has conveyed the impression of being a tough guy at the helm but he was not very tough on this. She beat him. She is in the Department of Health and Children not because he believes she is the best person to do the job but because she has politically insisted that is where she is staying. The Taoiseach will have to take direct responsibility for that decision because all the controversies that have arisen in the health services in the past year are slaps in the face for Rebecca O'Malley, the late Suzie Long and all the people who looked to him to make a real change in health. He has made the decision to leave the Department in the hands of a Minister who does not see health as a community service but as a business opportunity.

The Labour Party will provide strong opposition to his Government. We will remind him daily of the problems people face in this country and we will raise issues of poverty and the nearly 200,000 children who are living in poverty. We will insist that however he or the Minister for Finance wields the knife as the economic situation tightens, it will not affect those who are least able to bear it, namely, those who are homeless and poor and, in many cases, lack the lobbies of better off people.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an méid a dúirt an Taoiseach nua maidir leis an Ghaeilge. Tá súil agam go mbeidh toradh praiticiúil ar sin, mar shampla, le tacaíocht iomlán don tumoideachas, d'fhorbairt eacnamaíochta na Gaeltachta, do Bhille Teanga sna Sé Chontae agus do mhéadú ar úsáid na Gaeilge anseo san Oireachtas.

The departure of the former Taoiseach has been one of the longest goodbyes in political history. I do not begrudge him his moment of history in Washington or his day in the sun beside the River Boyne, but Fianna Fáil has been benefiting from a virtual political truce called by Fine Gael and Labour since he announced his resignation. I welcome the end of that unreal, almost surreal period. Along with the Progressive Democrats and the Green Party, these parties are in the "Yes" camp on the Lisbon treaty debate. They are clearly not representing the large swathes of their own support base who oppose the ratification of Lisbon. A cosy media consensus follows suit.

Fianna Fáil has been riding high as health cuts, education shortfalls, job losses and the overall economic slump were swept from the headlines. The politics of personality has reigned supreme. The new Taoiseach and Ministers may bask in the media spotlight today but tomorrow and the next weeks and months will present a very different reality. They will face massive challenges.

The new Taoiseach will take responsibility for the continued consolidation of the peace process and the developing all-Ireland political process. He brings with him his experience as Minister for Foreign Affairs. I believe his commitment is sincere. Like the former Taoiseach, the incoming Taoiseach has played his part. Tremendous progress has been made but it must be remembered that this is a process and that momentum must be maintained.

Yesterday was a good day and as an Irish republican I would see what happened at the site of the Battle of the Boyne not as commemorating two foreign kings who vied for the supremacy of Ireland and Britain at the cost of much Irish blood but as the celebration of new relationships among all the people who share this island.

The agreements of Good Friday in 1998 and St. Andrews in 2006 form the basis of these new relationships and of the successful new political dispensation. The transfer of policing and justice powers from London to Belfast is an essential requirement and it will be a serious setback if there is slippage from the promised date of transfer of powers in this month of May 2008. That is the biggest single challenge facing the new Taoiseach with regard to the all-Ireland political process. I urge him to spare no effort to ensure the delivery of that absolutely vital element of the agreements, on which so much progress has been made and on which rests so much hope for the future.

Sinn Féin seeks constructive consensus based on progressive politics. We seek all-party co-operation to build on the peace process, develop the all-Ireland political dynamic and work in a planned way towards the unification of our island and of all the people who call it home. We look forward to working with the new Taoiseach and his colleagues on that great national project.

The new Taoiseach is also a former health Minister. He preceded Deputy Micheál Martin, who anchored the Government health strategy of 2001, the longest list of broken promises ever to gather dust on a shelf. Deputy Martin was famous for commissioning reports but presided over an unreformed health service with escalating waiting lists. He in turn was succeeded by the present Minister, Deputy Mary Harney. Her term of office as health Minister has been nothing short of disastrous.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: She oversaw the creation of the HSE, a body I have already described on the floor of this Chamber as the quango from hell. There is no longer any democratic accountability for health policy and health care delivery. The Minister, Deputy Harney, has pursued a ruthless drive to centralise and privatise our health services. On top of this are the current HSE cutbacks which are attacking already overstretched and underresourced services and making patients suffer.

I deplore the proposal to retain Deputy Harney as health Minister, not because I bear ill-will towards her personally — I do not — but because her retention in that post signals a continuation of the disastrous policies fronted by this Minister.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I say "fronted" deliberately because these are Fianna Fáil policies and every Deputy and Senator of that party bears collective responsibility for them. They cannot hide behind the Minister, Deputy Harney, nor can she in turn hide behind the HSE.

I have urged the new Taoiseach to change direction and I again urge him to do so even though he wishes to retain Deputy Harney in the health portfolio. I strongly contend that no party calling itself republican can continue with current health policies which are deepening the divide in our two-tier system.

I have a proposal for the Taoiseach. Sinn Féin would like to be part of an all-party agreement on health. The foundation of that agreement would be the ending of health care apartheid and the creation of a single-tier service with equal access for all based on need alone. Centralisation and privatisation should end, with services supported and developed at our local hospitals. We need a coalition for equality and excellence in our health services, a coalition that will build up our public health system and harness the commitment and dedication of health services workers. It would be an alliance of those workers along with communities and patients' groups and everyone in our society concerned with building better and fairer health services.

The new Taoiseach comes into office from the Department of Finance at a time of economic downturn. Unemployment rates continue to increase. Nothing has been done to protect or retrain workers in vulnerable sectors. Tax revenue is well below projections, with €927 million or 6.5% less being collected in tax revenue during the first four months of 2008 than in 2007.

Under the now Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, and his predecessors the Exchequer became ever more dependent on revenue from construction and domestic consumption. We are paying the price for this now as revenue from these sectors declines.

The Government has allowed the economy to become unsustainable as economic growth over recent years was driven by domestic consumption rather than exports or trade. Nothing was done to tackle this. This dependence in economic growth on domestic consumption left the economy particularly vulnerable, and both then Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen, and Deputy Micheál Martin at the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, failed to take any action in response to the downturn in the economy.

