

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 15 Márta 2011.
Tuesday, 15 March 2011.

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Business of Dáil

An Ceann Comhairle: Before moving on to Leaders' Questions I wish to extend on your behalf deepest sympathy to our fellow parliamentarians in Japan, the members of the Diet, and the Japanese people for the pain and destruction caused as a consequence of the catastrophic earthquake and resultant tsunami on the scale unimagined. The resilience of the Japanese people is renowned but hopefully the good wishes of a small nation may be of some support in their hour of need.

Leaders' Questions

An Ceann Comhairle: Before calling Deputy Micheál Martin, I wish to point out for the information of the House that as this is the first time we have had Leaders' Questions in this the 31st Dáil, I remind Members of Standing Order 27 which allows questions to be asked by leaders in the following order: the leader of the Fianna Fáil Party, then the leader of Sinn Féin, who will be followed by the nominated leader of the Technical Group. Some 21 minutes overall are allowed for Leaders' Questions, seven minutes to each question with the leader having two minutes to ask his question and the Taoiseach being given three minutes to reply, with that leader having one minute for a supplementary question and the Taoiseach one minute for a final reply. I wish to give notice that I intend to ensure these limits are adhered to on both sides of the House.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Micheál Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to add my voice and join with you in articulating our sympathy with the people of Japan as the horror has unfolded in recent days and to say that we support the Government's offer of support and assistance to the Japanese people. We have always been of that disposition in respect of the situation in which we find ourselves. The Government has my full support in regard to that issue. I would also like to assure the Taoiseach and Tánaiste of my full support in respect of any comprehensive programme of assistance that may be offered to Irish citizens who may be anxious to return home or to leave. I am aware of certain situations developing in that regard and, perhaps, a

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

comprehensive programme may be required. The Government can, perhaps, comment on that later in the afternoon in the Taoiseach's contribution. That is important.

Last Friday a number of our European colleagues again tried to put pressure on the Government to increase our corporation tax rate in return for a lower interest rate on the loan facility we enjoy from the European Union and the IMF. They clearly hoped there would be movement on an issue which they also endeavoured to raise with the previous Government and on which they had failed. They could not get that commitment. I think they made the offer during discussions which were not really scheduled for decision-making but were rather exploratory in that regard. I think the Taoiseach recognises that it was a classic try-on and I wish to articulate my full support for the stance he took and his refusal to accept this offer and his rejection of other attempts to exploit this situation in terms of endeavouring to bring about tax harmonisation.

I have heard talk across the political domain about the need for a referendum on the bailout and so on. However, it is important to remind the European leaders, and I ask the Taoiseach to do so, that we had a referendum on corporation tax. We negotiated with the European leaders a protocol to be attached to the second Lisbon referendum proposal, which was put to the people. They were left in no doubt on that occasion about how sincerely and deeply held this view was among the Irish people.

In that respect, if the European Union is to mean anything to its people, the European leaders must keep their word and their word must be their bond. I ask the Taoiseach to remind President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel of that at the summit meeting. It is an important point which perhaps has been lost sight of in the recent discussions.

It is unfortunate that the issue of the reduction in the interest rate has been conjoined with that of corporate taxation. They are two separate issues. Over the past number of months, we have witnessed greater insight into, and people becoming more enlightened about, the need for a change and an improvement in the loan facility deal. Does the Taoiseach agree that perhaps the most important thing to emerge from the meeting on Friday was the confirmation that the consensus now exists to improve the European Financial Stability Fund, EFSF, and to ensure greater sustainability and recoverability from the programme?

The Taoiseach: I join with the Ceann Comhairle in expressing the sympathy of the Irish people to the Japanese people in their crisis arising from the awesome power of nature coupled with the difficulties being experienced with the nuclear reactors. I commend Deputy Martin on comments of support in respect of what the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, on behalf of the Irish people, can do assist in this regard with expertise. Obviously, Ireland has a unique record of assistance in humanitarian crises of one sort or another, as Deputy Martin is well aware from his experience as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

It is heartening to hear Deputy Martin speak like this about our corporation tax rate. This is an issue of fundamental importance to everybody in this House and in our country. It may well have been a classic try-on but the point was made perfectly clear at the meeting in Brussels that these issues are separate and that the question of common consolidated corporate tax base, CCCTB, or the corporate tax rates are separate matters from the IMF-EU deal.

Our position has been to seek an improvement in the terms of the deal in so far as the Irish taxpayer is concerned. The decision at the conclusion of the meeting on Friday was that the countries involved in the EFSF would have interest rate reductions brought about. Ireland, of

course, is the only country in that package. Greece achieved a reduction of 100 basis points, or 1%. While it is not a member of that particular package, its situation is particularly difficult.

I, on behalf of the Irish people and Government, and given the mandate the Government has been given, am not prepared to accept anything less than absolute clarity in respect of the corporate tax rate and the question of CCCTB. Deputy Martin will appreciate the references to this matter in New York yesterday are a cause of anxiety and concern. It is my privilege to travel to the United States this evening. Tomorrow I will reassure business interests who have an interest in investing in our country that these matters are of absolute importance to us.

The discussions over the past few days and again next week centre around getting an improvement for the Irish taxpayer in respect of the IMF-EU deal. As Deputy Martin will be aware, the Minister for Finance met the President of the ECB and Commissioner Rehn yesterday and is in a meeting of the Ministers for Finance today, and there are other meetings scheduled as we prepare for the meeting of 24 and 25 March. In that regard, our focus is to achieve a flexibility which will bring about an easing of this position for the Irish taxpayer.

I want to see that everything we do can advance us to a point where our country can borrow again in the bond markets, where we have retrieved our sovereignty and where our destiny is in our own hands. One can take it that every action the Government will take will be focused on that. Absolute clarity has been our point in respect of the corporate tax rate and CCCTB, and that is the way it will remain.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is clear for some time that a new deal is on the table in this regard. I would agree with the Taoiseach's emphasis on the term "clarity". We need clarity on this and on a number of other issues because clarity is essential to economic recovery, in particular, to investor confidence.

I ask the Taoiseach two questions in that context. First, would he support the motion that I intend to bring to the House next week to confirm again to the country, and to Europe and to the world, that there is cross-party political support for our corporation tax strategy and that this unanimous approach in the House has been unaffected by the recent election? There was a similar motion brought before the previous Dáil in November last. That would be an important statement in itself from the newly-elected Dáil.

Second, during the election campaign there was much commentary about burning the bond holders. In Fine Gael's document "Credit Where Credit is Due", there were references — in essence, a pledge — that this may have to happen. I was struck by the comments of the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes. Would the Taoiseach agree with the view of the Minister of State that such a move would be "crazy"?

The Taoiseach: I have not seen the terms of Deputy Martin's motion. When on that side of the House, we put down a motion in respect of corporate tax rates as sending out a signal from the Parliament of how important it is for Ireland. I fully support the principle. I would like to see the wording of the motion. I would consider there will not be any difference of opinion about it.

In respect of bond holders, we made it clear during the course of the election campaign and in the programme for Government that there should be no further moneys put into the banks beyond what is already committed until we see how that responsibility is to be shared. Those are the discussions that are taking place at present.

Irrespective of changed views from Europe, as I made the point on many occasions, it is grossly unfair to expect the Irish taxpayer to have to pay fully for the cause of reckless banking,

[The Taoiseach.]

which happened over the years and which culminated in an agreement by the Government of which Deputy Martin was a member. There are serious difficulties being encountered by ordinary people in respect of the consequences of this. That is the focus of our attention, to get a better deal for the Irish taxpayer in respect of the IMF-EU deal.

All of these issues are now being discussed and considered. Hopefully, by Friday week we will be in a much clearer position arising from some of the works that are ongoing with the stress tests on the banks to have some greater clarity as to the true level of indebtedness.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I raised a specific point made by the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes when he said a unilateral burning of the bond holders would be “crazy”. Does the Taoiseach agree?

Deputy Brian Hayes: Good try.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Adams.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Caithfidh mé a rá ar dtús go n-aontaím leis an Taoiseach agus leis an Cheann Comhairle faoin rud millteanach a tharla do phobal na Seapáine. Táimid i Sinn Féin ag smaoineamh faoi mhuintir na tíre sin ag an uair millteanach seo. I am very minded that there were two small earthquakes in England recently. One of them was in Cumbria, where Sellafield is located. Perhaps the Taoiseach might want to raise this issue with the British authorities. Our thoughts are with the people of Japan at this dreadful time in their lives.

Like many other Deputies, I have been back to my constituency. I have been hearing — as I am sure all of them have — tales of the misery caused by the universal social charge. The people of County Louth are very oppressed by this tax, all the more so because they are being asked to pay it in order to meet the price of the banking debt. I have read about recent remarks made by the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan; he is one of the Finance Ministers, at least. I will read those remarks as I do not want to misquote them: “we are explaining to our European——

An Ceann Comhairle: I apologise for interrupting the Deputy, but this is Leaders’ Questions.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tuigim é sin.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to put a question to the Taoiseach.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Níor chuir tú isteach ar an ceannaire eile. You did not interrupt the other speaker.

An Ceann Comhairle: I did. I want to make it quite clear that this is Leaders’ Questions. I ask the Deputy to put a question to the Taoiseach on a topical issue.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá mé ag cur na ceiste. Éist liom, le do thoil. I am putting a question. The Minister for Finance is quoted as saying that “we are explaining to our European colleagues that there’s a certain point where a combination of the sovereign debt is manageable and [with] the bank debt put on top of it we reach a point where the sustainability of the situation becomes doubtful”. Sinn Féin has been saying this from day one. Does the Taoiseach agree with the Minister for Finance? When will we reach the stage at which “the sustainability of the situation becomes doubtful”, as the Minister has said? Is the Taoiseach prepared to arrange a referendum on this issue and thereby allow the people to have their say?

Deputy Shane McEntee: We had one.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Adams has asked a number of questions. I will raise the incident in Cumbria that he mentioned. I do not have the full details of it, but I will be happy to raise it with the British Prime Minister when I meet him.

The Government agreed in the programme for Government to carry out a review of the universal social charge before the budget for 2012 is drawn up. The charge is having an impact on thousands of people, particularly those at the lower end of the scale. I feel something needs to be done in respect of people in that category. We will review the situation.

I share the view expressed by the Minister for Finance in the comment that has been mentioned. That is exactly where the discussions are at the moment. The meeting of the eurozone leaders related to debt sustainability. This country's position was made perfectly clear, given the situation that exists here. In my view, a referendum on this matter was held when the general election took place. This Government was given a clear mandate to improve the terms, in respect of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, on behalf of the Irish taxpayer. That is where our entire focus will be.

Deputy Gerry Adams: With respect, the question is very simple. The Taoiseach has agreed with what the Minister for Finance said. When will it be appreciated that the combination of the sovereign debt and the banking debt is not sustainable? What will the Government do about it? I predict that the interest rates will be reduced. We do not need to talk about corporation tax. We were told during the debate on the Lisbon treaty that corporation tax was not an issue and would not come up again. The real question relates to the comment of the Minister for Finance that the situation will not be sustainable. When will that happen? We are riding into a crisis about which our party warned during the election campaign. When will the situation become unsustainable? What will the Government do about it?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Adams will be glad to know that the conclusion of the meeting on Friday — it was contained in the statement that was issued — was that it was agreed that countries in the European Financial Stability Facility package would have their interest rates reduced. That has not applied to Ireland because of claims for conditionality that are being attached to it. I cannot speak for other European leaders but I speak with them on corporate tax rates or anything else. As the Deputy will be aware, the Commission published a paper on the common consolidated corporate tax base. It is fully entitled to initiate legislation and neither I nor the Deputy can stop it from doing so. However, in respect of that, I stated that we would participate in discussions but our view is absolutely clear in respect of the CCCTB and the corporate tax rate. On the question of the debt being sustainable, we have made this point on many occasions. The problem for our country is that we are able to deal with a challenging position in respect of the difficulties arising from our own economy but it is the cost of the banking structure that places the real burden on our people and it is there that flexibility, change and adjustments have to apply. That is exactly where the discussions will be focussed as we prepare for the meeting of 24 and 25 March, and beyond.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The deal is a bad one and the Taoiseach needs to end it. He is dodging the question.

The Taoiseach: I am answering the question.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I express the solidarity of the ordinary people with the traumatised and suffering people of Japan. I earnestly hope that a worse nuclear disaster does not materialise and quietly salute the wisdom of our people, whose campaign in the 1970s ensured that we do not have to contend with the generation of power by nuclear fission.

Only six short Hibernian nights and days have passed since the formation of this Government and it is already guilty of monumentally betraying its promise of honesty to the people.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: He could have waited a week.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Do not exaggerate.

Deputy Joe Higgins: The programme for Government promised burden sharing so that the gambling bondholders in the Irish banks would carry at least some of the massive losses they incurred and which are now being foisted on the people. However, the Minister for Finance said yesterday that we are no longer pursuing this option. In other words the economic lifeblood of the people is to continue pouring for all the bad gambling debts of the speculators. What has changed? Did big sister, Chancellor Merkel, order the Taoiseach to drop this demand at the meeting of EU leaders? What was he told at the meeting about the demand? We need clear answers. What has changed with his Labour Party colleagues? Only three weeks ago they were lining up the tanks to roll on Frankfurt to insist on terms with the ECB against the pressure of speculators. Now it appears the tanks will not get any further than the local social welfare office to shake down the unemployed and the poor to pay off the very same speculators. What happened? Let us have a clear and honest answer.

Since 2009, €15.4 billion has been poured into the banks by the taxpayer and a further €40 billion is contemplated. The Minister for Finance stated yesterday, as was alluded to, that sustainability becomes doubtful. In other words, a default is possible because the people cannot pay this amount. At what point is it unsustainable? Is it when interest reaches €7 billion, €8 billion or €10 billion per annum? Can the Taoiseach tell us? Is he aware of the comment by Mr. David McWilliams that the talk in Wall Street is of a default among the marketeers? Will the Taoiseach at least declare now that the people cannot pay and, starting with the €19 billion of largely subordinated unsecured bonds that are due to be paid by crippled banks very shortly, pour those billions instead into massive job creation programmes here to end the awful suffering of our unemployed people?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Higgins is welcome back. In his absence there was no difference between a day in Hibernia and a day anywhere else. It has been 144 hours or, as the Deputy notes, six Hibernian days and nights since the Government took office. Maybe if the Deputy had not been sent away to Europe by the voters on the last occasion, he might have found out what happened. I would like to know myself, actually. He might have a word with the former Minister for Finance when he leaves the Chamber to find out exactly what happened. As the Deputy knows, there is to be a parliamentary inquiry — with which, no doubt, he will assist — to determine what came about.

I have held the view for a long time that it was always unfair to expect the Irish taxpayer to fork out 100% of the cost of the consequences of reckless banking. I still hold that view. The discussions that took place last Friday, yesterday and today, and will continue next week, will centre specifically on this issue. Our taxpayers have taken a major hit due to this crisis, which was brought about by the previous Government of Fianna Fáil and the Green Party. The economic burden on our people is already severe. It is not that we want to get into a programme; we are in a programme — the IMF-EU deal — which is exceptionally challenging and has seriously dented our sovereignty, and which requires us to make reports each week. I

repeat that no further moneys, beyond what is already committed, should go to the banks without some sharing of responsibility by those who have involvement in a number of categories. If other European countries do not want to proceed with that, or have a different view, these are the areas on which the discussion will be centred. My focus is on obtaining an improvement in the terms of this deal for the Irish people, and that is where my focus will remain.

Deputy Joe Higgins: The Taoiseach answered neither of my questions. What happened between last Wednesday, when the new programme for Government promised that the bondholders would take a hit, and yesterday, when the Minister of Finance said we were no longer pursuing this issue? I ask the Taoiseach to answer that when he comes to his final reply. At what stage is it unsustainable, as we have been warned by the Minister for Finance, to continue to increase this burden on the Irish people?

The Taoiseach said the situation was unfair. He might agree, then, with the argument put forward by some people drawing a parallel between the Famine and what is happening today. I would not wish to compare the trauma of the Famine with today, but at that time, fresh produce was going abroad to pay landlords while our people starved and now billions are going into European banks while half a million people are languishing on the dole.

The Taoiseach mentioned an inquiry into the banking disaster. I ask him to be specific about this, along with the two earlier parts of my question, in his reply. Will representatives of the Irish people be provided with a structure to find out the inside story of the orgy of profiteering in property and banking? We need to know who was involved, the profits that were made, the deals that were done and where the money is now. Will people be compelled to provide information and every book possible opened to get to the truth?

The Taoiseach: The position of the Government is clear, in respect of the programme for Government, on burden sharing. I will repeat that since last Wednesday the focus of our discussions has been on relieving the burden on the Irish taxpayer. I would much prefer if our country was in a position to borrow from the bond markets and be in charge of our own destiny. Unfortunately, because of reckless actions, that is not possible, and we are currently constrained by the consequences of the deal that was done.

Deputy Joe Higgins: What did the Taoiseach learn at the last meeting?

The Taoiseach: I learned quite a lot, actually.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Tell us.

The Taoiseach: I learned how to stand up for the Irish people.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I learned to stand up and defend our mandate. I learned to articulate on behalf of our country, and it was a privilege to do so, that we will stand up for what we believe in and for what we signed up to.

I made it clear to our European colleagues that when they came looking for assistance, this country voted for the Lisbon treaty to allow the institutions of Europe to develop and be able to live up to their potential. I also learned about some of the ways that other countries participate in debates and do their business. That, too, I suppose is always a learning experience.

I am not sure what type of orgies the Deputy is talking about, in respect of developers, bankers and all the rest, but I share his view that the truth should be known here, however it may become available through this House and the opportunities provided by the Oireachtas as

[The Taoiseach.]

a whole. I, too, would like to find out the truth about much of what went on and I hope that the Deputy will participate and help us in those discussions when they take place.

Appointment of Ministers and Ministers of State

The Taoiseach: I wish to announce for the information of the Dáil that having informed the President that Dáil Éireann had approved my nomination of Deputies to be members of the Government on 9 March, she appointed them accordingly. On the same day I nominated Deputy Eamon Gilmore to be Tánaiste and assigned the Department of Foreign Affairs to him. On the same date I assigned the Departments of State to the other members of Government as follows:

Department of Finance to Deputy Michael Noonan.

Department of Education and Skills to Deputy Ruairí Quinn.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation to Deputy Richard Bruton.

Department of Social Protection to Deputy Joan Burton.

Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport to Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to Deputy Pat Rabbitte.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to Deputy Phil Hogan.

Department of Justice and Law Reform and Department of Defence to Deputy Alan Shatter.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to Deputy Simon Coveney.

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to Deputy Frances Fitzgerald.

Department of Health and Children to Deputy James Reilly.

Department of Transport to Deputy Leo Varadkar.

These assignments have been made pending completion of the necessary processes for the establishment of the new Departments, and for transfers of the functions that I announced in the House last week; Deputy Brendan Howlin is a member of the Government without portfolio pending completion of these processes; on 9 March 2011 the President approved Máire Whelan SC as Attorney General; on the same date the Government appointed Deputy Paul Kehoe to be Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach, with special responsibility as Government Chief Whip, and at the Department of Defence; and Deputy Willie Penrose to be Minister of State at the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government, with special responsibility for housing and planning; and that on 10 March 2011, on my nomination, the Government appointed:

3 o'clock

Deputy Dinny McGinley to be Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht affairs, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Deputy Róisín Shortall to be Minister of State with special responsibility for primary care, Department of Health and Children.

Deputy John Perry to be Minister of State with special responsibility for small business, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation.

Deputy Michael Ring to be Minister of State with special responsibility for tourism and sport, Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan to be Minister of State with special responsibility for trade and development, Department of Foreign Affairs.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch to be Minister of State with special responsibility for disability, equality and mental health, Department of Health and Children and Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd to be Minister of State with special responsibility for the NewEra project, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Deputy Brian Hayes to be Minister of State with special responsibility for public service reform and the Office of Public Works, Department of Finance.

Deputy Shane McEntee to be Minister of State with special responsibility for food, horticulture and food safety, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton to be Minister of State with special responsibility for European affairs, Department of the Taoiseach and Department of Foreign Affairs.

Deputy Seán Sherlock to be Minister of State with special responsibility for research and innovation, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and Department of Education and Skills.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon to be Minister of State with special responsibility for training and skills, Department of Education and Skills.

Deputy Alan Kelly to be Minister of State with special responsibility for public and commuter transport, Department of Transport.

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 2, motion re programme for Government. It is also proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the proceedings on No. 2 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 7.30 p.m and that the following arrangements shall apply: the speech of a Minister or Minister of State and the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case; Members may share time; a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed ten minutes; and the Dáil on its rising shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 March.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are two proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 2, motion re programme for Government, agreed to?

Deputy Micheál Martin: On a point of clarification, will there be a vote at the end of that debate?

The Taoiseach: Yes.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed?

Deputy Gerry Adams: It is not agreed. I also wish to speak on the Order of Business.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Adams can speak to the motion on speaking time.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Táimid an-mhíshásta nach bhfuil neart spás ann chun díospóireacht cheart a dhéanamh ar chláir an Rialtais. Tá Sinn Féin an-mhíshásta faoi sin. Tá an Taoiseach chun leanacht ar aghaidh le stop a chur leis an díospóireacht ag leath uair tar éis a seacht anocht agus nach mbeidh aon Aire ag teacht isteach sa Teach chun ceisteanna a freagairt. Níl aon ciall le sin. There is an attempt to ramrod the motion through by 7.30 p.m. There is not enough space and there are no Ministers coming forward. There are issues that we will not have a chance to discuss properly. Matters are being brought forward that have not been included in the programme for Government. Brendan Behan famously said the first thing on any Irish agenda was the split. The first thing the Taoiseach did was to split the Department of Finance. We have not been told how it will work. We need more space.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Sinn Féin is very good at splits.

