



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 02 Deireadh Fómhair 2012

Tuesday, 02 October 2012

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2 p.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Priority Questions

Credit Guarantee Scheme

43. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the loan guarantee scheme; when it will be fully operational; the reason for the delay in launching the scheme; the proposed interest rate regime; when he expects it to become operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41821/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Before the clock starts, I take the opportunity to welcome Deputy Calleary to his new role as this is the first time we have had an opportunity to speak in the House.

As Deputies will be aware, the Oireachtas enacted the Credit Guarantee Act 2012 in July 2012. I signed a commencement order on 30 August 2012. Since the Bill passed, considerable work has been undertaken to prepare the scheme to go live. This included training workshops conducted with the banks to prepare for the scheme, bilateral legal agreements negotiated with the banks to participate in the scheme, an accreditation process undertaken for banks to participate and the drafting of the necessary scheme under section 5 of the Act. Drafting of the primary legislation and the statutory instrument was complex and time consuming. Nevertheless, we have delivered on our quarterly commitments under the action plan for jobs in terms of the credit guarantee scheme.

With the consent of my colleagues the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have now made the necessary scheme under section 5 of the Act. The scheme, which is SI 343 of 2012, was laid before the Oireachtas on 13 September. Officials in my Department are working on the final arrangements in conjunction with the participating banks and the operator of the scheme, Capita Assets Services. Launch of the scheme is im-

minent.

With regard to the interest rate, this will be a matter for the individual participating banks. As required under EU State aid rules, a premium will be charged by the State to companies availing of the scheme. This has been set at 2%.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I thank the Minister for his good wishes. I look forward to working with him.

I want to raise a couple of issues arising out of the Minister's response. The Minister has missed his target in terms of the assurance given on passage of the Credit Guarantee Bill 2012 at the end of the previous Dáil term that the scheme would be up and running in quarter three. We are now into quarter four. I cannot understand the reason all of the technical issues to which the Minister referred were not addressed while the scheme was being negotiated and all the heavy lifting was under way. Issues such as training, briefing of the banks and so on should have been addressed in parallel with the legislative process. The Minister knew, given the Government majority and broad support of the House for the legislation, that it would be passed.

I would like to put this matter in context. While this training, briefing of the banks and so on is under way, the reality in terms of lending on the ground is stark, as set out by the Central Bank in its report of September last. I know there is an understanding in the Minister's Department of the seriousness of the lending situation. However, I fear this is not properly understood in the Department of Finance. They are either blind or ignorant of it. Gross "new" lending was down one third in the first quarter of 2012 versus the last quarter of 2011. Only Greece has refused more small business loans than Ireland during that quarter, with one in four businesses seeking credit in Ireland being refused in the past six months versus one in 28 in Greece. It is constantly stated that Ireland is not Greece. However, small businesses seeking loans would get an easier hearing in Greece while there is a continual faffing around here in terms of the introduction of the loan guarantee scheme.

I am incredibly concerned that it is being left to the banks to set the interest rate.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is a scandal.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Has nothing been learned that the banks are once again being put in the driving seat of a scheme put in place to guarantee the future of small businesses? I do not need to tell the Minister or his officials that small businesses around this country are creaking at the seams. There is hay rolling down streets for the want of access to finance by businesses. The Minister need not bother reading out the statistics supplied to him by the Department of Finance in regard to the Credit Review Office. Businesses on the ground are not getting finance. If they are, they are getting it at penalty rates and conditions and only in respect of the re-financing of existing working capital. As such, this lending cannot be defined as new. While people are being trained and we are negotiating interest rates, businesses are laying off people and are unable to create jobs or access whatever demand exists.

When will this money be in the pipeline and when will a business be able to apply for money from the scheme? Is it fair to say it will be quarter one of 2013 before moneys are released under this scheme?

Deputy Richard Bruton: My Department has launched two new credit schemes. While these schemes were considered by the previous Minister, he did not deliver them. My Depart-

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ment has delivered two new instruments, the microfinance scheme which was launched last week and the loan guarantee scheme which will be, as stated in my reply, launched imminently, which means within the next fortnight.

There are huge problems in terms of bank lending. We are seeking to introduce schemes to assist where the system is not working. It is important we give a break, through the provision of microfinance, to those wishing to start up a business. We are also seeking to introduce a scheme for loan guarantees. To answer Deputy Calleary's point, the banks are still those who give the loan. Where a loan has been turned down the credit guarantee scheme is applied, and in return for this guarantee we charge a 2% premium on top of the rate which would otherwise have been provided to the lending. Our scheme is to intervene where people are turned down wrongly because of a system whereby the bank rejected the risk on the grounds of collateral or because of the sector. This intervention is very targeted.

As the Deputy stated, I accept wider issues exist with regard to banking. We need to get to grips with banking and no State scheme can fill the gap whereby banks must take primary responsibility. They are who are responsible primarily to deliver credit to a small exporting economy and they must deliver it.

Job Creation

44. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he is on track to create the additional 100,000 extra jobs as committed to in the action plans for jobs. [41824/12]

Deputy Richard Bruton: Ireland suffered a fall of more than 300,000 in the number of people in employment in the three years to March 2011. The private sector experienced the brunt of the job losses, with the construction sector alone losing 150,000 jobs in the period. To reverse this trend and deliver our target of 100,000 extra jobs by 2016 will require a major transformation in the economy. The new economy which we must build will be based on enterprise, innovation and exporting. For the Government to promote this transformation will require progress on a number of fronts, including improving competitiveness, improving access to finance, embedding a jobs agenda within the necessary fiscal consolidation, taking strategic action to facilitate growth in sectors with significant potential and improving the capacity to convert good ideas into good jobs.

The action plan for jobs seeks to integrate work across the whole of Government to deliver the focus on employment. Actions are delivered in accordance with stretching timelines. The progress we have made in our first 18 months in office is encouraging, but there is a long way to go. Employment in export oriented companies supported by the agencies under my Department has increased by a net 10,000 in the past 18 months. This is in sharp contrast to losses of 45,000 among such companies in the previous three years.

It is particularly encouraging to see that exports from indigenous companies have been growing even faster than foreign direct investment and reached €15.2 billion in exports in 2011, the highest level ever.

In spite of continued job losses in more traditional sectors such as construction, and financial, insurance and administrative activities, we are seeing stabilisation in the level of private

sector employment. However, the downgrading of growth forecasts in most of our trading partners will create a particularly challenging environment for the next 12 months. We are working on the preparation of proposals for the action plan for jobs 2013. I have had a number of consultative meetings and invite submissions for consideration for the strategy.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I understand how difficult a job it is to chair these events but will it be possible to ask a supplementary question after this one? I will do my best to ensure time remains for it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): We have four minutes to deal with a supplementary questions and replies.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: In the past four years Ireland has lost more jobs *per capita* than any other western country since the great depression. This is a phenomenal indictment of the Government's policies and those of the previous Government. A total of 87,000 people emigrated last year, which is more than the number that sat the leaving certificate last year. Emigration and unemployment are the burning issues in Irish society today. The action plan for jobs was launched last February, 12 months after the Government came to power. At the time, the Taoiseach stated he would create 100,000 additional jobs. In this period alone, 33,000 jobs have been lost net so the Government is already at -133,000 given its promises. In this period, the Government has seen long-term unemployment increase from 50% to 60% and the jobs free action plan is the micro-management of the Department rather than what is needed, which is macroeconomic investment in the State.

We need significant investment if we are to tackle the major burning issue of our generation. A total of €1 billion was given to unsecured bondholders by this Government yesterday. Would that money not have been better spent on Irish people seeking jobs? What real changes will the Government make to resolve what has now been an epic failure on its part with regard to job creation?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): For the record, AIB paid the bond yesterday.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Yes, but it was money that went into the Irish State.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): Noted.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I thank the Acting Chairman for allowing the supplementary questions. I wish to make it clear that we are undertaking a massive transformation, as Deputy Tóibín pointed out. Construction collapsed and 60% of employment in this sector was wiped out. A total of 160,000 mainly male employees became unemployed. There is a huge job to create a new economy that will absorb people from the sectors that, as we know, are in decline. They grew too big and the policy that supported them was not sustainable. We know that about banking, construction and so on. So we have to create the new economy that builds the opportunities. That is what we are doing. Last year, the IDA had the best year in a decade. It created the most new jobs in a decade and had the lowest level of job losses for a very long period. International investment in Ireland has returned and we are seeing a jobs dividend from that. As I also pointed out in the reply, we have reversed the dramatic collapse that was occurring in indigenous export-oriented companies. That has been reversed and Enterprise Ireland companies are now growing employment.

We have seen a huge turnaround but I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge. It

is a huge challenge and we are working on it with determination. The merit of the action plan for jobs is that every year, every Department focuses on what changes can be made this year to make a practical contribution to the target. That is the approach we need to take and that is the one we are implementing.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): Deputy Tóibín, very briefly.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Yesterday, Spicers Bakery in Navan closed its doors. It has been in operation since 1834 and survived the Famine, the Black and Tans war, two world wars and every recession in between. It has not survived the policy of this Government. A total of 70 jobs in the bakery have been lost over the past two years. It seems that in respect of this entire sector, Spicers Bakery is symbolic of domestic enterprise in Ireland. This sector has been ignored and is suffering from Government policies.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: A total of six net jobs were created by Enterprise Ireland last year. What did the Minister do to stop Spicers Bakery closing down? If it was a foreign business operating here, one would have had a task force and a number of agencies already in place seeking to retrain those workers. This is an example of 1,400 other businesses that close down on a monthly basis in this State.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): The Minister, very briefly. He has 30 seconds.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy has got it wrong. The food sector is one of the sectors that is doing very well. If one looks at the employment numbers within Enterprise Ireland, it has grown by something like 4% in the past 12 months. This is a sector that is growing and it is building its strength on innovation, new green products and breaking open new markets. If one looks at the data, one will see that Irish food companies are winning markets in China, India and all across the globe. This is a sector that is being developed. Of course, as in any sector, some parts of it do well while some parts do not do so well. That is inevitable. I cannot stop the sort of change that has occurred. However, overall, food as a sector is doing very well.

Sick Pay Scheme

45. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will comment on the views of the Small Firms Association that proposals to pass on sick pay costs to the employer will cost jobs and restrict future recruitment; the steps he has taken to ensure that such jobs are protected [42021/12]

46. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will respond to the continuing concerns of thousands of small businesses here regarding the Minister for Social Protection's proposal for a mandatory sick pay scheme; if he has carried out an impact assessment on the effect that a mandatory sick pay scheme would have on small and medium enterprises in terms of additional costs and impact on employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter [41822/12]

Deputy Richard Bruton: I propose to take Questions Nos. 45 and 46 together.

Earlier this year, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, who has policy responsibility for the sick pay scheme, held a consultative meeting to discuss potential changes to the scheme in Ireland. The meeting was held in the context of the growing cost of, and dependence on, State-funded sickness benefit schemes and the need to examine ways to address these issues.

I have received a number of representations from employers' bodies expressing concerns that a statutory sick pay scheme could add to the costs of doing business and impact on job creation. I am also aware of the views of the Small Firms Association on the matter. These submissions have argued that absences in the private sector are already low by international standards and by comparison with the public sector. They have also pointed to the increased costs that would be involved, particularly for smaller employers. These submissions have also been sent in as part of the consultation phase.

Any formal proposals for changes in the sick pay scheme would be a matter for the budgetary process, which will be considered in due course by the Government, taking all factors into account. All Ministers are aware of the need to create a supportive enterprise environment in order to facilitate economic recovery and achieve the objective of having 100,000 more people at work by 2016, as committed to the action plan for jobs.

In our action plan for jobs, we seek to make reforms that improve the competitiveness of enterprise and I am aware of the dangers of any policy that could be seen to damage that competitiveness. Any formal proposals for changes in the sick pay scheme would be a matter for the budgetary process, which will be considered in due course by the Government, taking all factors into account.

All Ministers are aware of the need to create a supportive environment to facilitate economic recover and achieve the objective of having 100,000 more people at work by 2016, as committed to in the action plan for jobs.

Deputy Dara Calleary: We all share the Minister's wish to improve the competitive nature of enterprise. The difficulty with the proposal is that the Minister for Social Protection has form. Last year, she pushed through substantial changes to the redundancy rebate payment system. She justified this on the basis of the argument that large companies can afford to make the payment. Nobody disagrees with that but when I asked for a breakdown of the payout from the redundancy fund over a number of years, I was told by the Minister's Department that the figures were not available. Therefore, the Minister did not know how many large or small companies were involved. She made the decision completely ill prepared. I fear she will do the same again. She clearly does not like the business sector and has, since she entered her Department, produced a range of policies that are anti-business. We depend on the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, to defend the business sector against this.

The Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, referred to the SFA. Its figures suggest that 88% of businesses will be affected by cash flow changes if the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, proceeds with her plan. Some 69% of businesses said it would restrict recruitment. Despite all the talk of job creation and the action plan, the proposed measure would restrict the creation of new jobs. Some 61% of firms indicated the proposal may lead to job losses. The decision is in the Government's court and it could have a negative impact on jobs.

In case the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation would like us to believe employers

do not pay their share he should note that in 2010, employers paid €5 billion towards the social insurance fund. This is 75% of the total contribution. Does the Minister agree that €5 billion is a very substantial contribution from employers generally towards the fund, and that increasing the contribution will, as said by the SFA when reflecting the views of its members, potentially add to the unemployment problem and hamper cash flow within companies?

Deputy Richard Bruton: Deputy Calleary knows that budgetary decisions are collective decisions taken by the Cabinet. There is a consultative process and the Minister is open to consultation and giving groups the opportunity to make submissions. The groups have made submissions which, as the Deputy knows, signal that within small businesses, the absence rate is but a little over 2%. This is contrasted with the figure for the public service, where it can be 5%, on average. Clearly, there are germane issues. The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy John Burton, is concerned about the drift into long-term reliance on sickness benefits. This is an important policy issue and we need to have a debate on how the problem can be contained.

These matters will all be weighed up by the Government when making decisions. I agree with the Deputy that we can ill afford anything that would add to competitiveness problems for business. We need to remain competitive and to solve many issues. We need to see emerging from this debate a sensible set of proposals that can restore our economy and public finances.

Deputy Dara Calleary: We all agree there is a danger of dependency on illness benefit but the Minister is still dodging the question on the rate in the public sector by comparison with that in the private sector. Is the problem far greater in the former than in the latter? In asking this, I am not pitting one against the other but pointing to the nucleus of the problem.

The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton, stated the proposal will not affect those businesses with fewer than 100 employees. Can the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation confirm this? While I know he cannot comment on budgetary proposals, it seems many of his colleagues around the table were commenting on another proposal from the Department of Social Protection, namely, that on child benefit. I ask the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to indicate that he, as Minister responsible for jobs and business, will fight for the interests of businesses against a Minister who clearly does not care about the business community.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Decisions by the Cabinet will be taken collectively and we will consider the evidence. No Minister comes to the table with a view that is closed. These issues will be debated and we will take decisions in due course. This is the approach that any Government must take.

I am acutely conscious of the needs of business to remain competitive. We must promote employment and be wary of anything that would add to its cost. We need to approach this issue collectively following the assessments of the evidence that is submitted. This is the Government's approach and a collective decision will be taken.

Local Enterprise Offices

47. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will outline when the new local enterprise offices will be established and operational. [41825/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Perry) (Deputy John Perry): I congratulate Deputy Calleary on his appointment to this important area of responsibility.

Micro and small businesses are crucial parts of our economy. Ensuring more such businesses can start up, expand and export is a key pillar of our plans for jobs and growth. For this reason, the Government has decided to implement an ambitious reform of the delivery of services to small and micro businesses. This will include the development of a new small and microbusiness division within Enterprise Ireland as a centre of excellence in the provision of supports to that sector; the dissolution of the county and city enterprise boards, CEBs, and the transfer of their functions, assets and liabilities to Enterprise Ireland; the establishment of local enterprise offices, LEOs, to provide a high quality, innovative, one-stop shop support service for small businesses within local authorities and early access to services provided by national bodies; the integration of key local authority business services into the LEOs; and the promotion of a local environment in which enterprise can thrive.

Not only is it important that this restructuring be conducted as a priority, we must also ensure the new model is fit for purpose. A high level implementation working group chaired by my Department is progressing the range of issues involved, including a focus on functions, structures and staffing, all of which will form the basis of a detailed and ambitious service level agreement between Enterprise Ireland and the local authorities. A project plan is in preparation that will set out clear milestones and timelines for implementation. I intend to complete the process as rapidly as possible.

In tandem with the work of the implementation working group, my Department is engaged with the Office of the Attorney General regarding the detailed primary legislation that will be necessary to implement the new arrangements. My ambition is to give administrative effect to the new structures as soon as possible and in advance of the formal enactment of legislation. To this end, I plan to deliver a series of significant interim milestones during the transitional arrangement. These are in preparation.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The beginning of the jobs plan states that governments do not create jobs. That is certainly true of this Government. The majority of the State's employment is found in small to medium-sized enterprises, SMEs. Some 2,200 new businesses open every month. However, 1,400 businesses also close every month. Whenever we discuss this issue with the Government, it tells us that steps forward are being taken. While there have been some steps forward, for example, in terms of foreign direct investment, there have also been major steps back. On balance, the latter worsen the State's unemployment situation.

Last week, the Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation received evidence from the Irish Exporters Association, IEA. Like us, it has seen a vacuum develop within the supports for SMEs. The city and county enterprise boards, CEBs have been in a state of chaotic limbo since Mr. Batt O'Keeffe was the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. The evidence to the committee suggests this situation is costing jobs.

I do not mean this personally, but there is a vacuum in this area because there is a vacuum in the Department. Ineptitude in the Minister of State's small enterprise section is allowing a critical sector that is heavily dependent on job creation to flounder. We are dealing not only with significant economic challenges, but also with a lack of leadership on the part of the Minister of State. The Government has been in power for nearly 18 months, yet he was unable to provide

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a date for when the new regime would be in place. Will he show some leadership today and indicate the date on which the regime will start?

Deputy John Perry: Much work has been done and the role of county enterprise boards is still very effective. I attended the national ploughing championships last week and I noted a certain number of start-up businesses getting on with their enterprise. There have been closures but there are also some very high-potential start-up businesses. There has been an establishment of the first-time exports division and the microfinance fund will be rolled out through county and city enterprise boards. This is about the evaluation and management of enterprise in every sense and potential in the market.

It is important to note that the new interim milestones relate to the determination of local enterprise offices and accommodation plans; this is taken with enterprise officers on the ground, the centralisation of services and roll-out of services for small companies. The backbone of the economy is made up of small enterprises, and these take in manufacturing as well as high-potential start-up companies. All these are doing exceptionally well. I have been all over the country meeting the people in all these companies. Enterprise Ireland has a very focused working plan and this was not a simple shift from county and city enterprise boards. The working group has formulated a strong level service agreement that will establish a one-stop shop for business.