I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to the new Tánaiste, who also takes on the portfolio of Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. I wish Deputy Mary Coughlan success in her new responsibilities.

The hands-off approach to economic management adopted to date should be brought to an end by the new Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan. There should be action to tackle those factors undermining competitiveness, such as deficiencies in transport and communications infrastructure. There must be intervention to provide training and upskilling to vulner-

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

able workers and those recently made unemployed. Tax and PRSI cuts proposed in the programme for Government are not viable and should not go ahead, and revenue should be retained to provide better public services.

The new Taoiseach faces a major challenge in attempting to negotiate a successor to the Towards 2016 agreement. He should ignore the hypocritical calls for pay restraint from top management in the private sector, which has awarded itself massive pay rises while ordinary workers struggle to keep up with the cost of living. Any new agreement must also guarantee the right to union recognition.

We urge the immediate introduction of legislation on agency workers based on the principle of equal rights. This issue is damaging our economy by allowing a race to the bottom in terms of workers' rights and wages. Agency workers are being used to casualise the labour market and the claims of employers' bodies that agency workers allow us to be more competitive are blown out of the water by the fact that every country ranking more competitive than us in Europe already has protective legislation for agency workers. The trade union movement has called this the potential breaking point of the talks on social partnership.

The new Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Mary Hanafin, as well as raising welfare payments to a decent standard, should review the entire system of social welfare to make it customer accessible and more efficient, as well as geared towards removing barriers to work. Specifically she should step back from the plan to push single parents into the workplace while there are still no adequate child care facilities available to them. Two weeks paid paternity leave should be introduced and maternity benefit payment should be raised to an acceptable living standard.

That same Minister, in her previous portfolio, has in no small way contributed to the range of major problems now plain to see in the education system. It gives me no pleasure to say that. The problems include the state of existing school buildings and the shortage of accommodation, her attack on early immersion Irish language education, the underfunding of primary schools, insufficient third-level grants and school secretaries being paid disparate rates of pay and in some cases under the minimum wage. Of course, we have the scandal of families of children with autism and other special needs being denied the services they so desperately require. The new Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, must make a fresh start.

The new Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern, also faces significant challenges. Successive Fianna Fáil-led Governments refused to properly resource the six-year national drugs strategy which concludes this year. The strategy has been starved of funding. In the meantime, the heroin epidemic has spread beyond the capital and cocaine is in use in every town on the island. Drug-related and gangland crime have flourished as a direct result of Government inaction. Under budget 2008, funding allocated to the drugs initiative-young people's facilities and services fund, which includes the national drugs strategy, is to be €64 million. Contrast this figure with that allocated to the horse and greyhound racing fund, €76.6 million, and it is clear where the Government's priorities lie.

The HSE has already made cuts in the area of drug treatment and has reneged on promises to deliver. The fight against drugs must receive the priority and resources required. The full cost of the drugs crisis ranges from overdoses and road deaths, hospital stays, addiction treatments, social welfare payments and absenteeism from work to gangland murder and intimidation. Funding to front-line services must be sufficient and secure. Pilot projects should be mainstreamed without delay.

Having kept the good wine until last, I wish to avail of this opportunity to extend my personal congratulations and good wishes to the new Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Deputy Smith. The Minister must take a strong line in respect of the WTO negotiations and ensure that the EU Commission does not sacrifice the interests of Irish agriculture in pursuit of a deal favourable to larger member states. The current proposals associated with Commissioner for Trade, Peter Mandelson — in reality they are the Commission's proposals — represent a betrayal of the commitment given to farmers in 2003 when they agreed to the reform of CAP and, in particular, to the introduction of the decoupled single farm payment. The Minister must ensure that this commitment is not reneged upon and that farmers are not forced down a road which could lead to the decimation of the sector, with all the implications this would have for food production, employment and the fabric of rural Ireland.

Sinn Féin represents a different voice in this House. We will not be part of any cosy consensus. We have presented our analysis and our position consistently throughout our years of representation in this Chamber. We will not, therefore, be supporting this Cabinet. We will continue to offer constructive opposition, representing as honestly and as comprehensively as possible all who have elected us and also the many people who have been abandoned by those in whom they previously placed their trust.

Deputy Mary Alexandra White: Cuireann sé áthas orm go bhfuil an Teachta Brian Cowen tofa mar Taoiseach. Ba mhaith liom mo chomhghairdeas a ghabháil leis an Taoiseach, a chlann agus muintir Uíbh Fháilí ar an ócáid stairiúil seo.

Those of us in the Green Party got to know the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, as a tough-as-old-boots negotiator when we hammered out a programme for Government last May and June. It is not easy make a deal with him. It took 12 days to do so and at times it was touch and go. Thus far, however, we have found the tough dealer to be a straight dealer who honours hard-won agreements. The Green Party has kept its word in government. We will continue to honour our commitments and we look forward to proceeding with our work. Painful though it is for Deputies Gilmore and Kenny and others in opposition to hear, it is far more satisfactory to be on this side of the House and in a position to implement one's party's policies. Instead of crafting good speeches and juicy media titbits, we are working well in government. The Green Party worked well with Deputy Bertie Ahern and I am confident we can do the same with the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen.

Those on all sides attested earlier to the new Taoiseach's considerable ability and vast political experience. Cé gur fear óg é, tá mórchuid taithí aige mar pholaiteoir. Togadh é mar Teachta Dála don chéad uair i 1984. Chaith sé breis is deich mbliana mar Aire, sular chaith sé ceithre bhliain mar Aire Airgeadais. Is duine tuisceanach, oilte é, atá lán-dáiríre faoin pholaitíocht. Creidim go bhfuil sé réidh chun a seacht ndícheall a dhéanamh ar son na tíre.

In addition to his vast experience, Deputy Cowen comes to the office of Taoiseach with impeccable political credentials. As already stated, this is a proud day for the people of Laois-Offaly and the midlands in general as they see one of their own take the most responsible political office in the land. As deputy leader of the Green Party — and also as a Deputy who represents a rural constituency, Carlow-Kilkenny, which is situated not far from the Taoiseach's native Offaly — I fully appreciate the importance of Deputy Cowen's election for his neighbours, the wider community and the surrounding region.