The Taoiseach: Tá a fhios ag an Teachta Adams, cé go bhfuil sé míshásta, go bhfuil sé seo thar a bheith coitianta istigh anseo. Mar sin féin, deireann an Príomh-Aoire liom nár chuir an Teachta ceist ar bith air faoi ceisteanna nó faoi am breise a thabhairt don díospóireacht. Sin an chaoi a bhfuil sé. Beidh neart ama ag an Teachta as seo amach chun ceisteanna a chur faoin Roinn Airgeadais a scoilt ina dhá leath agus an fáth go ndearnamar sin — i dtreo is go mbeadh i bhfad níos mó iniúchta ar na Vótaí airgid atá ag dul do na Rannaí Stáit éagsúla. Sin an fáth go bhfuil an scoilt ann agus gur scoilt muid an Roinn ina dhá leath. Mar adúirt mé, dá mba rud é go raibh breis ama iarrtha don díospóireacht nó do cheisteanna ón bPríomh-Aoire, is dócha go mbeadh an t-am sin tugtha. Freisin, mar adúirt mé leis an Aire Martin, beidh vóta ag deireadh na díospóireachta seo.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is the French way — once a Minister, always a Minister.

Question put: “That the proposal for dealing with No. 2, motion re programme for Government, be agreed to.”

The Dáil divided: Tá, 122; Níl, 28.

Tá

Bannon, James.
Barry, Tom.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Browne, John.
Bruton, Richard.
Burton, Joan.
Butler, Ray.
Buttimer, Jerry.
Byrne, Catherine.
Byrne, Eric.
Calleary, Dara.
Cannon, Ciarán.
Carey, Joe.
Coffey, Paudie.
Collins, Áine.
Collins, Niall.
Conaghan, Michael.
Conlan, Seán.
Connaughton, Paul J.
Conway, Ciara.
Coonan, Noel.
Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.
Costello, Joe.
Coveney, Simon.

Cowen, Barry.
Creighton, Lucinda.
Daly, Jim.
Deasy, John.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Deering, Pat.
Doherty, Regina.
Donohoe, Paschal.
Dooley, Timmy.
Dowds, Robert.
Doyle, Andrew.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.
Farrell, Alan.
Feighan, Frank.
Ferris, Anne.
Fitzpatrick, Peter.
Flanagan, Charles.
Flanagan, Terence.
Fleming, Sean.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Griffin, Brendan.
Hannigan, Dominic.
Harrington, Noel.
Harris, Simon.

Tá—*continued*

Hayes, Brian.
 Healy-Rae, Michael.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Humphreys, Heather.
 Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keating, Derek.
 Keaveney, Colm.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Alan.
 Kenny, Enda.
 Kenny, Seán.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 Lyons, John.
 McCarthy, Michael.
 McConalogue, Charlie.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Maloney, Eamonn.
 Martin, Micheál.
 Mathews, Peter.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Moynihan, Michael.

Mulherin, Michelle.
 Murphy, Dara.
 Murphy, Eoghan.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Phelan, Ann.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Shatter, Alan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Spring, Arthur.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Troy, Robert.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Wall, Jack.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Adams, Gerry.
 Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Collins, Joan.
 Colreavy, Michael.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Donnelly, Stephen.
 Ellis, Dessie.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
 Halligan, John.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Higgins, Joe.

Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
 McDonald, Mary Lou.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McLellan, Sandra.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Brien, Jonathan.
 O'Sullivan, Maureen.
 Pringle, Thomas.
 Stanley, Brian.
 Tóibín, Peadar.
 Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Paul Keogh and Emmet Stagg; Níl, Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Catherine Murphy.

Question declared carried.

Is the proposal: "That the Dáil, on its rising today, shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 March 2011" agreed to?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Am I allowed a point of order?

An Ceann Comhairle: On the point that the Dáil will adjourn until next Tuesday.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The point of order is that we have not been given any list of promised legislation. We are being asked to adjourn the Dáil until next Tuesday.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not a point of order.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I wish to speak.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is it a point of order?

Deputy Joe Higgins: Yes, it is to do with the order. However, it should first be pointed out for the benefit of Deputies that a translation service from Irish to English is available in the Dáil. I do not think many people are aware of that agus seachtain na Gaeilge go mór mhór, ba ceart go ndéarfadh é sin.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Higgins, I am putting a question that the Dáil adjourn.

Deputy Joe Higgins: May I ask the Taoiseach a question before you do so?

An Ceann Comhairle: You may not. I am putting the question that the Dáil adjourn and after that I will allow a short matter to be raised.

Deputy Micheál Martin: May I ask a question? We might need translation services for the nineteenth century——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the new Taoiseach clarify when the new programme of legislation will be presented to the House? This is the second sitting of the House but we have yet to have sight of it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, Deputy, I will allow you speak when I have put the question to the House.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I think it is pertinent.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must put the question first. I will make the decision as to when, if the Deputy does not mind. There is only one Chair here. I will put the question yet again. Is the proposal: “That the Dáil, on its rising today, shall adjourn until 2.10 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 March 2011” agreed to?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Not agreed.

Question put and declared carried.

Deputy Joe Higgins: On the Order of Business.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no Order of Business as such, today. I will allow a point of clarification from Deputies, Micheál Martin, Gerry Adams and Joe Higgins. The Taoiseach may answer all the questions together.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach indicate when we can expect the legislative programme to be published? Given the Taoiseach's commitment to come before the Dáil in advance of every European Council meeting, will he make time available next week for this to happen?

Deputy Gerry Adams: I made the same point but when I asked this question earlier, the Ceann Comhairle would not allow me in.

An Ceann Comhairle: It was not a point of order.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Maith go leor. Táimid anois i lár seachtain na Gaeilge. Táimid ag lorg eolas ón Taoiseach faoin áit ina bhfuil an straitéis 20 bliain. What is the Government position with regard to the 20-year plan? Does it intend to bring forward plans to restructure Údarás na Gaeltachta which will have elections this year? What is the Taoiseach's policy on the down-sizing of gaelscoileanna? We need to know when these issues will be dealt with, as well as promised legislation. There is promised legislation on this issue also.

Deputy Joe Higgins: On the arrangements for sittings, it is very urgent that the Government notifies Deputies about the times and days of Dáil sittings, beginning next week. We all have pressure on our diaries——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, as usual. I am surprised. Deputy Higgins should not ask a question if he knows the answer. He knows the answer very well.

An Ceann Comhairle: Through the Chair, please Deputy.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I say to Deputy Stagg that it is very interesting, since he is again——

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to please speak through the Chair.

Deputy Joe Higgins: ——resiling from the programme for Government which states that we will sit on Fridays.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I ask the Deputy to give us a bit of time.

A Deputy: Deputy Stagg has bottled it already.

An Ceann Comhairle: Has Deputy Higgins a question for the Taoiseach?

Deputy Joe Higgins: I do not think the Ceann Comhairle should allow voices offstage to interrupt me.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not allowing them.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I was asking a genuine question of the Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please put a question to the Taoiseach.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I will do so but Deputy Stagg obviously wishes he was sitting elsewhere——

An Ceann Comhairle: Never mind Deputy Stagg, Deputy Higgins, I ask that you speak through the Chair.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Hear, hear, do not mind Deputy Stagg.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I ask the Taoiseach to indicate to us as soon as possible the times and the days in which we are required to be in the Dáil from the immediate period of next week onwards.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is an important point. Dáil reform is supposed to be a collective and cross-party process. I do not think it is a matter for the Executive to order the sittings of Parliament but rather it is a matter to be decided collectively by the Dáil.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is dealt with in Standing Orders.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Yes, I know that but we have all committed to reform and last week I asked that we take some initial steps to collectively work together to agree best procedure. We have just lost 25 minutes on a pointless vote so we need to change the way we do business here. I ask that the Whips agree on sitting days and business to ensure we are effective and efficient.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before the Taoiseach replies, I wish to say that people made a genuine point that they did not think sufficient time was allowed for debate. We are wasting time here on technical issues. I ask Members to please co-operate with the Chair in their own interest. I want to see people having time to speak and I do not wish to have to keep interrupting them. I ask Members to please recognise the job I have to do. Time wasted here means there is less speaking time for Members. I ask the Taoiseach to reply and then I will immediately begin the debate, in fairness to those who want to speak on the motion. Members can make all the points they wish in the debate on the programme for Government, including Dáil reform, which I will be only too delighted to comply with if that is the wish of the House.

The Taoiseach: Members will be aware, at least those who have been here before, that normally after a change of government the Dáil does not sit for approximately two weeks. I thought it appropriate to return today for a debate on the programme for Government. Time is short and as Deputy Higgins reminded me, it is six Hibernian days and nights since the change of government, with a few minutes extra added. Several Bills will be ready to come to the House next week. In reply to Deputy Martin, the Departments have been requested to name the Bills they wish to place on the "A" list of legislation by 21 March 2011. The Departments have been advised that this is a matter of urgency. A meeting of the legislative committee will be held on 31 March in order for the Cabinet to clear it by 5 April and the list will then be published immediately. I will come before the House in advance of Council meetings and a debate will be held next week before the meeting of 24 and 25 March to allow every Member to express his or her views.

In respect of Deputy Adams's question about seachtain na Gaeilge, I realise this is seachtain na Gaeilge and because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, I would be very amenable to having a debate or a díospóireacht on the straithéis 20 bliain.

With regard to sittings of the Dáil, Deputy Higgins will be aware that Dáil reform is of interest to me and to many others. I do not wish to regard it as being a decision for the Executive. The Chief Whip will meet the Opposition Whips next week and I suggest we discuss a realistic and series of changes capable of being implemented to make this place more effective. I asked for this from the other side of the House for many years. Deputy Higgins will be aware that the programme for Government also means that we do away with the traditional absence on a Tuesday after a bank holiday although this only happens a few times during the year. I have not yet decided on the extent of the Easter break, but this will be organised very quickly and the Deputy will have the full schedule to put in his diary so that he will know when he is supposed to be here on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays or Fridays. We will keep him

very busy and he will have ample opportunity to give vent to his colourful eloquence in respect of the various matters that affect our State from time to time.

Programme for Government: Motion

The Taoiseach: I move:

“That Dáil Éireann welcomes and supports the Programme for Government agreed by the Parties in Government of the 31st Dáil.”

Ireland is facing an economic and social crisis with few parallels in our history. More than 430,000 people are on the live register, more than 160,000 of whom have been unemployed for more than a year. We are again facing the prospect of forced emigration with an estimated 2,000 people set to leave every week over the next two years. Unsustainable tax and expenditure decisions have undermined the public finances, leaving an expected Exchequer deficit of more than €17.5 billion in 2011. A failure of regulation and irresponsible behaviour in financial institutions have brought about the effective collapse of our banking system. International and domestic confidence in the credibility of the State and its capacity to manage the financial crisis has been undermined. The State's creditworthiness has been lost as a result of the decision to bail out the creditors of private institutions. We are no longer able to borrow at reasonable rates of interest on the open market. Ireland's reputation in the European Union and across the world has been badly damaged.

Faced with this national emergency, which is the direct result of bad policy decisions and poor leadership, the Irish people voted for change, not just a change of faces around the Cabinet table, but a new approach to politics here. In overwhelming numbers, the Irish people voted for Fine Gael and the Labour Party to implement that change. Based on this strong mandate, the Fine Gael and Labour parties have agreed a programme for national recovery. The programme is based on a realistic and honest assessment of the crisis facing the country.

The programme for Government aims to restore confidence in the country at home and abroad. We will rebuild Ireland's international reputation. Starting with the St. Patrick's Day visits this week, the Government will lead a sustained campaign to restore confidence in the country as a place to invest, locate a business or visit as a tourist. The programme offers hope, particularly to young people who fear for their future in Ireland. It aims to persuade our best and brightest to stay with us and help lead the process of change and renewal.

It places immediate focus on the jobs crisis. Within 100 days we will introduce a jobs budget that will help keep our young people at home building the future of their own country. We will reduce the lower rate of VAT and will halve the lower rate of employers' PRSI. We will create 15,000 new places in training, work experience and education for people out of work. Through NewERA we will revitalise our national infrastructure networks — water, energy and broadband — to create thousands of new jobs and increase our competitiveness.

We will set up a strategic investment bank and new mechanisms to deliver credit to small businesses. We will prioritise building relationships with emerging markets, which hold huge potential for investment and trade in the future. We will reduce costs for business and support local SMEs to build and grow their businesses, and compete on world markets. We will put a new focus on venture capital and commercialising research, ensuring innovative ideas translate into new companies and jobs. We will implement ambitious job-creation strategies in each sector — in agrifood, tourism, the IFSC, digital industries, green enterprise, international education and many others.

The programme for Government re-commits Ireland to solving the fiscal crisis and honouring our sovereign debts. Closing the gap between tax revenue and expenditure requires painful but

[The Taoiseach.]

necessary decisions over the years ahead. It is important to emphasise that this gap exists independent of the banking sector and must be closed if we are to return to the markets at the end of the EU-IMF programme. We will reduce the gap in a planned way, minimising the impact on the most vulnerable, while retaining incentives for enterprise and work. We will also establish an independent fiscal advisory council to ensure that the budgetary mistakes of the past decade are not repeated.

We also need to limit additional taxpayer commitments to the banking sector to levels consistent with Ireland being able to return to the bond markets at the end of the current EU-IMF programme of support. The programme for Government sets out the strategies we will pursue to secure a solution which is perceived as affordable by the international markets and the Irish public. We need to restructure and restore confidence in our banking system without further damaging the credibility of the Exchequer. As part of this process, we need to restore Ireland's standing as a respected and influential member of the European Union.

The work has already begun. Last Friday, I attended a meeting of the European Council and of the Heads of State or Government of the eurozone. On Thursday evening, I met the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso. We will continue to work with our partners to improve Ireland's situation, including improving the terms on which it receives loans from the European Financial Stability Facility and securing support to bring the crisis in our banking to a close. Negotiations are continuing to that end and it would not be appropriate for me to spell out the detail at this stage. However, I reassure the House that I will not compromise on our 12.5% corporation tax rate. As the programme for Government makes clear, this is a core element of our fiscal strategy. The Government has a strong mandate from the people for the negotiation strategy we are now pursuing and I am confident it will deliver an outcome which works for Ireland and for our EU partners.

We also need to bring to an end a situation where the European Union is presented as being over there and not here in Ireland. European law is Irish law and, as the elected representatives of the people, it is important that the Oireachtas plays its full part in overseeing its enactment. That is why the programme for Government contains an extensive set of measures to overhaul how European business is handled. All committees must play a role in scrutinising EU law as an integral part of their business. All Ministers will be obliged to appear before their respective committees or before the Committee on European Affairs, prior to travelling to Council meetings where decisions are likely to be made. I will brief the Oireachtas prior to attending meetings of the European Council.

Our system of Government must modernise, adapt to new financial circumstances and start to deliver better services with scarce resources. We will introduce the most ambitious programme of reform since the foundation of our State. We will make the system smaller and more efficient by substantially reducing employee numbers and by changing the way in which work is done. Front-line staff will be given more power to make decisions and we will bring in new personnel with new ideas to strengthen the public service. We will bring in new skills and rigour into policy-making across all Departments. There will be increased delegation of budgets and accountability for results at every level of the public sector with clear consequences for success and failure.

Resources will be put into the hands of citizens to acquire services that are tailored to better suit their needs and are less expensive for the taxpayer. We will conduct a comprehensive spending review to examine all areas of public spending and to develop multi-annual budget plans. We want a more effective, leaner, and high-performing public service, which is in the interests of citizens and public servants alike, and is no less than the people deserve. This will mean empowering our Civil Service whereby the legal responsibility between Ministers and

their civil servants is spelled out, and there is greater flexibility and mobility across the entire public service. We intend to use the full potential of the Croke Park agreement to deliver on these reforms. We will capture the appetite for change now evident within the public service, and ensure that improved service delivery, and organisational efficiency and effectiveness are achieved. Circumstances have now provided us with a unique opportunity to streamline our public service, and to strengthen its performance. This will be done with renewed urgency under the guidance of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, and the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes.

The credibility of this reform agenda requires politicians to take the lead. We need to change forever the way politics works here. Reform is required to restore trust in politics and politicians. That is why reform will start with politics. The election of this new Government, composed of parties which between them obtained 55.5% of the popular vote on 25 February, has brought the composition of the Government into line with the recently expressed wishes of the people.

It has also given the Government a powerful mandate to introduce fundamental reform in the institutions of the country and in the way they work. Such reform is essential to restore trust in politics and in Government. It is also essential for other reasons, namely, to ensure the resolution of the fiscal crisis is seen to be carried out as far as possible in a way that protects the most vulnerable people in our society, of whom there are many; to maintain and enhance our competitiveness; and to put value for money, efficiency and effectiveness in public spending at the top of that agenda.

Our commitments start with ourselves. We have already reduced ministerial pay and we are reforming the system of transport for Ministers, which was decided today. We will also make sure that political expenses are vouched for and we will axe severance payments for Ministers. No political pensions will be paid to sitting Deputies and in future no retired politician will get a political pension until the national retirement age.

We will further reduce the cost of our political institutions by abolishing the Seanad, if the people approve it in a referendum, and by reducing the number of Deputies after the publication of the results of this year's census. We are also committed to making the Dáil more effective. For example, the Abbeylara Supreme Court judgment limited the ability of Dáil committees to investigate crucial issues of public concern. We intend to bring a referendum before the people to amend the Constitution to give Dáil committees full powers of investigation, for which many Deputies have called over many years. We will have fewer, but stronger, Dáil committees which are properly resourced.

We will introduce legislation to apply a radical extension of the parliamentary questions regime to State bodies and bodies with majority ownership or funding by the State, requiring them to provide answers to written questions within a specified number of Dáil sitting days. We will of course recognise the special position of bodies with a commercial mandate operating at arm's length from Government. We will require the CEO of every State funded body attend the relevant committee on a regular basis to answer oral parliamentary questions, on a similar basis to the attendance of Ministers before the full Dáil.

We will legislate to restore the previous position in regard to the Freedom of Information Act and we will extend the remit of that Act and of the Ombudsman Act. We will also introduce whistleblowers legislation and amend the Official Secrets Act. We will introduce spending limits for all elections, including presidential elections and constitutional referendums. We will also reduce the limits on political donations to political parties and candidates and we will require disclosure of all aggregate sums above €1,500 and €600 respectively. We will bring

[The Taoiseach.]

forward the necessary legal and constitutional provisions to ban corporate donations to political parties.

Last, but by no means least, in addition to bringing forward referendums ourselves we will establish a constitutional convention to consider comprehensive constitutional reform, including a review of our Dáil electoral system, reducing the presidential term, providing for same-sex marriage, removing the clause on women and encouraging greater participation of women in public life and possibly reducing the voting age.

Although we face difficult times, the programme will bring equality and fairness back to the heart of Government. We want a fair society where people trust and have faith in the institutions and services of the State and where those services demonstrably work for them. We will introduce universal health insurance with equal access to care for all. Nobody will be left behind. We will ensure universal coverage by paying for those on lower incomes and providing subsidies for those on middle incomes. Within the term of this Government, we will deliver universal primary care, which will remove fees for general practitioner care and ensure that patients have access to a wider range of health services and professionals in their local communities.

As we rebuild our economy we are determined to look after those who are most vulnerable, ensuring all our people live with dignity. We will bring forward a realistic implementation plan for the national disability strategy, including sectoral plans with achievable time scales and targets. We will ensure that money spent on disability services is clearly set out and audited. Any decent society must value, respect and protect older people. We will complete and implement the national positive ageing strategy to this end.

It is time to bring a renewed focus to tackling poverty, educational disadvantage and social protection. We know that children remain the group most at risk of poverty in Ireland, with more than 90,000 children living in families that cannot afford basic necessities like food, warm clothing or heating. We have to break that cycle of poverty. This Government will adopt a new area-based approach to child poverty, which draws on best international practice and existing services to tackle every aspect of child poverty which is of concern to a great number of people.

Tackling educational disadvantage is key to increasing opportunities for future generations of young people. The review of the DEIS programme will provide a platform for new initiatives to deliver better outcomes for students in disadvantaged areas. We will protect families whose homes are at risk through a combination of new reliefs, existing supports and forbearance measures. These are tremendous challenges, but my Government is absolutely committed to meeting those challenges and delivering on our programme.

The Irish people have spoken and their verdict is reflected in the programme for national recovery before the House. The programme has been agreed by the two largest parties in the Oireachtas, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, ensuring that we now have a Government capable of strong and stable leadership. We have a Government with a mandate and willingness to face the hard decisions and offer real leadership to the Irish people. I am under no illusions about the scale of the challenges that lie ahead. I make no effort to hide the scale of these challenges from the Irish people.

As Taoiseach, it will be my privilege to be open and truthful with the Irish people as we tackle these challenges over the next number of years. I have great faith in the Irish people and their ingenuity, passion, sense of decency, resilience in the face of difficulty and pride in their country. I believe the programme meets the high standards the Irish people rightly demand of their Government. I commend the programme for Government to the House.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an dTeach as an am atá curtha ar fáil don díospóireacht inniu. Tá sé an-thábhachtach go bhfuil an deis againn na gnéithe éagsúla de chlár an Rialtais a phlé go géar agus go hoscailte.

First, I would like to thank the Dáil and Government for agreeing to our proposal to start this Dáil with a debate on the programme for Government. The original proposal to debate committees and the committee system is best left until there is something more concrete to discuss. When the programme was published it received almost no detailed examination. The Labour Party's members were able to give it only the most basic of reviews before voting on it. The Fine Gael parliamentary party also nodded it through without detailed debate.

Commentary then quickly turned to the issue of who would get which jobs. Given the importance of the programme to our work over the coming year, it deserves much more detailed scrutiny than it has received so far. There are many ways in which this debate could be approached and the least constructive of these would be to try to carry the rhetoric of the election into yet another week. The Government which the people wanted is now in office.

That said, it in no way automatically follows that the Government's programme is for what the people voted. The programme was not before the people. Each party is entitled to some flexibility in regard to its election promises and neither parties' voters can be expected to be fully happy with what has emerged. However, even in light of this, the programme contains an unusually large number of abandoned election pledges.

The need for compromise is accepted, but it cannot be used as the all-purpose excuse for breaking promises. A particularly striking example of this is the issue of the number of Ministers of State. Fine Gael not only promised to limit the number to 12, it even published a Bill to give effect to this. When 15 were appointed last Thursday it briefed that this was a condition it had to meet in negotiations. Unfortunately for it, the Labour Party confirmed that it had not asked for the higher number. Unless it was a negotiation between Fine Gael and some as yet unidentified partner, the simple fact is that the promise was unilaterally abandoned.

We could go through every part of both parties' manifestos and draw up a long list of priority policies which disappeared in recent days.