With regard to the timeframe, the legislation has been formulated, as I noted in the initial reply, and it will go to the Attorney General. I expect the local enterprise offices will be up and running in the second quarter of 2013.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Minister of State mentioned a number of bureaucratic changes but the fact is that with the interaction of businesses at the coal face, and where it counts, the exporters' association has indicated that chief executive officers have not been replaced in county enterprise boards and there is considerable inertia in the system. Companies and small businesses are paying for this. Currently, confidence in being able to do this job is seeping away so will the Minister of State give some timeframe to small businesses in order to end this inertia?

Deputy John Perry: I disagree that there is inertia.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: That is coming from the enterprise boards.

Deputy John Perry: There is a big commitment from within the enterprise sector, and even in the county and city enterprise boards, to be effective on the ground. The advisory groups are dealing with business people who are coming in, and there is an allocation of budget for each county.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: That is not the view of the county enterprise boards.

Deputy John Perry: That is the view I have from meeting the people involved. The restructuring process will tackle the local enterprise office process that has operated since 1993. The microfinance fund will be operational and people with an idea can go to a local enterprise office and seek up to €25,000. In the short term that will be operated by enterprise offices.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): The next question is in the name of Deputy John Browne but he is not in attendance so we will move on.

Deputy Dara Calleary: It has been nominated to me.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): I beg your pardon.

Deputy Clare Daly: I thought Question No. 58 would be taken with Question No. 48. It is very similar and both questions concern youth unemployment.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I have no objection to that.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): The Minister is responsible for the groupings. Does he feel up to answering both of the questions together?

Deputy Richard Bruton: Unfortunately, the grouping has already been determined. These are taken in order as people have won priority. I must answer them in order. This question is specifically about the youth guarantee and the EU Presidency, and therefore it has not been grouped with other questions on youth unemployment. Questions that relate just to youth unemployment have been grouped.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The Deputy could ask a supplementary question anyway.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): The Minister might accept a supplementary question.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Yes.

Deputy Clare Daly: That is fine.

Other Questions

Youth Unemployment

48. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation if he has had any discussions with the Department of Social Protection regarding plans for the introduction of a youth guarantee scheme as part of the EU presidency in 2013; his views on whether this goes far enough in tackling youth unemployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41645/12]

(Deputy Richard Bruton): The European Commission has signalled its intention to bring forward proposals to combat youth unemployment and support transition to work through a range of measures such as youth guarantees, activation measures targeting young people, the quality of traineeships, and youth mobility. The proposed measures follow upon the call by the European Council on 29 June that urged member states to step up efforts to increase youth employment, with “the objective that within a few months of leaving school, young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or a traineeship”.

My colleague the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, was invited to the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection on 26 September to outline the business of the forthcoming formal meeting of the Employment and Social Affairs Council, EPSCO, in

Luxembourg on 4 October and to brief the joint committee on her priorities for the forthcoming EU Presidency in the first half of 2013. The Minister, Deputy Burton, informed the joint committee that the European Commission is expected to publish a set of proposals in early December in the form of a youth transitions package. The main element of the forthcoming package is expected to be a proposal for a youth guarantee aiming to ensure targeted young people are either working or in appropriate training or work experience within a specified time after becoming unemployed. The objective of the Commission's proposal is to intensify actions at EU and member state level aimed at addressing the high level of youth unemployment across Europe.

My Department is responsible for convening an interdepartmental committee to co-ordinate policy in regard to the work of the EPSCO. I can confirm that there are continuing discussions involving the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Education and Skills and my Department, among others, regarding the possible content of the expected European Commission proposals, how they can be best adapted to the most urgent needs in the differing labour market circumstances of the EU member states in order to support young people in securing access to good quality apprenticeships, traineeship contracts and entrepreneurial skills, as well as modernising education and training systems to better reflect labour market needs.

I will have an opportunity on Wednesday, that is tomorrow, to discuss the Commission's proposed measures directly with László Andor, the EU Commissioner responsible for employment, social affairs and inclusion. I will assure Commissioner Andor that the incoming Presidency will co-operate with the European Commission to secure early adoption by the Council in 2013 of measures designed to encourage EU member states to strengthen co-operation among employment services and other labour market stakeholders, including the social partners and education and training bodies to target young people.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): I have been a little untidy in that I should have been restricting the supplementary questions and the replies thereto to one minute each.

Deputy Dara Calleary: The Acting Chairman has been quite tidy for me up to now.

The Minister cannot believe the answer he has given. He had a considerable track record going into this Department. We have a 30% youth unemployment rate. The rate in Europe is 23%, the common rate having regard to all labour market conditions in Europe. Therefore, have a serious problem, yet we get more words and verbiage. The European Commission does not understand the seriousness of this problem or, if it does, it is doing nothing about it.

When the Minister, together with almost the entire Government, go to Brussels tomorrow, can he emphasise that in Ireland, Spain, Greece and all of the member states the biggest issue to be faced is youth unemployment. Young people are not getting their chance. Deputy Tóibín referred to the brain drain out of this country in terms of emigration. The statistics reveal that 65% of young people now report their principal status as a student compared to 51% four years earlier. People are going down the education route. They are doing many things to avoid becoming an unemployment statistic. We have 306,000 people unemployed in this country, yet big companies tell us they cannot fill vacancies. I ask the Minister why do we not take action in Ireland and put in place an upskilling programme in the IT sector? It would involve the Minister's Department and the Department of Education and Skills. Surely the vacancies that are in the technical sector can be filled by those who are unemployed, particularly those who are classified as youth unemployed.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): As there are three other Members who wish to put questions, does the Minister wish to hear their questions before he addresses this one?

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Perhaps he should address this one first.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): Okay, but I remind Members that we are working against the clock on these.

Deputy Richard Bruton: With respect to Deputy Calleary, the question he put down was on the EU Presidency and asking a supplementary question about a national initiative-----

Deputy Dara Calleary: My question was whether this goes far enough in tackling youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is what I am interested in here. What is being done about it?

Deputy Richard Bruton: The position in regard to the Presidency is that it is seeking to have a youth guarantee scheme adopted but there is no financial mechanism attached to it. What it is considering is that it would be embodied in the reviews by the EU of the employment policies of different countries. They will be looking to see to what extent countries are embodying youth initiatives. The Government has a number of such initiatives, including Springboard, JobBridge, Tús and so on, which do not come under my Department's remit but about which I am aware.

The Commission is establishing a specific preparatory pilot scheme and it will give an opportunity for member states to develop models. I understand non-governmental organisations, which are interested in applying for this, should contact the Department of Education and Skills.

There is a question later on the wider issue of youth unemployment, which I will be happy to address then. It is a much wider issue than the Commission's specific initiative. The policy changes are those that have been brought in. JobBridge, for example, has had 7,000 participants through it and it is achieving a 40% placement rate. Springboard has had an equally good take up and success rate. These innovative policy instruments have proved successful and Ministers will look to build on those.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Mathews): Will the three Members ask their final supplementary questions before the Minister replies because we are running out of time for this question?

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The youth unemployment figures are unbelievable. A total of 5 million young people are unemployed in Europe currently while, in this State, 30% of young people are unemployed with 50% long-term unemployed. The Minister mentioned the preparatory action. The Commission has allocated €4 million for this, which equates to 80 cent per unemployed youth in the State. That is laughable if one is looking to tackle this issue. There are 7,000 participants in JobBridge but 1,600 people are emigrating on a weekly basis. The amount allocated is nowhere near proportionate. What budget is necessary to deal with this problem? Where will the Minister get this money? Will it be through Europe or the Government?

Deputy Clare Daly: How will the Minister pull off this conjuring trick if the methods he uses are the ones he is currently employing and seriously failing with? He quoted JobBridge figures but that initiative is one of the biggest scams going. In reality, it is an exploitative scheme to replace real jobs with bogus internships. Only 400 jobs have been created under

it and the Minister has yet to explain how that will be a solution to chronic youth unemployment. It is estimated the €3.5 billion in cutbacks the Government is proposing will take another 30,000 jobs out of the economy. How will that address the position of young people who are currently unemployed?

Deputy Mick Wallace: Does the Minister agree that the labour market has become much too focused on the short term and there is too little investment in training and apprenticeships, though which it takes time to reap rewards? Even prior to the recession in the construction sector, apprenticeship schemes had almost disappeared and we became reliant on eastern Europe for tradesmen. There has to be direct Government action to stimulate such schemes across every industry because they have disappeared gradually over the past 20 years and we have reached a point where all our young people must leave the country to get work.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Commission's ability to fund more initiatives in the youth unemployment area will depend on the European Social Fund budget. However, it is clearly Commissioner Andor's intention that there will be a shift in emphasis towards youth unemployment and youth guarantees. That is the implication of what he is seeking to do.

With regard to the domestic economy, I take Deputy Wallace's point. For a start, FÁS became solely focused on apprenticeships within the construction sector whereas the reality, if one examines the German and other successful continental European markets, is their apprenticeships models have a much broader industrial base. The EU is seeking to promulgate the building of a wider base of apprenticeships for member states. The role of SOLAS and the reorganised VECs will be in this area and the Deputy ought to table a question in this regard to the Minister for Education and Skills.

On the wider issue of the strategy for tackling unemployment raised by Deputy Clare Daly, we all know about financial constraints on the Government. However, within that, there are a number of strands in the strategy. One element is to make financial consolidation, which is essential, more job friendly. For example, selling old assets in order to invest in new assets is a way of becoming more dynamic. Examining the establishment of funds to exploit through NewERA and infrastructure can drive potential. Equally, the action plan for jobs considers how to get the whole of Government to move to a more pro-employment area. Pathways to Work, from the Minister for Social Protection, is about identifying those who are disadvantaged in the labour market and seeking to support them to give them an opportunity to take up employment. It involves many Ministers other than me but that is the basic approach.

Unemployment Levels

49. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the steps he is taking to tackle long-term unemployment; and the way in which he will assess the success of these steps. [41601/12]

55. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation following figures in the most recent quarterly national household survey, his views on whether the jobs plan is successful in tackling long term unemployment; the new and additional steps he will take to tackle long term unemployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41646/12]

62. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation his views on the increase in long term unemployment since taking office. [41602/12]

Deputy Richard Bruton: I propose to answer Questions Nos. 49 , 55 and 62 together. In the three years prior to taking office, over 300,000 jobs were lost. The collapse of the property bubble brought our banking system to a point of collapse and employment in the construction sector fell by 60%. The surge in unemployment is the direct consequence of these failed policies. A huge task of economic transformation is necessary to reverse these trends and get employment growing.

There are two major elements to the Government's response to unemployment – Pathways to Work and the action plan for jobs. The aim of the action plan for jobs is to create a supportive environment for enterprise to create and sustain new jobs. We have set an ambitious but realistic target of creating 100,000 jobs by 2016.

The aim of Pathways to Work is ensure that as many opportunities as possible go to people who are currently on the live register, particularly those who are long-term unemployed. It has an objective of ensuring that at least 75,000 of those currently long-term unemployed will move into employment by 2015. It also aims to reduce the average time spent on the live register from 21 months to less than 12 months by the end of 2015.

The establishment of the new integrated national employment and entitlements service will transform the nature and level of engagement between our employment services and those who are unemployed. It will also provide better targeted services to both job seekers and employers. The labour market activation measures outlined in Pathways to Work include over 85,000 job placement and work experience places to be delivered this year by the Department of Social Protection, and over 450,000 training and education places to be delivered by the Department of Education and Skills. In addition, the financial supports available to employers who recruit a person who is long-term unemployed have been improved. These include Revenue's job assist scheme and the employer's PRSI exemption scheme operated by the Department of Social Protection. The Government has been actively promoting these schemes to employers in recent months, with the support of business representative bodies. We must continue to do all we can to facilitate the return to work of those who have lost their jobs. I am currently preparing the 2013 action plan for jobs on behalf of the Government and will be exploring further measures which can be taken to transform our economy and support job creation.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Long-term unemployment is at a critical level. Since the Government has taken office, we have moved from 50% of those who are unemployed being long-term unemployed to 60%. The activities the Government has been involved in have had a negative effect. Long-term youth unemployment in Ireland is at the highest level in Europe. The Government is tinkering around the edges. This Government and the last Government have taken €24 billion out of the economy and at the same time the private sector has taken €30 billion out of the economy. Sucking that level of money out of the economy leads to the economy collapsing. The Government has been involved in a pro-cyclical policy, making the trough deeper. By these policies, the Government has taken a kango hammer to the Irish economy and it is in disorder as a result.

There are obvious solutions, and not just those proposed by Sinn Féin. There are internationally recognised counter-cyclical policies of investment. The country has two major strategic objectives for the next 15 to 20 years. One concerns energy and resources problems. We

have housing stock that is energy inefficient. We could match many of the long-term unemployed from the construction sector to the external cladding of these houses. A fund is available from the private pension industry which would be happy to be involved in this.

The second strategic objective is to increase our communications ability. We are at the bottom of the European league with regard to broadband. The provision of broadband would also employ people who are long-term unemployed, but that would take a complete about-face in Government policy. It is up to the Minister to do that.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy is raising issues that go beyond my brief. He will know that the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputies Noonan and Howlin, have developed a stimulus plan that involves initiatives across a range of infrastructure. It includes, for example, the establishment of Irish Water and its development as a professionally run utility that will become a major asset in the long term. At present, we are losing €500 million from water leaking into the ground from a system that is under-performing. That is a major investment which will also improve our infrastructure. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Rabbitte, recently announced his plans to achieve a broadband spread across the country. Deputy Tóibín might take up this issue with Deputy Rabbitte.

The intention of the Government is to achieve financial consolidation, which is essential. We inherited public finances where spending was exceeding tax by about 50%. That is not sustainable. The Deputy is advocating expansionary policies with a heavy level of reliance on borrowing when we can only borrow from one source, having been locked out of the lending markets. We must restructure our economy and build new sectors that can sustain economic prosperity in the future.

A major transformation is under way but the Deputy is offering a simplistic analysis of the scale of the challenge and how we can address it.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Perry, for his earlier remarks.

The Minister referred to the IDA's record year in 2011. The authority has also had a very successful nine months in 2012. One of its big announcements was of 1,000 jobs, but 500 of those jobs had to be filled from outside the State. Meanwhile, 306,000 people are unemployed, of whom 60% are long-term unemployed. We cannot have a skills shortage on the one hand and a serious unemployment problem on the other.

Can the Minister not look at the Fianna Fáil proposal to put a scheme in place similar to the one the Minister established when he was in his Department in a previous Administration? It was a technology transfer scheme where people who are in need of a job can go through the scheme and fill high-tech jobs, such as the 500 jobs to which I referred.

The Minister said some of Deputy Tóibín's proposals went beyond his ministerial brief. Deputy Bruton is the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. He should be a thorn in the side of every Minister in the Cabinet, demanding to know how many jobs they are creating in their Departments and how many jobs their proposals for the forthcoming budget will create. That is what the Minister with responsibility for jobs should be doing.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I agree with Deputy Calleary that there are issues of skills shortages. As part of our action plan for jobs, the Minister for Education and Skills rolled out a pro-

gramme to double output in the ICT sector over the next five years. That will involve initiatives such as Springboard which will provide short-term conversion courses, as well as increasing the longer term outputs from the colleges. There are acute skills shortages in key areas. There are shortages of programmers, for example, in the ICT area. There are also shortages of people with combinations of IT and language skills. There are gaps in those areas and we will be seeking to focus initiatives there. There is scope for improvement in those areas.

We need to focus on job creation activities. When I commented that the Deputy was referring to other areas I was drawing his attention to the very worthwhile things that are happening in other Departments. The development of Irish Water is a significant new infrastructure. We are creating a new public utility that will involve employment in the short term as we rebuild and connect it and make it more efficient in the long term.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Irish Water will employ existing county council workers. There will be no new jobs.

Deputy Richard Bruton: There will be new jobs. They will be outlined by other Ministers.

Investing, through NewERA, in the assets we need for the future and being willing to sell older assets from the past will, even in a financially strained economy, create funds to drive new employment and infrastructures. That is an area where real progress is being made by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. I participate collectively in the development of these proposals but they are the direct responsibility of other Ministers. They are worthwhile initiatives that are responding to the challenge we face.

Deputy Clare Daly: The problem with the Minister's answers is that they do not equate with reality on the ground. He has twice mentioned Irish Water. The work that will be transferred to Irish Water is currently being done by local authority workers. The contracts he referred to are short-term contracts for the installation of water meters to privatise the service and will be fulfilled by companies such as Sierra or SiteServ. There is no proper State-led investment to repair leaks and develop a proper infrastructure.

The policies the Minister identified as dealing with the unemployment issue are being used to add to the problem. The Minister mentioned activation measures. Schemes such as Job-Bridge are being exploited by the private sector, not to employ people but to take them on in cheap internships. Unless the Government recognises its over-reliance on the private sector, which has been on strike for the past number of years, and addresses that problem, the chronic and long-term unemployment that citizens are faced with will continue.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy refuses to see the positive things that are happening in the economy. This year, we had 95 high potential start-up companies. They were set up by predominantly young entrepreneurial people, men and women, who are setting up businesses that have the potential to grow to significant scale. We are backing those enterprises with preference shares, supports and mentoring. They are the new companies of the future that will create a strong new economy.

It takes a blinkered view not to see Irish Water as a new proper State-led investment. This is a State company, set up as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann. It is dealing with an asset of strategic long-term importance. Water is a hugely important asset and we are squandering it. We have a system that is not fit for purpose and is losing water into the ground. We need to build the system. We have given leadership in that regard. The work will involve employment

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in the rebuilding of the infrastructure and will be a win-win for the Irish economy. It is a wholly appropriate thing to do at this time.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The depression of the 1930s in the United States was probably worse than the present depression. That country worked its way out of it by applying the philosophy of John Maynard Keynes. The top priority was the creation of employment which led to growth and eventually to a balanced budget.

I know the Minister is focused on job creation, but does he not think the Government is putting budget balancing ahead of job creation and that its priority is to balance the budget and get the figures right? I do not say that is the Minister's priority but it seems to be the overall priority of the Government.

The failure to fix the leaks in the water infrastructure was not due to the lack of Irish Water. There was a State decision not to deal with the problem. I hope Irish Water fixes the leaks before it installs meters. One would not need to be a rocket scientist or a businessman to see that if we are losing almost 45% of our water it would be a very good business decision to stop the leaks before the meters are installed.