Today is a time for a certain pageantry and congratulations as we bid a final farewell to Deputy Bertie Ahern and offer a welcome to the new Taoiseach. I also wish to offer my congratulations to those newly appointed as Ministers.

[Deputy Mary Alexandra White.]

In one way, Deputy Cowen comes to the office of Taoiseach at a blessed time. There is now every reason to hope that the people of Northern Ireland have entered a new era of peace and prosperity. As Ian Paisley stated yesterday, in his own inimitable way, there can be no turning back to the bad old days of violence. The problems of Northern Ireland have been a huge feature of the work of this House and of successive Governments for four decades. We will continue to discuss and focus on the North. Henceforth, however, we will concentrate on exciting economic and social developments as cross-Border co-operation deepens.

Deputy Cowen's election as Taoiseach also comes at a very challenging time economically for Ireland, particularly as things tighten in the global economy. This is a signal that we need to address the issues we face with even more urgency and vigour. As the price of the barrel of oil tops $120 and supplies of other fossil fuels are both outrageously expensive and frighteningly fickle, we need to realise that we must reduce our dependence on imported energy. We know we must reduce our wastage of scarce and expensive energy resources.

Earlier today, I read without great surprise that Irish people are spending far more to light and heat their homes and to cook meals than are their counterparts in other EU countries with far colder climates. Apart from anything else, it is clear we are facing massive rises in our energy bills which, unless we change our ways, we will increasingly struggle to meet.

Questions of energy security dovetail with the key environmental challenge we face, namely, addressing the effects of climate change. It is now the shared view of thousands of scientists across the globe that we are living on borrowed time. The Green Party is in government because Deputy Bertie Ahern recognised this stark reality. We are remaining in government because the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, takes the same view. Climate change threatens our very existence. Irish aid organisations such as Trócaire and Concern have indicated their deep fears regarding the devastation that has already been wrought upon the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. We have just one chance to tackle climate change and Ireland must play its part with the other developed nations of the world.

Whatever the Opposition's response, I am confident the parties in government will continue to work together in a spirit of trust, co-operation and compromise. My colleagues in government have found the Taoiseach to be a man of his word — once the deal is done he honours it. We found this to be the case when he held the pivotal job of Minister for Finance. In that position, he provided us with additional resources to allow us to pursue our work.

Members of the Green Party are the first to recognise that in the coming years we face a period where resources will be less widely available. We know that in more straitened times we must be more rigorous in identifying projects to be funded. In addition, we must be even more vigilant with regard to obtaining value for taxpayers' money. We also know that we must be more cognisant than ever of the needs of business in order to protect existing jobs and promote employment creation. We can best do this by continuing to be part of the coalition Government. The Green Party is ready to continue to play its part in shaping a sustainable future for everyone on this island.

Deputy James Reilly: I wish to share time with Deputy Varadkar.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy James Reilly: Today is a great one for the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen. It is a proud day for him, for Offaly and for his family. I genuinely wish him well in his endeavours.

The Taoiseach referred to social inclusion. I hope that he was not merely uttering weasel or empty words. If he means what he says, then co-located hospitals should be a thought from the past and not a thing of the future.

They have the potential to cause tremendous social division. A situation will arise where people with influence — those with insurance and wealth — will turn right, to the new, well funded private hospital, while those without influence — those with medical cards, no insurance and chronic illness — will turn left, into a public health service that will continue to be undermined, as has been the case over the past 12 months, by the Minister the Taoiseach has seen fit to reappoint today. I must echo the comments of others in this regard.

An example of how co-located hospitals are manifesting themselves in the most despicable way is the case of St. Ita's and Beaumont hospital. The co-located hospital at Beaumont will occupy the site for which planning permission was awarded for a new psychiatric unit in 2004. It was put out to tender in 2005 but the site will be occupied by a private hospital while 23 men are housed in one ward and 23 women in another, with 3 ft between their beds and access to just a small bank of three toilets, one shower and one bathroom. They are to be left in this temporary facility that was built 40 years ago. To the back of the queue with them, while private enterprise moves on ahead. I hope the Taoiseach will be as good as his word and pursue a policy in health and education, as elsewhere, that means social inclusion.

The Minister, Deputy Harney, made an extraordinary statement in the House earlier. She obviously did not hear what Dr. Peter Boylan had to say. With regard to her comments on longevity having improved here, there are many social as well as medical factors which influence this. What she had to say should be told to the relatives of Suzy Long. What good is it to those like Beverly Seville Doyle, who died in a toilet in the Mater Hospital after waiting 19 hours in accident and emergency? What good is it to 76-year old Peg McEntee, who suffers from Alzheimer's and who asked to be let die in the Mater Hospital, having waited so long for a bed? Thankfully, she is at home and looking much better. The list continues of the many who suffered as a consequence of this Minister's inaction and inability to take action when forewarned, as in the case of the 97 women in Portlaoise, in the Taoiseach's constituency, who found out about their recall on the news.

What has she put forward with regard to change, innovation and reform? Her fair deal seems to have run into the ground. It was promised since before Christmas but there is still no sign of it — there are legal issues, we are told. A consultant contract which we were told with great fanfare was in place several weeks ago is still awaited. The Psychiatric Nurses Association is taking industrial action and causing problems in the health service, particularly the psychiatric health service where its members work. The IMPACT trade union is threatening industrial action. The list goes on.

This could have been the Taoiseach's opportunity to make his mark on the health service, so he would not be remembered only as the man who referred to it as "Angola" after two years as Minister — hardly a legacy of which one would be proud. This could have been his opportunity to institute radical reform in the HSE, which we now know is a bloated and dysfunctional bureaucracy, as highlighted in report after report. We know why this happened, namely, because the Government on its formation in 2002 would not bite the bullet of redundancies and instead merged 11 companies.