Equally we could waste time showing how the core of the five point plan has been hollowed out. This might make a more lively debate but it would serve no positive purpose.

For my part, I intend to be constructive. Just as important, I say to Ministers and Deputies that they should try to adapt their speeches to the reality of what is in the programme rather than the rhetoric of the campaign. The combination of aggressive attack and warm self-praise which has characterised speeches about the programme should be put aside and a more credible approach followed. The better way to use this debate is to look at the programme in terms of what it says about the type of Government we will have in the next few years and the policies it is likely to prioritise.

I encourage people to take time to read the programme in detail a few times to understand it fully. Overall, it would be better described as an agreement to share office rather than a genuine five-year programme for proper government. On issues large and small the document maintains a deliberate vagueness on the exact policies and time scales. A large part of this involves putting off many hard but vital decisions.

A very striking part of the programme is the number of areas where the last Government's policies have been adopted — on occasion with an almost comic attempt to cover this up with new titles for old initiatives. At the same time, exactly the opposite approach — of keeping the title but losing the substance — can be seen in regard to the attempt to present election prom-

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

ises as being retained in the programme. The programme is long on rhetoric but short on vital substance. Before it can be seen as a genuine basis for governing Ireland in the next few years a significant number of questions will need to be answered.

The rush in preparing the programme shows itself in many small errors in the document which are of no great importance. What is very important is where the parties do not appear to have noticed direct contradictions between different parts of the document. What the programme is good on is identifying the broad areas which should be prioritised — with the achievement of economic recovery being by far the most important. This is to be welcomed. Our economy can and will recover. It retains key strengths and enormous potential which can be released in the years ahead.

The programme mentions the specific areas of fiscal, financial and employment policies and I will deal with each in turn. Achievement of a stable and sustainable budget balance is an absolute precondition for recovery. It is essential for investor and consumer confidence as well as for reaching a stage where investment in public services can again grow. As independent commentators and government Members away from microphones confirm, the majority of the budget changes required to achieve this have been implemented. The failure of the programme to include a single significant change to any budgetary measure introduced by the last Government is surprising but welcome. The programme even goes as far as to retain measures which were called savage and which were opposed little more than a few weeks ago. Cynical though this change of heart may be, it is to be welcomed because it leaves in place a foundation for recovery.

Also welcome is the decision to adopt the budget aggregate we published for this year and next. Something which does not appear to have been noticed is that the decision to announce new spending on a range of areas in a “jobs budget” and for smaller initiatives will, therefore, require equal tax increases or spending cuts. I hope there will not be an attempt to fudge this when the extra spending is announced in the coming weeks.

What is of genuine concern is the failure of the programme to adopt any concrete fiscal rules for three out of the five years the Government could last. In the campaign both parties stated that certainty in fiscal planning is crucial. In the programme itself they state at length that we must have three-year budgeting if we are to use public money better and plan properly, yet the most we have is an agreement to follow the last Government’s plan for two years and then talk about what to do some time down the road. In two years we might have a three year plan which the programme describes as urgently needed.

The fundamental role of the EU-IMF Support Programme, is to enable us to fund public services up to the point where we have restored the budget. The specific programme contains measures which are required anyway. What should, and I believe will, be changed is the cost of the EU portion of the programme. As we discussed earlier, there is a now a consensus in Europe that the terms must change. The programme for Government also confirms that the three largest parties in this house accept here that this is a cross-Union matter. We will get to discuss this at greater length next week before the Council meeting. For now, there is one issue which should be clarified without delay.

On page 16 of the programme the Government states that the benefit of any reduced interest rate will be “offset against the aggregate adjustment required over the term of the programme.” No one has explained exactly what this means. If it means that it will be used to enable greater spending, this would defeat the entire purpose of seeking the reduction — which is to make sure that our debt levels are sustainable. The lower interest rate should be used to lower borrowing and, therefore, also help to lower long-term borrowing costs. It would be helpful if

Government Ministers were to use this debate as an opportunity to explain their intention on this issue.

At the heart of the credibility of the Government's fiscal policy remains the issue of how it actually will be run. The division of the Department of Finance is not mentioned in the programme for Government. It bears all the hallmarks of being cobbled together. Following questions which I raised last week, a consultant who advised Fine Gael and a number of Ministers were sent out to the media to claim that this division is quite common and the same as the roles of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Chief Secretary to the Treasury. How can this be true if we are to believe the claim that these are equal members of Government? The Chief Secretary is legislatively and administratively subject to the Chancellor. He is in effect a "super junior".

It is time for the Government to publicly outline, in detail, exactly how this division will work. What staffing will report to each Minister and, where will they use the same staff, how accountability will be attended to? What will be the respective budgetary roles of each Department? Simply pointing to the fact that they will both sit on a committee does not answer these questions.

Restoring a banking system which meets the needs of the economy is also rightly identified as a priority in the programme. What is not identified is exactly what the Government proposes to do about this. There is nothing new in committing to a smaller banking system — this is happening and it is inevitable. The restructuring and recapitalisation to be enabled by NAMA has been thrown into considerable doubt, with the nature of which assets, if any, are to be transferred being unclear. The objective concerning medium-term financing is something which is shared by everyone who wants greater security in the financial system. This is an issue we can return to in proper detail next week.

Oddly, given the commitment to a smaller banking system, the programme also includes a promise to establish another bank — a strategic investment bank, but provides exactly zero detail about what this is supposed to mean. If it is intended to be the Labour Party's election proposal then its implementation would cause immense damage to an already fragile system. Earlier this year the Tánaiste explained that his proposal would involve €20 billion in financing. This would come directly from the market funding available for the other banks. This is a huge potential source for instability in the system at a time when it can least be afforded. The Government should deal with this immediately by explaining what exactly it proposes and why on earth this country's taxpayers need to own yet another bank.

The most important thing that can be achieved through restoring the economy is the creation of jobs for those who are unemployed and those who will come into the labour force. Many of the indicators show that Ireland could be poised for a significant return to employment growth. The core of the long-term jobs strategy in the programme is the "Smart-Economy" approach and the innovation measures that are already under way. They are also working. As the Tánaiste said last Friday in a press release welcoming a major investment in his constituency, Ireland is attractive for investment and is securing significant new projects. The enterprise agencies also confirmed at the weekend that there are many very significant investment projects at an advanced stage. FÁS is already being replaced and tens of thousands of extra training places are being funded.

In these and many other specific actions on employment, policies referenced in the programme are being implemented and the funding is already provided in the 2011 budget. In one of the most shameless examples of rebranding the last Government's work the programme proposes to establish technology research centres with a specific commercialisation remit, but fails to mention that they are already in place under the name Technology Competence Centres

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

with funding from the IDA and Enterprise Ireland and have been in place for several years. The programme makes great play of saying that a centre will be established in high value manufacturing — failing to mention that a proposal is already before the agencies for funding this centre involving a partnership between ten major manufacturers and six universities. In the Taoiseach's speech on the nomination of Government he stated that he wanted honesty to be the hallmark of everything his Government does. I hope this will extend to being honest about the origins of many of the policies his Government has put in its programme.

The NewERA title has survived the campaign and is sitting happily in the programme with the Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, looking after its interests, albeit not at Cabinet. However, just like the strategic investment bank, the electoral NewERA bears no resemblance to the programme for Government NewERA. The claims for impact remain but the jobs targets and secured funding are gone. In fact, there is a major new issue with NewERA because the programme states on page 15 that its funding will come within the framework of the national development plan. Therefore, rather than being a major new economic stimulus, it will be funded by taking money from other public capital projects.

I welcome the clear statement in the programme that the Government believes export-oriented activity will be the driver of wider economic recovery. The dynamism of this sector is stronger than ever with enormous potential for direct and indirect employment support.

The programme is wrong to imply that nothing is coming from investment in advanced training and research when the evidence is quite the contrary. The innovation union strategy referenced in the programme has recently published an EU innovation scorecard which suggests that Ireland's investment in education and basic research is delivering real results. It places Ireland third out of 27 for the quality of training, sixth for research systems and second for turning this into concrete economic effects.

I have heard from many people in the system who are concerned that the programme for Government seems to imply a false division between applied and basic research in terms of their economic importance. Look at the thousands of jobs here in world-leading companies and one will see at the core of their activities people trained to the very highest level in basic research teams.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): You have one minute.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I have more time. I started after 4 p.m.

There are people who like to dismiss this but the people we should really listen to are the job creating companies. Every major employer in Ireland is now partnered with some significant basic research programme in our third level institutions. A majority of all IDA new projects are being attracted on the basis of the research capacity of our country. It would be reckless in the extreme to ignore this evidence and to do anything other than to maintain and increase the priority to be given to funding research in the next few years. Any move to switch funding from successful programmes to more direct commercialisation might give a very short term boost but very quickly the entire pipeline will dry up and we will be left without the people or programmes required to support industry.

The science and technology area is listed as a priority for national development plan investment on page 16 but it is missing from the same list on page 14. This should be clarified as soon as possible and the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation should seek an opportunity to outline his approach to the area.

My colleagues will address a number of other important economic issues touched on in the programme. In the short time remaining to me, I would like to address a few of the other main areas in the programme——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Deputy, there is no time remaining.

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——specifically, health, the public sector and political reform.

Many parts of the programme will find a high level of support in all parts of this House. There will be differences in terms of executional details but the thrust of policy will not be controversial. This is absolutely not the case in regard to the health policy in the programme.

It is ten years since the Labour Party proposed a universal health insurance model as the cure for all our ills. Launched with a great fanfare, a promise was made to publish costings and implementation legislation in order that the people could evaluate it for themselves. Nothing ever appeared.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It appeared.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Fine Gael’s compulsory private health insurance model brought far more details and the claim that the Dutch system is the answer to everything. I think I read reports at one stage of Fine Gael presenting Dutch canvassers on the doorstep to try to explain the proposals. In fact, claims were made for the Dutch model which even they do not make. More coverage for everyone and at zero cost to the Exchequer was the promise.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: The Labour Party provided a fully costed proposal.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Deputy Martin, your time has expired by one minute.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I started at 4 p.m. and 15 minutes has been provided in Standing Orders. I am entitled to at least two to three more minutes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): No, you started at 3.59 p.m. That is what I have been told officially.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Acting Chairman could be reasonable. I am nearly finished and ask for a small bit of leeway. In terms of the programme for Government, I have been reasonable and constructive. I looked at the clock before I started and I have approximately two minutes remaining. I do not want a row about it but——

Deputy Gerry Adams: Deputy Martin should have gone to Specsavers.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Please be brief.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will be very brief.

What has emerged in the programme is a hybrid system. There is to be funding through insurers and funding through a hospital insurance fund. Hospital services will be planned by a State body and by insurers. Services are to be integrated and stand alone. This is to happen with almost no increased resources and a major cut in staffing.

Also, in a quite incredible example of taking extra power into political hands, the programme explicitly and without qualification states that the Minister for Health will decide which hospitals will be kept open. What is promised is at best a dangerous experiment. It threatens progress in the many areas where treatment numbers and outcomes have improved. It is based

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

on wildly unrealistic financial assumptions. It is a policy which stems from wanting a neatly contained election idea rather than a real strategy for improving health services.

One thing which concerns me is the failure to include within the programme——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Deputy, you are abusing your position.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I would genuinely like to take this up with the Ceann Comhairle's office.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): You are already two and a half minutes over your time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am not two and a half minutes over time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Yes, you are.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Under no circumstances am I two and a half minutes over my time. I wish to conclude, if I may——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): I have to ask you to stop at this point.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Could I just conclude?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): You really cannot go on because everybody else will look for the same——

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): You are interfering with other people's positions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I put on the record my objection to this.

A Deputy: Is this new politics?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I did not get 15 minutes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): I have been informed that you did. Deputy Adams has 15 minutes and we will stick to that.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Beidh deich mbomaite agamsa agus ocht mbomaite ag an Teachta Mac Lochlainn. Under Deputy Martin's rules, there are ten minutes for me and eight for Deputy Mac Lochlainn.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Tá sin go maith.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Bhí mé ag éisteacht leis an nuacht ag deireadh na seachtaine agus chuala mé faoin cheiliúradh mhór i gContae Mhaigh Eo agus ba chosúil go raibh an Sam Maguire ann, leis an Taoiseach ann mar Sam, agus bhí craic iontach ann. Ócáid mhaith a bhí ann.

The Taoiseach: Tá súil agam go mbeidh Sam ann i Maigh Eo roimh i bhfad.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Sílim go mbeidh Sam i gContae Aontroma roimh Chontae Mhaigh Eo ach sin scéal eile.

In his speech, the Taoiseach cited Michael Davitt. Davitt was a former political prisoner and former member of the British Parliament. After he was released from prison where he spent seven years in the most awful brutal conditions, he was asked by Parnell what he intended to do. He said he would join the revolutionary movement of course. As we know, he was a founder of a mass movement for the rights of Irish people, something which is very needed these days. He was also an idealist, a nationalist, a Fenian, a republican, a revolutionary, a labour activist, a writer, a journalist, a historian, an internationalist agus fear as Maigh Eo a bhí ann fosta so tá an Taoiseach mar an gcéanna leis in a lán slite. The Taoiseach and Davitt, as he will see from this, have a lot in common.

The Taoiseach said in his remarks at the weekend that the election result was a democratic revolution. It was far from that. People voted for change but in this programme for Government, they are getting the same old Fianna Fáil austerity strategy as dictated by the EU and the IMF wrapped up and presented as something new. Ní aon clár rialtais é seo, ní clár le gníomhaíochta dearfacha é. It is filled with fudge and with reviews.

When that happens in any negotiation, it means there is no meeting of minds on the issue involved, so the issue is kicked up the road. Instead of agreeing a programme for Government and then going into a coalition on that basis, Fine Gael and the Labour Party cobbled together this piece of work to facilitate their ministerial ambitions. What this illustrates is the eagerness of these two parties to get into Government — as Sean O’Casey said, to get their posteriors on ministerial seats.

There is no strategy in this programme to get people back to work or to resolve the education crisis, so there is patently no excuse to describe it as a democratic revolution. The Taoiseach should call it something else and not a democratic revolution because that has yet to come. Tiocfaidh sí fós.

The Taoiseach may wonder what a democratic revolution might look like. Nuair a thitfidh an Taoiseach ina chodladh níos déanaí, b’fhéidir i rith na díospóireachta seo, dá mbeadh brionglóid aige, cén saghas brionglóide a bheadh ann? First, it would mean reclaiming economic sovereignty and not by 2016 but now. It would mean rejecting the IMF-EU deal and not modifying, improving or tinkering with it. The loan should not be drawn down. In a proper democratic revolution, the bank bondholders would be made to pay their own gambling debts. A real democratic revolution would ensure the banks served the Irish economy and that the economy served the people. Ní bheadh aon airgead poiblí eile caite isteach i mbainc dhona.

A real democratic revolution would see the most vulnerable protected, the livelihoods of working people safeguarded and public services, in particular the health service and education, properly organised, funded and available to all on an equal basis and not on the basis of wealth. Those with the ability to contribute more would be required to do so.

To be fully democratic, such a revolution would transform politics, make elected representatives more accountable, institutions more effective and make all of us and our institutions servants of citizens. Ministers and TDs would take a real cut in their salaries and there would not be 15 junior ministers — as I remarked earlier, the first U-turn away from the 12 promised by Fine Gael during the election.

A democratic revolution would properly empower citizens and local communities and make local government meaningful. Mar a dúirt mé, i lár sheachtain na Gaeilge beidh an teanga Gaeilge ar ais i mbéal an phobail. Tiocfaidh dá-theangacht ó Gleanntanna Aontroime go Ciarraí, ar sráideanna Bhéal Feirste, Corcaigh agus Baile Átha Cliath. In it our natural resources would be reclaimed and used for national benefit, and women would reclaim their rightful and equal place in positions of responsibility and leadership in all sectors of society.

[Deputy Gerry Adams.]

No-one can credibly speak of a democratic revolution in Ireland unless it ends partition, ushers in national reconciliation and unites the people and the island of Ireland.

The programme for Government put before us to be dealt with by 7.30 p.m. this evening — rush, get it through, push it through — pays lip-service to some of these ideas, ignores others completely and contradicts many of these basic points.

One of the single biggest issues on the doorsteps during the general election was the universal social charge. Fine Gael and Labour, speaking from here, rightly savaged the Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government for bringing in this aggressive and oppressive flat tax. That was the right thing to do. Would it be right now? Níl sé ann. It is not in the programme. We are promised a review — one of the many reviews promised.

The two coalition parties also denounced the banking policy of the outgoing Government and its deal with the IMF-EU, but that flawed fiscal and banking strategy forms the basis of this programme. It is the cornerstone of Government policy. The most significant and clearest line is: “The new Government supports the objectives of the EU/IMF Programme of Support . . .”. The Taoiseach states he will not compromise on our 12.5% corporation tax. This is making a virtue out of necessity. This is the least he can do. It is the deal which is wrong. Is é sin an fáth go bhfuil Sinn Féin ag chur in aghaidh an clár Rialtais seo.

There is no knowing what Davitt would have thought of this programme. My guess, based on his life and his writings, is that he, too, would be against it.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The people came out in huge numbers on 25 February last with hope in their hearts for change, for new political leadership and for a challenge to the injustice they have faced for so long now.

Like all the TDs in the House today, I canvassed my constituency of Donegal North-East and I listened to what I can only describe as the stories of despair related to emigration again in Donegal. The Taoiseach, as a Mayo man, will be aware of the impact of emigration on his county. On the impact of unemployment, one in three of the working people of Donegal are out of work. I also heard stories of cutbacks and the struggle to pay the bills.

However, there were also remarkable people who will turn this country around. I came across a woman aged 83 who cares for her 22 year old foster son, who was paralysed in a road accident. She has nurtured him, by love, by compassion and by support, back slowly towards having a decent standard of life. These are the people who deserve the support of the Republic and of us in this House, but they have been utterly failed.

It is a fundamental injustice that ordinary working families have been asked to pay the bills of those who were reckless in the financial institutions. This was a failure not merely in the Irish banking system but in the European and international banking system, and yet the ordinary families in Ireland, one of the smallest states in the European Union, have been asked to carry that burden. That is a fundamental injustice that nobody can defend and they hope for change in that regard.

Fine Gael and Labour have won the endorsement of approximately 56% of the people and good luck to them, but they campaigned on something that is very different to what is in the programme for Government. They did not say they would deliver more of the same. They did not say they would not reverse the cuts that have impacted so severely on families such as the universal social charge and the cuts to the unemployed, pensioners in terms of the blind pension and to those on disability payments. Those are the ones who suffered the impact. Student nurses have taken cuts and young students and hard-working families must pay more to send

their children to third level education. They said they would do something about all of those matters.

They stated that they would deal with the issue of banking and not allow it to cripple the economy. They did not speak of water charges. They did not speak of property taxes. They did not speak of stealth charges. These are the realities. The campaign they presented to the people does not relate to what is in this programme for Government.

The people voted for change with hope in their hearts. They voted for new political leadership. Our communities have been savaged by this financial crisis. They need to have their faith restored in the political system, not shattered. If the Government implements this programme for Government and if it does not challenge our European partners to do what is right and fair, it will fail them and their faith will be shattered yet again. We cannot have that.

Sinn Féin laid out its plan clearly. We said we need to separate the banking debt from the sovereign debt to take it off the backs of the people. We said that we need to stimulate the economy using the pensions reserve fund to get the economy moving again. We said that the Government can cut the deficit by asking the very wealthy to pay their fair share and asking highly paid civil servants to take a real cut. A €200,000 wage for the Taoiseach will not cut it with ordinary working families who struggle to pay their bills. That is the reality in terms of what has happened with the Government parties.

The issues of cutting the interest rate and corporation tax are distractions. Intelligent people know that these are distractions. What is needed is for the Government to stand up to our European partners. What they have done fundamentally unjust. It is clearly wrong to ask ordinary working families to carry the burden for a fundamental failure and crisis in the banking system across Europe. We must be seen by the international community to stand up to those partners and not have distractions and side shows around interest rates and corporation tax.

The Taoiseach spoke of 2016 in his opening address as Taoiseach and he spoke about the 1916 Proclamation. He knows in his heart that what we have endured, not only in recent years but for decades, has nothing to do with the hope of the 1916 Proclamation. For the 83 year old woman, for her 22 year old foster son and for all those who are unemployed in Donegal, Mayo and across the State, I genuinely hope the Taoiseach succeeds. The programme for Government is not a template for success; it is a template for more of the same. It will shatter the hope for change that brought the people out in huge numbers. I implore the Taoiseach and his colleagues in Government to not pursue this direction and to deliver a real republic and a real revolution for change which is what the people deserve.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I will share my time with Deputies Catherine Murphy, Halligan and Ross.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The problem with the programme for Government is captured in two statements made by the Taoiseach which show the inconsistency at the heart of the programme. He stated correctly that “the State’s credit worthiness has been lost as a result of the decision to bail out the creditors of private institutions,” which was an act of the last Government. He went on to say the Government “recommits Ireland to solving the fiscal crisis and honouring our sovereign debts.” The problem is that our unsustainable debt burden results precisely from the decision to guarantee the gambling debts of private financial institutions. The Taoiseach recognises that the decision in question was a disastrous mistake. Why does he intend to retain a policy that will sink the economy and undermine the admirable aspirations in the programme for Government with regard to fairness, job creation and the delivery of

[Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett.]

better public services? More cuts and job losses are guaranteed as long as we continue the bailout of these institutions and their gambling debts.

The programme for Government specifies that 25,000 jobs will be lost in the public sector, more stealth charges will be introduced and more cuts will be made in public services. Most disgracefully, it pledges that State assets will be sold. God knows what assets we are talking about. The idea that State companies, or the physical land of parts of the country, could be sold to pay the bad gambling debts of private institutions is outrageous. Any Government which talks about “a democratic revolution” — the Minister for Finance has said this situation may be “unsustainable” — should give the people a chance to vote on this package, at the very least, just as Iceland did. A referendum on whether we want to proceed with it is necessary because of the cruel implications it will have for ordinary people in the coming years. It looks like it is completely unsustainable; it is certainly unjust.