3 o'clock

Deputy Richard Bruton: Of course I am conscious that in an acute recession, such as the one we have now in Europe, we must have policies that are appropriate. Keynes was long an advocate of appropriate policies which included, during his time and which are still relevant, getting stability and confidence in a currency and having a system in which people will have confidence. That was not there during his time and, clearly, it is problem we must tackle at present. Equally, getting banks to lend was another obsession of Keynes. He wanted to get the system which had become broken repaired and back in action. That is absolutely true.

We need a growth strategy from Europe, and the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, is continually pursuing this at European level to complement, as Keynes would say, the stability of the currency and better banking policies. That is the trio that must be implemented if we are to get out of this recession. However, Ireland does not have the ability to deploy all those tools. Many of them require collective action across the 27 member states and that is extremely difficult to secure, as everybody knows from observing what is happening. There are huge challenges but we must ensure that the pieces we are working on are effective, and that is what I am seeking to outline.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The stimulus budget the Government spoke about a number of months ago amounted to approximately €2.5 billion. If one considers the cut in capital expenditure in the budget last year, which will obviously continue for the next number of years, the balance is that the Government stimulus adds €800,000 over six years. The idea of a stimulus is to impact the State with such a large investment that it radically changes the gear of the economy and points it in a new direction. As has been said, much of the investment that will be put into Irish Water will go on the metering of houses. What change in productivity will that bring to Irish society and its economy? It will bring none.

The Minister mentioned that the current ideas of stimulus were somehow simplistic. That is incredible because Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman and John Maynard Keynes, who were Nobel Prize winners, said the best time to make an investment is when the economy is down. It does not make sense to have a stimulus investment when the economy is up. A stimulus investment

only makes sense in this scenario.

With regard to there not being opportunities, the National Pensions Reserve Fund has billions of euro that are available to the State. The private pension industry is looking for an area in which to invest and has told me that the Government has not approached it with proper investment opportunities. We are in a critical situation and this is a burning issue throughout society. The Government must step up to the plate.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy must be aware, as everybody else is, that we are working within fiscal constraints that have been set by the troika. It happened before we took office but the country reached a point where, effectively, it could not borrow in the lending markets. There was only one place we could borrow and that was under the most strict conditions, of which the Deputy is aware. The conditions are about hitting key budgetary targets each year and the Government must do that. Our stimulus is about how, even within those targets, one can generate imaginative thinking that can create a stimulus package. Everything we are doing is of the type the Deputy has mentioned. It is about identifying new revenue streams, such as in the water sector, so we can have an investment programme to upgrade the key infrastructure. It is about taking funds in the National Pensions Reserve Fund and setting up, for example, the small and medium enterprises, SME, equity and lending fund which we are doing. That is the way in which we seek to drive a stimulus even though we are constrained by the international agreements we had to enter into to hit certain key borrowing targets. We are operating under severe constraints but, within that, we are producing the type of innovative strategies that can make a difference. The Deputy pretends those constraints are not there.

Industrial Development

50. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the steps he is taking to promote enterprise and employment and address the employment differentials across the State. [41610/12]

51. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the steps he is taking to address the loss of more than 10,000 jobs in the border region since taking office. [41599/12]

57. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation his views on the reduction in the labour force in the border region by more than 4,000 since taking office. [41600/12]

Deputy John Perry: I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 51 and 57 together.

The achievement of balanced regional growth is a core objective of the Government. Promoting entrepreneurship, attracting inward investment, helping indigenous companies grow and facilitating the key infrastructural needs of Irish enterprise are key policy instruments for building the competitive advantage of regions and promoting regional growth. The Action Plan for Jobs 2012 is a whole of Government national strategy aimed at creating and sustaining jobs across all regions of the State.

All of our agencies work to promote regional growth opportunities. The IDA has a specific target of delivering 50% of its projects outside Cork and Dublin. Enterprise Ireland and the

county enterprise board structure have a strong regional base of companies and active policies to promote their growth. The objective of balanced regional development is supported by the EU Commission's regional aid guidelines, which recognise that some regions can face significant structural disadvantage. The guidelines permit member states to grant higher investment aid to these areas. Under Ireland's current regional aid map, the highest rates are afforded to the Border, midlands and west, BMW, region. Under the Action Plan for Jobs 2012, the establishment of a one-stop-shop to provide micro-enterprise support through the dissolution of the existing county enterprise board, CEB, offices and the creation of a new network of local enterprise offices, LEOs, will ensure an enhanced delivery of support to micro-enterprises across all regions.

With regard to the question on the Border region, the agencies' network of offices includes Sligo, Letterkenny and Dundalk. Significant IDA projects in the Border region in the past 12 months include 175 jobs in Abbott in Sligo and 1,000 jobs in PayPal in Dundalk. There have been specific initiatives in the Border region, including the competitive start-up fund, enterprise development programmes, first-time exporters programme, new frontiers in Sligo and Letterkenny and supports provided by InterTradeIreland.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: When we have this debate Government Ministers, unfortunately, tend to identify some successful things that have happened in particular areas. Undoubtedly some successful things are happening but, on balance, the Government is failing disastrously. Areas such as Offaly, Wexford, Carlow, Laois, Longford, Roscommon, Cavan, Westmeath and Monaghan have experienced the highest increases in unemployment in the State. Those areas are really badly serviced in respect of key communications infrastructure such as broadband and so forth, but many of them have had no IDA visits in the past two years. While it is easy to identify a handful of opportunities, the reality is that these areas are suffering significantly due to unemployment and emigration. A more proportionate response is required to redress this. How many IDA visits have these counties received since the Minister was appointed? I hope he will not dance around the question but give figures or, at least, appropriate estimates.

Deputy John Perry: In 2011 there were 69 IDA client companies in the Border region employing a total of 8,223 people. In accordance with the Horizon 2020 strategy launched in 2010, the IDA's specific target for job creation in the period 2010 to 2014 is 105,000 new jobs in IDA-supported companies and a further 42,000 indirect jobs. With regard to facilitating IDA visits, the IDA is working with all its companies throughout the regions from its regional offices. Foreign direct investment has been very successful. There is also the record level of exports from Ireland at present at €173 billion. The challenge, as always, is to get the employer matched with the location.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The IDA is failing our heartlands with regard to job creation. Those areas that gave the most votes to Fine Gael in the last election are receiving the least number of IDA visits.

Deputy John Perry: The Deputy should look at the BMW region and the accelerated level of incentives that were given in the Border region.

Deputy Dara Calleary: It is all in Galway. Nowhere else has received it.

Deputy John Perry: The IDA brings in the potential investor. It is about location but there is a big emphasis on the north west and Border regions. I agree there is a difficulty getting

people out of the main centres and the job of the Government is to encourage the IDA to support that. Obviously, however, business is driven by its customer and that determines its preferred location. The IDA has had a successful year to date, with many announcements, and we should recognise client companies created more than 13,000 jobs in 2011, up 20% on the previous figure of 10,897 in 2010. There was an overall increase of 70% in the number of investments by IDA client companies in 2011. Despite the current global economic situation and a strong increase in international competition, there were 148 new investments won during the year across all industrial sectors.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I will focus specifically on Donegal as an example of the Government's failure to stimulate job creation in the Border region. From the recent CSO statistics, we know between 26% and 30% of the working population of Donegal is out of work. That is a shocking statistic. In some electoral districts up to 40% of all age groups are unemployed and emigration is rampant across the county. The Government not only focused foreign direct investment on one location in the county, Letterkenny, it then planned to withdraw the IDA offices from the town. It withdrew funding from the A5 road, a critical project to help Donegal, and there is no plan that might improve on what came before. Will the Minister of State outline to me his specific plans for job creation for Donegal?

Deputy John Perry: The focus of Government agencies is to create jobs. Unemployment in Donegal is very high. The Border region has an unemployment rate of 16.3% compared with the national average of 14.7%. To get foreign direct investment into Donegal, or even indigenous start-up companies, the local enterprise officers will be rolled out, which will start with small companies, which will be the driver of the engine of growth in the economy. They will also work with the third level institutes to facilitate the private sector. Innovation vouchers are available to help those with an idea to commercialise it. While getting a big company to locate there is very welcome, start-up companies are also very important and there are a number of such companies that believe opportunity still exists.

I agree this is a challenge but it is difficult, despite the success of the IDA, to give a clear, specific plan. There will be a focus on the north-west offices with the IDA, which brings investors into Donegal all the time. It is to be hoped there will be direct engagement that will benefit Donegal. That is my commitment as Minister of State, to ensure we get employment into the north west.

Donegal should also take up the coastal development opportunities outlined by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the development of fisheries. All those offer potential employment. This is a challenging job but the focus of Government is to attract foreign direct investment into Ireland. There have been a number of overseas trips by Ministers and delegations and they are making a difference.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: When is it proposed to supply sat-navs to the IDA so it can find County Kerry?

Job Creation

52. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the measures he has taken to support manufacturing industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41655/12]

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56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he has studied the potential for job creation throughout the manufacturing and services sectors in each of the past two years to date; the number of jobs created in both areas excluding those involving foreign direct investment in the same period; if any particular issues have been brought to his attention which might have a direct impact of job retention or creation; the action or actions arising or pending on foot of any such information; if it is expected or intended to put in place specific measures to address any negative influence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41639/12]

Deputy Richard Bruton: I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 56 together.

Manufacturing is a key priority of enterprise policy. It comprises 64% of Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs and over 50% of IDA-supported jobs in 2011, and 194,490 persons were employed in agency assisted manufacturing companies in 2011.

The Action Plan for Jobs includes measures aimed at exploiting sectoral opportunities, including those in the manufacturing and services sectors. I have established a manufacturing development forum to set out a strategic vision for 2020 aimed at increasing employment in the sector. Its membership comprises key industry players and I have instructed the forum to identify impediments to job creation in manufacturing areas and opportunities for immediate job creation. High value production is the future of indigenous manufacturing, and growth sectors are pharmaceutical, biotechnology, agriculture and food, medical technology and ICT. A number of steps have been taken to enable indigenous manufacturing firms to specialise, develop skills and value and scale up, including the launch of the new potential exporters division, Enterprise Ireland's lean business offer, the new development capital scheme and improvements to the research and development tax credit scheme.

Forfás data show that manufacturing employment grew by 1.1% in 2011, an increase of 2,198 jobs. This reverses a trend of four continuous years of job losses, when almost 45,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing. The bulk of the growth was in foreign-owned industry but indigenous manufacturing also increased slightly, with 92,507 employed by Irish-owned companies. Employment growth in Irish manufacturing companies has been especially strong in the medical device, food and ICT sectors.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Since we last spoke in the House, the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Shortall, has resigned. She gave a very revealing interview on the Marian Finucane radio show at the weekend in which she confirmed everything we have been saying in this House over recent months about work on primary care being blocked and poor management of the health budget, so much so that we are now facing the most appalling cuts because of the Minister's failure to tackle these issues.

The Taoiseach might recall that I asked three weeks ago whether the delegation of ministerial orders had been laid before the House on the former Minister of State's functions. The

Taoiseach did not seem to know if they were or not and said he would get back to me. I checked and they were laid before the House in September 2011. What is most revealing is that while they cover medicinal products and the poisons Bill, among other things they excluded completely any reference to primary care. Despite appointing the Minister of State, Deputy Shortall, saying she would have special responsibility for primary care, there is not a mention of primary care. Was it not then the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and their Cabinet colleagues ditched and isolated the Minister? She was not given statutory delegation for primary care and despite knowing from freedom of information requests that she had sought it on a number of occasions, it fell on deaf ears. Who excluded primary care from her delegated statutory authority as Minister of State?

The Minister of State met the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach during the summer to resolve this issue, and the suggestion was that a summer holiday might sort it out. We know the Minister of State had deep reservations about the Minister's performance that went beyond the added primary care centres. They went to the core of the implementation of the programme for Government itself.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As for the added primary care centres, the Minister, Deputy Reilly, has changed his story repeatedly. He misled the Dáil last week by claiming that Balbriggan and Swords lost out and were swept from high priority to low priority. There was no prioritisation system in 2007, as the former Minister of State, Deputy Shortall, has confirmed and as have others close to the issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Originally, the Minister, Deputy Reilly, stated that he consulted ministerial colleagues and officials, but no ministerial colleague can be found to confirm that he or she was consulted. Several Ministers, namely, Deputies Varadkar, Burton, Quinn and Creighton, have stated they are not familiar with the details.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Can the Taoiseach spell out the criteria? Can he confirm that he actually approved of the addition by the Minister, Deputy Reilly, of those 15 centres and of the basis on which he did it? Moreover, I presume the Taoiseach will facilitate the Minister's appearance before the House today to make a statement and to answer questions in this regard given that he is doing so with the Fine Gael Party. Moreover, I note the new Minister of State, Deputy White, also has been asked to find out the details relating to the criteria.

The Taoiseach: When Deputy Martin asked me the question last week about the statutory instrument, I could not recall exactly the nature of the instrument or when it was laid before the Dáil and I promised to revert to him. He is aware that all statutory instruments refer to a legal base. There is no legal base to a primary care Act, so in terms of statutory instruments they refer specifically to narrower confines. However, primary care, no more than public transport or any other issue, covers a range of activities.

I can confirm to Deputy Martin that the position is that issues which were raised in recent days about the pharmaceutical industry and the cost of drugs, insurance claims and the issue concerning consultants being re-rostered and the substantial savings that will accrue over the

coming years have all been the focus of pretty intense negotiations with conclusion in areas of these in the past period and with more to come. In respect of the primary care centres, when I addressed this matter last week, I told Deputy Martin they were in different sectors, in that leases were involved in some, direct Exchequer funding was involved in others and, in some cases, the primary care centres would be provided under a public private partnership, PPP, system. This is all part of the stimulus package of more than €2.5 billion brought forward by the Government which covers the areas of transport, health, justice and education, as well as the major development at Grangegorman. The entire seamless package was announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and, obviously, was approved by the Government.

From his own experience, the Deputy is aware of the value of primary care centres and how fundamental they are to providing a proper health system and health structures nationwide. I have visited a number of such centres myself, including one in Deputy Calleary's native town, which is very efficient and competent.

Deputy Dara Calleary: It had nothing to do with the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Those responsible provide a wonderful opportunity and level of service for people.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Were there strokes involved?

The Taoiseach: It has had the highly beneficial consequence of not having numbers turning up to accident and emergency centres who do not need to go there. More primary centres are needed and what has been announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is but part of the requirements that are needed in this regard. There will be more to follow because more are required.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach did not answer any of the questions I asked. I do not buy his answer in respect of the statutory order. However, I asked him specifically whether he approved of the adding of the 15 centres. This pertains to public private partnerships, which, as I noted last week, have a strong commercial dimension to them because they involve the State entering into a contract with individuals, a company or an entity. Therefore, there must be a transparent and open process. It is almost equivalent to a tender situation. It is a commercial contract. Consequently, one cannot simply fudge it and this has been a major problem since this issue first arose. Moreover, the story keeps changing all the time. The Taoiseach might indicate what 15 sites were displaced by the 15 that were added, given the list that Deputy Shortall had put together. The more I consider this saga from the outset----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Minister, Deputy Rabbitte, is happy, anyway.

Deputy Micheál Martin: ----the more I am reminded of a poem by Francis Duggan, "One Lie Leads To Another Lie So Happens To Be True", which goes:

When you tell one lie it leads to another
So you tell two lies to cover each other
Then you tell three lies and, oh brother
You're in trouble up to your ears.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I would never apply that to the Cabinet and so on-----

(Interruptions).

A Deputy: Did the Deputy do that for his junior certificate?

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----but that seems to be the position in respect of this saga.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: That is in the Koran.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy must have written that when he was in government.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The Fianna Fáil handbook.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Can the Taoiseach confirm the Minister, Deputy Reilly, will come into the House to make a statement? Is that the position? There has been a request by the Opposition but I am unsure whether it has been acceded to. Unquestionably, however, given all the different versions Members have heard on this matter, given that Fine Gael is having a meeting to discuss it and given that the Minister of State, Deputy White, has been sent in by some of his Labour Party colleagues to find out the reason they were added, the least one can expect is for Dáil Éireann-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. We are over time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----to have an opportunity to get a clear, honest and truthful account of how the 15 sites were added.

The Taoiseach: While I am unsure from what shelf in his archives the Deputy withdrew the poet's lines-----

Deputy Dara Calleary: I believe it was from inside the Taoiseach's manifesto.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am trying to make it easy for the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----perhaps before producing it here in the Chamber, he might have reflected on the fact that people on his side of the House stated "I didn't know the IMF was here; it is not here".

Deputy Dara Calleary: Like the Taoiseach did not know about the primary care centres.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Why did the Taoiseach vote for it?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin himself stated this was the cheapest bailout in history.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Taoiseach should deal with the here and now.

The Taoiseach: Moreover, he appeared on many television screens around the world on his travels stating that there was no need for a bailout and that it would be preposterous for Ireland. He should not come into this House and lecture Members with a poet's words. The fact of the matter is that to put together a proposal for primary care centres, be they where leases were

involved, where direct Exchequer funding was involved or the PPP system-----

Deputy Barry Cowen: This is waffle.

Deputy Micheál Martin: No, I referred to public private partnerships.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: What were the criteria?

The Taoiseach: -----one actually needs more than the number one sets out to put in place because one would not wish to be subservient to vested interests.

A Deputy: Stroke politics.

Deputy Micheál Martin: But there already was a list.

The Taoiseach: One would not wish to be caught in a situation where, for instance, general practitioners would not buy into using the facility.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Minister, Deputy Reilly, would know all about that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Yes, but there already was a list beyond the 20 sites.

The Taoiseach: Consequently, the proposal is to have 20 primary care centres under the PPP system. However, if one states they are the only 20 the Government intends to put in place, anyone could refuse to buy into that and therefore, one does not get the results one seeks.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: No, one follows the rankings.

Deputy Micheál Martin: One follow the rankings as per the system.

The Taoiseach: The Minister has outlined to the House the reasons for expanding the criteria beyond deprivation only.

Deputy Dara Calleary: No one believes him.

The Taoiseach: They are also to provide for competition, to provide for dealing with potential vested interests-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: They were his criteria and his alone. There was a very interesting parliamentary question and reply last week. The civil servants are not going with it.

The Taoiseach: -----to deal with problems that arise with objections in certain locations and so on. I think Deputy Martin can agree that primary care centres are a fundamental part of the changing of the structure of the delivery of health services.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I know that.

The Taoiseach: I have seen them myself and they are operating exceptionally well. I hope the process that is under way to bring to a conclusion the provision of these 20 primary care centres, for which a great deal of development is needed before they become a reality, will result in the provision of those centres of excellence and in confidence for people in those locations.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is the Minister coming before the House?

The Taoiseach: They will become a reality out of the 35 sites.