The list goes on in regard to cutbacks and issues around the budget sought by the HSE, which has been left almost €500 million short with €14.1 billion instead of €14.7 billion, with €200 million for extra work. It is clear there has been a long list of cutbacks throughout the country. Blanchardstown hospital is closing surgical and medical wards for a month. Galway City Hospital, the centre of excellence for the west and north west, will close for the month of

[Deputy James Reilly.]

August, the busiest month of the tourist season despite Galway being the capital of tourism in Ireland.

I had hoped to address many other issues and I had hoped to finish on a positive note. However, it is very difficult to be positive when we will have in pole position the same Minister who has presided over this disaster — it has been a disaster, as others have said. What chance is there of change when there remains in position a Minister who repeatedly ignores warning letters from consultants and other concerned people about problems that are pending, and who continues to strip out services before the services that are supposed to replace them are built, thus endangering patients, often with fatal consequences? I wish the Taoiseach well but I regret this missed opportunity to start anew in the health service. His failure to replace the Minister for Health and Children does not augur well for health care.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: As another member of the House has pointed out, I have been only a wet week in politics. However, during my 11 months as a Member of this House, I have seen many changes: the resignation of four party leaders; the election of four new party leaders to replace them; the resignation of a Taoiseach; and today, the election of a new one.

Being elected Taoiseach is the greatest honour that can be bestowed on an Irish politician. On a personal level, I extend my congratulations to Deputy Brian Cowen on his election as Taoiseach. I also extend my congratulations to the Cabinet on their appointment, in particular to the new Tánaiste, who I look forward to tangoing with over the next few months, to the Minister, Deputy Micheál Martin, who has decided to leave the country rather than dealing with unemployment and business closures, and also to my constituency colleague, the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, who I am sure will ensure there are no cutbacks in Dublin West, as, otherwise, he will feel the consequences.

However, I cannot help but wish that for the country's sake the events of today had been otherwise. We have today a Government the people did not vote for and a Taoiseach the people did not vote for. More than that, we do not have the one thing the country needs, namely, a Government made up of Ministers who understand and fathom the depth of the difficulties before us, who are committed to delivering change and driving reform and who are led by a Taoiseach with a record of achievement, competency and integrity. We have none of that tonight. The Taoiseach and these Ministers fail the test of competence in three key areas: ethics, the economy and equity.

On the subject of ethics, the Taoiseach is continuity Fianna Fáil. While I do not believe him to be unethical, I know him to be a politician who has turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to low standards in public office throughout his political career. He turned a blind eye when Liam Lawlor was elected to chair the ethics committee of this House. He sat next to Ray Burke in Cabinet. He defended loyally, without question, his predecessor's assertions in this House. His first act as leader of his party was to readmit to its ranks a Deputy who made a career of encouraging people to evade their taxes. Ireland does not need a Taoiseach or Ministers who value loyalty ahead of honesty or integrity. Ireland needs a Government that understands that our fellow citizens are the real victims of corruption and a Government that is committed to rooting it out.

On the economy, the Taoiseach and these Ministers have squandered the boom. They could have used the prosperity of the past ten years to lay the foundations for future growth by investing in infrastructure and education and by preparing Ireland for the inevitable downturn that will come, sooner or later. Instead, as the then Minister for Finance, the Taoiseach increased current account public spending by 10.5% every year at a time when the economy was not growing that fast. He transformed a surplus of €2.3 billion in 2003 into a projected

borrowing requirement of €7 billion this year, the worst turnaround in the State's public finances in its history.

Ireland does not need a Government that looks abroad to explain away our economic problems. It needs a Government that accepts responsibility for its failure, not one that is in constant denial. It needs a Government that will bring public services and spending under control and restore competitiveness. Above all, we need a Taoiseach of character and substance to lead it. This is not that Government and, regrettably, this is not that Taoiseach.

It has been said in this House that Deputy Cowen's predecessor was a lucky Taoiseach. He was fortunate to inherit from the Rainbow Government an economy growing at 10%, creating a thousand jobs a week, and the lowest inflation in Europe, as Deputy Gilmore pointed out. The Taoiseach and his Ministers are not so fortunate. He is inheriting an economic downturn that is not entirely but largely of his own making. He will have to take responsibility for the emerging economic crisis and he will have to take tough decisions to put it right. He will have to take responsibility for public services, which he has undermined and damaged through his flawed policies. He will have to grapple with the consequences of the low ethical standards which he has fostered and tolerated. If he does not do this, and I expect he will not, in three or four years he will lead his party to its worst electoral performance since 1927 — he will lead it to an apocalypse.

8 o'clock

Over the next four years we, as the Opposition, will hold the Taoiseach to account, expose his failures and highlight the injustices he would conceal. We will ensure that on the next occasion on which this House debates a motion on the election of a Taoiseach or a new Government, this country gets what it really needs — not a change of guard but a change of direction, a change of policy and a change of Government.

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I am very proud and privileged to speak as a member of the Government and I thank the Taoiseach for the confidence he has shown in me.

I want to deal with a number of issues raised. I was recently travelling from my constituency clinic when I heard a debate on "Saturday View" on the state of our economy. One contributor said that when capital gains tax was halved in 1997, it was the worst possible development. The contributor claimed it meant we did not have sufficient resources for health, education and welfare. I remember being somewhat amused listening to that because the reality is very different. The very first year after the halving of capital gains tax, the yield increased by 87%.

I listened this evening to the contention that when the current parties came into Government in 1997, they took over a wonderful economy from the Rainbow Government, and that it is the current Government's fault that the economy is now in difficulty. It was alleged that the success was due to our predecessors and that the failure is because of our own efforts. I do not believe in going back over history too much because it is the future that matters, but the reality is that the policies pursued since 1997 — although not exclusively because excellent policies were pursued by our predecessors — have contributed greatly to the economic prosperity this country enjoys today.

Unemployment in Ireland today is a third of what it was 20 years ago. Deputy Ó Caoláin should note that the last thing this country needs is to isolate itself from the action in the European Union. Ireland would be nowhere economically and socially without it, and its place in the world will be diminished if it does not continue to be at its heart.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We are agreed on that.