When we say we should default or burn the bondholders, people always ask us what we would do then. We are asked what the alternative is, or where we would get the money needed. At the weekend the *Sunday Independent* gave us a little hint of where we could get the money. It reported that €57 billion was in the hands of just 300 people. The people in question are €6.7 billion wealthier than they were last year. That figure is more than the amount saved through all the budget cuts imposed on the poor and working people through social welfare cuts, etc. Why does the Government not impose higher taxes on those wealthy people instead of continuing the attacks on working people, the poor, the unemployed and the vulnerable in our society? That is the direction a decent programme for Government would take.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: The programme for Government states that “by the end of our term in Government Ireland will be recognised as a modern, fair, socially inclusive and equal society supported by a productive and prosperous economy”. We would all like to think that will happen. That hope depends completely on how the banking crisis will play out and the Government’s approach in that regard. I have more than grave concerns in that respect. Having said that, I acknowledge that the theme of reform runs through the programme for Government, of which I want to pick out some practical aspects.

The programme states the Government “will merge local enterprise and job support functions of local, regional and national agencies into a single business and enterprise unit within Local Authorities”. We should go much further than this. We should develop a one stop shop where corporate, compliance, revenue, mentoring and other support services would be provided under one roof. There is no shortage of good ideas. We must ensure they are not exhausted before enterprises start their operations. We must simplify the system for the user. Sole traders, C2 construction workers and the self-employed are the most exposed when it comes to the social welfare code. The programme for Government includes a commitment that a tax and social welfare commission will be established. I hope that will happen at an early stage in the lifetime of the Government.

This country prides itself on having a well educated workforce, even though there are high levels of functional illiteracy. The programme for Government provides that “local authorities will be supported in developing Right to Read campaigns involving community supports for literacy, from within existing budgets such as more spacious social housing, longer opening hours for libraries, homework clubs and summer camps”. That is simply not achievable within the existing resources of many local authorities. The funding position is not equal across the country. The number of staff in County Meath is 50% of that in County Kerry. Embargoes can be blunt instruments. I question the practicalities of the delivery of this proposal. We are not

talking about people getting to third level education but about people simply being able to read. If this is all that is going to be offered, I would have serious concerns.

There is an element of tokenism in some of the measures proposed in the programme for Government. The establishment of a website such as *fixmystreet.ie* is a very good idea. It is guaranteed that a person who makes a complaint on the website will receive a response within two days. People do not want responses, however; they want problems to be fixed. If we reduce the number of people who deal with these matters at the coalface, we will encounter capacity issues. While I understand the programme for Government provides no more than a broad outline of what is intended, we need to see what is intended if we are to understand how national plans will work at local level. I agree that we need to see what capacity will be provided to deal with these matters.

I welcome the commitment to publish a plan for the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 and to “prioritise access for children with special needs”. There is a real crisis in this regard, particularly in certain parts of the country, due to the fact that specialists are not evenly spread. If we are to have a fair and inclusive Ireland, that matter will have to be dealt with in a way that has a practical application. I have serious concerns about the protection of front-line services if the number of public and civil servants is reduced by up to 25,000. I do not believe such a reduction can be achieved.

The programme for Government commits to ensuring tax exiles will make a fair contribution to the Exchequer. One’s rights as a citizen are accompanied by responsibilities. I agree with this proposal and want to see how it will play out. The money paid to developers and land owners when people bought houses off plans has gone somewhere. We have to make sure it does not end up in Argentina or some other country, although I do not want to pick out Argentina, in particular. I emphasise that rights are accompanied by responsibilities.

Deputy John Halligan: I will support some of the initiatives and measures contained in the programme for Government. I said last week that if a policy was good, I would acknowledge it as such. If some of the policies and initiatives pursued by the Government are good, I will acknowledge and support them. I agree with the reversal of the cut in the minimum wage, for example. If it had been ignored, it had the potential to cause real harm and damage to low income earners struggling to pay their way. Many thousands more would have been driven into poverty traps and there would have been an opportunity for many workers to be further exploited.

The further measures proposed as part of the 2011 jobs programme are largely positive. I refer to the reduction in the lower rate of VAT to 12%, for example, or the similar reduction in the lower rate of PRSI. I support the replacement of FÁS with a national employment and entitlements service, although I would like to hear more about its composition, the projected cost of its establishment and the manner in which it will be run.

I am pleased that the programme for Government is serious about fighting the war on drugs in our society. With the banking crisis, the greatest threat to our society is posed by the criminality associated with the drug barons, evidence of which we have all seen in recent years. I would like the initiatives in this regard provided for in the programme for Government to be teased out. The need to tackle anti-social behaviour is a huge issue in many housing estates.

The inclusion in the programme for Government of a reference to a “University in the South East” is long overdue. Such an institution is badly needed to drive economic development in that part of the country. In light of the detailed and comprehensive reports by Dr. Port and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, it is incomprehensible that so many people in the south east would be without universities status. Although many promises were made by successive

[Deputy John Halligan.]

Governments regarding a university for the south east, I have to believe that will be delivered if it is in the programme for Government. However, it is not possible that the proposal to cut as many as 25,000 jobs in the public service, a figure which is much higher than the 18,000 proposed by the Labour Party and Fianna Fáil, will not have an impact on front line services. We all know what is happening to front line services at present.

The introduction of water meters represents a sharp U-turn by the Labour Party in particular. Even subsequent to the election that party stated that the money spent on installing meters would be better invested in water infrastructure. Once again, this extra tax will become a burden on PAYE workers.

I am dismayed that the universal social charge will only be reviewed rather than reversed. The vagueness of the programme in this regard offers no clue as to how that review will be carried out or whether we are going to abolish it. Unfortunately, I believe it will probably be reviewed rather than abolished. It will continue to have an appalling effect on the less well off in society, as well as middle-income groups.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): I remind the Deputy there are only three minutes remaining in the slot.

Deputy John Halligan: I am almost finished. The programme for Government is a rough draft. It does not contain a projected timescale for the abolition of the Seanad or the other promised referendums and reforms. There are no definitive proposals or initiatives.

The Taoiseach spoke about a decent and fair society. The well-being of our society is being destroyed because we have done nothing to help those in receipt of carer's benefit or the blind pension. We have done nothing to help those carers who are working 24 hours per day. We will drive hundreds of thousands of people further into the poverty trap if we do not reverse these cuts. The programme is vague in many areas.

There is much more I would like to say but, unfortunately, my colleague wishes to speak.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): The Deputy's colleague has very little time.

Deputy John Halligan: It is not possible at present for me to support the programme for Government.

Deputy Shane Ross: I assure the Deputy he is not alone in feeling that way. I wish signal to the Taoiseach certain dangers that arise from what is happening this afternoon. The strongest applause for his programme for Government appears to have come from those who previously occupied his position. I was struck by the remarks of Deputy Martin, the Leader of the Opposition, who advised that the Taoiseach should be honest about the origins of the policies being pursued. I am not often in the business of agreeing with what the Leader of the Opposition says but there is an alarming similarity between the policies in the programme for Government and the policies pursued by the last Government. To some extent the Taoiseach and the Government have walked into the Fianna Fáil swamp and are already sinking in the quicksand.

The Taoiseach: I intend to clean it up.

Deputy Shane Ross: The dangers of which they should be aware have been particularly evident in Europe over the past ten days. I wish the Taoiseach God speed and good luck in his negotiations in Europe but he is landed in an extraordinarily difficult situation. To have found himself already retreating from the position held by the previous Government is a perilous development. The issue raised on the Order of Business by Deputy Higgins in regard to

sharing the burden disappeared from the agenda within days of the Government taking office. What is now at issue is the corporation tax rate of 12.5%. I noted carefully the Taoiseach's assurance that he is not going to yield on the 12.5% rate. While I thank God for that, he failed to state that he does not intend to yield on the corporation tax base. Perhaps it was omitted from his speech by mistake but there is a serious danger that it is under threat by stealth.

The Taoiseach: I clarified that.

Deputy Shane Ross: It is an omission therefore. It is very noticeably not there.

The Taoiseach: I merely pointed out that the Commission can make whatever proposals it wishes.

Deputy Shane Ross: That is fine.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): We will have to discuss these issues on another day. The Deputy's time has expired.

Deputy Shane Ross: This is a retreat from the programme the Taoiseach previously proposed. It is an apology for election promises. This is regrettable and the Government should be very careful if it is being praised by Fianna Fáil, the party which landed us in this mess.

The Taoiseach: It is in strict compliance with the programme for Government.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): This debate is about the future. It is about rolling up our sleeves and getting on with the task of rebuilding our economy, using the bricks and mortar of jobs, competitiveness, innovation and trade. More than that, however, it is about the kind of country we want to hand on to our children. The programme for Government agreed between the Labour Party and Fine Gael is a plan that draws on the best of both parties, united in our commitment to bring fresh ideas, new energy and renewed hope to the leadership of our country. It is the pledge of a national Government united in the national interest. This is a programme that is shaped by the bitter lessons of the past. I reminded Members this recession is the second time in a generation that Ireland has been brought to the brink of disaster by political recklessness, mismanagement and greed.

It is the commitment of the Labour Party that never again will Ireland be brought so low by those entrusted with the privilege of governing or entrusted with our financial institutions. That is why at the centre of this programme is the most comprehensive agenda for reform ever put to the Irish people. The reforms begin with the banks, tearing up the blank cheque policy on banking that has undermined our very sovereignty and clearing out, once and for all, any board member of a State-guaranteed bank that presided over casino style lending. The reforms will shine a light on the business of government. This Government will enact a package of reforms that extend the right to freedom of information, protect whistle blowers wherever they expose wrongdoing and register political lobbyists for the first time. The reforms will take up where Labour left off in 1997, when it introduced limits on electoral spending for the first time. To break the link between big money and politics, allowable donations from private individuals will be drastically reduced and corporate donations banned outright. The reforms will put an end to the corporate cronyism that has seen Ireland's name dragged through the mire in capital cities around the world. This Government will make good corporate governance the law rather than an optional extra. In my role as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, it will be my personal mission to restore Ireland's international reputation and repair our relationship with our European Union partners. That work has already begun, in my own case with the meeting of EU Foreign Ministers last weekend, together with the Taoiseach's meeting with Heads of

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

State in Brussels and the meetings attended by the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan. When the Irish people voted on 25 February, they voted not only to consign to history the old politics and the old warped priorities of the past but also for a strong and stable, but also balanced and fair, Government. None of us is under any illusion about the crisis facing our country. We have seen it first hand in the devastation of a family hit by unemployment, where months of joblessness have turned into years. We have heard it in the voices of parents of young people forced to emigrate, who fear that their grandchildren will be strangers. We have witnessed it in the boarded up shops and businesses in every town in every corner of Ireland. None of us on this side of the House is under any illusion about the difficult path ahead or the hard choices that will have to be made but from the very beginning of this economic crisis Labour's commitment — a commitment that goes to the heart of who we are as a party — was that the choices would be fair. That commitment is reflected in the programme for Government. Those most at risk of poverty will not be made to suffer further and family incomes will be protected. However, there will also be a strongly enforced minimum effective tax rate of 30% for high earners, so that even those with the best accountants must pay a fair contribution. This will be a Government with no tolerance for tax exiles who have an *à la carte* approach to the duties and obligations of Irish citizenship.

Fairness is about sharing the burden of Ireland's recovery in a way that we, as neighbours, as colleagues and as a community, can live with, but more than that, it is about the fabric of our society. It is about who we are as a nation. Nowhere are a nation's values more starkly laid out than in how it treats its elderly, its sick and its children. That is why this Government has, for the first time, a full Minister for Children. It is committed, also for the first time, to ending Ireland's two-tier health system, because it is simply wrong that a person's income rather than medical need determines when and where he or she is treated. In addition, it will make literacy a national cause because no child should leave an Irish school unable to read and write.

I make no apologies for the ambitions laid out in the programme for Government. They are achievable; more than that, they are essential. A country is not an economy. A country is her people, and no bank should take precedence over a child's education or the good health of its citizens. The ambitions and objectives of this programme are achievable because it puts jobs first. I have made clear since 2008 that neither the fiscal crisis nor the banking crisis can be solved unless we get people back to work and our economy growing again. We can and will work our way out of this crisis. We can and will build up our economy again.

Success for this Government is not a return to the unsustainable casino economy of the past. Success will be an economy that is grounded in developing new products and new markets to sell them in. Success will be a workforce that is supported in gaining skills that match the jobs of today and tomorrow, because those skills are a person's best insurance against long-term unemployment. Success will be an economy in which Irish businesses, creating Irish jobs, are given the support they need to grow; in which our competitive advantage in food, tourism or education is sharpened by innovation, technology and new trade opportunities; and in which new opportunities are actively sought out. For example, tomorrow in New York, as part of an official St. Patrick's Day visit, I will be attending a technology innovation event, organised by Enterprise Ireland and Bank of America, at which 20 Irish high-tech companies will meet some of the leading technology companies in the US. This will be the beginning of a new mandate for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to actively foster Ireland's trade relations.

Getting people back to work, changing our political system, fixing our public finances through a fair and balanced approach — that is what the Irish people elected the Labour Party and Fine Gael to do and, with a national effort and with the goodwill and support of our fellow

citizens, that is what we will do. We cannot do otherwise. The stakes are too high and our country's situation too grave. I have no doubt that in the months and years to come, there will be occasions on which it will be extremely difficult to be sitting on the Government benches. There will be some difficult days, days that will test our resolve and that of our supporters. The message for both our supporters and our critics is that the job of this Government, and any Government that has the privilege to serve, is to hand on to our children a country that is in a better position than when we found it. That will be our guiding principle. That be the measure of our success, and the Government cannot afford to fail.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Cuireann sé áthas orm deis a bheith agam cúpla focal a rá ar chlár an Rialtais agus gach rath a ghuí ar an Rialtas. Ar ndóigh, tá an Rialtas seo tofa ag an bpobal agus tá súil agam go ndéanfaidh sé leas don tír agus go mbeidh an tír níos fearr dá bharr.

There are many things in the programme for Government that I would like to debate today, but I will raise a few issues that are important. One of these is the vague commitment in the programme for Government to protect front line services in education. However, there is no commitment to increase the number of teachers as demographics require. It is important that the Government clarifies whether it is its intention to honour the commitment Fianna Fáil gave in Government to increasing the number of teachers to deal with demographic requirements. Any doubt about this must create serious doubt about the Government's commitment to education.

The national recovery plan contained a commitment to the creation of 2,500 extra teaching positions. I ask the Minister to clarify whether that is a firm commitment by this Government even though it is not provided for in the programme for Government. If it were not, I would be very concerned, particularly in view of the fact that the Government has said it will cut public service jobs by 25,000 between now and 2015. It is important that the Government now outlines where these jobs will be and whether any of them will be in the teaching sector. Is it now resiling on the previous commitment to the provision of teachers in our schools?

I welcome the support shown in the programme for Government for programmes that Fianna Fáil had already begun implementing, such as the free pre-school year in early childhood education, the professional development of maths and science teachers, a bonus system for maths and investment in ICT.

A second issue of major concern to me is the lack of reference to cross-Border infrastructure links. I have always believed in taking an all-island approach to as many matters as possible. One of the great signals given by the previous Government in recent years was the decision to provide a €580 million investment package to upgrade the A5 road from Aughnacloy to Derry and Letterkenny to dual carriageway status, as well as the provision of the road to Larne. In budget 2011, some €22.68 million was approved for cross-Border initiatives, a 77% increase on last year's allocation. I ask the Minister to clarify whether the incoming Government intends to honour this commitment not only to the North of Ireland, but also to the north west of this State, which is cut off from the rest of the country by a lack of motorways. There are motorways to the west, the south and the east of the country, but none to the north west. This money was intended to provide the dual carriageway to the north west that is so badly needed.

We know there is a difference between Fine Gael and the Labour Party on this point, with the Labour Party recently questioning the rationale behind the provision of this funding for cross-Border transport projects. I am disappointed with the lack of commitment in the programme for Government to something that made both economic and regional sense and was an indicator of good faith in the shared future of our peoples on this island.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

I welcome the commitment throughout the programme for Government to a number of strategies that Fianna Fáil introduced while in Government, including the innovation strategy, Food Harvest 2020, the national addiction strategy, the smart economy agus, ar ndóigh, an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge. Cé go ndeireann clár an Rialtais go bhfuil sé i bhfábhar na straitéise don Ghaeilge, is léir nach bhfuil sé i gceist acu í a chur i bhfeidhm. Cheana féin, tá trí nithé a bhí sa straitéis curtha ar leataobh ag an Rialtas. Ceann acu sin ná go mbeadh Aire sinsearach freagrach as gnóithe Gaeilge ó lá go lá.

The programme for Government proposes to implement the recommendations of the report Trading and Investing in the Smart Economy. This is a happy turnabout for Fine Gael. When Fianna Fáil was in Government, Fine Gael said there was nothing in this report and that it contained no funding and no new policies or programmes. I am delighted to see there has been a U-turn on this and that the Fine Gael-Labour Party Government is now supporting this report.

An enormous number of areas are ignored in this document, and perhaps that is understandable up to a point. However, an extraordinary omission for a document in which the Labour Party was involved is the fact that there is only one small reference to the Croke Park agreement, in the educational sector. There is no reference to it at all under the section dealing with public service reform, and again will the Minister clarify whether this Government is committed to the provisions of the Croke Park agreement and the important reforms it can bring about? These are reforms in which I was involved as Minister for Social Protection, where we made rapid progress, for example, in bringing FÁS into the Department of Social Protection as well as the transfer of community development officers, while providing guarantees for workers, which I believe were very important.

I was interested in the provisions relating to transport, where there was not a mention of roads. The vast majority of transport in this country is done by road. Even public transport in most parts of Ireland totally depends on roads. I am sorry, there is a reference to doing immediate work this year to fill the potholes, but there is none to major infrastructural needs, particularly in the more peripheral areas that are still highly deficient in road infrastructure. Those of us who travel the roads of Ireland all the time can see the enormous benefits in the road network. However, anyone who believes the road network is complete does not have any experience of what it is like to live in the more peripheral parts of the island. Furthermore, there is no reference or commitment on whether metro north in Dublin is to proceed or the western rail corridor in the west of Ireland. It is important these issues are clarified.

On social protection, there is a commitment to examine family and child income supports. I published a very detailed report as Minister for Social Protection, before Christmas last year, which looked at this whole issue. It is important that the Government clarifies in the short-term what its intentions are for child benefit. I notice that a major privatisation programme is being proposed by the Government. It is talking about realising €2 billion from the sale of non-strategic assets. We have to be very careful, however, and ensure that the Government does not propose to sell assets that it terms non-strategic which are, in fact, highly strategic for this country. I shall certainly watch this with great interest because I believe it is important that core assets are maintained in State ownership. We need clarification on what exactly the Government intends to sell and in the event we need to be absolutely satisfied that they are non-core strategic assets.

I deplore the habit that has crept in, in recent years, particularly in the light of seachtain na Gaeilge, namely, that all the names of the proposed new State companies are in English. There was a time that this State used Irish nomenclature, for example, Bus Áras, Córas Iompair

Éireann, Bus Éireann, Bord na Móna and Coillte. I notice in the proposed amalgamation of Bord na Móna and Coillte an Englishlanguage name is proposed for the new company. Similarly, right through the text, while lip service is being paid to the Irish language, the idea of having Irish as part of everyday life is not evident. In this regard, the excuse given sometimes is that strangers will have a difficulty with using Irish nomenclature. My view is that if it is explained to them what is involved, they normally understand. These names are normally for our own use and I never found that we had much difficulty in talking about the Knesset or the various institutions abroad that are now commonly in use but do not have English language origins. One way we had for enforcing Irish as the first official language of the State was to use it for key public bodies and positions. I regret the regression from this position.

Ar deireadh, I remember studying Caesar's Gallic wars, and the text contained an admonition to the effect that it was not just war but the threat of war that did the damage. By raising doubt in relation to the corporation tax rate, I believe the Government is not doing the State any great service. No doubt there are potential investors all around the world thinking of investing in Ireland, and we are competing with Switzerland and other countries that are asking, in effect, "Can we be sure anymore that the 12.5% low corporation tax rate will stay?". It is absolutely vital that the Government puts the argument to bed once and for all and gets absolute agreement in line with the Lisbon treaty that the corporation tax in this country is not for negotiation and will stay the way it is, and that nothing which happens in Europe will change this. The very doubt that it might even be debated will frighten off investors who might invest in this country.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I shall start by addressing the very last words uttered by Deputy Ó Cuív, while acknowledging his classical scholarship. It certainly was not this Government that cast any doubt on the view of Ireland's corporation tax rate. That was, as he knows, put on the table by others. I am not absolutely certain of Sinn Féin's position, but I believe that all parties in this House hold that the 12.5% negotiated by a Government of which I was a member is and will remain the official position. There should be no doubt in anybody's mind at home or abroad that this position is not only robust, but permanent.

It is my honour to support the endorsement by Dáil Éireann of the programme for a national Government that was negotiated between my party and Fine Gael. As others have said, it is the product of the amalgamated platforms that each of the two parties put to the people over recent months. We are two distinct parties. Each would have like to have had an overall majority to implement our full policy platforms, but the people determined something else. The people wanted a much more broadly based Government than could be constructed by any individual party. For that reason our two parties engaged over a relatively short period to amalgamate on an agreed basis a strategic programme to address the country's economic difficulties and lead us on a path to recovery.

There are things in it which indicate compromise, and Deputies can rightly point to these. However, what is not compromised is the determination of both parties in government to adhere to the wish of the people. Others have said that 56% of the Irish electorate have supported the two parties, the largest and the second largest in the State now, respectively, to form this Government. I honestly believe from all that I have heard subsequent to the election of this Government that the people of Ireland, even those who did not support the two parties that comprise it, wish it well because our national well-being and future as a country depend on the success of this Administration.

I respect the mandate demanded of every individual Member of this House and the Members opposite have rightly made much of this. I hope we will have a transformed Dáil, where the

[Deputy Brendan Howlin.]

mandate afforded to every individual of the House is respected, with time being provided for that voice to be heard, on both sides of the Chamber. Equally, we therefore have a right to demand that the decision of the electorate to elect this Government by such a clear majority should be respected and given fair wind, not uncritically, but in the interests of the country.