Deputy Barry Cowen: He is not coming before the House.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Under the Government's regime, public nursing homes are under threat, as are services for the elderly, . Last week, the HSE put in place a public consultation process to consider options for the future of the Cottage Hospital, Drogheda. At the same time, a statement from two Government party Deputies, Deputy Nash and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, claimed they had agreed a conclusion to this process with the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly. By so doing, they totally undermined the process, the rights of concerned citizens, the elderly themselves, their families and local representatives. In the programme for Government, the Taoiseach promised an end to the old politics. He promised to honour the trust of the electorate and to break from the corruption of Fianna Fáil. Tá sé go han-soiléir, áfach, go bhfuil an Rialtas mar Fhianna Fáil. Tá sé ag déanamh na rudaí céanna agus níl an córas sláinte ag obair ar son saoránaigh. Tá sé go han-mímhorálta go bhfuil 17,000 duine ar an liosta feithimh ach, ag an am gcéanna, go bhfuil Teachtaí an Rialtais ag deanamh strokes arís.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Strokes.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Strócaí.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Tá siad ag strócáil.

Deputy Gerry Adams: In the management of the health services in the primary care centre debacle and in this little deal concocted by two Government party Deputies in respect of the cottage hospital, one finds the same old stroke politics. The Taoiseach should tell Members whether he believes it is appropriate that two Ministers and a Government party Deputy should undermine a process of public consultation in this way.

The Taoiseach: Tá fáilte roimh an Teachta Adams thar n-ais mar ní raibh sé anseo an tseachtain seo chaite. In any event, as for the development of the plans for residential services for older people in County Louth, the HSE Louth-Meath primary services unit established a group to identify those options and to address existing pressures on the existing Cottage Hospital, of which Deputy Adams is aware. That review is now complete. The detailed options appraisal report has been prepared. The HSE Dublin north-east region will publish this report next week and there will be the commencement of a full public consultation process. It has already commenced informal meetings, as the Deputy will be aware, with residents of the Cottage Hospital and their families to discuss concerns they may have at this time. A similar options appraisal report for St. Joseph's Hospital in Ardee will be published in the coming weeks and will be the subject of further discussions. In that regard, the HSE is also involved in discussions about the future of public nursing homes and a conclusion to that will be published by the Minister for Health in due course. Clearly the HSE is also carrying out a viability analysis on the future of all long-stay nursing homes in order to maximise the numbers who should be retained within-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The private sector.

The Taoiseach: -----the existing staffing resources. That review will focus on a number of areas, including any home's ability to meet the changed HIQA standards for staffing and availability, clearly in some cases taking into account the structure, the age and the environment of a number of these homes throughout the country.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Taoiseach has totally missed the point I was making. He said

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the HSE would publish its conclusions. The Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, who is sitting behind the Taoiseach, and the Labour Party Deputy for the area have said, with the support of the Minister, that the conclusions have already been published. They have already said what will happen at the end of this process. I attended the consultation process. What is the point in the HSE having such a process? The point I was making is that this is another case of stroke politics. This is parish pump politics and the people who are suffering are those who are elderly and in need of care.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: That is rubbish.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Minister engaged in this kind of politics in his constituency with the primary care centre debacle. He has also failed to tackle consultants' pay and the price of drugs. He has failed to recoup money from private health insurance companies. He has failed to introduce free GP care - I could go on. However, he has imposed prescription charges on medical card holders, slashed funding from home help services and is closing public nursing home beds, including in County Louth. I will ask the question again. Does the Taoiseach believe it appropriate that two Ministers and a Government Deputy should behave in this way, undermining a process of public consultation?

The Taoiseach: The Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, advises me that funding is in place for the Cottage Hospital to become a step-down facility with more than 30 beds-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: The process is not finished.

The Taoiseach: -----arising from the options that were published on this matter last week. What is required and what will happen not just in the north east but throughout the entire country is a public consultation about where-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: There is no point doing it.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It is a sham.

The Taoiseach: -----we want to be with the health system in the years ahead. Clearly we need an effective and efficient system that delivers the best health care for all patients based on their medical requirement as distinct from what they have in their pockets.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: That is not what is happening.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach should tell that to the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly.

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy well knows, we cannot have centres of excellence at every crossroads.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: There are 40 people on trolleys in Drogheda and that is not a crossroads.

The Taoiseach: There will be changes, which people understand, but it must be as a result of consultation between everybody involved so that when a person becomes sick or has an ailment or a requirement in any part of the country-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: They get a trolley.

The Taoiseach: -----in the initial case they either have access to a primary care centre or, if it is a requirement for a hospital, they are able to travel there efficiently and effectively in order to get the treatment they need. In respect of the older people, the standards that apply need to apply across the country. The Deputy does not want elderly people in his constituency to be subject to inferior accommodation or facilities. There has been a very big juggernaut-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: It is called James Reilly.

The Taoiseach: -----for the past 30 years, which needs to be changed and will be changed. While the change is always difficult-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Nothing happens.

The Taoiseach: -----it is in the best interests of the country and the people. The main focus needs to be the patient, whether it be a child, young person, middle-aged person or elderly person. That is where the focus of the change and changing structure needs to be and that is where it will be.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: With two months until the budget, the kite flying from Ministers is already under way. We have already heard about the slashing of child benefit and I dare say this is only the tip of the iceberg over the next eight weeks of rumours and so-called leaks. I would like to remind the Taoiseach of one thing before the Government begins its next round of imposing penalisation on the people. Last year's budget has proved to be one of the most regressive in the history of the State, disproportionately affecting those already struggling. As the Nobel Laureate, Joseph Stiglitz, has said, austerity never works to resolve economic downturns. He said that austerity instead turns downturns into recessions and plunges recessions into depressions. A succession of budgets dragging down domestic demand and delaying recovery is not the answer. There are other options if only the Government would consider them.

Increasing the effective tax rate for high earners by just 1.5 percentage points would generate an extra €650 million in additional revenue. A wealth tax could also generate more than €200 million. The Government would effectively get €850 million just by a moderate targeting of high earners. Those are just two proposals the Nevin Economic Research Institute has published in its strategy for an alternative adjustment which would lead to the same deficit outcome of 7.5% of GDP but also provide for the protection of front line services and social protection.

The Government's plans will result in the loss of 29,000 jobs next year, whereas this costed proposal would save 21,000 of those. While there is no way to fast-track economic recovery, the path the Government is taking is the wrong one. There is an alternative to penalising people while still generating the revenue required. Does the Government intend to continue to burden those who cannot take any more or will it ensure that those can pay do?

The Taoiseach: I ask the Deputy to give my regards to his fellow county-people following their victory in the all-Ireland Football Championship.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Get that over with first.

The Taoiseach: Let me be clear about a few things. The Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare produced a report on child benefit. I have not seen this report nor has it come to Government. Matters of a budgetary nature are a matter for consideration by the Cabinet collectively and that is what the Cabinet will do in regard to the very challenging preparation

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work the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, has to do for 2013. The Deputy seems to forget the country is in a bailout programme and we do not have money to throw around as happened in years gone by.

The Deputy's quotation from Professor Stiglitz is incorrect. He said that austerity rarely works. I happened to be there to welcome 5,500 members of the International Bar Association to our country. They will be here for a week or longer, which will have a dramatic impact on the economic spend locally and give people from throughout the world a flavour of the personality of Irish people.

As we prepare for the Presidency of the European Union on 1 January, our focus is on growth and jobs because that is where the future of the country, and countries of the eurozone and European Union, lies. We have already made it clear that in our preparations for this Presidency that is where the focus will be - on the development of the Single Market and the continual opening of opportunities for jobs and business. I invite the Deputy and others to come to the House the week after next in order to participate in the economic debate that has been requested a number of times, taking into account the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council report, the IMF report and others. The Deputy can feel free to criticise Government, as I am sure he will, or to put forward constructive suggestions for consideration by the Minister for Finance as he prepares to bring his recommendations to Government. I invite him, rather than simply say we can achieve savings of €200 million here or there, to justify his proposals the next time. We have moved on from people assuming that we can transform our economy overnight. We are in a very challenging position, as the people know. I expect the Deputy to back up proposals put forward in his contributions.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I would like to pass on my condolences to the people of Mayo on their loss last Sunday.

The Taoiseach: I accept them.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Perhaps the Mayo team will win next year if they do not meet the Donegal team again.

The proposals I put forward are serious ones which have been costed. I believe they will stand up to scrutiny. We must achieve a balance between cuts and revenue. The Government's agenda is one of cuts to the income of people who cannot afford them, many of whom are going to the wall. One of the proposals which I put forward today would generate extra revenue through the targeting of people who can afford to pay extra. As per that proposal, people earning €100,000 would pay an extra €1,500 in tax. Surely these people can afford to carry that burden. We should not be targeting cuts to child benefit at people on low incomes and those in receipt of social welfare benefits who cannot afford that hit, or be forcing them into having to go cap in hand to secure an increase. We should be targeting the people who can afford to pay. The Taoiseach should consider and take on board my proposals, thus targeting the people who can afford to pay and protecting those who need our help.

The Taoiseach: I again invite the Deputy to put his proposals on the record of the House the week after next. Any constructive suggestions which the Deputy has to make will be listened to. I also invite him, as someone who can well afford to do so, to pay his household charge, which will go in part towards the provision of services for the elderly-----

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Hear, hear. The Deputy should not be lecturing other people

about what to do.

The Taoiseach: -----people in Killybegs and the constituency which he serves. The Deputy, as a legislator, should obey the law of the land rather than take a deliberate opposite view for opportunistic purposes. The Deputy is well able to pay the €100 household charge. I invite him to do so.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Get it from the tax exile billionaires first.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: The voice of Siberia.

Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)

Official Engagements

1. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to London during the Olympic Games. [37962/12]

2. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on any bilateral meetings he held with political or business leaders during his visit to London during the Olympic Games. [37963/12]

3. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on any recent discussions with British Prime Minister Mr David Cameron. [38951/12]

4. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the matters he raised during recent contacts with Prime Minister Cameron. [40257/12]

5. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach his plans to meet the British Prime Minister David Cameron. [41487/12]

6. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the recent discussions with British Prime Minister David Cameron; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41631/12]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, together.

I travelled to London on Friday, 27 July to attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. Prior to the ceremony, I had the honour to meet Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace where, along with other world leaders and key figures in the sporting realm I attended a reception. We then travelled on to the Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremony, which was truly a spectacular event.

Earlier in the day I met the Irish Olympic athletes who were based at the Irish camp in St. Mary's College in Twickenham. We were greeted by the Irish team's chef de mission, Olympic silver medalist, Sonia O'Sullivan. I congratulated all the athletes and their back-up teams for their efforts in qualifying and representing Ireland at the Olympics and said that they carried the dreams of the Irish nation with them. I wished them all the best in their respective fields.

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During the course of the day, I met the Governor and Republican Party US presidential candidate, Mr. Mitt Romney, at the Embassy of Ireland. The meeting, which was at Governor Romney's request, was an opportunity to discuss the close state of Irish-US relations, Ireland's economic recovery and the development of EU-US trade. I informed him of our preparations for Ireland's upcoming Presidency of the EU.

I returned to London on 12 August to attend the closing ceremony of the Olympic games. I commend the Olympic organising committee on an outstanding job as the games were a huge success. I would like to put on the record of the House my admiration for the efforts of all of those who competed for Ireland and, in particular, my congratulations to those who won medals. I would also like to take this opportunity to repeat once again my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all those who represented Ireland in the Paralympics. The Government has since hosted receptions in Farmleigh for the Olympic and Paralympic athletes, their coaches, families and friends.

The UK Prime Minister, Mr. David Cameron, invited me to attend an event on "hunger" which he was hosting prior to the closing ceremony. A small group of countries with a high profile in the area of nutrition were invited to participate in this global event, along with representatives of international organisations, the private sector and civil society. The event aimed to raise the level of political commitment to combat the problem and to stimulate the development of new products and services to improve nutritional levels in developing countries. I was invited to contribute on the overall challenge of under-nutrition and had an opportunity to emphasise the priority Ireland will attach to building further political commitment to address hunger and nutrition during our forthcoming Presidency of the EU in 2013. I stated that the eradication of hunger is a cornerstone of Ireland's foreign policy and that we are determined to play our part in putting solutions into practice. I informed the group that Ireland spends 20% of its Irish Aid budget on programmes that directly address hunger and nutrition and that we will continue to meet this target.

Following the global nutrition event, I had a meeting with Mr. Ertharin Cousin of the World Food Programme. I congratulated her on her recent appointment as executive director of the WFP. I reiterated Ireland's priority in eradicating hunger and achieving global food security and said that I looked forward to working with the WFP to deliver the international conference on hunger, nutrition and climate justice during Ireland's EU Presidency.

I have no immediate plans for a meeting with the UK Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron. I do expect, however, to see him at the forthcoming European Council meeting on 18 and 19 October.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Members on this, the Opposition side of the House were taken by the Taoiseach's correction of Deputy Pringle to the effect that austerity rarely works. It is reassuring to hear that austerity rarely works.

The Taoiseach: I was quoting Professor Stiglitz.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I understand. I do not think the Taoiseach sees the irony of that.

The Taoiseach: Professor Stiglitz, who is a more eminent person than I, said it rarely works.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Exactly. The Taoiseach should listen to him.

The Taoiseach: They were Professor Stiglitz words, not mine.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: He said it is not working now.

The Taoiseach: I was present when he said it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps we could move on with the questions.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I join the Taoiseach in commending our Olympic and Paralympic heroes, who represented our island magnificently. I also thank the Taoiseach for his response.

It strikes me, in terms particularly of the North, the peace process and agreement between the Irish and British Governments, that the Irish Government does not appear to have any real strategy for engagement. I welcome the Taoiseach's recent commitment to meet the Ballymurphy families. However, he may recall that I wrote to him in May suggesting that he follow the example of a former Taoiseach - I am not too sure who held that position at the time - and the former British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair. The Irish Government of the day, working with people involved in the Bloody Sunday issue-----

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The Taoiseach at the time was the former Deputy, Bertie Ahern.

Deputy Gerry Adams: -----put together a report which was presented to Mr. Blair. The former Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, told us afterwards that this played a pivotal part in his change in attitude. I suggested to the Taoiseach in my letter that he ask civil servants to use the expertise available to the Government to draw up comprehensive reports on all accessible information on the Ballymurphy massacre, the Pat Finucane murder and the Dublin-Monaghan bombings in order to make meetings and engagement with the British Government more meaningful. I have not received a satisfactory response to that letter. The first response ignored my suggestion entirely. I commend that approach to the Taoiseach in a sense of fraternity.

I also want to raise with the Taoiseach the cases of Marian Price and Martin Corey. These two citizens are being held without due process. They have no means of having the case against them heard in a system that would pass as a court of their peers. The Government needs to make representations. They should be released forthwith or they should be charged and go through the normal processes. I would like to see them released. Has the Government made representations on behalf of Marian Price and Martin Corey? If the suggestions I am making are useless then tell me so; it is not an issue. However, if the suggestion has worked in the past and can do so in the future surely the Government should take it on board.

The Taoiseach: In the absence of Deputy Adams last week I confirmed to Deputy McDonald that I would be happy to meet the Ballymurphy community there or here, whichever is more appropriate.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I appreciate that. Go raibh maith agat.

The Taoiseach: I do not have any difficulty with it. I will reflect upon the letter sent by Deputy Adams. It is important to have as comprehensive a background to these meetings as is possible. As Deputy Adams is aware, I met Mr. Black, the survivor of the Kingsmill massacre, and the families of the victims. I also intend to meet a group from west Fermanagh who will soon come down with the Minister, Ms Foster. These events are an important opportunity to speak for survivors and next of kin who have lost loved ones.

This morning I raised the issue of Marian Price with the Secretary of State when we met shortly after 8 a.m. It is an issue about which we are concerned and I understand from back-

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ground information that her health has improved somewhat. It is of interest in respect of her as a person and I took the opportunity to raise the issue this morning.

We also discussed the question of dissident groups and the importance of keeping a focus on community development. The covenant centenary march went off without any great disruption, although there were aspects of sectarianism in some incidents. It is important to keep in perspective that the decade of centenary commemorations will be overseen sensitively and in an understanding and comprehensive way by both Governments and we have a keen interest in this.

For the Deputy's information, we also discussed having a strategy for involvement in working with our colleagues in Northern Ireland. Co-operation can be enhanced in the areas of health, hospital care, education and tourism. We have appointed some personnel to the permanent representation in Brussels as we prepare for the Presidency of the European Union which will be of interest and assistance to our colleagues in Northern Ireland. Work is being done by both Governments on licensing diesel suppliers and the capacity of both Governments, through research which is being done, on putting a marker into diesel which cannot be washed out, which would deal with the extraordinary level of cross-Border activity. I commend the customs service and the Garda for their confiscation in recent days of substantial equipment. This activity does down the local economies of people who go about their business perfectly legitimately.

There is a great deal of cross-Border involvement. The next meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council is to be held in Armagh. I hope to build on further involvement in visits to Northern Ireland.

When we signed the strategic partnership agreement with Prime Minister Cameron it was suggested that as is appropriate, I as Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister would visit on an alternate basis to show interest in the work of the Executive and the Assembly and also with regard to communities in Northern Ireland. I have met a number of people in the course of normal business here who have expressed views and proposals which in some cases are worthy of following up. I invite Deputy Adams to put forward his views on which we might follow through. It is not true to say we do not have a strategy, interest or involvement in building on the foundations of the Good Friday Agreement for the betterment of all communities. I hope over a period of time to demonstrate this.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I thank the Taoiseach for his response. I very much welcome his assertion that the Government will continue to improve co-operation across the island on a range of issues. Like the Taoiseach, I join in commending the customs service and the Garda Síochána on the arrests and confiscation of equipment in diesel laundering plants. It always strikes me, including with regard to what happened last night, that those arrested are almost immediately released. Not only are both states denied a tax intake but environmental damage is caused by the huge amount of sludge that is dumped, not least in counties Louth and Monaghan. I have met the PSNI and Garda Síochána on this issue.

There is much in what the Taoiseach said with which I agree. I was in Belfast at the weekend and I very much welcomed that the big parade went off peacefully, apart from a few unsightly sectarian examples. No one was injured or killed and this is something to be glad about in such a charged atmosphere.

I will return to the point I made earlier. I am not convinced, and more importantly the

families of Pat Finucane, the Ballymurphy victims and others are not convinced, that the British Government wants to deal with these issues. David Cameron is not responsible for them; he was not there and he may not have even been born. The only way the British Government can be brought to deal with these issues is if the Government gives Mr. Cameron a case which is absolutely and totally undeniable. The Government has the wherewithal to do so because such a case exists. The people of Ballymurphy will co-operate. When Deputy Martin was the Minister for Foreign Affairs he visited the site, walked the ground and met the people. The same thing happened with regard to other instances. The Finucane family has a proven track record on the issue affecting it and those involved in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings also deserve support.