Deputy Mary Harney: It is in our vital national interest to support the Lisbon treaty, which is about making the Union more effective socially and economically. It is a question of giving the Union a more powerful influence on global affairs.

I want to talk mainly about health, for obvious reasons. The policies I pursue, as Minister for Health and Children, are the policies of the Government.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Harney: Those in Cabinet will know that proposals are brought by a Minister to the Government and are either agreed or rejected thereby. When they are agreed, I, as a member of Cabinet with collective responsibility, support, defend and advance them.

Being a general practitioner, Deputy Reilly will know that the health service in Ireland has improved dramatically over the past decade. I have a list of improvements extending to 20 pages. I will not elaborate on them all but will mention just a few. Today 11,000 older people are being supported clinically at home, whereas there was no such support ten years ago. Some 24,000 people with disabilities are in receipt of day services, while almost none of these services was available in the early 1990s. Eight thousand people with disabilities are in care while virtually nobody was ten or more years ago. Four thousand disabled people are in receipt of respite services annually.

The health service has increased the output from its hospitals. I very much welcome the comments of the Taoiseach on outputs and delivery because we sometimes become obsessed with money and resources. As the OECD has shown, we have 3.9 staff per acute hospital bed, which is double the OECD average. The concentration on inputs rather than outcomes has been one of our great failures as a country in terms of our attitude to public services. Today our hospitals are treating nearly 400,000 more people annually than they did a decade ago.

Today, 200,000 more people have medical cards than they did three years ago and a greater number of people than ever before can go to their general practitioner free of charge than in any time since the 1980s, when unemployment was three times higher.

Deputy James Reilly: The percentage of the population has decreased.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy was listened to in silence. He should have some manners.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister should continue.

Deputy Mary Harney: Deputy Kenny stated today that Fine Gael leaders always put the country first. As a doctor, Deputy Reilly will know about cancer survival outcomes and that we now have a cancer registry whereby we can measure survival rates. It is a fact that the survival rate of people treated in the north west for breast cancer is 25% lower than that pertaining to those treated in specialist centres in Dublin. I refer to the last period for which we have results. Anyone who puts the country and patients first cannot but act in the face of this convincing fact. I will not talk about multidisciplinary teams or use complicated language; suffice it to say that when women with breast cancer are treated by a number of different experts in a single place, outcomes improve by 20% to 25%. There are 250 medical publications worldwide that back up that fact. Our reorganisation of cancer services is about outcomes and delivery and nothing else.

Last week in Galway I had the pleasure of meeting a group known as Helping Hands, whose members joined together voluntarily some years ago because their friends had a child with cancer. The mother of the child was in Dublin with that child for almost a whole year. The group, with which I was really impressed, helped out the family and developed into an organis-

ation. The mother of the child told me she was devastated when her child was diagnosed five and a half years ago. She said she and her husband were prepared to sell their house and go anywhere they could to obtain treatment for their child. She also said they did a lot of investigation and discovered there was nowhere better than Crumlin hospital. She said she was so happy their child was treated in that hospital.

When I listen to these debates, I get so upset when Members do not support the inevitable concentration of services where experts can be brought together. With regard to children's campuses, we are top of the class worldwide because of the way in which we have organised the services. We all have experience of illness among loved ones and we would bring them almost anywhere if we could get them cured. Therefore, when reorganising services, it is not a question of budgets. Our performance has but one driver and that is patient outcomes and patient safety.

A very encouraging report was published recently on MRSA for the third quarter of last year. While it is but one report, it shows a dramatic improvement in our performance. Some years ago we could never have known how we were doing in this regard because we never measured our progress. Hospitals must now report individually and thus we are able to measure progress, set targets and drive improvements in the interest of patient safety.

I could list many examples of where the health services are improving without any additional resources. Let me cite the example of the winner of one of the health innovation awards last week, St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin. Without any additional resources, its neurology unit increased its service level twofold. It was seeing 2,500 patients annually and is now seeing nearly 5,000. The doctors are spending twice the time with patients that they used to spend with them. They are doing so because innovative doctors, nurses and managers got together to change the way they were dealing with their patients. Instead of patients having to wait one year to see a neurologist at the hospital, they now only need to wait a matter of weeks.

These are some examples of what the reform agenda is seeking to achieve. We have amalgamated many organisations into the HSE. If any Member tells me that services were better when we had the health boards with their 273 members, I will challenge his facts.

The HSE is not perfect and considerable efforts are being made by the management of the executive and the board — the board includes very dedicated women and men who have agreed to sit on it and give it their everything — to get the organisation right, establish the lines of accountability and ensure we know who is responsible, when they are responsible and who reports to whom. We have never had a change process of this scale in the public or private sector.

Deputy Gilmore's former party, the Democratic Left, said of Deputy Howlin when he produced his health strategy in May 1994 that he had slavishly given in to the private sector. The words may be different but the same is said of me. If services are put in place, my obligation and that of the Government is to make them available to patients.

Consequently, at present privately funded radiation oncology services in Limerick and Waterford are made available to all patients. Moreover, Deputy Reilly should note there will be access for all patients to any facilities built.

The Taoiseach: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Harney: They will not be the exclusive remit of any single group of citizens. The well-off always can deal with their own health. The challenge is to provide a health service that delivers speedy responses to those who need them.

Deputy James Reilly: Deputy Harney has failed that challenge.

Deputy Mary Harney: The National Treatment Purchase Fund recently celebrated the treatment of 100,000 people, 90% of whom were treated in private hospitals in Ireland. Some people from Dublin went to the country for treatment and *vice versa*. I met and continue to meet such patients and what matters above all else to them is getting the appropriate treatment when they need it. They do not care who put up the money to put in place the facility once it is quality assured and they know they will get better. This is what the patients want.

The Taoiseach: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Harney: I emphasise this is the Government's health policy.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister's time has expired.

Deputy Mary Harney: I am pursuing the Government's health policy. It was agreed in the programme for Government and any initiatives will be agreed by the Cabinet. Those that are rejected will not proceed while those that receive support will be pursued with enthusiasm.