The opening statement of common purpose is important, that is, the actual structure of the document in terms of policies. An inordinate amount of time was taken up in the negotiations towards addressing the economic difficulties, which goes without saying. Perhaps in the four or five days we had, a more comprehensive view could have been taken as regards the sectoral policies, had we had the time. The bulk of our focus was concentrated on economic recovery, however, for obvious and very good reasons. That is why they represent the clearest parts of this document. We crafted the statement of common purpose because that underpins the reasoning of the document and the reasoning behind the two parties coming together:

Our country deserves a fresh start from the failed politics of the years past. It also deserves a new hope that a new Government guided by the needs of the many rather than the greed of the few can make a real, positive difference in their lives.

That is not intended as a piece of rhetoric. It is meant to be an underpinning principle that will guide our decision-making and policy platforms we have.

I wish we had the flexibility of coming in without the burden of indebtedness the previous Administration has placed upon this nation. I wish we had but we have no magic wand to make the indebtedness go away or to make the awful decisions that must be made go away but we will take those with the new sense of urgency and fairness encapsulated in those sentences.

My party contested the general election with three main themes — jobs, reform and fairness. The programme the Government before this House reflects these objectives throughout its 64 pages. The prime focus of this Government is economic recovery and the prime element of that recovery is jobs — the retention and creation of jobs. That is why our first commitment is to a jobs programme, a jobs budget within 100 days. We have set out much of the content of the programme but not all. If the Opposition has ideas, it should submit them. They will not be rejected if they are of merit. That applies to all policy platforms. The view on this side of the House is that good ideas from any Member or party in the House will be welcomed and entertained as far as practicable. Without jobs and growth, our economic difficulties cannot be overcome. As a Government, we are determined to provide the basis for that economic growth and recovery.

The reform agenda, the second pillar of my party's platform, is seldom one that becomes a major election issue but this election was different. Our political system and our system of public administration was found to be woefully wanting. It is broken and needs to be reconstructed. It is in urgent need of fundamental change and reform. This Government commits itself to the radical overhaul of the way we do politics in this country, the way Government works and the way the agents of Government in public services and its agencies work. It will be a major body of work, involving constitutional and legislative change, and we will make a start at the top.

Among the constitutional changes we will promulgate is the abolition of Seanad Éireann. We have undertaken careful analysis, not in a knee-jerk way but because we believe there is not a compelling case for its retention. That is the yardstick we must apply to every agency in the State. Is there a compelling reason for it to exist or can its work be done more effectively and efficiently elsewhere? We will have a referendum to amend the Constitution to reverse the effects of the *Abbeylara* judgment. Members of the previous Oireachtas know how restrictive it

was on the work of proper inquiry, which is normal to Parliaments. I have been arguing for this amendment for some time.

Even closer to my agenda is a referendum to protect the right of citizens to communicate in confidence with Deputies. It was a principle I was forced to defend in the High Court and Supreme Court. I regret that the principle was breached and it should be restored so that people who think they can identify wrongdoing, malpractice or something that needs investigation should be able to reach out to their elected representatives in this House without fear of putting themselves on a hazard.

We will promulgate a referendum to allow the pay of judges to be reduced in line with others in society. No privileges are afforded to any class of people to make them unique. We are all citizens in an equal republic. There will be a referendum to ensure children's rights are strengthened. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin worked very hard on that process and we are determined to bring the work to fruition and present it to the people.

There will be a full constitutional convention on a range of other important issues. There will be a range of important legislation to continue, as the Tánaiste said, the work started by the Labour Party the last time it was in Government. I was privileged to introduce the Electoral Act at that time, which required a declaration by Members and officeholders so that we know what influences may be brought to bear on them. The Act introduced a limit on election spending and a limit on what can be donated. We must go much further and we will continue that work. We will restore freedom of information provisions, protect whistleblowers, limit political donations, abolish corporate donations, regulate lobbyists, establish a petitions committee and much more.

I refer to the new Department I am privileged to run. It must yet be constituted and that will be done by law as a new Department of public expenditure and reform. My primary role will be to manage public expenditure and reform the public service. I started that worked immediately, even without the legislative framework. It is understood that the work must be done immediately. It starts on the basis of respect. This Government respects public service and public servants. We start with the view that the *status quo* will not do. We must have change and we must buy into change. It will be my job to convince, not to bully, that we can provide the best public services in the world if we make the changes and open ourselves to the changes required.

I have much more to say but ten minutes is too little time to do justice to this matter. There will be other times to map out what the new Department, which I have the privilege of being in charge of, will do. I commend the motion to endorse this programme to get on with the work set before us by the people.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I propose to share time with Deputy Sandra McLellan. Today's debate on the programme for Government should only be an opening opportunity to address a programme that covers a wide range of issues, that raises many questions and that needs to be fully teased out and explained, with the relevant Ministers making themselves available to the Dáil to answer questions on their responsibilities within the programme.

This is especially the case in the area of health care. The Minister is unable to be in the Chamber today. The policy changes proposed in the health section of this programme are very far-reaching. Unfortunately, the programme raises as many questions as it answers on the approach of the new Government to health care. The programme appears to be a compromise between the insurance-based models put forward by Fine Gael and Labour. The commitment in the programme is to develop a universal, single-tier health service that guarantees access to medical care based on need, not income. That is a fundamental principle and on that point we

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

have common ground. That is a principle Sinn Féin has long advocated in this House. The key difference is that it is our strong view that such a health service can be delivered equitably and efficiently only on the basis of public provision, funded from fair taxation and with an end to the State subsidisation of the private health care industry.

The insurance-based model, which is the centre-piece of health care in this programme for Government, is highly problematic. Experience from other countries, including the Netherlands on which Fine Gael bases its approach, points to the danger of insurance companies being given an undue role in determining the level of care received by health service users. It is important to examine what is happening in the Netherlands, where the insurance-based system has run into huge problems with half a million people uninsured or defaulting on health insurance payments. Private health insurance companies are finding ways to circumvent the ban on risk selection. The universal health insurance basic package in the Netherlands costs €1,194 per person. Employers deduct a further 6.9% contribution from income. It is estimated currently at approximately €5,000. A total of 41% of people surveyed recently in The Netherlands said that the quality of the health system has worsened since the introduction of universal health insurance in 2006, while only 8% indicated that it had improved.

The Government may argue that this programme is a compromise and that it does not fully adopt the Dutch system. However, the problems with insurance-based systems have been well identified and the programme does nothing to allay those concerns. On the contrary, it is alarming that the health care section of the programme contains no costings — something on which other parties have pointed the finger at Sinn Féin in the past — apart from the single instance relating to the limited initial extension of free GP care.

When Fine Gael initially published its fair care plan it promised to provide further details, including costings, but that has not been done. Perhaps before the conclusion of the debate a Government spokesperson could indicate when we will see those detailed figures and projections. It cannot be argued that Fine Gael lack the resources to provide the necessary expertise to elaborate on its policy given the enormous sums of money the party has spent in the recent general election.

Many of the aspirations and proposals in the health section of the programme are commendable. I wish to put that on record. Sinn Féin has committed to constructive opposition. Where we believe there is something meritorious of praise, we will say so. I include in that the extension of free GP care to all, within the Government's term of office. That is a very big commitment. We are told that the extension of free GP care to certain categories of patients in the first two years will cost €32 million. However, what will happen after that? Presumably the promised extension of free GP care to all within the lifetime of the Government will be dependent on the negotiation of a new GP contract.

We are told that all of the measures will be transitional, until the introduction of universal health insurance by 2016. What will happen in the meantime? Will the Fianna Fáil-Green Party health cuts be reversed? Will the recruitment embargo in the health services be lifted? Will the payment for working student nurses be fully restored? I welcome the commitment to compensate the women excluded from the Lourdes hospital redress scheme. Finally, I must ask about symphysiotomy and whether there will be an inquiry.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: I am proud and honoured to give my first speech in the Dáil Chamber as a Sinn Féin Deputy. I thank the people of Cork East for putting their faith in me to represent them and their interests. I also thank my family and all those who worked tirelessly to put forward the Sinn Féin alternative platform over the course of the election campaign.

I was elected to stand up for ordinary working people and families, for the unemployed, the sick and the vulnerable. In the course of my campaign I said that there was a better and a fairer way, that there is an alternative to the *status quo* and that Sinn Féin is that alternative. I believe in Sinn Féin's alternative vision and I will do my utmost to make that vision a reality.

It is my intention to use my time as a Deputy to put forward proposals that are credible, that work and, most of all, that are fair. I intend to stand up for what is right and to fight against what is wrong. As a woman with a family I am acutely aware of the fact that not only are women totally under-represented in politics but also that we have borne the brunt of cutbacks and austerity measures foisted upon us by the previous Government. Last week marked the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day and it is in that spirit that I make a commitment to use my time as a Deputy to stand up for women and to drive forward issues that are relevant to women in Ireland today.

The political system is totally out of date and removed from the ordinary person. We must put people-power back on the agenda. We must ensure that the Government works for the people and not for vested interests. The politics of cronyism is alive and well. Our political system is dominated by middle-aged, middle-class men in suits working for other middle-aged, middle-class men in suits. We need real and radical reform to bring politics back to what it is supposed to be — a system that works for the people and is run by the people.

People throughout the State are suffering. Unemployment is sky-rocketing. Upwards of 100,000 people will be forced to emigrate in the next two years in search of work. In my own constituency unemployment is growing rapidly. Towns such as Youghal, Cobh, Mallow and Mitchelstown are ghosts of what they once were. Whether it is Tytex in Youghal or the beet factory in Mallow, jobs are being haemorrhaged left, right and centre and urgent action must be taken. The new Government must make the creation and retention of jobs its number one priority. The programme for Government is vague in that regard and does not offer much hope for the hundreds of thousands who have found themselves out of work and struggling to cope with rising costs.

We in Sinn Féin have put forward our proposals for job creation. I ask Fine Gael and Labour in particular to take those proposals on board. Our fully costed proposals have the potential to create 160,000 jobs. We would do this through a variety of measures including investing in a jobs stimulus fund, unleashing the potential of growth sectors such as agrifood and constructing essential infrastructure. We have shown that there are solutions and there are ways to get Ireland working.

The people have put their faith in the new Government to get the economy back on track, to make a change. However, change will not be achieved through a change of faces. Real change can only be achieved through policies which work for the people. Fine Gael's flawed policies of cuts, privatisation and attacks on the public sector are reminiscent of the very worst of Fianna Fáil's disastrous tenure in government. The Labour Party, unfortunately, is now part of that coalition for cuts. We in Sinn Féin have pledged to use our position in opposition to hold the Government to account and we will do so as we have done in the past. We will provide a voice for those who have been let down by the political elite and we will continue to put forward our radical alternative and to stand up for the people.

Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I congratulate Deputy Sandra McLellan on her maiden speech. It is always a difficult thing to come into the Chamber to, as she said, have middle-aged and besuited people listening to one.

Let us be honest. People are enduring a catastrophe of unbelievable proportions. It is as if a tsunami has hit our people in recent years. The fault lines for the tsunami are not some

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

earthquake that happened way out at sea. Most of the fault lines that caused the tsunami happened at home. They were in failed politics, failed regulation systems, cosy social partnership that did not face up to the need for reform. They were in a public service that was not sufficiently open to change, that did not recruit people from outside but was closed. All recruitment to top positions were from within the public service. It did not have proper accountability. Our budgetary system was out of the ark. We voted through money. Members currently on the Opposition benches were making decisions about money without any real, serious scrutiny.

Those are the problems that led to the decay of the systems that produced the earthquake that has occurred. One of the worst mistakes that can happen after an earthquake is that people build with the same building materials, using the same designs over the same fault lines and the same things happen further down the road. What the programme offers is the opportunity to change many of those fault lines that were at the heart of the crisis that we have suffered in recent times. We must look at the reaction we have seen to date in this crisis. It has been to concentrate on a very narrow agenda of fixing the banks and the deficit. As a result, considerable effort has been put into nursing along the failed property loans of the past. However, in the process, we have starved those who could create new businesses and opportunities of credit to drive them along. In the public service, we have concentrated on cutting pay and stopping recruitment but we have not reformed the structures or the way the public service works. We have not opened up the public service to new blood, nor have we tapped into the considerable talent therewithin that is constrained by a system that is largely failing us. We have cut investment, which naturally happened to stay within budget, but we have not found any other imaginative ways to date of continuing to create the infrastructure we need, be it a broadband system, water system or energy system. I refer to the systems we need to drive economic recovery.

The programme for Government is exciting because it presents an opportunity for change. It offers a vision and a direction for change in politics, the public service and the ways in which we face up to the jobs crisis and put together our budgets. No one, including me, can pretend the programme contains all the answers. It certainly does not but it does strike out bravely into new ground where we have not travelled as a society to date. We are talking about steps that will transform the way politics works not only by making the system smaller and less wasteful, but also by ensuring people who are elected shape legislation that is passed in the House and are not presented with legislation as a *fait accompli*. Members should shape the budgets and consider better ways of spending the money than those put forward by the Government. We are enabling that to happen.

We are establishing an independent fiscal council that will prevent the sorts of crass decisions that poured petrol onto the fire of the booming economy in the past for political advantage. We are setting our face against that so short-term political thinking will not dominate budgetary strategy, as we saw so often, particularly in 2001 and 2002 and again in 2007 in 2008. We are willing to change in this regard.

Most of all, we are willing to confront what most people have talked about, that is, the jobs crisis. The crisis is not just about fixing the banks and public finances in the belief that everything in the garden would be rosy thereafter. The previous Government stated this continuously. There must be a serious change of strategy behind what the Government does. The programme for Government brings that to the fore.

The programme pushes out the boundaries of economic thinking in Ireland. Fine Gael is the party that has been putting forward the idea of a holding company for our really strong State companies that could drive investment in those assets. It could create stronger and more efficient companies delivering to high standards, and it could improve competitiveness. Usually one would say the notions of holding companies and developing our State come from parties

of the left but Fine Gael recognises that the State now has considerable responsibilities. We need to drive the strategy in this regard. That is what is behind the thinking of newERA. It is tapping into resources.

The programme states we will have to sell some of the assets that we have owned. If we want to create the assets of the future that are critical to our mission of achieving recovery, bearing in mind that we cannot borrow, we must ask whether we can let go of some of the assets we own. I refer to assets that could thrive just as well in the private sector. The State would get the opportunity to drive what it wants to drive, thus returning to being a source of dynamism. Dynamism was once a feature of the State, particularly in the post-war years under Lemass and Whitaker. It was a matter of grabbing some of the things that have gone wrong by the collar and changing them.

Fine Gael is also considering what it can do about the great obstacle to business represented by the lack of access to finance. We are considering this in a whole range of areas. We are going to offer a loan guarantee in respect of banks lending to small businesses such that banks that have become very risk-averse and focused on their own survival, and which do not look at all at the needs of businesses, can turn their faces again to those needs. We are not content only with that. We are also saying there should be special funds for micro-enterprises and start-up companies.

Let us be honest: the future of this country will be secured through the ingenuity and creativity of people at home, the sorts of entrepreneurs I met yesterday from the constituency of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Deenihan. They were from Altobridge, a company that makes use of research in UCC and the Institute of Technology Tralee. It is bringing venture money from Intel, a company which is almost a family name in Ireland. It is an asset. Altobridge is investing in modern technology to provide a service in Malaysia and Indonesia. When one sees a Kerry company accessing such markets, one must ask what better company one could have. This is what we can do. We must unleash this ingenuity at home. Micro-enterprise funds are very important in this regard. We are committed to a new bank that would open up opportunities in this area.

We recognise there are new sectors that we can revitalise. The digital gaming sector, for example, is growing at tremendous speed. Although the sector is dynamic, we have all the ingredients to build on that strength.

The programme for Government is not backward looking, nor does it forget the need to create employment. It is not a question of middle-aged people in their grey suits because the programme considers how we can shake up the way we run the State.

While we may have our political differences, we are all in this together, regardless of the side of the House we are on. We need to avoid the sort of thinking that stipulates every change is a zero-sum game, such that if one person is giving a bit someone else must concede. Too much of the debate, be it the political debate or that on public service reform or economic change, is viewed as a zero-sum game. It is regarded as a question of them or us. We must stop thinking in this manner.

I am old enough and long enough in the House to know people will lampoon the Government but I ask that we not always deal in caricatures of one another. I have listened to Sinn Féin talking and believe it is developing a caricature of Fine Gael which it wants to batter down. Fine Gael is a party that is churning out new ideas. We need to engage with one another on those ideas. Sinn Féin and the Independents are bringing ideas to the table. The Government side has 113 people bristling with ideas. Many of them are newly elected and want to shape the future of this country.

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

I hope the debate can be of greater maturity. I hope that as we offer more opportunities for Members to engage constructively, we use them to the benefit of the country.

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan: Given that I have been allowed only three minutes, I will limit my remarks to two issues, the first of which is unemployment. I noticed in the Taoiseach’s speech that 208,000 people are set to leave this country in the next two years. That is an interesting fact. I did not believe anything was “set” and that the Government was in favour of change in this regard. According to the Taoiseach’s speech, “We are again facing the prospect of forced emigration with an estimated 2,000 people set to leave every week over the next two years”. If the Taoiseach’s remarks did not end there, I might have had some hope. I had hoped the speech would indicate a figure acceptable to the Government, such as 100,000 or 50,000, but it stated we are set to lose 208,000 people. That is awfully sad. I hope the Government will not put up with that and accept it as a fact. Such emigration has happened before and should not happen again. While the Government did not cause the problem over the past few years, it is now its job to do something about it.

It was heartening to hear the Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, say he will listen to good ideas that the Opposition has. I have ideas on how we can make tourism thrive in Roscommon-Leitrim South. I also have ideas on how, if we reach one third of the tourism levels reached in Galway, we can create 3,000 new jobs in the next five years. I hope over the course of my five years in Dáil Éireann I will be listened to and that some of these ideas will be implemented.

The second matter I wish to raise is turf and I will discuss it in a positive sense as it is great news to see it in the programme for Government. I will not call it “peat” because I do not know anyone who has cut turf who calls it “peat”. We will be allowed an exemption for domestic turf cutting on the 75 national heritage area sites subject to the introduction of an agreed national code of environmental practices. This is excellent news and I hope it will be followed through. As PRO of the Turf Cutters and Contractors Association and as a Deputy for Roscommon-South Leitrim I will be delighted to work with the Government on this.

An independent mediation committee will be established for all relevant stakeholders to deal with the 55 special areas of conservation. Since last April, I and many of my neighbours have been criminalised for cutting turf in Cloonchambers bog. I am delighted we are being listened to and I hope this independent mediation organisation will work better than the inter-departmental committee on the cessation of turf cutting did. It gave us a kick in the teeth, as it told us it would listen to us and would cut us some slack and that it would report back to the main stakeholders but, at the end of it all, we read in the newspapers that we were to be criminalised for cutting turf.

There will also be independent mediation to resolve the outstanding issues associated with turf cutting on blanket bogs. Anyone who thinks the current situation on blanket bogs means people will be allowed to cut turf should realise that using a hopper machine, which will be the only machine allowed on blanket bogs, is not an efficient or environmentally friendly way of cutting turf. Some use of the sausage machine must be allowed. I do not agree with its use on raised bogs but I believe it is essential on blanket bogs.

I am delighted that the Turf Cutters and Contractors Association has been listened to and that as a result, turf has been included in the programme for Government. I would also like to thank Deputy Dennis Naughten, who has worked very hard on this. It gives me hope that all politicians are not the same. I will be delighted to work with him in the future. As I stated on the first day, I hope things go well for the Government because if things go well for the Government they go well for the entire country and this is essential.

Deputy Seamus Healy: We have heard already from various speakers that the programme for Government is about change, reform and all being in this together. However, one of the most important and significant questions to be asked about the programme for Government is who pays for the recession. As always, we find that low and middle income earners and poor people are being forced to pay for this recession, a recession they had no hand, act or part in creating.

As always, taxes are for little people. There is no distribution of the burden of tax throughout the various levels in society. Low and middle income families are being targeted in the programme for Government through the continuation of the universal social charge, which is a most regressive tax and a huge burden on ordinary families. They are being targeted through water charges and a re-introduction of rates on domestic dwellings. When the Government is finished, every family in the country will have paid approximately €1,000 per year in additional indirect taxes. This will fleece them and put them under huge pressure.

Let us compare this to what very wealthy people in the country will pay as a result of the programme for Government. This is a very wealthy country. The problem is that the distribution of wealth is probably the worst in the developed world. We had a peep in the window to this situation in the most recent edition of the *Sunday Independent*; 300 people in the country have wealth of €57 billion and we know from studies that 3,000 millionaires in the country own €120 billion in assets. We also know that the top 6% super rich in the country have assets of €250 billion. They are not being asked to pay one farthing more in the programme for Government. There is no wealth tax. Some years ago, a Fine Gael Minister introduced a wealth tax which was abolished by Fianna Fáil. Now, we have low and middle income families being fleeced while people who are extremely wealthy and who have huge assets are not being asked to pay a red cent to get us out of the recession. Many of these very people were involved in creating this recession. It is about time that we had a little patriotism from the super wealthy in the country.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Deputy Mick Wallace has two and a half minutes because Deputy Ming Flanagan took up more time than was allocated to him.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Thank you, Ming.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: You can have some of my time on the next occasion.

Deputy Mick Wallace: It was very unfair of Ming.

On the subject of reform, I see there is mention of a constitutional convention which is a great idea. I am delighted to hear that Deputy Richard Bruton thinks we should be engaged on it and this is very important. There has to be serious engagement with the citizens of the country on any type of constitutional change. In the past, much lip-service has been paid to constitutional change but too often it has amounted to very little. There must be wider involvement. If it is to be real and serious we must engage the ordinary people. The people have to feel they are part of this. They have to feel that they are part of the Republic and the country, and they should have a say in how things are done. Too often, they are isolated. If we involve them more it will be harder to go back on the ideas we come up with; we will not be able to fudge them and bury them as easily and they will carry more weight.

I am concerned about one matter. When the Labour Party put forward its proposals prior to the election it also mentioned a constitutional convention and used the terms "ordinary people" and "association", meaning civil society. Both of these have been dropped from the combined programme for Government. Does this mean the Labour Party is not quite as

[Deputy Mick Wallace.]

interested in engaging the ordinary citizens? It will amount to very little unless ordinary people are engaged.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): I now call on the Minister of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, who is sharing his time with the Minister of State, Deputy Dinny McGinley.

Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Before coming to this brief, I resolved that I would make the arts and culture part of our primary script. In other words, it would no longer be on the periphery, an add-on or a diversion when the serious work of Government was done but rather it would be central, an essential part of the narrative about the character of a new, different, changed and better Ireland.