With respect, what I suggest is logical. The Taoiseach should take some of his very fine civil servants and set them to deal with the information aspect. Then, if the Taoiseach is satisfied the case is made, he should send it to Mr. Cameron so when he next meets him it is on his desk and he cannot dodge it, and it is more than something mentioned at a meeting but is something in which the Government is involved. If the British do not deal with it then the Taoiseach should arm the consular and diplomatic services, our friends in the United States and in the diaspora and other governments which praise the peace process but want to see it brought to completion. They are allies in this task. Once again I commend this approach to the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: This morning I raised the case of Pat Finucane with the Secretary of State and repeated to the Right Honourable Ms Villiers our position following the decision of Judge Cory, appointed after the Weston Park talks, namely, that whatever recommendations he makes will be followed through by both Governments; that I regard it as an international agreement; and that the British Government did not honour its element of it and instead chose a review under Mr. da Silva which was not satisfactory for the Finucane family.

4 o'clock

It is not acceptable in the sense that there was a clear agreement between both Governments and this Government set up the Smithwick tribunal arising from the Cory recommendations in so far as this jurisdiction is concerned. That is our view and we will continue that. I would be very happy to read all of the file about Ballymurphy insofar as I can before I meet with the residents. I will refer to it here when I get the opportunity to do that.

I discussed the good news about Derry being the European City of Culture in 2013. This will be an enormous opportunity for Northern Ireland and Derry in particular in addition to the decision about Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. These are great opportunities to project a brand and image of a modern Ireland and a modern city with the international currency that goes with that in terms of Ireland and its people, traditions, culture and music. I hope this will be an outstanding success. The Government and agencies here will work with our colleagues to ensure it becomes a success. I hope that for Derry and Northern Ireland in general, these will be occasions of great memory that will set out a new perspective on the ability and potential of Northern Ireland to develop its economy through international investment arising from the investment by visitors business.

Deputy Gerry Adams: On a brief point of information.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will come back to the Deputy.

Deputy Gerry Adams: My information is that Marian Price's health has not improved.

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The Taoiseach: I have not read the doctors' reports but I am informed that while Marian Price is in a wheelchair, her mental health has improved.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I have read the doctors' reports.

The Taoiseach: Her health is a source of concern to everybody. I have not read the doctors' report. I am only commenting on the basis of the information made available to me. Arising from what the Deputy has said, I will have that double-checked.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I thank the Taoiseach.

Deputy Joe Higgins: The Taoiseach said that the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, invited him to a conference on nutrition, world hunger and related issues. What new ideas came forward from the British Prime Minister in respect of the alleviation or, preferably, elimination of hunger and malnutrition across the world? What new ideas, if any, did the Taoiseach bring to the conference? Were the results of a major study by a non-governmental organisation called Tax Justice Network, written by James Henry, formerly of McKinsey & Co and an expert on tax havens, that an incredible \$21 trillion are salted away by the super-rich global elite in off-shore accounts, trusts, etc., relayed there? In view of that stunning information, how does the Taoiseach justify joining with the British Prime Minister in opposing even a modest transaction tax on the vast billions circulating through the world and European financial markets on a daily basis? Even a modest wealth tax on this elite is opposed, which in Europe and elsewhere refuses to invest in the productive economy and is instead facilitated by the ten top private banks, including the likes of Goldman Sachs - the great vampire squid, as it was famously alluded to in an American magazine - sucking up the resources for its services to big business and the super-rich internationally? Is it not very clear that on the basis of this information, emergency action, taxes and levies on these elements of wealth need to be introduced on a European and world basis? Why, for example, will the Taoiseach not lead a move within the European Union in this regard? This morning and just now, he professed a willingness to put on his wellington boots and wade through the toxic sludge to end diesel laundering, which I agree should be ended.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we get back to the question about the Taoiseach's discussions with the British Prime Minister?

Deputy Joe Higgins: What is lost here to the taxpayer is wrong but it is peanuts compared to what is happening at the very top of society and usually quite legally precisely because the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister join together to protect the super-rich. Can the Taoiseach give us any insights into his thinking and what new ideas he will produce in respect of the fact that world hunger could be ended if these resources were used instead for the common good rather than for the enrichment of the top 1%?

The Taoiseach: There are so many opportunities in a global sense to improve the circumstances in which hunger can be eliminated and nutrition developed. It does not just apply to the area mentioned by Deputy Higgins. For example, the Hunger Task Force report of 2008 called on Ireland to prioritise three particular areas. The first was to improve small-holder agricultural productivity in Africa, particularly among women farmers. The second was to target the prevention of maternal and infant under-nutrition and the third was to promote governance and leadership to reduce global hunger at both national and international level. The Deputy is aware of Ireland's long tradition of involving itself in these matters over the years, from the concerts organised by well-known Irish musicians from Bob Geldof to the campaign by U2 for

the elimination of debt in the Third World. These people are all part of that programme.

The event took place in Downing Street and included a number of leaders, political personnel and organisational personnel from non-governmental organisations, with particular reference to Africa and North Africa. Contributions were made by these people at the event called by the Prime Minister. One thing that struck me was the impact of nutrition being made available and dealt with for children from birth to two years of age who suffer from stunted growth, which carries through to other families. For example, a British entrepreneur has a foundation dealing with the provision of nutritious foods through peanut butter and such additions. The impact it can make in a few short weeks is extraordinary. There was a good deal of discussion about that and where it could lead. As the Minister of State with responsibility for disability, equality and mental health, Deputy Lynch, pointed out, the Step Up Nutrition or SUN concept is of importance as well.

The Deputy is also aware of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the William J. Clinton Foundation and the impact they have made, particularly in Africa with regard to related matters there. Small-holder agricultural productivity, particularly among women farmers in Africa, is of particular interest to Ireland. Over the years and under a range of Governments, Ireland has become recognised as a country that leads in a sensitive, caring way when dealing with under-nutrition, malnutrition and hunger elimination, both through the practical demonstration of food production standards and the provision of water and facilities. For a small country, we have a disproportionate impact, as has been evident in our involvement in Lesotho and other regions.

The meeting lasted for an hour or an hour and a half and was based in particular on contributions from African personnel. One of those present was the Somalian runner Mo Farah, who received this year Olympic gold medals in both the 5,000 m and 10,000 m. Also present was the former world record holder, Haile Gebrselassie, an ambassador and proponent of the work that is under way. Mo Farah, the Olympic double champion, spoke with great feeling about his homeland and other countries in the region. He referred to the impact of credible, common-sense action to deal with malnutrition and under-nutrition and to the agri-sector in particular.

The proposition made by Ireland, based on its involvement over the years, was recognised by the leaders present at the meeting. We intend to maintain expenditure under our Irish aid programme at 20%. Ireland is the only country in the world to have made and delivered upon such a commitment. This has been the case over the years and it is commendable. The Tánaiste recently announced that it is our intention to maintain expenditure at its current level in dealing with these particular areas.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I commend all those involved in the struggle to improve nutrition and end hunger. They should receive every support. The point I am making to the Taoiseach, however, is that the resources deployed in this regard are a fraction of what could be brought to bear in a concerted way if we had a very different financial system internationally and a different order of priorities. Does the Taoiseach not see any contradiction between his wish to end suffering and the fact that European and other world leaders, among whom he mixes so effortlessly and who slap him on the back as the best of friends, deploy significantly more resources to areas such as armaments production than to the resolution of human problems such as hunger, whose solution is crucial?

The Taoiseach mentioned in his reply two billionaire so-called philanthropists. The pov-

erty-stricken and hungry are dependent on the kindness of people who make billions, using all kinds of tax havens in the process to maximise the profits of their corporations. Does this not strike the Taoiseach as obscene in reality? The wealth these people have created, including the €15 trillion that has been salted away, is created by human labour, by hundreds of millions of people. Should it not be taxed in an emergency fashion through transaction and wealth taxes? With his friend Prime Minister Cameron, why does the Taoiseach not open up a new front in this regard rather than apply the Band-Aid which, unfortunately, will not in any way resolve the crisis of world hunger?

The Taoiseach: If we had had a very different financial order and competence ourselves over the years, we would be in an even stronger position to deal with elements of this. The Deputy asked me our view on the financial transaction tax. I have answered this in the House on many occasions. We have not supported a financial transaction tax because it would place our financial services centre and, as a consequence, our economy at a disadvantage. Were it to be applied on a global scale, or throughout the European Union, we would have a different perspective. It is not applied globally and, for that reason, Ireland has a very clear view. It will retain such a view during its Presidency. It will run its Presidency as competently as it can but it will not become an advocate of a measure that could place our economy and, as a consequence, our people at a serious disadvantage.

Partly through the programmes adopted by Ireland, the Union and many other countries, the region in question will expand enormously economically in the coming 20 years. Many countries in north Africa are expanding at a rate of 6%, 7% or 8% per year. Clearly, there is enormous potential in this regard. When one speaks to those affected directly by the Irish aid programme and expenditure thereunder, one notes that they value the aid very much. They commend the NGOs and the Irish Aid assistance programme. I am sure they feel this way about other countries also. We continue to keep on that path development. It is in the interest of Ireland and the African peoples. I am sure the Deputy supports that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The reply to this batch of questions shows up the Taoiseach's reluctance to engage in any substantive way with EU matters or to embark on a substantive diplomatic initiative. From the replies to questions on the meeting with Prime Minister Cameron, we do not get a sense of any detailed face-to-face discussions on the European Union, for example. Instead, we are hearing accounts of small encounters or encounters exaggerated by the Taoiseach's spin doctors; it seems the real work is left to others.

At the weekend, the Taoiseach made a seemingly strong statement demanding that Germany and other countries keep to his understanding of the June deal. This had more than a hint of *The Skibbereen Eagle* about it because, in reality, the Taoiseach indicated he had serious bilateral talks with leaders of only one of the three countries implicated in the statements of last week. The Taoiseach met the Chancellor well over a year ago. Since June, there has been no sense of there being any engagement with any leaders on the EU issue and the follow-through from the June meeting.

Did the Taoiseach discuss with Prime Minister Cameron the ongoing eurozone crisis? Did he endeavour to enlist support for Ireland's position on the separation of bank debt from sovereign debt? Did he discuss the European position thereon? He stated last week in the House that he felt his only role is to attend and speak at the summits. It is time to end that policy and have a series of substantive bilateral talks with the countries that matter in respect of following through on the June meeting, including Finland, Holland and Germany. He should keep push-

ing our case because it has been drifting since June. We know what has happened.

What was Prime Minister Cameron's perspective on the European Union? Was there any sign of change in terms of his having opted out of the important negotiations? Was there any sense of his becoming more involved or coming back within the fold? While we welcome the bilateral funding from the United Kingdom, made available some time ago, we must acknowledge a very important issue arises in terms of the role of the United Kingdom in the unfolding eurozone crisis and the resolution thereof. The United Kingdom could have a significant role to play and could offer significant support for Ireland.

Very little has happened over the past year and a half on any of the issues pertaining to the North that we discuss here week in, week out, be it the Finucane case or the prisoners in Magherry. We are receiving the same replies week in, week out, and one does not have any sense of a new initiative. There is considerable lethargy in the North-South agenda, as I articulated last week.

My central point is on the absence of a substantive EU diplomatic initiative on the Taoiseach's part to press home the key issue facing the country, namely, the separation of banking debt from sovereign debt.

The Taoiseach: I disagree fundamentally with Deputy Martin when he says that we have a reluctance to engage on any substantive issue about the EU. He is aware that not only did I introduce the opportunity to report to the House before European Council meetings, but also after. The Deputy's question reads: "...asked the Taoiseach the matters he raised during recent contacts with Prime Minister Cameron." I have answered the question for Deputy Adams, who has tabled three questions. Deputies Higgins, Boyd Barrett and Martin each have one question. The last occasion when I met Prime Minister Cameron face to face was as a result of his inviting me to attend Downing Street at a meeting he had called during the course of the Olympic Games to deal with the issue of hunger and under-nutrition in Africa. There was nothing else on the agenda but that. There was no opportunity to raise matters such as Northern Ireland, the EU, the eurozone, financial transaction taxes, the relationship between Ireland and England or sterling versus the euro. That is the situation.

I am quite prepared to have discussions here about the EU as often and as long as Deputy Martin wants. Suffice it to say that every Minister who goes abroad on EU business has a full programme and sees it through fully. The Deputy is aware of the intense level of negotiation that has gone on between Department of Finance officials and others with their counterparts in France, Spain, Germany and so on, the Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF. The Deputy is aware of the Minister for Finance following through with his counterparts in Paris, Rome and Berlin before he went to the informal meeting in Cyprus. I also reported to the House last week on my own direct meetings with Prime Ministers Samaras, Rajoy and Monti. We fixed a date for a meeting with President Hollande. Tomorrow, I have a meeting with President Barroso of the Commission, President Van Rompuy of the Council and other leaders who are there. These discussions will obviously centre around the eurozone crisis and our priorities for the Presidency, which will reflect dealing with that crisis. As I told Deputy Adams earlier, I discussed a range of issues with Secretary of State Villiers this morning in regard to Northern Ireland.

It seems as if Deputy Martin thinks that I should spend my time travelling around Europe. I am much more interested in results. The last big result was on 29 June when the Council of the

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Heads of Government decided to break the link between sovereign and bank debt, that Ireland's debt sustainability issue would be looked at and that we would get equal treatment. Commissioner Rehn, who has been very supportive, has said that he would like to see that completed by the end of October. I do not think that is feasible, but what I am interested in, and what the Minister for Finance is taking very skilfully down the line, is getting the best deal for the Irish people and the Irish taxpayer in this regard. I will say that very clearly during the course of face-to-face meetings tomorrow, including with Mr. Barroso, and to the other leaders when I meet them at the next European Council meeting, as I did last week.

Deputy Martin seems to think that we should be travelling all of the time and having meetings. We have a very big team in the permanent representation and Ministers engage directly with officials on a constant basis. I would like to think that we could have a conclusion to this, but it is not that simple, as the Deputy is well aware. The difficulty is compounded by electoral prospects in other countries, which are always part of this mix, as the Deputy is well aware.

The interpretations that can be put on the future of the banking union, whether it should be on a stepped approach for the systemic banks in the first instance or all of the banks together, and other issues are for discussion. They arise from a very clear decision that was made. The statement last weekend merely reiterates the fact that the Heads of Government made a very clear decision and I want to see that followed through and concluded. What it means is that the link would be broken, banks could be recapitalised directly by putting a structure in place to do that, this country's capacity to meet our debt repayments would be reviewed and, in the context of deals for others, Ireland would get equal treatment. That is the decision and that is what I want to see implemented, as I am sure Deputy Martin does. While I am sure that elements - the promissory note and the sustainability of the bank debt - can be very technical and complex, the decision as a foundation is very clear and we want to see that followed through.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach's answer confirmed more or less the points that I made in my question. I would challenge him, as it was not correct to state that he was obliged to stick to the agenda set by Prime Minister Cameron. Setting the agenda for a meeting of the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister has always been a two-way process.

The Taoiseach: I will deal with that for Deputy Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: One can always seek a meeting with the British Prime Minister or to have issues put on the agenda. The idea that the British Prime Minister would dictate the entire agenda is not tenable, particularly given the seriousness of these times.

The Taoiseach: It was not a bilateral meeting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It suggests an agenda of exaggerating about small gatherings around large events. They are not substantial bilateral meetings from which anything of consequence emerges. That is the reality and the Taoiseach would be better off stating as much.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have a question, please?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach made a point about Ministers following through on full programmes in Europe. These are meaningless statements.

The Taoiseach: No. The Ministers attend their meetings.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We had the highest attendance record of all. Do not start with

that untruth again.

The Taoiseach: I was reminding the Deputy of it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach claimed that I told him he should spend his time going around Europe and all over the place, but in leader to leader terms he is not moving at all. Storm clouds gathered over the June deal during the summer and people are trying to erect obstacles. Just as the Taoiseach does, we want the best deal for the country. Anyone reading any analysis of what is occurring will know that the Finns, the Dutch and the Germans, particularly their finance Ministers, are unhappy and have a different perspective of the path to be taken in terms of sequencing and how the crisis should be resolved. This is clear from the statement that was issued last week.

The Taoiseach mentioned Prime Ministers Samaras and Rajoy, but those discussions were on the edge of the meeting with the Pope. We saw how the Taoiseach's spin doctors spun that. It was to be a private briefing with the Pope.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we get back to the topic?

Deputy Micheál Martin: We know what happened. They had to clean up the mess afterwards. The meeting became about a mobile telephone and the Taoiseach texting. That is all that emerged from the meeting. The people behind the Taoiseach's operation in Government Buildings should stop spinning every half meeting as a substantive meeting.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have a question, please? Deputy Boyd Barrett is waiting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: At the outset of the term of office of this Government the Taoiseach stated that he would undertake a substantive diplomatic initiative, yet he has not done so. The challenge in trying to push home a deal that was apparently agreed in June is to meet the Prime Ministers of the countries in question, keep them on side and persuade them of Europe's need for the separation of banking and sovereign debt to be followed through.

The Taoiseach: I am surprised by the Deputy's line of argument. For his information, the Holy Father did not brief anybody or meet anybody in particular other than the general audience.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am aware of that. It was the Taoiseach's people who briefed, not the Holy Father's.

The Taoiseach: I want Deputy Martin to understand that I met with Prime Minister Monti, as did officials and our officials, and had a very good discussion about the eurozone crisis, the situation in so far as Italy is concerned and the relationship between Ireland and Italy. That was a factual meeting that, unlike some that occurred here, was recorded in terms of the notes that were taken. I also did the same with Prime Minister Rajoy. We know there are implications for Ireland from the decision taken on 29 June, specifically with regard to the banking union. Spanish Prime Minister Rajoy set out his view as to what the liability assessed in respect of Spain would be, and that has since been published. He also set out his views on the European Stability Mechanism, the European Central Bank, his perspective on the Spanish position and the prospects with regard to employment, growth and job opportunities. The same applied in the case of Greek Prime Minister Samaras, who spoke to us at some length about the current position in Greece, the pending assessment of the troika, what the Greek Government proposes

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to do in respect of the latest programme of reductions in current spending in Greece, and the latest analysis of how the Union might react to this.

The Deputy should tell me if he believes those face-to-face meetings with prime ministers are not worthwhile, as I certainly found them worthwhile, and so did the leaders. The Deputy should not tell me that the prime ministers of Greece, Spain or Italy are not important personalities. Deputy O’Dea might find that funny but it is not funny in the context of the Irish economy or from the perspective of the Irish taxpayer, who is part of the eurozone. What happens in Spain has implications for us in Ireland.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What about the Dutch and Finnish prime ministers?

The Taoiseach: We will have a clear and straightforward interaction with President Barroso tomorrow with regard to the preparation for our Presidency and our current view on Europe’s position. If Deputy Martin feels that having face-to-face meetings with prime ministers is not worthwhile, I disagree with him.