Deputy Alan Shatter: I wish to share time with Deputy Michael Ring.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Alan Shatter: I begin, like other speakers, by congratulating Deputy Brian Cowen on his appointment as Taoiseach and I wish him well in that position. He knows the Fine Gael Party will support him on those occasions when he deserves support and I hope we will be constructively critical on other occasions. I also congratulate all those who have been re-appointed to Government, as well as some of the new appointees. In the brief time available to me, I wish my constituency colleague, Deputy Séamus Brennan well and a speedy return to good health. We have been constituency colleagues in Dublin South since 1981 and I hope he will return to work for his constituents and that we will continue to compete in the manner we have in the past.

I also commiserate with my constituency colleague, Deputy Tom Kitt. Deputy Kitt laboured hard for the Government for many years as Chief Whip and it comes as a surprise to many to discover he is not part of the Government and has not been appointed to a senior position. In sympathising with him, the reason for this became apparent as today's speeches progressed. It is clear that at present, the country does not have a coalition Government. The Green Party has become more Fianna Fáil than Fianna Fáil itself. Deputy Gormley could barely contain himself from jumping up and down. Had he been allowed to deliver a third speech as a paean to the Taoiseach, he would have done so. It is now clear that Deputy Eamon Ryan represents Fianna Fáil in the constituency of Dublin South and I wonder how long it will take before the Green Party simply amalgamates with the Fianna Fáil Party.

I listened with interest to the Green Party Members talking about climate change. While all Members are concerned about climate change, it is time to begin to examine some of the policies in this regard more carefully. It is time to consider the consequences of what is being done in these areas. Perhaps this might dawn on the Government, if it is not completely enthralled by being obliged to embrace everything the Green Party had to say to obtain its support in Government. It appears that globally, there is a major campaign for clean air to tackle the problems associated with CO2, which is hugely important. The promotion of bio-fuels apparently also is promoting, in the interests of humanity, global famine. I refer to the

major problems now emerging in Third World countries. Moreover, crop changes in First World countries to produce bio-fuels are having a dramatic impact on the world. There now is a need to reconsider carefully the directions in which we are heading. While I am unsure whether Deputy Gormley will allow his new pals to do so, this issue must be taken seriously.

Since my return to the Dáil at the last election, I have noticed an interesting phenomenon, which differs somewhat to one I have observed in my previous 21 years in this House. It appears this phenomenon will continue under the present Government, which is regrettable because it results in growing cynicism in politics and undermines the political credibility of the Government and this House. The predecessor to this Government was interested in power without responsibility. When anything went right, it claimed it had achieved something while when anything went wrong, everyone ducked responsibility. The speech disappointingly delivered by the Taoiseach today was a classic example of this phenomenon. He referred to the OECD report which, in the language of that institution, constitutes a damning indictment of the failures of the Government to reform our public services. He spoke of a new emphasis to be put on performance or on outcomes, as opposed to bureaucracy.

However, the Government, of which he was Minister for Finance, failed abysmally to do so at any time. He had his personal critique of the HSE, which the Minister for Health and Children sought to shoot down. Clearly, the HSE as a bureaucracy is not working. It is not accountable to this House. It is an example of a second phenomenon, that is, Government without accountability. While the Minister wants to have inquiries into everything that goes wrong with the HSE, she never wants blame to be assigned and no one should be regarded as being accountable. The Government should accept responsibility and recognise its true accountability to this House, as well as the need to amend substantially the legislation governing the HSE and other bodies to make them truly accountable to this House for the poor services they provide.

I congratulate Deputy Brendan Smith on his promotion from his post as Minister of State with responsibility for children to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I also congratulate Deputy Brian Lenihan on his move from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to the Department of Finance. However, in congratulating them, I raise a concern to which the Taoiseach failed to refer in his speech. The Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children now has been sitting for six months to achieve a consensus on a substantial amendment to the Constitution——

An Ceann Comhairle: I must call Deputy Ring.

Deputy Alan Shatter: —— and to agree the principles of substantive legislation. Deputy Barry Andrews now has been appointed to the position of Minister of State with responsibility for children and youth affairs. He has not attended meetings of the joint committee and is not privy to its proceedings. Deputy Dermot Ahern now is the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform instead of being the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must call Deputy Ring.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It seems that in making these appointments, the intent of the Taoiseach essentially is to sabotage six months' work of that committee. I find it extraordinary that the two Ministers who have been directly involved in the work of the joint committee have been replaced by two other Ministers, who have been parachuted in without having had hand, act

[Deputy Alan Shatter.]

or part in the hearings, submissions or discussions that have taken place in the past six months. This creates a major problem for the continued working of this joint committee.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ring has four minutes.

Deputy Michael Ring: I congratulate the new Taoiseach and Tánaiste. I am delighted to see power being taken out of Dublin and am glad it has gone to the midlands. I also am glad the Tánaiste comes from the north-west as it was time to take power from Dublin. I hope that after the next election, it will move further west and the Taoiseach will be from County Mayo.

I will speak softly today for the benefit of Deputy Harney because she was upset recently when I spoke too loudly. Consequently I will be nice and soft today.

Deputy Mary Harney: My point was the Deputy should speak softly and carry a big stick.

An Ceann Comhairle: She is not the only one.

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy Séamus Brennan is a man in this House for whom I have great time. I was Fine Gael spokesperson for social and family affairs and when Deputy Brennan came into this House, he did not know a great deal about social welfare. However, he was prepared to listen and learn. I found him to be a highly compassionate and decent man who gave loyal service to Fianna Fáil, the Government and the State. I was sorry to hear he is sick and am sorry he has left the Cabinet today.

The outgoing Taoiseach has spent the past month accepting tributes paid to him. Although Deputy Séamus Brennan also was part of the Government, he has departed today. In Deputy Brennan's absence, I wish to put on record, for his benefit and that of his wife and family, that he is a man of compassion to whom I brought many problems. He is a man who listened and dealt with such problems quietly. He was not afraid to listen to the Opposition or to take on ideas. I am sorry to note his departure from the Cabinet but I wish him well. Perhaps now he will be able to deal with his health problems. It would not have been easy to do so before, given the pressures of being a Minister. I wish him well and hope he has a speedy recovery. I mean this sincerely.