Today, a country like ours survives, grows and prospers through the talent and ability of its people. Human ability, resilience and creativity are key. The more they are developed, the better we are. Modern goods and services require high value-added input. Some of it comes from technology or financial capital, both instantly transferable and internationally mobile. More of it comes from people and their ability to innovate, to think afresh, and to be creative.

The process of stimulation through music, plays, books, films and works of art and the delight in design, architecture and crafts enlarges a country's capacity to be reflective, interested, dynamic and bold. Dynamism in the arts and culture induces dynamism in a nation. When more children are given access to the possibilities of art and creativity it is not the art alone they learn but it is the art of living, of thinking for themselves and creating. They may never be an artist or a dancer or a designer but in whatever job and in whatever life, they will carry an idea that it is not just about commerce but about what makes the ordinary special and the extraordinary possible. A nation that cares about art and culture will not just be a better nation; in the early 21st century, it will be a more successful one.

I believe that the next five years can be an exciting time for the arts, culture and film sectors. The integration of these sectors with the Irish language and heritage within one Department, makes eminent sense and I look forward to seeking out and building on the self-evident synergies between these areas. With regard to the arts, culture and film, over the course of the five years, this Government will work to maintain employment levels in the sector which are currently of the order of 50,000; increase visitor numbers to the cultural institutions to 3.5 million per annum in 2011 and grow that number further next year. A 4.5 million visitor objective by 2015 is not unrealistic provided we continue to invest. The Government will grow engagement with the arts from the community up, with particular reference to young people; invest in ambitious exhibition programmes at all the national cultural institutions; settle the institutional future of the National Library of Ireland and the National Archives; pursue innovative philanthropic initiatives for the arts; build on Ireland's cultural brand through the work of my Department's Culture Ireland — especially in the United States and in the BRIC countries; finalise development work on key regional arts and culture infrastructure; refurbish the National Gallery historic wings; ensure, through current funding, that key arts and culture venues across major centres throughout the country remain in business as these are local hubs of cultural, economic and commercial activity; maximise the return from section 481 film production relief; leverage the impact of our expertise in the animation business; in the context of our jobs strategy, conclude and publish a five-year development strategy for the audiovisual production sector; maintain our competitive position on film and TV production internationally to drive inward investment opportunities, in co-operation with the IDA and the industrial development agencies; build on the success of the regional festivals' programme in 2011 as part of an integrated cultural and regional tourism drive.

I also intend to maximize the impact of the 1901 and 1911 census digitisation project in conjunction with the tourism agencies. I have committed to publish the 1926 census on line and to work to grow the roots tourism and genealogy opportunities. I also intend to invest in technology to enhance engagement with the arts and culture sectors. In the digital world our customers are 0.8 seconds away and so are our competitors. I intend to bring our cultural offering to Silicon Valley in conjunction with the Irish Film Board and Culture Ireland.

I refer to the novel partnerships across the technology platforms which are possible here and we will seek those out. I intend to address economic reputational damage through Brand Ireland cultural promotional work and to maintain a prominent international position particularly in theatre, dance and the traditional arts. I intend to reorganise and achieve economies of scale across the sector through shared services models.

I will put major emphasis on the maintenance of regional venues and touring programmes with available funding. It is also important to leverage the City of Literature and other designations and build and grow the Culture Night initiative.

As Minister with responsibility for heritage, I believe that Ireland's rich heritage can play a central role in national economic recovery. In my term of office I will have two key overarching objectives in the heritage area. These are to promote the role of Ireland's heritage in making Ireland an attractive destination for sustainable tourism and inward investment.

The Gaeltacht is part of my responsibility. Mar fhocal scoir, tá an-áthas orm go bhfuil cúram na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta orm mar Aire. Tuigeann an Rialtas an tábhacht ar leith a bhaineann leis na cúrsaí seo i saol na hÉireann agus tá sin aitheanta, go háirithe ag an Taoiseach. Táim lán sásta a bheith ag obair leis an Aire Stáit, Donncha Mac Fhionnlaioich, a bhfuil cúram ar leith tugtha dó ó thaobh na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta de. Tá suim an Aire Stait sna cúrsaí seo aitheanta le fada. Nil amhras ar bith orm ach go dtabharfaidh sé tuiscint agus saineolas speisialta leis agus é ag dul i mbun na gcúraimí seo sna blianta atá romhainn. Cuireann sé an-áthas orm a iarraidh ar an Aire Stáit labhairt leis an Teach anois.

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Tá an-áthas orm deis a bheith agam comhoibriú leis an Aire sa Roinn Ealaíon Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta. Roinn í seo a raibh baint agam féin léi ó tháinig mé isteach ins an Dáil. Is duine ón nGaelacht mé agus bhí baint agam ar feadh na mblianta leis an Roinn sin. Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam oibriú leis an Aire ins an Roinn sin ar mhaithe leis an Ghaeilge agus ar mhaithe leis an Ghaeltacht.

Mar atá ráite ins an chlár Rialtais, tá sé i gceist ag an Rialtas tacaíocht a thabhairt do Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 sa chaoi gur féidir linn na spriocanna indéanta atá luaite ins an straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm. Is cinnte gur beatha teanga í a labhairt. Sa chomhthéacs sin, cuirim fáilte roimh an ngealltanas a tugadh sa chlár Rialtais go gcuirfear leasaithe i bhfeidhm ar churaclam na Gaeilge agus ar an gcaoi ina múintear an Ghaeilge ag an mbun leibhéal agus ag an iar-bhun leibhéal sa chaoi is go mbeidh níos mó béime curtha ar chumas cainte agus ar chumas cluastuisceana. Mar iar-mhuinteoir a bhfuil tuiscint agam ar múineadh na Gaeilge, tá mé ag súil go mbeidh mé ag comhoibriú le mo chomhghleacaí, an t-Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna, an Teachta Ruairí Quinn, ar an ábhar fíor-thábhachtach seo.

Táimse ag súil an deis a thapú, mar Aire Stáit a bhfuil freagracht na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta orm, beart a dhéanamh de réir mo bhriathair chun gach uile ní a dhéanamh chun an Ghaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht a chosaint. Mar chéad chéim, tá sé i gceist agam féin agus ag an Aire dul i ndáil chomhairle leis na páirtithe leasmhara cuí sa chaoi is gur féidir leis an Roinn úr tuiscint mar is ceart a fháil ar na ceisteanna atá ag déanamh buartha do na daoine san earnáil seo.

[Deputy Dinny McGinley.]

Ar ndóigh, caithfidimid uile a bheith réalaíoch maidir leis an méid gur féidir a chur i gcrích san aeráid eacnamaíoch faoi láthair. Ní chiallaíonn sin, dar ndóigh, nach féidir linn a bheith gan dóchas ar son na Gaeilge agus beidh mé ag tnúth leis seasamh dá reir a ghlacadh i gcomhar leis na daoine agus leis na páirtithe leasmhara uile a bhfuil todhchaí agus cur chun cinn na teanga ar a gcéad chloch dá bpaidrín.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I wish to share my time with Deputy Willie O’Dea.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Barry Cowen: During the course of the recent election, when I was asked by constituents as to how I and my party might in the short term, rectify, alter, change or amend existing policies with a view to improving the lot of our people or allaying their fears and their worries and anxieties, my answer was always that neither or my party nor any other candidate could profess to offer any simple panacea, any quick-fix solution, any magic wand formula to turn our fortunes around in the short term. The four year plan was the foundation upon which our future was and is based. Any deviation from that plan, I said, was to deviate from the truth and from reality. We could not and must not prey on the minds of the weak in offering something not yet within our reach.

The subsequent election gave a very definitive result, a resounding vote for change. It resulted in a new Government with a substantial majority. Just as the new Government has a mandate, it also has responsibilities, based on the trust it sought and got from the electorate. While the electorate sent a clear message the Government must take stock of that message and the goodwill it carries. It must now inform the public of the detail of its intentions. It must strive to tell the public how it, in government, intends specifically to address the issues. It must tell the public how different it will be in government compared with when its parties were not. It must tell the public that having voted against the four year plan, it is now to support it. It must tell the public that having opposed the Finance Bill, it is now to support it. It must tell the public that having promised not to put one more cent into the banks, it will now put billions into them. It has now left the world of five-point plans and of *www.finegael.com*, the world of populist sound bites, the pre-election world. It is now at the coalface and I welcome it to the real world.

When we look over some of the proposed areas in the programme for Government, it is easy to see how confused and disorientated both parties are in this real world. Prior to the general election when we asked how vast policy differences might be resolved, the public were told not to worry about it, they would resolve them and compromise. The public were not given an eye-opener and were not allowed to adjudicate. The compromise agreed translates into climbdowns, U-turns and flip-flops. The Government has been put together under false pretences. In the area of trading and investment in the smart economy, when Fianna Fáil produced its document in September 2010, the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, said it was high on targets and short on specifics, and that it was more about an attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of a then discredited Government than getting people back to work. In the area of the sale of assets, the programme for Government states that €2 billion will be raised. What and where are the specifics in this regard? I ask the Ministers, Deputies Rabbitte, Quinn, Burton and Gilmore, what is for sale and when will it be for sale.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Deputy had the report on that.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Please, Minister.

Deputy Barry Cowen: We know where Fine Gael stands on that. It proposed selling Bord Gáis Energy, ESB power generators and ESB Customer Supply. What about Bord na Móna and Coillte? I know the value of these to my constituency, as does Deputy Corcoran Kennedy. The Labour Party does not seem to know about them.

Deputy Simon Coveney: What about them? The Deputy should not be scaremongering.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Please, Minister.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I am not scaremongering at all.

On public reform, Fine Gael and Labour have shown themselves to have misled the electorate on the issue. On 9 February the Minister, Deputy Quinn, said the Fine Gael proposals to cut 30,000 jobs public sector jobs would have a devastating impact on front line services. We have proposed reductions of 18,000, and Fine Gael demanded a further 12,000 and we have seen what it got. To put that in context, a reduction of 12,000 is the same as removing two teachers from every primary school plus one in every six nurses. Those are the Minister's words not mine. I cannot and will not commend this programme to the House.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Let me start by congratulating the Minister, Deputy Coveney, on his well deserved appointment. I also congratulate the Minister, Deputy Deenihan, and the Minister of State, Deputy McGinley, who have just left the House. I also commend my colleague, Deputy Cowen, on a very inspiring and rousing maiden speech.

During last week's debate on the formation of the Government, I raised a number of questions to which I have still not got answers. I pointed out that the tangible, measurable and quantifiable promises in the Fine Gael manifesto — a reduction of 20 Deputies, a reduction to 12 Ministers of State and the abolition of no less than 145 quangos — for some reason failed to make the transition from the Fine Gael manifesto to the programme for Government. They have disappeared into some sort of Bermuda triangle, which is regrettable and the people are entitled to know what happened to those proposals.

The Government was in no rush to send me a copy of the programme for Government, but I eventually obtained a copy and looked through it last night. I counted no less than 38 reviews in a 64-page document. Having said that, there are some aspects of the programme for Government that I welcome, particularly in the banking area. However, the proposals I have in mind, namely the decision by the Government apparently to stop the transfer of further loans to NAMA and its decision to wean the banks off emergency funding as a prelude to slowing down the deleveraging process in the disposal of non-core assets, while welcome, are of course contingent on the agreement of the EU and the ECB. If that agreement is not forthcoming, they are not worth the paper on which they are written. Nevertheless I agree with the policy. In view of the discounts being applied by NAMA to loans, the transfer of another of €16.5 billion worth of loans each of less than €20 million would have a devastating effect on the banks' balance sheets. Worse would be a fire sale of non-core assets in the short term, which would have a shattering impact on banks' balance sheets. I wish the Government the very best of luck in persuading the EU and the ECB to go along with those policies because if they do not, the policies are null and void.

I briefly looked at the section of the programme dealing with the areas of defence and justice. I was struck not by the concrete proposals, but by the lack of concrete proposals. For example, I cannot understand how we will have a stronger and more efficient Garda service if the Government will reduce the public sector by 25,000. I well recall that during the previous Fine Gael-Labour Government the number of gardaí fell and it looks like we are heading that way again. Before the general election Fine Gael proposed a very fundamental change in our policy

[Deputy Willie O'Dea.]

on neutrality, namely the discarding of the UN resolution aspect of the triple-lock. The Labour Party opposed that and claimed that it would rip up Ireland's policy of military neutrality. I searched from page 1 to page 64 of the programme for Government and found no reference to it; the conflict has not been resolved.

I wish to comment on the Government's decision to amalgamate the Departments of Justice and Law Reform and Defence. The Minister, Deputy Shatter, said he was surprised to get two big Departments and it sends out a very bad message to the people in the Army who have put their lives on the line to save some of the poorest people in the planet over many years, that their Department is now subsumed as a kind of adjunct to the Department of Justice and Law Reform.

On prison places, the programme promises to review the decision to build a new prison at Thornton Hall with a view to considering alternatives. What does that mean? I recall that the previous Fine Gael-Labour Government did not build an extra prison cell. We now have this vague commitment, despite the old guff we hear from the new Minister, Deputy Quinn, about interning gangland criminals etc. I believe this is just more empty talk from the Labour Party. Over the next four or five years, or however long the Government survives, we will see a return to the programme of non-provision of extra prison spaces, despite the tough talk.

Last week I wished the new Government well; it is in the interests of every citizen that it does well. However, I want to put it on notice that while we will be a constructive Opposition, we will be a robust Opposition and we have no notion or intention of being marginalised or going away anywhere. We will be here, will be vocal and will hold the Government to account.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I congratulate all the new Deputies, on getting elected and in particular I congratulate those who have made their maiden speeches during this debate. I remember when I did that. I should not have interrupted Deputy Cowen — if I had realised it was his first time speaking, I would not have done so. However, it is important to correct the record. Fine Gael has never suggested the sale of either Coillte or Bord na Móna and that is still the position now that we are in government.

In terms of some of the compromises that have been made from the Fine Gael general election manifesto and what is now the programme for Government, that is the nature of coalition — sometimes one needs compromise.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Fine Gael abandoned everything.

Deputy Simon Coveney: No, we certainly have not abandoned anything. If the Deputy looks at the programme for Government, he will see Fine Gael's stamp all over that document——

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I did; there are 38 reviews.

Deputy Simon Coveney: —— which is a good thing. We will be judged on our performance in terms of its delivery come the next general election. The country faces an unprecedented national economic emergency but this Government has the determination and resolve to restore the country's economic well-being, our international reputation and, most importantly, the pride of our people. The people have voted for significant change and we intend to deliver that.

The Taoiseach has already attended his first European Council meeting and defended this country's economic interest. Later this week I will attend my first EU Agriculture Council meeting and I intend to take the opportunity to set out our position in regard to the future of CAP. I will also develop contacts with colleague Ministers on which I can build a relationship

to ensure Irish interests are heard, in terms of EU policy and WTO negotiations, from an Irish agriculture, agrifood and fisheries perspective.

Our programme for Government clearly identifies that Ireland's economic recovery must be export-led and the Government is committed to taking a number of actions to achieve the maximum growth in our exports, including the long-term development of new markets. As Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food, I want to see the agrifood and marine sectors being centre stage in that economic recovery. This Government intends to grow those sectors and reposition them at the centre of Irish economic activity.

There is enormous potential for growth in the agrifood and marine sectors and I intend to ensure that potential is realised. These indigenous sectors are hugely important, not alone to the Irish economy but also to thousands of rural and coastal communities throughout the country which do not have alternative job prospects should the agricultural and fisheries industries not exist. The fisheries industry is responsible for more 150,000 jobs with an annual output of around €24 billion. The agrifood industry accounts for 10% of total exports and last year exports of the agrifood and drinks industry grew by 11% to almost €8 billion.

I intend to take an active, hands-on approach to the delivery of the Food Harvest 2020 targets, which our programme for Government intends to strongly support. I acknowledge that the document was put together by the previous Government and is a policy worth pursuing. The targets set out are challenging and ambitious, but this Government is not without ambition. We must be ambitious if we are to realise our potential.

I intend to drive the implementation process across all the sectors in the coming years and I will chair an early meeting of the high level implementation committee to focus on the three key issues of competitiveness, innovation and upskilling. The strategy very usefully outlines the challenges that face the sector and emphasises the importance of increasing technology adoption and improving competitiveness at farm level. There also must be an increased focus on the consumer and together we must develop a coherent market strategy for Irish food and drink products. Teagasc will have a key role to play in creating and disseminating new knowledge to augment the profitability and sustainability of the Irish agrifood industry.

In our programme for Government, we are committed to the development of a single brand for the Irish agrifood sector globally. Bord Bia will have an important role to play in this regard, working in co-operation with producers and small businesses to develop value-added Irish food brands. Later this week, I will go to Paris to support Bord Bia's efforts to promote Irish food and drink in France and across Europe. Bord Bia has been proactive in its promotion and development of markets for Irish produce and through its 2010 Pathways initiative it made a significant contribution to the Food Harvest 2020 process.

While Food Harvest 2020 sets out a road map for the growth of the seafood sector and includes a number of key recommendations that are critical for delivering on the substantial potential of the sector, the Government is also committed to putting in place an Irish seafood strategy to develop Ireland as a European hub for seafood processing and to grow market profile and demand for seafood products. Bord Iascaigh Mhara will be tasked with assisting Irish companies in adding value to products through innovation.

I am convinced that there is a tremendous opportunity to significantly grow our aquaculture sector and I want to see obstacles to that growth eliminated. Ireland currently produces 50,000 tonnes of aquaculture products and we are well placed to benefit from strong global demand for such products, including fin fish, such as salmon, and shellfish, which includes everything from mussels to oysters. Aquaculture is a labour intensive industry, providing high value added products. The expansion of aquaculture will result in job creation in peripheral coastal communities and will drive the expansion of the seafood processing industry through increased raw

[Deputy Simon Coveney.]

material supply. Our Government will support the development of sustainable aquaculture and fish farms by streamlining the licensing process and reducing associated bureaucracy, which to date has not been performing as it should.

My aim for the agrifood and fisheries sectors is ambitious and I want to see the commitments in the programme for Government being delivered upon. I want those sectors to take their place at the heart of domestic economic policy and as key drivers for economic growth and renewal. In an international context, I intend to defend Ireland's interests and to ensure we secure a strong, well-financed CAP and that, in the context of the review of the Common Fisheries Policy, CFP, we secure the best possible deal for Irish fishermen and the processing sector.

At this week's Agriculture Council, I very much look forward to meeting the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development and I intend to set up a meeting in the coming weeks with Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries to outline our views on CFP. Irish agriculture and the agrifood sector has always shown itself to be resilient and has overcome many challenges in the past. It has demonstrated a capacity to adapt and to innovate but it has not always received the recognition it deserves, in particular over the past decade.

In some ways it became fashionable in Ireland for the media and policy makers to focus on the so-called more exciting elements of the Irish economy, such as the smart economy, IT and construction, where there was a quick buck to be made and new companies were coming to Ireland to set up. In many ways, the importance of agriculture, the agrifood sector, fisheries and fish processing to Ireland was not prioritised as it should have been through the boom years.

We now see the importance of the sector and while Ireland is in recession, we see agriculture and the agrifood sector as providing the good news story that the economy needs at the moment, in terms of job creation and export growth. The agrifood sector is now the most important indigenous industry in terms of potential growth and job creation, even in the midst of a very difficult recessionary period.

I am privileged to be entrusted with the role of Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food. I am looking forward to ensuring that my Department provides the kind of reform and ambition that can fulfil the potential our country has as a food producer. The targets under Food Harvest 2020 are ambitious. We plan to increase output in Ireland by one third and to increase dairy and fish output by 50% by 2020. We currently employ 150,000 people in the sector and tens of thousands more jobs can be created in the next five years. I look forward to working with all my colleagues in the House, on this side and on the other side, to make those ambitions a reality.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I wish to share time with Deputy Brian Stanley.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le gach éinne — mo chlann ina measc — a thug tacaíocht dom agus do Sinn Féin san olltoghchán. Is mór an chúis ómóis é bheith mar Theachta Dála le haghaidh muintir Bhaile Átha Cliath Thiar Thuaidh. Tá athrú á lorg ag na daoine. Tá sé le feiceáil i mo phobal féin — an t-aon dáilcheantar nár thogh Teachta ar bith ó Fianna Fáil nó Fine Gael. Déanfaidh mé mo sheacht ndícheall obair a dhéanamh ar son gach éinne — ní hamháin iad siúd a thug a vóta dom. I am proud to be here today as a Sinn Féin Deputy. I thank the people of Dublin North-West for the mandate they have given me to represent them and their interests. Dublin North-West is the only constituency in the State that did not return a Fianna Fáil or a Fine Gael Deputy. That reflects the mood of

change that my team and I encountered during the election campaign. I wish also to thank my family and all those who worked tirelessly to put forward the Sinn Féin message that there is a better way.

I was elected to stand up for ordinary working people and families in areas such as Finglas, Ballymun, Santry, Whitehall and Beaumont. I will use my position here to fight for their rights, for the unemployed, the sick and the vulnerable hard-working low and middle income families who have been pushed to the brink by the last Government. In the course of the election campaign Sinn Féin set out its stall for a better and fairer society, that there is an alternative to the *status quo* and that Sinn Féin is that alternative.

In considering the motion on the programme for Government, it is frustrating to see how little detail there is in what the new Government has put forward. However, one thing is clear. One of the opening sentences in the programme is that the new Government supports the objectives of the EU-IMF programme of support. This new Government has set out very clearly that it intends to continue with the policies of savage cuts which the last Government pursued and which has served only to prolong and deepen the recession.

One of the planks of the IMF plan, as we have seen in Greece, has been the wholesale sell-off of State assets. I note with deep concern that in this programme for Government the Labour Party has, apparently, signed up to the Fine Gael plan for the sell off of non-strategic State assets. Of course, they provide no detail on what precisely are non-strategic assets. However, I have no doubt this is a plan for privatisation. The programme for Government states that they will sell off up to €2 billion worth of State assets. Given that the most recent figure I have seen for the value of public entities under review by the McCarthy group was €10 billion, that gives some indication of the scale of what we are talking about. The programme also states that the Government will be guided in regard to any sale by the McCarthy report. Given that this report which is due to be presented imminently is widely expected to recommend a large scale sell-off of State assets, that is not much of a comfort to those who make use of the services of the ESB, Bord Gáis or their employees.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): The Deputy's time——

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Professor McCarthy is also likely to recommend the sale of Coillte in whole or in part. Despite the programme's commitment to merge Coillte and Bord na Móna, the 7% of the State's land under the control of Coillte is by no means safe. There is much in the report that also highlights the departure from pre-election promises, particularly on the part on the Labour Party. There is much flowery rhetoric about education, for example. That is all well and good but there is no commitment to reverse the huge cuts in third level grants that will force thousands of students out of college and on to the dole queues or emigration.