Deputy Micheál Martin: When did I say that? Do not put untruths out there. I never said that.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The Deputy implied it.

The Taoiseach: These discussions were important as-----

An Ceann Comhairle: There are other Deputies waiting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I did not imply it.

The Taoiseach: -----part of the ongoing conversation and contract between Ministers.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I said the opposite.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: It was implied.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach is filibustering.

An Ceann Comhairle: We have spent 15 minutes on this group of questions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Whose fault is that? The Taoiseach has been filibustering every answer.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy feels that these are not important meetings, I disagree with his judgment.

Deputy Micheál Martin: When did I say that?

The Taoiseach: I am interested in achieving a conclusion-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Do not say untruths in the House. The Taoiseach is twisting words.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The Deputy implied it.

The Taoiseach: -----to the agreement set out by the Heads of Government. If I am twisting

words, I would like to hear what the Deputy said.

An Ceann Comhairle: I want to allow in Deputy Boyd Barrett.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach is twisting words. It is his favourite sort of operation.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: What does the Deputy think is discussed at these meetings after the mess the Deputy's party left us in?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I asked a question about meeting the Finnish Prime Minister-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Boyd Barrett.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----the Dutch Prime Minister and the German Prime Minister.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: We have a country that the Deputy's party left destroyed. What does the Deputy think is discussed?

An Ceann Comhairle: I would appreciate it if Deputy Martin stopped interrupting. I call Deputy Boyd Barrett.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The Minister for Health's supporter.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The former Minister of State, Deputy Shortall, knows all about Deputy Lynch's loyalty and solidarity.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: What does the Deputy think is discussed?

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Deputy Reilly's number one fan.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister's number one fan.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: A Reilly fan.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputies to allow in Deputy Boyd Barrett. We have spent 15 minutes on this group of questions. We have strayed from one end of the world to the next when we are talking about a particular meeting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Ceann Comhairle should not be looking at this side of the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: Would you mind your own business for a minute?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I beg your pardon? Do not address me in that manner.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have called Deputy Boyd Barrett. Thank you.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach has been filibustering for the whole session. He has spent 15 minutes going around the world. It was no one else.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy has done a fair bit of that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He will not answer a question.

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Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Deputy Martin has had the practice.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I will pass over the irony of Fianna Fáil lecturing anyone about leadership, seeing as it led us to the most disastrous economic decision any Government has ever taken in this State with the blanket guarantee for the banks and the ensuing catastrophic consequences. Perhaps Fianna Fáil should take a lesson in irony before lecturing anyone.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The Deputy would know all about leadership.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: You have had your 15 years.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: You are a one-trick pony, a fraud.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies should address remarks through the Chair.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Do not be upset with that.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: A spoofer.

An Ceann Comhairle: We do not need help from Deputy Durkan.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I apologise, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Deputy's party spoofed for 15 years and look where that landed us.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: A spoofer extraordinaire.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Setting aside the question of the euro crisis, the meeting with British Prime Minister, David Cameron, was on the question of world hunger and on the occasion of the Olympics and Paralympics. Perhaps that should have been an opportunity to ask slightly broader and deeper questions about the priorities in the world and how well governments are dealing with the issues facing humanity. The Taoiseach would probably agree that big international events like that allow us to think about what is happening in the world and for humanity.

The import of Deputy Higgins's question is whether the Taoiseach, Prime Minister Cameron and the others attending the summit questioned why we have such an extent of hunger in the world, when the hunger is evident in a world of plenty. We do not have hunger today as we did 300 years ago because there is not enough food in the world. The irony is that millions of people are starving and go hungry when there is more food in the world than the world's population could possibly eat. Therefore, leaders like the Taoiseach, Prime Minister Cameron and other European leaders must consider the issue of the fair and civilised distribution of food, wealth and resources in our society. Our economic system is failing disastrously in that regard and moving in precisely the opposite direction. Rather than moving to greater equality and better distribution, it is moving the other way.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have a question?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The differential between those at the top and those at the bottom is growing wider every year, including in this country, where the top 10% of people have 14 times the income of those at the bottom. It is in that context that the financial transaction tax arises. It was proposed specifically to deal with the impact of globalisation and the

unequal distribution of wealth, including world poverty.

The Taoiseach has met Prime Minister Cameron, the major objector to a financial transaction tax in Europe, so why did he not challenge him on the issue? Why does the Taoiseach not publicly challenge Prime Minister Cameron and offer leadership and example by stating that it is a moral and humanitarian imperative for Ireland and Britain, Europe as a whole and the world to impose some kind of tax on the enormous wealth of financial and multinational corporations? They have all the wealth while millions of people in the world starve and go hungry. Why has the Taoiseach not offered leadership on that issue rather than simply using excuses such as that Britain's objections mean we cannot do it or we must wait for others to act?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is blaming Britain but it is not the only objector to a financial transaction tax. There are reports clearly indicating a loss of up to 15,000 jobs in the European Union if a financial transaction tax were imposed. That is a matter of opinion. There are other countries in Europe with a very strong objection to a financial transaction tax. We object to this on the basis of it being discriminatory, and if it had a severe impact on our economy, it could be disastrous. If it were applied in a global sense, we could have a very different perspective. Our membership of the European Union and eurozone allows in some cases for those who want to pursue the area of enhanced co-operation to do so. We have indicated that clearly while arguing the issue at European Council meetings.

At the meeting in Downing Street during the course of the Olympic Games, which dealt with hunger, under-nutrition and malnutrition, there were contributions from a number of representatives from African non-governmental organisations, as well as African leaders. They reported on the activities ongoing in their individual countries and suggestions for dealing with malnutrition in that sense.

As I said, the Tánaiste, who visited Africa some time ago, outlined Ireland's programme as being the only country in the world where 20% of our foreign aid is focused directly on dealing with the question of malnutrition and hunger elimination. I made the suggestion that because we will hold the Presidency of the European Union until June of next year, and the British Government will hold the presidency of the G8, we should co-operate at both those leadership levels to further pursue proposals to deal with hunger elimination, malnutrition and under-nutrition. I found the conclusions of the meeting in that regard were very satisfactory and we will build on that during the course of our Presidency with our British colleagues who will have the presidency of the G8.

The contribution made by the double Olympic champion, Mo Farah, spoke for itself. As a refugee from Somalia, he noted the appreciation and consequence of the food aid programme, the efforts to eliminate hunger and deal with the malnutrition and under-nutrition were very strong. As Deputy Boyd Barrett is aware, the European Union has the strongest and most comprehensive food aid programme in the world, and Ireland has been an outstanding contributor to many causes over the years. We are at 20% in terms of the spend of our Irish Aid programme on the elimination of hunger, malnutrition and under-nutrition and the Tánaiste has confirmed that we will maintain that.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Taoiseach has not answered my main question. I accept that Ireland has a reasonably good record in terms of aid for the developing world but my question is on the financial transaction tax and the reason we are not taking a more proactive leadership role and leading by example when it comes to championing the imposition of this

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modest proposal that was put forward explicitly to respond to the question of world hunger and world poverty and the shocking gap between rich and poor in the world. The Tobin tax was explicitly developed as an idea to deal with this problem.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could the Deputy put his question?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Why are we not leading from the front in demanding and publicly confronting those leaders, including David Cameron in Britain, who refused to go along with this modest proposal to deal with poverty and inequality across the world? Is it the case that it is because the Taoiseach has as a higher imperative the question of economic competition over everything else? Competition when it is applied to a football match between Mayo and Donegal is fine because the costs are just a few tears for the people of Mayo.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: And for the people of Dublin.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: More than a few.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: But economic competition-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, we are over the allocated time. Will you put the question?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: -----when it is applied as the highest imperative that overrides everything else, leads to starvation, hunger, inequality, poverty, needless deaths and people dying from diseases from which they should not have to die. The financial transaction tax is an effort to deal with that and we should be the ones who lead by example and proactively argue for its imposition and be willing to bring it in here.

The Taoiseach: We are leading from the front. As I said, we are the only country in the world which has a 20% spend from our food aid programme directly focused on dealing with the elimination of hunger, malnutrition and under-nutrition. There is no other country in the world which has that level of spend from its overseas development programme and, on behalf of the Government, the Tánaiste has confirmed that we will maintain that. It is a striking figure when one speaks to those people from the Africa nations who have concerns and have to deal with this on a daily basis.

The Deputy would be the first to come in here if the Government were to be associated with a tax which could prove to be discriminatory were it not applied in a global sense. Ireland has been very clear on this. We do not support a financial transaction tax that would put our economy or our financial services at a distinct disadvantage over others that are close to us, namely, London, Paris, Frankfurt or wherever. Were this to be applied in a global sense, that would be a different matter. I do not speak for other leaders. We talk to them and with them about these issues-----

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Does the Taoiseach speak to them?

The Taoiseach: -----but in so far as that is concerned, we have been very clear about this.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Why does the Taoiseach not demand it and lead the way for a change?

The Taoiseach: We will continue to focus, as Ireland has always done and has done best, on this area. We are leading the world in so many ways with what we do here.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Will the Taoiseach use our Presidency of the EU to launch

a campaign on this?

The Taoiseach: As I said, the Deputy should listen to the words of those who are the recipients of Ireland's experience-----

Deputy Joe Higgins: It is not enough; it is a fraction of what is needed for God's sake.

The Taoiseach: -----Ireland's opportunity and Ireland's aid. The figure of 20% in that respect is a leading one in the world at present. *Written Answers follow Adjournment.*

Ministerial Appointment: Announcement by Taoiseach

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach to make an announcement for the information of the House.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is about musical chairs.

The Taoiseach: I wish to announce for the information of the Dáil that the Government, on my nomination today, appointed Deputy Alex White to be Minister of State at the Department of Health with special responsibility for primary care.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Has he got the criteria?

Deputy Micheál Martin: A Cheann Comhairle, is there a debate on this?

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: On a point of order, is there an opportunity to discuss the Taoiseach's announcement regarding a ministerial appointment here?

The Taoiseach: -----No. 4, Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is was an announcement.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We were not alerted to it. I am just pointing that out.

The Taoiseach: Private Members' Business shall be No. 61, motion re addiction services.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are no proposals to put to the House. I call Deputy Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They are not being put to the house?

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An Ceann Comhairle: There are no proposals to be put to the House.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In terms of the order of the House?

An Ceann Comhairle: No. There is no motion before the House.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Before we start on the Order of Business proper may I take this opportunity on my behalf and on behalf of my party to express our deepest sympathy to the family of the late Teachta Dála P.J. Morley who passed away, and to Mary, his wife, and to Patrick, Enda, Brian and Cathy, we extend our deepest sympathies. P.J. served in this House for 20 years from 1977 to 1997. He was a man of great integrity and commitment and an outstanding parliamentarian in working for his people in Mayo. He had a very close association with the late Monsignor Horan and worked extremely hard on the securing and development of Knock Airport among other achievements in the region. We sympathise with his family on their loss. I hope we will get an opportunity later to pay a more fulsome tribute but I want to pay this tribute to P.J. and to offer our sympathies and condolences to his wife and family.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach might like to respond before we move on to the Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: I assume we will have an opportunity to say a few words about this again. I concur with the sentiments expressed by Deputy Martin and I sympathise with the Morley family on the death of P.J. I served with him both as a councillor and a Deputy for many years. I enjoyed his company and I will have an opportunity to say some words again. He was a person who showed an extraordinary degree of practical common sense in dealing with many issues that were quite contentious over the years. To his wife Mary and family, I offer my sympathy to the family and to the party. He was a good, loyal and convivial servant of the people of my own county for many years.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Ba mhaith liom cur leis an méid a dúirt an Taoiseach agus an Teachta Martin faoin scéal brónach seo i dtaobh báis P.J. Morley. I wish to extend sympathy to the Morley family. Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a anam dílis.

An Ceann Comhairle: As has been said, we will have another opportunity to give a more detailed response later.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We would have wished to have had the opportunity to oppose the Order of Business and we are disappointed that this opportunity has not been facilitated. I asked the Taoiseach earlier if the Minister for Health would come to the Dáil to speak about the serious issues within his own Department, particularly in the context of the resignation of the former Minister of State, Deputy Shortall, which is, by any standards, an issue of national importance, particularly as she outlined at the weekend the difficulties in following through on the programme for Government, the degree to which any worthy initiatives were blocked by the Minister-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. We cannot discuss that now.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----and the degree to which we could again have a balanced budget this year if the Minister had followed through on the commitments that he gave to big ticket items.

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps the Deputy will stick to what he can speak about on the

Order of Business.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I have to say to the Ceann Comhairle-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, the Deputy does not have to.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----it is an extraordinary situation that everybody outside the House is discussing the House-----

An Ceann Comhairle: There are plenty of other ways besides this.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Every radio station is talking about it and we do not have an opportunity to have a private notice question accepted, which would have allowed for a detailed presentation by the Minister of his position and his perspective in the aftermath of the resignation of a Minister of State in his Department. This significant controversy has been under way for some weeks. On occasion in previous dáileanna, Ministers were inevitably brought in and asked to respond to a private notice question. That was always the standard.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Standing Order relating to private notice questions is quite clear.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Deputy is mixed up.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not denying the Deputy any opportunities. The Standing Orders are quite clear about private notice questions and I only stick to the wording in the Standing Orders. Therefore, please get on and deal with what we can deal with.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This controversy has raged for weeks.

An Ceann Comhairle: Maybe so, but I am not interested in dealing with controversies.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy is getting a good bit of mileage out of it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The bottom line is the story has changed time and time again.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are other ways of dealing with it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: A Minister of State has resigned and it is extraordinary that we do not have an opportunity following a frank interview by her-----

An Ceann Comhairle: There are plenty of other ways of trying to raise it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----to ask the Minister for Health some basic questions and hope to get some straightforward answers.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to co-operate with the Chair.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As a political party, we are annoyed and extremely angry at this turn of events.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Deputy is showing it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----and at the failure of the Minister to come in and account for it.

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Deputy Paul Kehoe: It is a pity Fianna Fáil did not have these principles when it was in government.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have asked the Deputy please-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: What seems to be happening is that a very partisan approach is being taken. I just counted the opportunities the Opposition gets in the House and they are few.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy please adhere to what I have asked him to adhere to?

Deputy Micheál Martin: Very little opportunity is afforded to the Opposition in this Dáil. Despite all the talk and protestations about reform, transparency and openness, it has not been forthcoming since the Government has taken up office.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will not ask the Deputy a third time to please resume his seat if he has not something in order on the Order of Business.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I find it extraordinary that we are in this situation today where the Minister for Health will not come in and, for a minimum of time, make a presentation on the issues that have unfolded.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy resume his seat?

Deputy Micheál Martin: This could have been avoided if the private notice question-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Adams.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We have gone through all the procedures and we have been shot down in this regard in an unfair way.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy referred to the Chair as acting in an unfair way and I ask him to withdraw that remark forthwith.

Deputy Micheál Martin: No, I did not. I am not withdrawing any remark.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy implied in his statement that he was treated unfairly by me because I did not grant a private notice question. I ask him to withdraw that remark.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am not withdrawing any remark. I asked earlier-----

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a matter for the Chair to interpret the Standing Orders adopted by this House. The Standing Orders are quite clear about the granting of a private notice question. The Deputy's request did not conform with those requirements and, therefore, it is not a matter of being fair or unfair.

Deputy Micheál Martin: On a point of order, I asked-----

An Ceann Comhairle: And I take grave exception to the manner in which the-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Ceann Comhairle is making comments-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy please resume his seat?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I asked the Taoiseach on the Order of the House today at Leaders' Questions to facilitate and provide for the Minister for Health----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy may be looking at the press but I am telling him what the Standing Orders say.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I know well what the Standing Orders are.

An Ceann Comhairle: Has Deputy Adams got a question?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am putting it clearly to the Chair in my opinion and I outlined what our party believes.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is quite entitled to table a motion.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Fianna Fáil Party believes that the way the House is being managed and the facility being afforded to the Opposition is not fair or satisfactory.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy does not have confidence in my chairmanship, he has a means of dealing with it. All he has to do is table the motion.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What is unfolding here is a ridiculous scenario.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is quite entitled to table a motion.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Ceist faoi reachtaíocht atá fógraithe. I wish the Minister of State, Teachta Alex White, well in his new position.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Fair play to the Deputy. He has manners that others do not.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I wish him luck. He will need all the luck he can get, given the way Deputy Shortall was dealt with. The new Minister of State has a hard job to do and I wish him luck with it.

Last week, Deputy MacDonald asked the Taoiseach whether statutory power for primary care had been delegated to the former Minister of State, Deputy Shortall, and he replied that he thought that it had not been.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is not in order on the Order of Business. I am sorry.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I think it is but I will be bound by the Chair's instruction. Will the Taoiseach confirm whether statutory power for primary care has been delegated to the new Minister of State, Deputy White, or whether the Government plans to bring forward such a statutory instrument? Has the programme for Government been changed, given Deputy Shortall's assertion that it is not being implemented? Does the Government intend to bring forward amendments to it?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not a matter for the Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: I have no time for the false anger of Deputy Martin. In spite of the charge he made, the first Priority Question taken by the Minister for Health last Thursday-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Late at night and he misled the House.

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Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Why was Deputy Martin not present?

The Taoiseach: -----was asked by Deputy Kelleher and dealt with the issue of primary care centres. The Minister gave his answer.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He misled the House.

The Taoiseach: I further remind the Deputy that the first Private Members' business following the recess was a motion of no confidence in the Minister for Health and he did not even bother to contribute to that debate.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Some of the Taoiseach's Labour Party colleagues did and they are not too happy now.

The Taoiseach: With regard to Deputy Adams's question, primary care is not based on a particular statute and cannot be delegated in the normal way-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Of course it can. If the Government wants to, it can but it chooses not to.

The Taoiseach: -----because it crosses many areas in the Department of Health and other Departments.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It might interfere with the Minister's portfolio.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Correct.

The Taoiseach: From that perspective, we do not have a defined area of primary care because it is not based on a particular statute.

Deputy Niall Collins: Cyber-bullying is a phenomenon of growing concern to many people and communities. It is not just an issue for young people, as there are many well documented cases of adults and elderly people who were victims of this crime. Is the Taoiseach aware of the extent of this phenomenon? Has he any legislative proposals to deal with this crime?

An Ceann Comhairle: Is there promised legislation?

The Taoiseach: Yes, the criminal justice (cybercrime) Bill is listed but there is no date for publication. The Minister for Education and Skills is concerned about this. There is a conference on 19 October dealing with this issue. The Minister will reflect on the contributions made at it and will bring forward his proposals for updated legislation dealing with what is a serious matter.

Deputy Derek Keating: The office of the Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ring, has received approximately 2,7000 applications for sports capital grants. Given decisions in this regard are imminent, will legislation be required and will funding be secured for them?