As for the Government, the Taoiseach had a wonderful opportunity today and it is a pity he did not introduce new faces. There is only one new person in the Cabinet today as everyone else had attended Cabinet meetings beforehand. It is like musical chairs or moving the chairs around on the *Titanic*. I regret he did not bring in more new faces and did not move other Ministers around. I will not criticise Deputy Harney tonight because she has taken a lot of stick that Fianna Fáil should take. The only reason Fianna Fáil allows her to remain there is because it has destroyed the Progressive Democrats. Moreover, it will destroy the Green Party, which will not be heard from after the next election. The Ministers, Deputies Gormley and Ryan, should enjoy their time in their State cars because they will not have them after the next general election. The Green Party will not be heard of then.

I will give the House a simple example of the problems in the Department of Health and Children. When the Government established the HSE, no staff lost their old jobs in the old health boards or the Department. Under the nursing home subvention scheme, the Government took money from old people who were unable to meet nursing home costs. I understood that it was planned to repay €1 billion to such people, but it now seems that just €400 million will be paid. I will tell the House who the real winners are. The State has paid €7 million to consultants. They will get €15 million before the scheme comes to an end. They have taken

money from poor people. It is not above board. When we ask questions in the Dáil, we do not get answers. We are not told what is happening. We are told it is a matter for the constituents and the consultancy company. What is going on is wrong. Too many consultants and agencies are taking the State's money. I understand that consultants are contacting the Chairmen of Oireachtas committees to see if they can be given responsibility for compiling certain reports. They are looking for business from the Government. The biggest business in this country is the business of consultants.

I ask the Taoiseach to examine the stealth taxes which are putting this country's small businesses out of business. More and more small businesses are losing jobs every day as a result of the stealth taxes imposed by the local authorities and the Government. It is something that has to be considered if we are to support small businesses, which are the backbone of this economy, rather than putting them out of business.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Many of the speakers opposite have congratulated the new Taoiseach and the various Ministers who have been proposed for nomination. Before the House divides in a few moments, I would like to express my appreciation of the generosity of many of the tributes which have been paid by Opposition Deputies during this debate. As Deputy Kenny pointed out when he opened this debate on behalf of the Opposition, it is an honour to serve in government. The Taoiseach is permitted to appoint a maximum of 14 Ministers to his Government. It is a singular honour to hold any one of those offices. While all Ministries carry certain responsibilities, the office to which I am to be appointed is one of particular responsibility. Under the Constitution, Ministers must act collectively and be collectively accountable to this House.

Deputy Shatter expressed concerns about the proposed referendum on children's rights. I assure him that the new Ministers will be briefed by their predecessors about the work of the committee. The Government will act collectively on that issue, just as it will in respect of the many other matters with which it is faced.

One of the themes of this debate has been the negativity of the commentary on the Minister for Health and Children. She gave a robust account of her stewardship of that Department. We have full confidence in her. The decisions for which she is held accountable are collective decisions of the Cabinet. I have been concerned for some time about the quality of the debate in this House on the subject of health care. I refer to the unthinking opposition to the concept of co-location, for example.

Deputy Michael Creed: That is an insult.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: While I can understand why some Deputies with a particular ideological bias object to co-location, I do not understand why many Deputies do not see that the question of co-location relates to the total absence of any pricing system within our hospital structures. The Minister, Deputy Harney, has mentioned this evening that more than 100,000 people have had to be treated under the National Purchase Treatment Fund. In that context, the Deputies opposite should examine carefully the health service structures, systems and operations which are producing such an extraordinary level of demand.

Deputy Damien English: There is a reason for that.

Deputy Michael Creed: I can give the Minister chapter and verse on the winding down of the public orthopaedic service in Cork.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is in complete opposition to certain——

Deputy Damien English: There is universal health insurance.

The Taoiseach: We are trying to have a debate, lads.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is clear that the Opposition parties do not care to scrutinise the substantial vested interests operating in this area.

Deputy Kenny spoke about this country's economic position. As someone who has been sitting on the Government benches for some time, I have often heard Opposition Deputies saying that the successful stewardship of the economy by several recent Governments has been entirely due to international factors. However, Deputy Kenny told us this evening that we should ignore international factors. He suggested that all this country's economic difficulties can be laid at the feet of the Government. The truth lies in between, of course — we must study and apply our intelligence to the international factors before responding intelligently to those factors over which we have control.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Ar dtús báire, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le gach éinne as ucht an tacaíocht a thug siad dom go pearsanta. Is mór an phribhléid agus onóir dom é gur mise an chéad Tánaiste as Dún na nGall, an chontae ina bhfuil mé i mo chónaí. Go mórmhór, ba mhaith liom ómós a thabhairt don Taoiseach as ucht an Rialtas atá roghnaithe aige anocht agus a bheidh tofa i gceann cúpla nóiméad, i mo thuairim. It is with great pride and pleasure that I stand here this evening. I have been honoured by the Taoiseach, who has nominated me for appointment as Tánaiste. I support him as Taoiseach and wish him every success.

I have listened to the views of other Members. Their vision is not our vision. Our vision is one of compassion, social justice, economic opportunity and civic participation by all citizens, all of the time. That vision is a reflection of the man who is our political leader. The Taoiseach is a man of compassion. He believes in the real republican ideal. His intellect allows him to understand what real social justice is all about. As a Deputy for Donegal South-West, I am aware of the vision, compassion and listening skills the Taoiseach showed as Minister for Health when dealing with the unfortunate hepatitis C debacle. He listened to the people and addressed their concerns. I am familiar with the Taoiseach's vision for people with special needs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. As Minister for Finance, he continued the work he had done as Minister for Health in supporting those who are less fortunate in our society.