The Labour Party has also compromised on the area of public sector redundancies which will amount to 25,000 by 2015. Each person made unemployed will cost the State at least €20,000 as well as the ancillary benefits, and nor is there any longer a commitment to these redundancies being voluntary. The reality is that in order to achieve the target, the Government will have to sack people.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Will the Deputy please conclude?

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Ba mhaith liom cúpla nóiméad eile. The reality is that the people who will be sacked are those who are supplying vital public services. The reality also is that despite the commitment to safeguard front line services, the scale of redundancies targeted and the overall reduction in key public services for budgetary reasons will mean it is inevitable that teachers and nurses will be among those who are sacrificed on the altar of austerity.

[Deputy Dessie Ellis.]

Sinn Féin opposes any attempt to downgrade the Irish language and the axing of capital projects such as metro north which will deliver real jobs and benefits to local areas. We cannot cut ourselves out of recession. We will fight any attempt to lower the standards of ordinary people. There is a better way. There is an alternative. Sinn Féin has articulated this way.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): I call Deputy Brian Stanley who has four minutes.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I am proud and humbled to be here as a Sinn Féin Deputy, elected by the people of Laois-Offaly. I am the first Sinn Féin Deputy from the constituency since Séan McGuinness was elected in 1923. I thank all those who worked on my election campaign and the electorate of Laois-Offaly who placed their trust in me to represent them. When I stood for election I stood on a platform of change, of bringing politics back to the grassroots, of standing with those people who had been abandoned by the political establishment. I will stay true to that platform and will use my experience as a community activist and councillor to represent those people who elected me to the best of my ability.

The programme for Government is extremely vague and lacking in important detail. The people have put their faith in the Fine Gael-Labour Government to deliver for them but they have fallen short at the first hurdle. The programme is patchy and vague at best and at times like this, patchiness is not adequate — people deserve real answers. Unemployment is rocketing, public services are crumbling and many people have reached crisis point. We all met them on the canvas. We need a Government that will act and, at best, it has offered some fuzzy aspirational solutions; at worst, it has offered more public sector cuts. The Government cannot take 25,000 out of the public service without causing huge damage. In my constituency of Laois-Offaly, it will cause massive damage. We will have more redundancies and the selling off of valuable State assets. The Government is well on the road to becoming a coalition for cuts.

We have been promised political reform but the reality is that there cannot be any reform simply by changing the faces around the table. Real reform starts with radical new policies. I have read the programme for Government and there is nothing radical in it and nothing new in the Fine Gael and Labour policies. In fact, they offer nothing different from that offered by the previous Fianna Fáil Government.

Politicians need to work for the people and not for the elite. The cosy relationship between politicians, bankers and developers, unfortunately, is still alive. There is the scandal of ghost and unfinished estates which are plain to see throughout the State. In my constituency of Laois-Offaly there are estates such as Glenall in Borris-in-Ossry where only six out of 91 houses have been finished and occupied. The six families have no proper sewerage system and cannot get the deeds of the houses they bought some years ago. At the same time there are thousands of people on housing waiting lists in constituencies such as Laois-Offaly. It is simply not acceptable that these houses are lying empty. What is equally unacceptable——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): The Deputy must conclude.

Deputy Brian Stanley: As this is my maiden speech please give me a chance. I had a hard job getting here. What is equally unacceptable is the fact that local authorities are being told by central government to rent houses for social housing from the same property developers who created the crisis in the first place. Half-finished estates must be completed and occupied. This is an opportunity to provide work for the thousands of unemployed tradesmen and tradeswomen and building workers throughout the State. If these estates were completed, some of the vacant units in them and the unfinished housing units could be used for social and affordable housing at knockdown rates. The residents who live in these half-finished estates would

benefit if whole estates were completed properly. I do not want to hear from the Government benches and the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Phil Hogan, that they cannot intervene in this matter as it involves private estates or is a market issue. The bondholders were also a private matter but that did not stop the previous Government or the current Government putting in billions of euro to make good their losses. Unfortunately, this Government is following the same path. Ministers cannot have any inhibitions about intervening in the housing market and putting in place a proper action plan to deal with the unfinished estates. The new Government must act to address this scandal. Unfortunately, there are only three lines in the programme for Government which shows that this issue is not being given the attention it needs. We need the Government to show it is serious about the issues of housing and employment. We cannot allow the *status quo* to be retained. The banks have been bailed out. It is now time for the people to receive their bailout. We need to get people housed and to get Ireland back to work.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I wish to share my time with Deputy Ciaran Lynch. I compliment Deputies Ellis and Stanley on their maiden speeches which were well made.

I am happy to address the House as Minister of State with responsibility for housing and planning. Housing and planning have always been two critical areas of public policy in Ireland but their importance has never been greater than it is now, facing as we do the greatest challenges we have had to face as an independent State. That is why getting these areas right, getting them in order and properly tackling the legacy problems which still grip our economy, communities and our people will be the task I set myself during my time as Minister of State. The programme for Government provides me with a strong mandate to do so.

In the planning area, I will develop and implement initiatives over the coming months to refocus around a number of new priorities, including more co-ordinated national, regional and local planning to achieve better developments that support local communities, making provision for transport, schools, local amenities and avoidance of flood risk more central to the planning process and delivering higher quality in our physical surroundings.

As Deputy Stanley said, unfinished estates are a significant issue and in planning for the future, we must apply the hard lessons learned from the past. It is unacceptable that people who bought homes in good faith should now be left to endure the substandard living conditions of our unfinished estates. Most serious of all are those developments where unfinished building works are not properly secured meaning that local children looking for somewhere to play can gain access to hazardous and sometimes dangerous places. The Government has a strong resolve to deal coherently with unfinished estates. Our approach will involve all the key stakeholders, including the more transparent and proactive NAMA which the Minister for Finance will deliver. I will focus on a number of key actions which will ensure all parties deliver on their responsibilities and will restore confidence in our capacity to deal with unfinished housing developments and confidence in the very concept of a sustainable urban development.

Delivering new social housing is also a priority. As somebody who started off living in a council house, I know how important it is. Too many houses were for sale in some areas of the country. Social housing need, already at a record high back in 2008, is still rising. The funding of social housing has suffered significantly harsh treatment over the past number of budgets. As a matter of urgency, we must now develop new approaches to the funding and delivery of social housing. This will see a greater focus on delivering permanent new social housing stock while reducing long-term dependence on rent supplement.

I want to reinvigorate local authorities but I also want to see the voluntary and co-operative housing sector become a more equal partner. I recognise that if I, as Minister of State, am to

[Deputy Willie Penrose.]

demand more of the sector, I must provide it with the proper support framework. The proper regulation of the social housing sector as a whole will, therefore, be a key focus in the years ahead.

In regard to arrears, there are many households outside the social housing sphere which are barely hanging on to their homes which they have worked long and hard to buy and to keep. The Government will not stand by and see these young people and families thrown to the wolves of repossession. This Government will put in place credible, meaningful and compassionate measures to help families struggling every month to keep a roof over their heads. Our banking system depends on the State and the taxpayer for its very survival. This gives us considerable leverage on the banking system and we must not be coy about using that leverage where it is done with the public interest at heart.

The private rented sector also needs to be focused on. While the builders and the banks partied and peddled an obsession with home ownership, the private rented sector was left in the halfpenny place. We now see where the obsession with home ownership has left us. We now see what happens when buying a house becomes investment and yield rather than hearth and home. This Government must shift that focus. We will ensure mortgage lending is done prudently and soundly in the future. We will deliver choices across tenures and make the rented sector a stable and attractive housing option for all. As part of that, one of my immediate objectives will be to address the issue of the illegal retention of deposits by some landlords.

Long-term homelessness cannot be tolerated in the Ireland of today and it is our intention to end it. We cannot nor will we tolerate the need for anyone to sleep rough. The programme for Government sets out a range of new initiatives to be brought forward to alleviate homelessness where it has occurred and to prevent its further occurrence.

Significant issues arose at the heart of our banking system giving rise to legacy problems in the housing and planning sectors that are critical patients at the heart of our struggling economy. The patients include half built unwanted houses, completed but unsold houses, young families crippled by arrears and trapped by negative equity and a private rental sector that has been largely ignored in favour of a slavish devotion to home ownership at all costs. They are our enemies. Some of the medicine will be tough. Difficult decisions will need to be taken but I pledge to this House and beyond that those decisions will be taken fairly and in the best interests of the many and not the privileged few.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: If we needed a reminder of the scale of the task which lies ahead for this Government, it was the increase in the number unemployed and the decrease in the number of people in jobs as outlined in today's quarterly national household survey for 2010 which shows that almost 65,000 fewer people are in work. These figures highlight the urgency of implementing the various job creation measures contained in the Labour Party and Fine Gael programme for Government presented to, and being debated by, this House.

Job creation must be at the root of tackling all the major financial and economic problems which have hit this country such as emigration, families falling into mortgage arrears and Fianna Fáil's massive Exchequer deficit. The programme for Government comes down to the issue of jobs and puts forward radical proposals in this area such as providing resources for an additional 15,000 places in training, work experience and educational opportunities for those who are out of work. We stated that we will reverse the cut in the minimum wage, a measure which has not been welcomed by any Member of the Opposition today, despite the rhetoric we heard during the election campaign. We will also accelerate capital works which are shovel ready and labour intensive, including schools and other building programmes.

Our economic revival must be export driven. The new Government will leave no stone unturned in its effort to achieve the maximum growth in exports, including the long-term development of new markets such as China, India and other emerging markets. I look forward to the establishment of an export trade council to strengthen co-operation and other measures across all key Departments and agencies involved in promotion and development of trade and exports.

This Government will not look for a honeymoon period. The task ahead of us is far too important and the measures we must take are far too immediate. If we were to look for a honeymoon period, it would be that of a black widow spider because it would be over that quickly.

Our task is to get Ireland into the recovery position and to do that through a programme for national recovery based on job creation, reform and fairness. The programme for national recovery shows clearly that job creation is our first priority. The promise to legislate to end upward only rent reviews for existing leases is a very welcome one in the programme for Government. It is something for which I have been campaigning for a number of years and I welcome its inclusion in the programme for Government.

The retail sector, which employs more than 300,000 people, has suffered dramatically as a result of Fianna Fáil policy in Government. It saw its revenues plunge after the dramatic collapse of the property bubble and it now finds itself trapped in boom time rents with recession incomes. The abolition of upward only rent reviews for existing leases and for businesses is a welcome and a job protecting measure.

The programme for Government will also bring forward measures to ensure families remain in their homes. We will ensure families which are doing everything possible to ensure the roofs are not taken from over their heads and people who are doing their best to meet their financial obligations are protected by immediately putting in place a two-year moratorium and by restructuring and rebalancing the relationship between lender and borrowers. We will convert the Money Advice and Budgeting Service into a personal debt management agency and we will restructure the legislation and put a framework in place to ensure homeowners do not suffer during the duration of the recession and find themselves out on the street.

The public knows that we are in extraordinary times and that extraordinary measures are required. They know that it will take a long number of years for this country to get itself back on its feet. They will have patience, but it will be a limited patience based on there being a plan in place. That is our job in government, to give people confidence and to show that we have a plan in place.

The Opposition has its role to play as well. The political reforms that we lay out allow the Opposition to do that. However, what is critical is that the Opposition needs to be more than merely a coalition and consensus for criticism.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should conclude.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: It needs to be an Opposition that contributes to the operation of this House, not one that is merely that consensus for criticism and other negative measures. They have a job to do. They will be facilitated with reforms in this House that will allow them to do it robustly. I welcome it because it is required.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: To conclude,——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Lynch is over his time.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: I will conclude on this point. The days——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is over his time. I am sorry.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: ——of instant and immediate gratification——

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, he is taking somebody else's time at this stage.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: ——are over and this House faces into five years of a long programme to ensure that this country gets itself back to work.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan, who perhaps would let us know with whom she is sharing time.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I am sharing time with Deputies Clare Daly and Mattie McGrath.

While this is called a programme for Government, it is more than that because what is needed is a programme for the survival of this country. I read a section on the statement of common purpose and noted the point that the public demanded change. No doubt there is a great desire for change, but it must be real and meaningful in the way that we operate at national level, local authority level and right throughout society.

There are parts of the programme that I welcome and that I want to highlight. For example, it states that the policy of blank cheques for banks will be ended and that those directors who presided over failed lending practices will be replaced. I await those developments. I welcome that major capital projects will be subjected to proper cost-benefit analysis because there have been far too many overspends on such projects. I have concerns that we will not even debate the corporate tax rate and that we are becoming a tax haven for foreign companies.

On the proposed referenda, I welcome the ones on the salaries of judges and children's rights and other aspects of constitutional reform, but I wonder exactly how local government reform and the commitment to the fundamental reorganisation of local governance structures will pan out so that local communities will have greater power in particular aspects.

There is much that is aspirational, particularly when it comes to health. However, there are parts that I welcome, particularly the ring-fencing of funding for additional psychologists and counsellors for community mental health teams in the area of early intervention, particularly those at risk of suicide, and also to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. I welcome that there will be better care for older people in the community and in residential settings, and I hope to see it. I also welcome that unsuitable psychiatric institutions will be closed. I am also pleased that there is a possibility of further compensation for the victims of thalidomide.

As a former teacher, I would have liked more acknowledgement of the good practice that is going on in so many schools, whether in educational disadvantage, children with special needs, anti-bullying or literacy. I make a special plea for community education and the need for a new funding model.

The section on homelessness — I glad it was referred to here — is aspirational and I wonder about the funding of resources to achieve it. Having chaired the North Inner City Drugs Task Force, I looked at that section. I am glad there is a commitment to the national drug and alcohol strategy and plans to strengthen the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau, but I ask that a portion received from drug seizures would be ring-fenced for those communities most affected by drugs.

Like many others, I am looking for action. I hope it will not be like the U-turn on stag hunting that seems to be proposed. The main action I would like to see is that people are

served before banks and that bank debt is not public debt, with a greater emphasis on social inclusion and equality.

Deputy Clare Daly: The programme for Government that we are discussing shows quite clearly that while the election results returned one of the biggest changes in political representation, in fact, it yielded one of the most negligible changes in policy. It is somewhat ironic to sit here and listen to Fianna Fáil ochón the broken promises of Fine Gael and Labour when, in effect, those broken promises are the policies Fianna Fáil and the Greens began.

Far from being a programme of national recovery, the programme for Government is a programme of national austerity. It is a recipe for more of the same. Undoubtedly, it will have a devastating impact on the living standards of ordinary people.

I want to deal briefly with the issue of jobs. Apart from the human cost for those who are unemployed and the loss of potential and talent of our people, there is also the impact on the economy. Unless the jobs crisis is dealt with, there cannot be any recovery. Just talking about job creation does not deliver any jobs. There really is no meat on the bones of the Government's proposal. There is a 100 day promise, but it certainly does not give young people in this country the hope referred to by the Taoiseach earlier today.

In contradiction of the previous Deputy on the Government side, the only figure on jobs given in this programme is one for job reduction. The loss of 25,000 jobs in the public sector will have a significant impact on public services which have already lost 17,000 jobs in SNAs, fire fighters, teaching staff, etc., not to mind the cost to the Exchequer.

It is simply a total contradiction in the Government's proposals. It can call them radical, but there really is no meat there to substantiate that. What it has is one Minister's Department commissioned to out to carry out the slaughter in the public sector, which, as has been said, will not be voluntary because the previous Government could not even get that in the HSE and the Government certainly will not get it there. Training places, and 60,000 internships on which there are no details on whether there will be any funding to back that up, is not a replacement of those jobs.

There is a fundamental flaw in the strategy in that it completely relies on the private sector to solve the crisis of 500,000 unemployed people. It is simply not going to happen. Tinkering with PRSI and VAT will merely scratch the surface. Incidentally, the Government will forfeit €1.8 billion in revenue by doing that, but it does not seem to be mentioned in the programme.

The reality is that the private sector has shown itself unwilling to invest because its profit margins are not guaranteed. In fact, there has been a strike of capital in this country over the past number of years. The only way the issues can be addressed is by a State-led programme. Instead the Government is doing the opposite by selling off State assets and putting money into the banks rather than investing in a radical jobs programme. Quite simply, that is a recipe for more of the same and for continued job losses, not job creation.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I support the motion. It is an amalgamated programme between Fine Gael and Labour, which together got 56% of the vote. I understand there must be give and take in any coalition, but the national well-being and the very future of Ireland is at stake here. We need to transform radically the system of governance. This is why I voted for the Taoiseach last week and, indeed, for the Cabinet also.

The economic policies must change. We must renegotiate the so-called EU-IMF bailout and I am very supportive of the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance's stance in Europe. I am hopeful that there are some signs, however slim and double-edged they might be with their threats to the corporation tax rate, that we will stand firm. They have a mandate to renegotiate

[Deputy Mattie McGrath.]

this unfair and penal so-called loan system which is coercing us to invest much of our badly needed pension funds in failed banks.

We need a fresh approach that clearly shows step by step vigorous energetic leadership, and which sends out imaginative and positive rays of hope to our people. I believe we have industrious people who are interested in the future of our country who are ready, willing and able. They are crying out for leadership to show them the way to bring this country back to its proud place, give employment to people, support their families and encourage young business entrepreneurs to go out there and develop jobs not only for themselves, but for others.

The system of governance we have had in recent decades is shattered. It needs a radical overhaul and I welcome the constitutional changes proposed in the programme. Among other issues, I refer to the proposed referendum regarding judges' salaries. On reform of Seanad Éireann, I do not know whether the Government will live up to the commitments to put it to the people that it be abolished. It certainly needs to be reformed radically. I believe the permanent Government must be tackled. I am delighted there is a commitment to replace FÁS. Although the organisation has done much good work, some of its senior officials have done tremendous damage to its name. FÁS has many thousands of good employees and participants on the ground who are bedevilled by its baggage as a body. It needs a new name and a new direction. I think it is appropriate to rename it the national employment and entitlements service and to provide it is fully managed by a single Department. The Department of Social Protection is the appropriate Department in this context.

I would like to conclude by speaking about public service reform. Our system of government must modernise, adapt to new financial circumstances and begin to deliver better services with fewer resources. We need to introduce an ambitious programme of reform. It should be the most ambitious such programme since the inception of the State. We have no choice other than to make the system smaller and more efficient, for example, by reducing employee numbers and by changing the way the work is done. Rather than reducing front line services, we should make reductions at the top and throughout the layers of bureaucracy that have crept in over the years. Such a system has been cosseted, encouraged and embraced by senior people. Front line staff need to be given more power to make decisions. We badly need to bring new personnel with new ideas into the public service from the outside. Although there are many good people in the service, I suggest that a change is as good as a rest. We need to ensure officials have the skills to implement rigorous policy ideas across all Departments. I welcome the commitment to reverse the cut in the minimum wage, which I voted against. I assure the Deputies on the other side of the House that I welcome this measure.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Brian Hayes): I would like to share my time with Deputy Mathews.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Brian Hayes: It is an enormous privilege to have been elected by the people of Dublin South-West to represent them in the 31st Dáil. I recognise the presence of Deputies Maloney and Crowe, who were also elected by the people of that constituency. I congratulate them on their election.

I want to work with all Deputies on all sides of the House in a spirit of co-operation and partnership. Every Member of this Assembly who was elected in the recent election has a mandate, regardless of whether they represent a party or they are in government. As a Government and as a Dáil, we need to ensure we get the best out of people as we try to provide solution-based politics. Rhetoric is fine, but the Irish people have given us all a mandate to

provide solutions to their problems. Of course the Government must be tested on the proposals it makes. Tonight's debate is an example of that. Equally, the Government must be prepared to listen not only to Opposition Deputies, but also to Deputies on this side of the House. The 113 Deputies who currently support the Government have a mandate, a role and a responsibility to ensure their voices are heard. Every single Member has such a mandate. In the last 15 years, unfortunately, we got into the habit of tolerating a kind of one-party State in which people's views are ignored, put to one side and not listened to. We need to reform this House radically as a means of ensuring every single Deputy has his or her voice heard and has a role in establishing national policy.

I support the programme for Government that has been negotiated by Fine Gael and the Labour Party. In the recent election, the Irish people gave the two parties a mandate, with a substantial majority, to run this country for the next five years. The Irish people are not stupid. They know exactly the scale of the problem that faces this country. They have given Members on the Government side an enormous majority in this House to support us as we take the difficult decisions that will be necessary over the next four or five years. It was clear in the last week of the campaign, in particular, that such a mandate was being given to both of the parties that are now in government together.

This is a period of enormous uncertainty in this country. I agree with Deputy Clare Daly that employment is the number one issue. We need to reflect on how we will get our people back to work. At a macro level, we need to ensure the tax and social welfare system encourages people to move from benefits to work and provides employers with an opportunity to create work for people. We have an opportunity to grow jobs in every sector of our economy. When I was Fine Gael's education spokesman, I worked with Deputy Naughten to produce a document explaining how 10,000 jobs could be created in the international education sector. There are similar opportunities in many other sectors. Deputy Luke Flanagan, who represents Roscommon-South Leitrim, spoke earlier about job opportunities in agri-tourism. A range of jobs can be provided in each sector as long as we get the macro context right.

I strongly believe the Irish people have given this House a mandate to fix this problem, rather than to kick it down the road for a future generation as we did in the early 1980s when we failed to confront this country's substantial deficit. Not all of the current deficit can be attributed to the enormous problems in the banking sector. We must reflect on the fiscal irresponsibility that was evident when this country spent money it did not have. Public expenditure increased from €37 billion to €62 billion over a four year period. Such a significant increase in expenditure was not sustainable. We need to return to a fiscal position in which the deficit can be reduced. The programme for Government sets a target of reducing the deficit to 3% by 2015. We cannot do that unless we are prepared to make hard decisions.