The Taoiseach might join me in wishing Jim Gavin from Round Towers every success as the newly appointed Dublin manager.

The Taoiseach: I do.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: In view of the oft expressed concerns about crime and the

ongoing spate of crime, I used to raised the question of the bail Bill-----

An Ceann Comhairle: What the Deputy is raising now is more important, not what he used to raise.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am talking about it now but I am also reminiscing.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no time for reminiscing on the Order of Business.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am reminding the Ceann Comhairle that when I was on the Opposition benches and Deputies Micheál Martin and Mattie McGrath were in government, I raised questions about the bail Bill and the need to introduce it at an early date to combat the problem-----

An Ceann Comhairle: What legislation is the Deputy inquiring about?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The bail Bill. To show serious intent, since the previous Administration did not show any intent in that area, would it be possible to bring that important legislation to the House ahead of schedule?

5 o'clock

The Taoiseach: Let me reflect Deputy Durkan's concern. The heads of the Bill are being drafted in the Department of Justice and Equality and it is the intention of the Minister for Justice and Equality to bring the heads of the Bill to the Government as soon as he has completed the work.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: One year ago last week, the Taoiseach announced the establishment of the strategic investment fund and he is well aware that we need an amendment to the existing legislation, the National Pensions Reserve Fund Act 2000, to allow the National Pensions Reserve Fund to invest in the strategic investment fund that is supposed to help venture capital and long-term capital for small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs. Given that it is a cornerstone of the job creation strategy one year on, amendments have not been coming forward and it is not on the list for the rest of the year. When are we likely to see legislation brought forward in order that the strategic investment fund announced by the Government on 28 September last year can finally be established?

The Taoiseach: A great deal of work has been done on this. It is to give effect to that commitment for investment in Irish infrastructure for Irish jobs. I cannot give an accurate date for publication but it is receiving priority. The use of the NewERA concept and the National Pensions Reserve Fund for investment in Irish infrastructure has been the subject of a great deal of discussion.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: That is a blast from the past.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: We are now one year on.

The Taoiseach: I cannot give an accurate date for its introduction but it is moving along. It is not too far away.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Regarding the noise nuisance Bill-----

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Deputy McGrath is qualified.

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Deputy Mattie McGrath: No, seriously. This is in section C of the Government legislation programme. Can the Minister extend or improve the powers available to the enforcement authorities to prevent noise or to reduce and abate noise? Last night, at the homecoming of the victorious Kilkenny team, which I congratulate, the noise of the booing broke all decimal levels when the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Phil Hogan-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy McGrath please resume his seat? This is a House of Parliament. I call Deputy Healy-Rae.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They were so jubilant but they booed the Minister, Deputy Hogan.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Deputy McGrath is proscribed.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Was Deputy McGrath at the gate collecting fivers?

An Ceann Comhairle: I called Deputy Healy-Rae. It is bad enough the way things are going without making a total show of ourselves in here.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I congratulate the new Minister of State and I wish him well. Regarding the new land and conveyancing law reform (amendment) Bill, can we ensure that when the Bill is brought before the House, the new practice of-----

An Ceann Comhairle: When it comes before the House, Deputy Healy-Rae can have a long debate on it. When is the legislation due?

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Can I just say to the Taoiseach-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, Deputy Healy-Rae cannot say it, not on the Order of Business.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Everyone else gets to say-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, they do not.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Very briefly, the Taoiseach knows that in recent days there has been a practice of the value of properties being put online showing what people paid for properties.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Healy-Rae to resume his seat and not to make a farce out of the House. He should table a parliamentary question. What item of legislation does this concern?

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: It is the land and conveyancing law reform (amendment) Bill.

The Taoiseach: It will be next year before it is published. Deputy Healy-Rae will have the opportunity to make comments at that point. I hope the man beside him does not suffer from tinnitus from all the noise.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The noise is coming from there.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Deputy McGrath can get treatment for that.

Deputy Ray Butler: I will bring some normality back to the House.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Deputy Durkan needs some of that treatment.

Deputy Ray Butler: I thank Deputy McGrath. When is publication expected of the gambling control Bill? I refer especially to the gambling done on websites. Facebook put up a website in England and we could have the same site in Ireland. Many young people are on Facebook and we need control of websites and gambling.

The Taoiseach: This refers to the gambling control Bill. The Government approved the preparation of the heads of the Bill but it has not yet come to Government. It will be next year before it is published.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I refer to the minerals development Bill and, in view of alarming reports today of sharp increases in health insurance, the health insurance (risk equalisation) Bill. I had hoped to advise Minister of State, Deputy Alex White, before he left the Chamber-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sure Deputy Higgins could meet him in the corridors.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: That is a dangerous place.

Deputy Joe Higgins: In his new dispensation, he might be able to use his youthful political training in how to deal successfully with an entrenched Stalinist regime.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He was there before.

An Ceann Comhairle: This involves two items of legislation.

The Taoiseach: The minerals development Bill and health insurance risk (equalisation) Bill will be published this session.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: In wishing the Minister of State, Deputy White, the best of luck, I want to inquire if the instruments assigning power to the Minister of State have been signed. Will the instruments be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas?

An Ceann Comhairle: That question was already asked.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Will it include primary care and will the delegated functions be in the tenure of Minister of State?

The Taoiseach: The question was answered already.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Buttimer.

Deputy Micheál Martin: There was no answer.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: There was no answer the previous time when Deputy Adams raised it.

The Taoiseach: The answer is that I have already made an announcement in the House for the information of Deputies, including Deputy Kelleher, that Deputy Alex White has been nominated and approved by the Government as a Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for primary care.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: With no powers.

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The Taoiseach: Primary care is not contained in a particular statute because it crosses many areas of the Department so powers are not assigned in the normal way because the statutory remit is not that narrow.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is why reform did not happen. What was the Tánaiste doing?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Buttimer.

The Taoiseach: False anger, Deputy Martin.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: There were many Ministers of State in the previous Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Buttimer to proceed.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The heckling is getting to me.

Deputy Niall Collins: Deputy Buttimer is getting too much for the rest of us.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: In the city of Cork, many people cannot obtain insurance due to flooding or subsidence-----

Deputy Niall Collins: It is the fault of Fine Gael.

An Ceann Comhairle: It sounds like a Topical Issue matter to me.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Has the Government a plan? I wrote to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform on this issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is this about promised legislation?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: It is a pitch for a chairmanship.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I am being heckled but it is a serious matter. There are people in the city of Cork who do not have house insurance or whose house insurance has increased by 150%-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should raise it some other way, not on the Order of Business.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Can the Government, through European or other means, introduce legislation regarding that point?

The Taoiseach: The point raised by Deputy Buttimer is a serious one for those so concerned.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What legislation is that?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Besides noise.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Very partisan.

The Taoiseach: The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Minister for Finance are attempting to work out a solution in respect of which money has been made available.

Topical Issue Matters

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 27A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Ray Butler - the need to provide credit facilities to small businesses; (2) Deputy Tony McLoughlin - the need to acquire adjoining land from the HSE to enable the Holy Family national school, Tubbercurry, County Sligo, to provide for an additional set-down area to ensure the safety of the pupils; (3) Deputies Brendan Smith, Denis Naughten and John O'Mahony - bus services in rural areas; (4) Deputy Jim Daly - the need to establish a national policy framework to deal with the safety risk posed to rural road users by unmaintained roadside verges; (5) Deputy Peadar Tóibín - cutbacks in industry pension schemes; (6) Deputy Timmy Dooley - the funding cut of €243,000 in the block grant to Clare County Council; (7) Deputy Billy Kelleher - the plans to transfer staff from the district veterinary office at Darrara, Clonakilty, County Cork; (8) Deputy Jonathan O'Brien - the need for the religious congregations to meet their share of the costs of the compensation bill for victims of institutional residential abuse; (9) Deputy Seán Kyne - the need to ensure advancements in the treatment of diabetics, including the use of insulin pumps, is extended to children of all ages across all HSE areas; (10) Deputy Michael McCarthy - the need to award a disability allowance to a person (details supplied); (11) Deputy Gerald Nash - staffing arrangements for polling stations and count centres in the upcoming referendum; (12) Deputy Michael Conaghan - the threat posed by escalating gang related violence; (13) Deputy Brian Stanley - the effects of HSE cuts on respite service for young people with mental disabilities in County Laois; (14) Deputy Martin Ferris - the transfer of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine veterinary office from Clonakilty to Cork city; (15) Deputy Paul J. Connaughton - the reason families whose homes were flooded in 2009 have yet to receive compensation; (16) Deputy Michelle Mulherin - the need to conduct a regulatory impact assessment before placing the burden for sick pay of employees on business; (17) Deputy Martin Heydon - the need to include a new primary school at Crookstown, Ballitore, Athy, County Kildare, on the Department of Education and Skill's five year building programme; (18) Deputy Mattie McGrath - the requirement by the HSE for home help workers who are family carers to carry out manual handling training; (19) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett - the position of teachers employed in VECs in view of new Teaching Council regulations; (20) Deputy Gerry Adams - the future of public nursing home services at the Cottage Hospital, Drogheda, County Louth; (21) Deputies Clare Daly and Dessie Ellis - the need to achieve a solution to the pyrite problem; (22) Deputy Willie O'Dea - the possible creation of a two tier child benefit system; (23) Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív - the circumstances surrounding the representations made to Kilkenny County Council on the housing allocation for a specific family; (24) Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin - the criteria which were used to identify the 35 priority primary care centres announced as part of the Government stimulus package on 17 July 2012; and (25) Deputy Mick Wallace - the raid by the Revenue's customs service on two illegal diesel laundries and the effect this illegal activity has on jobs.

The matters raised by Deputies Brendan Smith, Denis Naughten and John O'Mahony, Gerald Nash, Jim Daly, and Clare Daly and Dessie Ellis have been selected for discussion.

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Topical Issue Debate

Public Transport

Deputy Brendan Smith: There is widespread shock and anger in the west Cavan area at the decision to cease daily bus services through Swanlinbar, Bawnboy and Ballyconnell. At present there are three return services on the route, linking with bus services in Cavan and providing a good service for customers to Dublin and northwards to Enniskillen and Donegal.

The service is provided on behalf of Bus Éireann by two operators, Martin Leydon of Swanlinbar and McGeehans of Donegal. I know many of the people who avail of the service on a constant basis and they appreciate the excellent and reliable service of those operators that has been in place in the area over many years.

Last week, Councillors Sean Smith and John Paul Feeley spoke to me about the need to outline clearly to Bus Éireann and to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the absolute anger of the local community at this further attack on rural Ireland. Not alone does this service facilitate people from west Cavan, but many others availing of the service are from south Leitrim and south Fermanagh. People of all age groups use the service, including students, workers, elderly persons and people needing to travel to Cavan General Hospital or to Dublin hospitals. Councillor Smith detailed to me the exact difficulties that will be faced by so many people who spoke to him in recent days, who need this public transport and who are not in a position to hire taxis. Many individuals do not have immediate family members to bring them to hospital appointments or on other necessary journeys. Individuals and representatives of different groups have spoken to the local newspaper, *The Anglo-Celt*, and to the local radio station, Northern Sound, outlining the major setback this practical cessation of these services will mean for so many families.

To my knowledge, the route has attracted good customer numbers over the years. Indeed, a proposal was put forward by Ballinamore Community Council to extend the service. Such an extension of service would provide a direct route to Dublin for a large part of County Leitrim as well as for that important part of west Cavan and south Fermanagh.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this issue. I want to record my condemnation of the decision by Bus Éireann to withdraw completely the bus transport services from the towns of Elphin, Roosky and Dromad. I also echo the comments of Deputy Brendan Smith regarding the provision of services in Ballinamore. It makes no sense, in time or distance travelled, to change either Route 22 between Ballina and Dublin or Route 23 between Sligo and Dublin from the current route that services these towns to the route proposed by Bus Éireann, with two weeks notice.

Services cannot be removed completely from communities. We are told the public service obligation, PSO, does not cover this decision, but we are also told the National Transport Authority, NTA, has responsibility to allocate funding under the PSO. Surely it makes more sense for the NTA to provide financial assistance to Bus Éireann to continue to provide these services to the communities involved rather than remove a service completely.

These communities lost their local hospital in the past 14 months and are now to lose the alternative bus service to the Midland Regional Hospital in Mullingar which could help to

provide an alternative for hospital appointments. We were promised a streamlining of the budget of more than €200 million for rural transport and the PSO, along with funding for HSE non-emergency transport and school transport services. That streamlining has not been done although it could provide savings and assistance to Bus Éireann, not only to continue to provide existing services but to enhance them. We are also told there will be a tendering for bundles of services which could include profitable and non-profitable routes. That has not happened either, although it could help to address this situation and provide a service to the communities involved.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I want to add my concern and objection to the proposed changes to the Expressway routes due to be implemented from Sunday next. Services are being changed or withdrawn altogether where there are no alternative forms of public transport. I refer in particular to Route 22, the Ballina, Longford, Dublin Airport route, where the stops at Carracastle in County Mayo and Elphin, Roosky and Ballinafad are to be removed from the Expressway service.

I will focus in particular on the Carracastle stop. I ask the Minister or Bus Éireann what savings will be made by the bus taking the new route. It is nearer to travel from Charlestown via Carracastle to the N4 than the proposed new route. The new route will increase the distance travelled. I have been contacted by a number of people who use this service and who do not have transport to the nearest pick-up points in Charlestown or Ballaghaderreen. They have said that there was no consultation on these changes. I am asking that the changes be deferred until the communities are consulted and provided with an opportunity to increase the usage, if that is a problem. We all understand that savings must be made. I would like to hear the Minister's response to this question.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I thank the Members for raising this important issue. First, it must be stated that I have no personal or ministerial power when it comes to bus routes and route frequencies operated by Bus Éireann. The provision of bus services and the routes they take are operational matters for the company management in conjunction with the National Transport Authority, NTA, which is the licensing and regulatory body for public transport. However, as the Government is the sole shareholder in the CIE companies, the re-design of this and other Bus Éireann routes is something of which I am aware and in which I am interested, so I have made inquiries with the company on the matter.

Bus Éireann operate a mix of services. Some of these services are commercial. These include school transport and Expressway which competes on the open market with private operators. The company also operates public service obligation, PSO, services. This PSO payment is made for the company to carry out important and necessary bus services which would not be viable were they to rely on commercial revenue alone. Expressway services do not receive a subsidy, either directly or indirectly. Bus Éireann's services are not as direct as their competitors and, due to that and the recession, Expressway has lost passengers and revenue as customers have opted for private providers who operate a faster service by bypassing smaller population centres. In order to gain competitiveness and achieve a break-even position, Bus Éireann had to re-design its Expressway services.

I appreciate that changes to the bus services will inconvenience some passengers. Given the financial position that Bus Éireann and the CIE companies are in, however, there is no alternative for the companies but to ensure that commercial operations operate on a commercial footing, and that means following the routes that most passengers want.

Rural transport is a critical component of public transport services and it is vital for the development of a fully inclusive society, both from a social and economic perspective. In January last, the Government approved new arrangements for the development and implementation of integrated local and rural transport services. It was decided that the NTA would be assigned national responsibility for local and rural transport services integration, including the rural transport programme, RTP, and this has been effective since 1 April 2012. This new role for the NTA coupled with its existing national remit for securing the provision of public passenger transport services will enable the development of better links between local and rural services and scheduled bus and rail services. This is something which is fundamental to a wholly integrated transport network.

Local integration working groups have been established in some areas while in others RTP groups have been working informally with potential partners to identify transport integration opportunities. Work has commenced on the inclusion of the RTP services in the national journey planner and on the inclusion of RTP and school transport services in reviews of public transport services being undertaken by the NTA in the South-Eastern Regional Authority area, in the Border, Midland and West area and in the South and Mid-West area. Consideration of RTP services in these reviews will serve to highlight transport needs and offer opportunities for integration.

The integration process is set to achieve the efficiencies required in the face of the challenging fiscal climate in which the country finds itself. Some of the challenges involved in the integration process are quite complex, involve multiple players and involve matters not always within our control. Integration can deliver a more complete and cost-effective transport service in local and rural areas that better meets the transport demands of all users.

As I have indicated, Bus Éireann must ensure it meets the customer demand for limited stop services with quicker journey times in order that Expressway services are commercially viable. Failure to react to this market demand would result in a loss of Expressway services altogether. I appreciate the concerns of Deputies with regard to the impact on certain passengers arising from the re-design of certain Expressway routes and I have asked the chief executive of Bus Éireann to meet Oireachtas Members and brief them personally on the changes to services in the north-west.

I will also direct the NTA, in its ongoing reviews of the PSO services, to take account of those places that will no longer be served by commercial services. It should be noted that future cuts to the level of subvention for PSO public bus services will limit the scope for any new or additional services.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I appreciate the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, replying on this matter. I recall the Minister speaking eloquently and properly in Enniskillen about cross-Border co-operation and the real progress that has been made in the province of Ulster, especially since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The route I have spoken about is Enniskillen, Swanlinbar, Bawnboy, Ballyconnell and on to Cavan. The service is part of south Fermanagh and it has the potential to service an even bigger area in south Leitrim, as Deputy Naughten agreed, as well as west Cavan. Bus Éireann said in a reply to local media that it was due to low customer usage, but it refused to detail the records about the numbers travelling. To my knowledge, that route is very well used in the area. The reply given by Bus Éireann is unacceptable.

I appreciate the Minister making arrangements for Members of the Oireachtas to meet the

chief executive of Bus Éireann but will the Minister put a direct request to Bus Éireann on my behalf that this route be considered a public service obligation? It is an addition to the Dublin to Donegal Expressway service. If necessary, we could avail of a very small amount of the large public funding that is given to Bus Éireann. Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal do not have access to rail services but I have read recently of new rail services that are not being utilised being provided in counties where there are both bus and rail services.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Will the Minister ask Bus Éireann and the National Transport Authority to postpone the decision regarding routes 22 and 23 until the communities involved are consulted? I cannot see the justification for a situation where all the bus routes being developed are to bypass communities across the middle of the country. Services are being withdrawn in communities throughout the midlands. It appears to be a case of Expressway services from one side of the country to the other and forget about the people in the middle. I estimate that approximately 20,000 travel passes are being misused either fraudulently or otherwise each year. That is a significant amount of revenue lost to both Bus Éireann and the Exchequer. Surely it makes far more sense to focus on that than on the communities involved in this case. Does the Minister not agree that the provision of bus shelters along many of these routes would increase the number of people using the services? Bus Éireann has failed to consider the provision of bus shelters along many of these routes.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I thank the Minister for his reply and for instructing the Bus Éireann executives to meet us. I ask him to instruct those executives to tell us what savings are being made through the withdrawal of certain routes. As I stated with regard to the Carracastle route, Bus Éireann will be travelling farther with the proposed new route. Also, will he instruct the executives to outline what alternative they will provide for people who have no other form of transport aside from public transport in those rural areas? I appeal to the Minister to instruct the executives to defer this decision until more consultation takes place.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I am informed by the company with regard to Swanlinbar, Bawnboy and Ballyconnell that between five and ten passengers per day use each service. I realise this is extremely inconvenient for the 20 people or so affected but there are probably as many people, if not more, who are not using this service because of the route it currently takes. That is the type of decision Bus Éireann must make when providing a commercial service. The chief executive officer of Bus Éireann met the Wicklow and Wexford Deputies today about a similar issue, and I will use my offices to ensure the Deputies meet the chief executive officer and senior management directly to discuss this. The Deputies know the area and the local issues far better than I, and ultimately Bus Éireann is the decision maker in this regard.