The Taoiseach is not a man of personal ambition, but of ambition for this country. He wants to allow all our citizens to participate in society. He understands the challenges faced by young people, in particular. He will give all young people an opportunity to participate in the social aspects of the economy. We will foster the ability of such people to achieve what they can. The members of the Government, representing the Progressive Democrats, the Green Party and Fianna Fáil, will ensure that the Taoiseach's vision is realised. In steering this country, we will bear in mind the needs of the community, particularly those who are less well-off. We will ensure that economic success and prosperity are afforded to all. That will not be done in a singular way. We will work together to tackle various challenges, particularly in the economy. The prudent work of the outgoing Minister for Finance will be continued under the stewardship of the incoming Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan.

While we are open to constructive criticism from the Opposition parties, we will not necessarily listen to it all. We have a vision for what we want this country to achieve. As members

of the Cabinet, we will work together to that end. This country's resources will be used for the betterment of all the people, who have joint ownership of those resources. Therefore, it is with great pride that I add to the voices of many of my colleagues on this side of the House who have spoken about the recommended composition of the new Cabinet. In particular, I commend to the House the leadership of the new Taoiseach, who is a man of great honour. He has rural and urban Ireland in his heart. He is a man of compassion. He has huge ambition for this nation. In supporting him, I am mindful of the personal and political respect that has been shown to him in this House. He holds those who are elected to this House in the highest regard, regardless of their political hue. The Taoiseach's respect for this Chamber is emphasised by the honourable manner in which he has represented the constituency of Laois-Offaly over many years. Arís, a Cheann Comhairle, molaim an Rialtais agus, go mórmhór, an Taoiseach é fhéin.

An Ceann Comhairle: Toisc go bhfuil sé 8.30 i.n., tá orm an cheist a chur de bhun rún na Dála inniu. As it is now 8.30 p.m., I am required to put the question in accordance with a resolution of the Dáil today.

Cuireadh an cheist: "Go n-aontaíonn Dáil Éireann leis an Taoiseach d'ainmniú na dTeachtaí a ainmníodh chun a gceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar chomhaltaí den Rialtas."

Question put: "That Dáil Éireann approves the nomination by the Taoiseach of the Deputies nominated for appointment by the President to be members of the Government."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 87; Níl, 74.

Tá

Ahern, Bertie.
Ahern, Dermot.
Ahern, Michael.
Ahern, Noel.
Andrews, Barry.
Andrews, Chris.
Ardagh, Seán.
Aylward, Bobby.
Behan, Joe.
Blaney, Niall.
Brady, Áine.
Brady, Cyprian.
Brady, Johnny.
Browne, John.
Byrne, Thomas.
Calleary, Dara.
Carey, Pat.
Collins, Niall.
Conlon, Margaret.
Connick, Seán.
Coughlan, Mary.
Cowen, Brian.
Cregan, John.
Cuffe, Ciarán.
Cullen, Martin.
Curran, John.
Dempsey, Noel.
Devins, Jimmy.
Dooley, Timmy.
Fahey, Frank.
Finneran, Michael.
Fitzpatrick, Michael.
Fleming, Seán.
Flynn, Beverley.
Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
Gogarty, Paul.
Gormley, John.
Grealish, Noel.
Hanafin, Mary.
Harney, Mary.
Haughey, Seán.
Hoctor, Máire.
Kelleher, Billy.
Kelly, Peter.
Kenneally, Brendan.
Kennedy, Michael.
Killeen, Tony.
Kirk, Seamus.
Kitt, Michael P.
Kitt, Tom.
Lenihan, Brian.
Lenihan, Conor.
Lowry, Michael.
Mansergh, Martin.
Martin, Micheál.
McDaid, James.
McEllistrim, Thomas.
McGrath, Finian.
McGrath, Mattie.
McGrath, Michael.
McGuinness, John.
Moloney, John.
Moynihan, Michael.
Mulcahy, Michael.
Nolan, M. J.
Ó Cuív, Éamon.
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
O'Brien, Darragh.

Tá—*continued*

O'Connor, Charlie.
O'Dea, Willie.
O'Flynn, Noel.
O'Hanlon, Rory.
O'Keeffe, Batt.
O'Keeffe, Edward.
O'Rourke, Mary.
O'Sullivan, Christy.
Power, Peter.
Power, Seán.
Roche, Dick.
Ryan, Eamon.
Sargent, Trevor.
Scanlon, Eamon.
Smith, Brendan.
Treacy, Noel.
Wallace, Mary.
White, Mary Alexandra.
Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
Bannon, James.
Barrett, Seán.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Bruton, Richard.
Burke, Ulick.
Burton, Joan.
Byrne, Catherine.
Carey, Joe.
Clune, Deirdre.
Connaughton, Paul.
Coonan, Noel J.
Costello, Joe.
Coveney, Simon.
Crawford, Seymour.
Creed, Michael.
Creighton, Lucinda.
D'Arcy, Michael.
Deasy, John.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Doyle, Andrew.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.
Enright, Olwyn.
Feighan, Frank.
Ferris, Martin.
Flanagan, Charles.
Flanagan, Terence.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Hayes, Brian.
Hayes, Tom.
Higgins, Michael D.
Hogan, Phil.
Howlin, Brendan.
Kehoe, Paul.
Kenny, Enda.
Lynch, Ciarán.
Lynch, Kathleen.
McCormack, Pádraic.
McEntee, Shane.
McGinley, Dinny.
McHugh, Joe.
McManus, Liz.
Mitchell, Olivia.
Morgan, Arthur.
Naughten, Denis.
Neville, Dan.
Noonan, Michael.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
O'Donnell, Kieran.
O'Dowd, Fergus.
O'Mahony, John.
O'Shea, Brian.
O'Sullivan, Jan.
Penrose, Willie.
Perry, John.
Quinn, Ruairí.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Shatter, Alan.
Sheahan, Tom.
Sheehan, P. J.
Sherlock, Seán.
Shortall, Róisín.
Stagg, Emmet.
Stanton, David.
Timmins, Billy.
Tuffy, Joanna.
Upton, Mary.
Varadkar, Leo.
Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and John Curran; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared carried.

The Dáil adjourned at 8.50 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 8 May 2008.