Difficult decisions are required if we are to transform Government, for example. We have to make Government smaller, starting with this House and with politics. We need to show a lead to the public sector, in particular. We cannot lecture the public sector and the public administration in this country unless we are prepared to take a lead in relation to this issue. It is crucially important that we address the issue of public sector reform. We need to ensure we get smaller and more effective government. I believe this Government will fall or succeed on the basis of its proposals for public sector reform. That is why I am delighted to have a role — working with the Ministers, Deputies Howlin and Noonan, in their respective Departments — in delivering the kind of change the people badly want. As Deputy Harris said in the House last week, the period of mourning is over. I echo that. We have to work with colleagues on all sides to ensure the people of this country are given the hope they so badly need.

Deputy Peter Mathews: I am honoured. I thank the electorate of Dublin South for entrusting me as their Dáil Deputy in this Chamber for the next five years. It is a great honour and a privilege. I am here because they have asked me to bring my skills and my experience to the Chamber during our debates and conversations about how we should address this country's problems. I thank the electorate and my family for this privilege.

Today, we have heard many differing views about what faces the country. The Taoiseach has presented the joint programme for Government that has been agreed by Fine Gael and the Labour Party. We have a huge mandate to govern the country as best we can. Essentially, there are two aspects to this problem. The EU, IMF and ECB package attempts to address the fiscal problem, which relates to the disparity between the expenditure and the revenue of the State on an annual basis. In addition, a bank debt problem has arisen because of the huge embedded losses in the banking sector, which the last Government was not willing to admit to and accept. When one does not admit to the scale of one's problem, one has no chance of mending it.

I commend and congratulate the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance on their initial presentations to their counterparties and colleagues in Europe. They set off and actually did something on behalf of this country. They presented the picture truthfully and well for its first presentation. In the starting days of the new Government's relationship with Europe, the Minister, Deputy Noonan, was right to make the point that there is a doubt about the sustainability of the bank debt. One can take the problem further. As earlier speakers said, there is no point in looking for a magic wand solution within two or three hours, or two or three days. There is a process and although it is not long drawn out, one has to make one's introductions and the discussion has to be positioned properly. I congratulate the Minister, Deputy Noonan, and the Taoiseach on the way they have done that. As the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes, noted, it is up to all of us to join in the collective work of bringing our country out of the fog and the swamp. The important starting point is recognising those bank losses because they happened in a way that was exacerbated by the regulatory and supervisory authorities in Europe as well as in this country. When a car accident occurs, the damages are shared out in cases of contributory negligence. That should be the starting point for our discussion with Europe. I am confident that by the end of March we will be making progress towards clarifying the picture by insisting that our European colleagues contribute.

I commend to the House an article written by Professor Karl Whelan in today's *The Irish Times* which suggests an alternative way of sharing the burden of the banks' losses. It is important that we speak truthfully to the people of Ireland and show them the language of Finance is just another way of expressing the hurt and pain they are suffering through emigration, job losses and collapsing businesses.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I wish to share time with Deputy Michael McGrath.

I congratulate the Ceannt Comhairle on his appointment and my constituency colleagues, Deputy Enda Kenny, on his appointment as Taoiseach and, Deputy Ring, on his new post as Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. It is a great honour to serve one's country, particularly during the current period. The Government has the goodwill of the House as it sets about its mission with honour and integrity. I share my county's collective pride in the Taoiseach's achievement because we are aware of the work he has put in over the years. However, despite sharing this pride, I will not shy from supervising his delivery.

Today's debate shares a common theme in the importance of job creation. While the most imminent challenge faced by the Government is the summit at the end of this month and the associated banking difficulties, job creation must be at the heart of our response. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, invited submissions from every side of

the House in regard to job creation, which the programme for Government proposes to place at the heart of the budget due to be introduced in the next 100 days. The Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes, referred to the macro budget on job creation but there is also a need to address the other factors which are choking the ability of people to create jobs in this economy. I look forward to hearing the Government's response to the review of joint labour committees and employment regulation orders and the impact these are having on people who wish to create jobs and opportunities. In the context of differing opinions on the Government parties I hope a solution will be found to the challenges we face. A range of initiatives are required, particularly on the part of the Department of Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, and the good wind that accompanies any new Government provides the opportunity to address anything that gets in the way of creating jobs so that we can offer solutions for the future. Each of us canvassed parents and grandparents who watched their loved ones emigrate again. We owe those who made huge sacrifices for their children our dedicated efforts to provide a solution.

I welcome that the Government has accorded a Cabinet position to the public service transformation agenda. I wish the Minister, Deputy Howlin, every success in his position. As a junior Minister carrying out that role, I noted several months ago that senior management see public service transformation as somebody else's business. The appointment of a senior Minister to this area should smash that argument to smithereens. However, the Minister should have no illusions about the blockages that will be put in his way. The most important job to be done in the establishment of his position is the transfer of powers from the Department of Finance and every other Department. Departments are good at using the exclusivity of their respective functions to block progress. Surely in a Civil Service which is relatively small we should be able to reach agreement on shared services. We have been unable to do so because people are protecting their own empires, with the result that the potential for efficiencies has been blocked. The central applications facility and transfer policies are applied to varying extents by different Departments. This will be addressed only on foot of an efficient transfer of power to the Minister, Deputy Howlin, whom I wish well.

This House can contribute to the programme for Government through an effective committee system. As has been demonstrated in the last Dáil, quantity does not mean quality. Let us offer quality by ensuring the committee system is properly resourced and powered so that the difficulties associated with Abbeylara and other judgments are resolved without delay. An effective committee system can be the basis of transforming ourselves.

I wish the Government well. We will be responsible in our opposition and I will offer my help to any Minister who requests it in the coming days. Equally however, I will not hold back in pointing out where the Government has failed to meet expectations.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I congratulate the Ceann Comhairle on his appointment and the Government parties on their success in the election. The new Ministers and Ministers of State are faced with a huge task and it is in all our interest that they achieve their goals for economic renewal and reform of the way politics is conducted. As this is my first contribution to the 31st Dáil, I thank the people of Cork South-Central for re-electing me. I am joined in the Chamber by my constituency colleague, Deputy Buttimer, who I wish well, and Deputy O'Brien, who represents Cork North-Central.

The Minister for Finance will probably play the key role in Government over the next several weeks. He faces substantial challenges at EU level in regard to fiscal matters and the bank stress tests due to be conducted at the end of March. We are witnessing an all out assault at European level on our right as a sovereign nation to set our own corporate tax rate. I welcome the Government's efforts to vigorously resist this attack. The interest rate on the EU-IMF bailout needs to be renegotiated. Deposits continue to haemorrhage from Irish banks, which

[Deputy Michael McGrath.]

are increasingly relying on external support from the Central Bank and the ECB. Bond yields for other vulnerable eurozone countries continue to rise. These are serious issues which have to be addressed at European level. I wish the Minister and his team well in the negotiations which will take place next week.

I welcome that the Government has committed itself to introducing a jobs budget in its first 100 days in office. I presume it will be announced some time in June. This is not the occasion to start picking holes in the objectives the Government has set out for that budget. I look forward to having a constructive engagement in which every Deputy will be given opportunities to submit ideas.

As someone with business and commercial experience, the key issue for me is to aggressively dismantle the cost of doing business in this country. There are major barriers to people who want to set up in business and to viable businesses that want to survive in our economy. The Government will need to set as its key objective in the jobs budget a reduction in the cost of doing business. The CSO figure we saw today was a sobering one if we needed any reminding of the challenge that lies ahead in tackling the scourge of unemployment that is affecting every single town and village in the country.

On the fiscal and budgetary side, major challenges also lie ahead for the new Government. It has committed to the €6 billion adjustment which has already been enacted for 2011, despite opposing it trenchantly when its members were on this side of the House, but that is politics. It has also committed to a budget for next year which is in line with the national recovery plan and the overall target of €3.6 billion. That is where its commitment ends, apart from a general objective of achieving a deficit of 3% by 2015. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, said during the election campaign that the Labour Party's plan to kick the can down the road to 2016 would have added an extra €5 billion to the national debt, but it appears that Fine Gael has gone some way towards kicking the can down the road and is presumably adding €2 billion or €2.5 billion to the national debt by not sticking to the 2014 target that was set out in the national recovery plan. We have no details whatsoever about the budgetary deficit for 2013, 2014 and 2015. I agree with the Taoiseach's comment today that it should be the objective to go back to the bond markets so that we can access funding on the international money markets, but what chance do we have of achieving credibility and convincing those markets of our bona fides in fiscal management if we are not willing to give any details except an overall figure for 2012 and no details whatsoever for any of the subsequent years?

I look forward to engaging in far more detail on all of these issues. There is much goodwill towards the new Government, which deserves a fair wind behind it. I wish it well in the major task it has ahead, and I and my party will certainly work constructively to support its objectives.

An Ceann Comhairle: The next speaker is Deputy Kieran O'Donnell. I must point out that I am obliged by an order of the Dáil to call on the Minister at 7.20 p.m., so I ask people who are dividing time to be conscious of that.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I wish to share my time with Deputies Buttimer and Donohoe.

I rise to endorse and support the programme for Government. In the limited time I have, I will discuss three main areas.

If we do not deal with the banking crisis, we cannot move forward as an economy. I remember when the bank guarantee scheme was introduced by the then Government in September 2008. It was introduced on the premise of getting credit flowing to the SME sector, the lifeblood

of the economy, but that has not happened. Now, Europe must realise that this issue affects an area far wider than Ireland, and what is good for Ireland is good for Europe. Our corporation tax of 12.5% is a cornerstone of our specific economic platform. Europe must realise that there are industries that come to Ireland because of the 12.5% corporation tax rate, and if it were not for that these companies might not come to Europe at all, resulting in an overall loss. That is a bottom-line issue for us as a Government. I commend the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, and the Taoiseach on their deliberations with Europe to date. We must set out a platform for considering the issue of banking in a wider context.

I wish to discuss the issue of disabilities with reference to the programme for Government. I welcome the fact that a review will be carried out with regard to the dedication of a proportion of public spending to a personal budget model so that people with disabilities and their families have the flexibility to make the choices that best suit their needs. On the issue of respite services in my constituency of Limerick, we must ring-fence funding from the Department specifically for people with disabilities.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputies have three minutes and 45 seconds to divide between them.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I thank the people of Dublin Central for their support and I look forward to working with all my colleagues to benefit the country and the constituency. As I stand in front of the Dáil I wonder what people had in mind when they went to vote for us. There were two things they wanted to achieve — diversity and stability — and by casting their votes they have achieved both. They have a diverse Dáil with new faces and new parties, and a stable Government with a large majority. What we need to do now is to reflect on what we want the Dáil and the Government to do.

I suggest that the Government should have two urgent priorities, on which I am glad to see it is now following up. The first is to clarify the cost and scale of our banking crisis. Crucially, we must break the link between the sovereign and that cost, which our Government is already beginning to do. Second, we must show that the Government is capable of creating an environment within which jobs can be created. For too long, people have seen the Government as something that sucks the lifeblood from an economy. It now has an opportunity to show it can inject new blood and vitality into the economy. The jobs budget that the Government will propose within the next 100 days provides a welcome opportunity to do that.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Tréaslaím leis an Rialtas nua agus leis an Taoiseach nua. Cuirim fáilte roimh an chlár Rialtais. Tús nua atá i gceist do mhuintir na hÉireann agus, go mórmhór, don tír seo. Léiríonn an clár go bhfuil tréimhse téarnamh i ndán d'Éirinn.

This is a Government of renewal. The programme for Government commits to job creation. The opening preamble to the programme states that there is not a moment to be lost, and it is important that we work together to get our country back to work. I commend the programme for Government. This is a Government of partnership and renewal, and I challenge the Members opposite to join us and work with us to rebuild Ireland. The task ahead of the Government is to restore confidence among our people, to restore credibility in the Oireachtas and in the political class and, more importantly, to get our people back to work. I thank the people of Cork South Central for the trust they have given to me and to Fine Gael and the Labour Party to govern for the next five years.

The Government must rebuild the relationship between the people and the body politic. It can only do that, as it has done today, by building on the reform elements of the programme

[Deputy Jerry Buttimer.]

for Government and by delivering on its promises. This morning we saw the Government's intentions with regard to ministerial transport, staff and resources. It is a question of leadership, which we have not had for the past decade. The biggest challenges we face are ending unemployment and emigration, creating hope among our people, driving away negative equity and dealing with other mortgage-related issues. Today our nation and our people expect us to deliver on our promises, to bring about change and to drive reform. That is our fundamental challenge. I commend the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, and the Minister of State, Deputy Hayes, on the work they have done thus far in Government. They have shown leadership, which is what our people need.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I will focus my contribution this evening on issues relating to my Department.

The programme for Government envisages that the Department of Finance will be reconfigured as two Departments: a restructured Department of Finance, which will encompass the budget, taxation and economic division and the banking division, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which will comprise one division dealing with public service management and development and another, the sectoral policy division, dealing with matters relating to public expenditure.

There is a myth that the Department was divided because there was a failure to agree in the Government negotiations. This is not true. The decision to separate the functions in this way derives from a policy proposal developed by the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation when he was the Fine Gael spokesperson on finance in Opposition.

As Deputies will be aware, there have been many attempts at public sector reform in the past. The assessment of the Minister, Deputy Bruton, supported by Fine Gael colleagues and our new colleagues in Government, was that previous attempts failed for two reasons. First, previous processes over the last number of years were not driven by a Minister of Cabinet rank. Second, where the reform agenda was being pursued, the Minister of State or the official driving the initiative was hampered by not having the necessary levers available to deliver on that agenda.

The new organisational configuration overcomes these drawbacks. We now have a position where the Minister responsible for public sector reform is a Minister of full Cabinet rank equal in every respect to all other Cabinet colleagues. This will ensure that the reform process can be advanced and championed at government level. In addition, because the Minister's portfolio now includes the expenditure control function, he will have the necessary levers to deliver on reform. These two aspects are fundamental departures from the approach adopted by Administrations up to now and the Government is fully confident that the new arrangements will be successful. Reforming the delivery of public services, while at the same time controlling Government expenditure, taking account of the poor state of the public finances, will be a key priority for the Government. If anybody wants to check the facts, the public sector reform policy published by Deputy Richard Bruton last September has this in detail, and it was carried forward into the Fine Gael programme for Government. That is the origin of the proposal and it is a myth that it arose from any decision between Labour and Fine Gael in the discussions for the programme for Government.

The Government programme sets out the fiscal strategy that the Government intends to follow. As stated in the programme, we believe that it is appropriate in order to enhance international credibility to adhere to the aggregate adjustment as set out in the national recov-

ery plan for the combined period 2011 to 2012. This approach to our fiscal position is both prudent and practical. In the process of negotiating the programme for Government, the negotiating teams from the Government parties were briefed by officials from the Department of Finance, the Central Bank, the NTMA and others. It became evident that while the path forward for the economy can be set out with some certainty for 2011-2012, beyond that matters become somewhat more opaque. The Government will keep to the fiscal targets of 2011 and 2012 but, on the advice of the Governor of the Central Bank, we will build in a review for the later years. In this regard, three variables are relevant: the projected rate of growth; the impact of the Government's jobs and growth strategy, and the extent to which it is possible to renegotiate the EU-IMF programme of support.

In relation to the first of these, the projected rate of growth for the economy varies from forecast to forecast depending on the agency making the projection. My Department's view, based on its assessment last November, is for an annual average GDP growth rate of around 2.75% over 2011 to 2014. As part of the new EU semester which applies to all member states, the Department will submit revised forecasts to the European Commission next month, which will take account of the latest domestic and international information to hand.

On the second issue, the Government is very strongly committed to a jobs and growth strategy, and I understand this was a theme that went right through the debate today. We are also fully committed to bringing forward as a priority a budget to put the strategy into effect in the early stages of our term. We are optimistic that this will be successful and will enhance the rate of growth in the economy. The Government also hopes to secure a renegotiation of the EU-IMF programme of support including a downward revision on the interest rate which applies to the financial elements of the programme. As Deputies will be aware from events in Brussels in the last number of days, the negotiations are likely to be challenging, to say the least. The Taoiseach and I have been making the Irish case and while nothing final has been agreed, I am confident that we can achieve some improvement in the costs associated with the programme. Obviously, success in this area would ease the quantum of the adjustment required to reach our deficit target by 2015 and this is to be welcomed.

As stated in the Government programme, beyond 2015, our commitment goes further than that of the previous Administration and envisages balanced budgets and current surpluses. This is an important commitment as our colleagues in Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Austria in particular want assurances that if the European Union gets its house in order in fiscal terms it will not regress to previous undesirable practices. We share this commitment and it is something that this Government fully supports. In this regard, it is my intention to strengthen our budgetary process to best international practice and standards.

I would now like to turn to the issue of banking policy. The crisis in our banking sector remains a major problem for Ireland. The cost of the banks is perceived to threaten the sustainability of our fiscal programme. The continued reliance on Central Bank funding has eroded market confidence in our banks and their ability to access market funding. There is broad agreement that the medium-term solution for the problems of the Irish banks is to deleverage them, that is, to reduce the size in a balanced and measured way. At the same time, a fast deleveraging process cannot be undertaken because, as recognised in the programme agreement, sales of bank assets at fire sale prices would have significant consequences for our sovereign indebtedness.

The EU-IMF programme of support addresses the uncertainty over the capital needs of the banks by providing that a detailed analysis of the Irish banks under an extreme stress scenario is currently being carried out by independent consultants. As the House will be aware, I have

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

indicated that the €10 billion earmarked in the EU-IMF programme for recapitalising the banks will probably not be enough. The extent of the shortfall will be revealed by the results of the banks' stress tests, which will be published by the end of March. Any significant increase from the current estimated capital need will exacerbate market concerns regarding the sustainability of our debt position.

The EU-/IMF programme does not address the question of the medium-term funding for the Irish banking system, which remains one of the major vulnerabilities for the sector overall. The fact is that without medium-term funding at a reasonable cost, the Irish banking system will not be able to return to a stable funding position. A mechanism which addresses this issue for the banks would play a major role in restoring confidence in the sovereign and help underpin the good progress being made on the fiscal side.

In early February, my predecessor, Deputy Brian Lenihan, decided not to inject further capital into the banking system to ensure that Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and the Educational Building Society would be capitalised to a level of 12% core tier 1 capital as required under the programme agreement. The move was to have been carried out as part of the commitments under the EU-IMF programme of support. As had been made clear, the new Government will not make a decision until the results of the P-CAR exercise, that is, the stress testing to which I have referred, become available. The Government expects to have the results by the end of March.

I wish to make a general point before I close. The Government has an enormous and urgent programme of work, mandated by the people, to get the economy moving, restore confidence and support the protection and creation of jobs, a task which is even more pressing in the light of the latest labour market figures for the final quarter of 2010 which were published earlier today. We have also the task of fixing our banking system which is not going to be easy or pleasant. In addition, our political system must embrace change and our system of government must modernise and deliver better services with scarce resources. The Government for National Recovery 2011-2016 programme is aptly named. It is a comprehensive and soundly-based programme which will deliver national recovery and put us back on a sustainable path where our potential can be realised.

During the debate it was suggested that the programme is long on rhetoric but short on specifics. It was also suggested that it contains no strategy for getting people back to work. I do not accept this analysis. The programme contains many specific commitments in relation to a jobs programme and labour market policy and covering banking policy, fiscal reform and political and public sector reform. It is also the case that, as I mentioned earlier, the programme outlines the Government commitment to bring forward as a priority a budget to put a jobs and growth strategy into effect in the early stages of our term.

I listened with interest to Deputies Michael McGrath and Dara Calleary, very able young people who will be here long after I have gone, I have no doubt. When they are holding the Government to account, however, and describing the dire state of the country as they now perceive it, they should recall that what they are really talking about is the Fianna Fáil legacy, after 14 years in Government. When they are holding us to account, they just cannot go in, like the múinteoir into the classroom on the morning and clean the blackboard with a glantóir. Everything they describe, deplore wish to change and find unacceptable in Irish society is the Fianna Fáil legacy after 14 years in Government.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 103; Níl, 46.

Tá

Bannon, James.
 Barry, Tom.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burton, Joan.
 Butler, Ray.
 Buttimer, Jerry.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Byrne, Eric.
 Cannon, Ciarán.
 Carey, Joe.
 Coffey, Paudie.
 Collins, Áine.
 Conaghan, Michael.
 Conlan, Seán.
 Connaughton, Paul J.
 Conway, Ciara.
 Coonan, Noel.
 Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 Daly, Jim.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Deering, Pat.
 Doherty, Regina.
 Donohoe, Paschal.
 Dowds, Robert.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Farrell, Alan.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Anne.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Griffin, Brendan.
 Hannigan, Dominic.
 Harrington, Noel.
 Harris, Simon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Humphreys, Heather.
 Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keating, Derek.
 Keaveney, Colm.

Kehoe, Paul.
 Kelly, Alan.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 Lyons, John.
 McCarthy, Michael.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Maloney, Eamonn.
 Mathews, Peter.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mulherin, Michelle.
 Murphy, Dara.
 Murphy, Eoghan.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Phelan, Ann.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Shatter, Alan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Spring, Arthur.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Wall, Jack.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Adams, Gerry.
 Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Browne, John.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Collins, Joan.
 Collins, Niall.
 Colreavy, Michael.

Cowen, Barry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Donnelly, Stephen.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Ellis, Dessie.

Níl—*continued*

Ferris, Martin.
Flanagan, Luke ‘Ming’.
Fleming, Sean.
Healy, Seamus.
Higgins, Joe.
Kelleher, Billy.
Kitt, Michael P.
Lenihan, Brian.
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
McConalogue, Charlie.
McDonald, Mary Lou.
McGrath, Finian.
McGrath, Michael.
McGuinness, John.
McLellan, Sandra.
Martin, Micheál.

Moynihan, Michael.
Murphy, Catherine.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
Ó Cuív, Éamon.
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
O’Brien, Jonathan.
O’Dea, Willie.
O’Sullivan, Maureen.
Pringle, Thomas.
Ross, Shane.
Smith, Brendan.
Stanley, Brian.
Tóibín, Peadar.
Troy, Robert.
Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg; Níl, Deputies Seán Ó Fearghaíl and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Question declared carried.

The Dáil adjourned at 7.50 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 March 2011.