Expressway services do not receive any subsidy from my Department. Therefore, I do not have the power to instruct the company to defer or change its decision. Solutions can be found, however, albeit partial solutions. There was a similar issue in the midlands a few weeks ago and it was possible to identify public service obligation, PSO, alternatives for people. They might not be able to get the bus they wish but they can at least get a PSO bus to somewhere that is served by an Expressway service. In another case, it was possible to give a licence to a private operator on a no-subsidy basis to provide a feeder service to a bigger town where passengers could then take the Expressway service. They might not be able to get it in the town in which they live, but they at least have a service. Those are the types of options that can be explored.

On Deputy Naughten's question about fraud and travel passes, that budget comes from the Department of Social Protection. There is a working group of officials from my Department

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and the Department of Social Protection examining those issues. Given the scale of the deficit and the losses occurring across the CIE companies, like the budget we must do in December it will not be a case of either-or but a series of measures, including fare increases and service reductions, that will be required to allow us to continue to have public transport in the State.

Election Management System

Deputy Gerald Nash: None of us needs to be reminded of the appalling unemployment figures that were inherited from the previous Administration and with which the Government continues to grapple. In that context, it makes sense to award any State work available, where possible, to people on the live register. While I accept the guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to returning officers throughout the country advise that consideration be given to unemployed people, it is clear from past experience that these guidelines, weak as they are, are being largely ignored and flouted.

Many of our returning officers have not even set up websites, although there is a common website format available to them. Of those who have, only a few have application forms available for election work. To my knowledge, none of these returning officers has made any attempt to advertise the fact that people can apply for these jobs. If a person is motivated enough to find these secret jobs, what happens next? The applicant fills in a form which asks for contact details and a personal public service, PPS, number. The only other information actively sought is an applicant's current employment status and whether they have worked previously in the role. There is a blank section to fill in other details but the form does not specifically ask about work experience, qualifications, information technology skills, administration skills and so forth. Why would our returning officers not seek this information from prospective employees?

I believe this so-called application process is largely a worthless and cosmetic exercise and that the jobs will be filled the same way they always have been, from the ranks of retired civil servants and the student children of those who are in the know. I do not believe I am being cynical in saying this. At least the returning officer in Wicklow, for example, is honest enough not even to pay lip service to this farce. A message on the Wicklow website about the employment of polling and count staff, dated 20 September 2012, states:

All jobs are offered first to people who have worked successfully with me in the past. Due to a nationwide revision of the number of voters assigned to each polling station, there will be fewer stations in this constituency for future polls. There are fewer jobs available and a surplus of experienced staff. For the moment, therefore, I will not be accepting any new applications.

This is a disgrace and must be rectified. The generous payment on offer to polling clerks and count centre officials could make a difference to a child's Christmas for an unemployed family, whereas for a retired civil servant on a State pension it means Christmas in Lanzarote. I know which I would prefer to prioritise and I hope the Minister will agree with me and introduce transparent and rigorously enforced requirements for the hiring of election staff, beginning with the forthcoming referendum.

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I thank Deputy Nash for raising this important issue. The primary role of my Department in electoral matters is to provide an appropriate policy and legislative framework for a modern

and efficient electoral system. Within that framework, local returning officers are responsible for all matters in connection with the actual conduct of elections and referenda, including the selection, appointment and training of polling station staff in accordance with the relevant provisions of electoral law. To assist returning officers, the Department issues guidance to them in advance of each election and referendum. In that guidance, it is emphasised that the smooth conduct of polls is dependent on maintaining a cadre of sufficiently skilled and experienced people. Having regard to the overall objective of the smooth conduct of the polls, returning officers are advised to employ competent and efficient persons as polling staff. They are also asked to give consideration, wherever possible, to employing suitable persons who are unemployed.

The approach taken in the Department's guidance strikes the right balance. However, I agree with Deputy Nash that it might not always have been the case that it was implemented in the spirit in which the guidance was issued to the returning officers. There are competent unemployed individuals who could, with appropriate training, undertake duties in the conduct of polls. It would, however, be unwise to dispense entirely with the experience of some staff who are needed, particularly in large polling stations for supervision purposes, but there are positions such as poll clerk that could easily be assigned for electoral purposes in each polling station.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government issues a manual for presiding officers at each election and referendum. Local returning officers supplement this with appropriate training to ensure that all staff are familiar with their tasks and responsibilities but I will take this opportunity after Deputy Nash has raised this issue to contact returning officers again this week to emphasise the importance at this difficult time for families and individuals who are unemployed and to remind them of their duty, as laid out in the guidelines, to employ suitable people who are currently unemployed.

Deputy Gerald Nash: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive outline of the situation. I am pleased he has taken the opportunity at this juncture to remind returning officers of their responsibilities. We are in a time of national crisis and we as Government have always attempted to prioritise the needs of the unemployed or underemployed. As I said earlier, €400 would mean a world of difference to those experiencing unemployment. It would help to pay the mortgage or for groceries and bills. We must use every opportunity and tool at our disposal to ensure those who are unemployed get the opportunity to earn a few extra euro to help with those bills in these difficult circumstances.

We all appreciate the work carried out by polling clerks and count centre staff. It is critical to the democratic process and electoral system and I thank those who assist in my constituency on a regular basis. Now, however, is a time of national crisis and we must use every tool at our disposal to ensure those who require support get it. The training is rudimentary but those who go through it gain a lot from it, along with access to local authority staff and returning officers. It gives them a unique opportunity to engage in the democratic system so it is vital we use every tool at our disposal to ensure returning officers in the upcoming referendum on 10 November, in so far as is practicable, employ as many people from the live register as possible and at subsequent polls.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I agree with Deputy Nash that this is a time national crisis and there are many competent people who are unemployed. I will get a report from returning officers after the referendum to establish if they made the necessary efforts under the departmental guid-

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ance and employed as many people as possible who are currently unemployed, particularly as poll clerks. I understand the presiding officer must have a greater level of training and supervisory experience to run a poll smoothly but the post of poll clerk does not require a lot of training and the responsibilities of the post can be fulfilled under the guidance of the presiding officer. If regulations are required in future to ensure the guidance document is fully implemented, I will consider that.

Road Safety

Deputy Jim Daly: Fáiltím an deis labhairt ar an ábhar seo. I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity to raise this issue. My predecessor, the former Deputy P.J. Sheehan, used the oft-quoted line that there would be nothing left in west Cork but bachelors, briars and bullocks. I am returning to that theme today, particularly to the issue of briars - I am not that concerned about the bachelors or bullocks. The former Deputy used to refer to the briars shaking hands in the middle of the road and I am here to inform the Minister that in many cases in west Cork, the situation has got worse since it was first brought to the attention of the House by my former colleague.

The current position of Cork County Council according to a recent reply is that it is not in a position due to resource constraints to patrol all roadside hedges and issue notices on a systematic basis. Nevertheless, notices are regularly issued, particularly when a specific problem is brought to the attention of staff. It is an objective of the roads directorate to follow up assiduously on any cases of non-compliance with such notices.

Essentially, if a person reports to the council that a particular landowner has overgrown hedges, the council will issue the landowner with a notice but those who are out walking or driving do not have the wherewithal to write down each landowner's details. It goes against the grain for many people to report on their neighbours or to set neighbour against neighbour by writing to the council seeking legal directives for people to cut their hedges. Under the law the Roads Act 1993 passes responsibility for this duty to the landowner but the council undertook this practice until 2009 and maintained the roadside hedges. Since 2009, it has abandoned that duty and left it to the law to take its course. The reality, however, is that the system is not working. To be fair to rural dwellers, when we canvass such areas, they do not make many demands of their elected councillors, and I have had the privilege of running in two local elections, but one issue of annoyance to them is that of overgrown hedges and I am anxious councils would take on board the responsibility to deal with this.

I live in the real world and I am not looking for Exchequer funding but I ask the Minister to speak to his officials and come up with a national policy whereby the Department would take the lead in the matter and instruct the councils to be more proactive. At a time when we are trying to achieve a greater level of compliance with the household charge, and people in rural areas have in general paid the charge with no difficulty while making few demands of the council in return - they do not get waste services or water - one issue that is very important to them is that the hedges are trimmed. People have shown goodwill by paying the household charge so a greater policy response on behalf of councils would go a long way towards addressing this problem rather than the abandonment that has taken place to date. As matters stand it is a matter for individual landowners and if they are reported, the council will follow up.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The compliance rate with the household charge in Cork is not as good

as in the local authorities in Deputy Ellis's and Deputy Clare Daly's constituencies. They are having much more success in those local authorities.

Deputy Clare Daly: Perhaps they are not as good at distorting figures in those authorities as they are in our constituencies.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The facts speak for themselves. Under the Roads and Road Vehicles (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2007 all remaining matters pertaining to the Roads Act 1993 were transferred to the Minister with responsibility for transport. Consequently, this matter is one which comes within the policy remit of my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Perhaps the Office of the Ceann Comhairle might take note of that. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has a wide range of functions related to roads, including the legal framework for the provision and maintenance of roads, funding of the roads programme and promotion of road safety. The Department states that its overall objective is to provide, within the framework of a balanced and integrated transport policy, for the safe, efficient and cost effective movement of persons and goods by road. Specific objectives include those to ensure, as far as possible, the provision of a safe and efficient network of national, regional and local roads, and to ensure the optimum and safe use of the public road network.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each road authority. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the road authority.

It is also the case that section 70 of the Roads Act provides that the owner or occupier of land must take all reasonable steps to ensure that a tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation on the land is not a hazard or potential hazard to persons using a public road and that it does not obstruct or interfere with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of such a road. Where a tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation is a hazard or potential hazard to persons using a public road, or where it obstructs or interferes with the safe use of a public road, a road authority may serve a notice in writing on the owner or occupier of the land in question requiring the preservation, felling, cutting, lopping, trimming or removal of such tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation within the period stated in the notice.

However, I can inform Deputy Jim Daly that I am examining the prospect of developing a new social employment scheme in the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton. This could involve participants, who are unemployed at present, carrying out some of the work that is the subject of the topical issue raised by the Deputy. I hope the Minister, Deputy Burton, and I will be in a position to agree this scheme in the coming weeks with a view to having it rolled out in 2013.

Deputy Jim Daly: I thank the Minister for his response, which I appreciate. I assure him that irrespective of the figures for County Cork as a whole, the good people of west Cork, albeit not because of my voice or representation of them, are well up-to-date in respect of their household charge payments. Were the figures to be broken down, the Minister would find them to be highly impressive. Notwithstanding that, I do not appreciate being pushed around from one Department to another, of being obliged to deal with the intricacies of the matter and of trying to find out who is responsible. I wish to bring the matter to the attention of the House and in

particular, to the attention of the Executive running the country at present to get it dealt with.

I would greatly welcome an opportunity to have an input into the scheme proposed by the Minister. I proposed such a scheme to the previous Administration numerous times, when I referred to the social employment scheme and the number of people who were willing to partake in community projects and who would love to have something for which to get up in the morning but who unfortunately do not have a job to attend. Consequently, I would be anxious to see something like this because ultimately, an area like west Cork relies heavily on tourism and on the appearance of the countryside. In addition, there also is a leisure, health and safety aspect and while people are being encouraged to walk, it is not possible on many roads. Consequently, at a time like this of disappearing revenues, which many Members appreciate and understand, one can be creative, imaginative and more proactive in one's determination to get more for less. Basically, this is what I seek in this regard.

Deputy Phil Hogan: Briefly, I indicated to the Deputy that the road authority has the power to require the owner or occupier of the land to remove or trim the ditches on the side of the road as well. Consequently, it is not simply a matter for the local authority. However, the Deputy should use his good offices to make representations to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to support the scheme the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton, and I are trying to develop and perhaps to add some funds to the scheme to make it more attractive for local authorities, thereby ensuring more participants in such a scheme in the future.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

Deputy Clare Daly: The Minister released the pyrite panel report before the summer recess with a great fanfare. The scale of the problem was identified and at least 10,000 home owners are in ownership of what essentially are valueless properties. At the time, the Minister assured Members the stakeholders involved, namely, the insurance industry, the construction industry, banking, HomeBond and so on were being given until the end of September to come up with solutions to fund the remediation works and to this problem and that if they did not do so voluntarily, he would impose a solution on them. It is now 2 October and I note that last week, the Construction Industry Federation's spokesperson, Tom Parlon, was highly voluble in stating that he, as a spokesperson allegedly for the stakeholders, has no solution to this problem. Consequently, the ball is firmly in the Minister's court with regard to telling Members the status of the fund to implement plan B, as he assured them at the start of the summer. Moreover, I might add this is required now both because of the failure of the stakeholders and because the State cannot shirk its responsibility for its role in this scenario. I refer to the fact that evidence existed for decades about the problem of pyrite in other countries such as Britain and Canada, as well as in the geological formations of the land around us. In addition, the fact the building regulations were changed in December 2007 and the HomeBond structural guarantee was changed in 2008 is indicative that both these schemes were defective and deficient in the first place. The State stood over a lack of regulation, a lack of testing and an inadequate guarantee system through HomeBond. Therefore, the State must take responsibility now. These home owners cannot wait any longer and a long-overdue requirement now exists for the Minister to tell Members from where the fund will come and what is the plan B to finally solve this problem.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: The report and series of recommendations from the panel set up to examine the crisis regarding pyrite has been published. Slightly more than 10,000 homes were

identified, 850 of which needed immediate attention and repairs. I note this does not include paths, streets or even some of the boundaries. There may be many thousands more, as problems with pyrite may not become manifest until later. This is not to mention the local authority housing projects, schools and community buildings in which pyrite has been discovered but which are not mentioned in this report. It is very disappointing that the agencies, including HomeBond for the insurance industry, the Construction Industry Federation, the Irish Concrete Federation and even the Law Society of Ireland did not engage with the Minister or his Department. I note HomeBond would not even engage with the committee as set up and some of the aforementioned bodies would not even engage with the pyrite action groups set up to pursue this matter. It is not good enough to state it is not the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and that it is a private matter. While this happened to private houses, there is an onus on Members to deal with this matter. There is an onus on the State, on the Minister and his Department to deal with this problem because people's homes are falling apart. Some of those affected are in negative equity and some have huge mortgages. The living standards of people have gone downhill and many are suffering from depression and other side-effects.

I also wish to flag the plight of five families in my constituency who are living in caravans at a site in Finglas. They are waiting for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide funding to repair their houses, which contain pyrite. While they await that funding, I appeal to the Minister to look into this matter because these people have spent two years in these caravans in the most appalling conditions and this cannot be allowed to continue.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Deputy, I am afraid your time is up.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I will revert to the matter later.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I thank Deputies Clare Daly and Ellis for raising this matter. As they aware, I have stated on many occasions that the State is not responsible for the pyrite problem or liable for the costs associated with the remediation of pyrite-damaged dwellings. However, I believe the State has a role and a duty to assist home owners to find a resolution to the problem. This was one of my key objectives in setting up the independent pyrite panel, on which Deputies Clare Daly and Ellis have been briefed on a regular basis by those involved with the panel. Indeed, the panel follows the same theme in its report, identifying the State as having an important role in ensuring that responsible parties engage constructively in processes to deliver solutions for home owners. I note there are not 10,000 homes which are ready to fall down but that 850 require urgent remediation. The panel's report identified 10,000 home owners with a potential liability for pyrites. The cost for the remediation of pyrite-damaged dwellings must fall on those responsible and I welcome the report of the panel, which has a clear view on this matter. It was unambiguous in its view that the parties with direct or indirect responsibility for the pyrite problem should face up to their responsibilities and provide solutions for home owners and that the State is not responsible for the pyrite problem and consequently, not liable for the cost of remediation.

On receiving the pyrite report in June and reflecting on the panel's recommendations for stakeholders to provide solutions to home owners, I immediately began a series of discussions with the stakeholders with a view to securing a voluntary industry-led solution for home owners. I asked the stakeholders to give urgent consideration to the relevant recommendations in the report and revert to me with their proposals by the end of September. I have received

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responses from all the stakeholders in the last couple of days and am now in a position to give urgent and careful consideration to the content of these responses. I am not in a position at present to give a considered view but seek a few more days in which I will be in a position to read those responses in great detail to ascertain whether any meaningful input into the resolution of this problem has been given to me by the stakeholders.

I previously made it clear that in the absence of workable solutions from the stakeholders, I will consider an imposed solution along the lines recommended in the pyrite report. Recommendation No. 14 in the report recommends the establishment of a resolution board, which could be funded by the construction, quarrying and related insurance sectors. I do not believe it is a sustainable viewpoint that the taxpayer should be made liable for the costs associated with the remediation of pyrite-damaged dwellings and the panel noted its report the potential for those responsible readily to pass responsibility to the State. It would not be appropriate to allow this to happen.

Deputy Clare Daly: It certainly is not sustainable for the home owners to continue the way they have been. Moreover, the figure probably is far in excess of 10,000 and many more than 850 require immediate works. In the same way as the Government and the Housing Finance Agency took over bad loans from county councils, there is a precedent for the State providing money upfront and then going after those responsible. The people at home certainly cannot wait because home has become a nightmare for people whose homes have pyrite. It just not good enough for the Minister to ask to be given a chance to look at what they are saying. He has said it will take a few days, but what does he mean? The end of September was last week and he knew what was coming.

Deputy Phil Hogan: It was two days ago.

Deputy Clare Daly: That was for a resolution. If he has been in discussion with them he must have an idea what they are saying and presumably anticipated the response of people such as Mr. Parlon that his organisation would do nothing and he should have had a plan B. If he is trying to tell us that the CIF has come in with something different from what Mr. Tom Parlon has said, then we would be very grateful to hear that. If the response is as outlined by him on the airwaves, then the Minister has a serious problem because the State is responsible for standing over poor building regulations, inadequate insurance and bad standards. There is no way those home owners will pay the bill for that.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I believe that is the first time I heard the stakeholders had responded and I am glad to hear that. I hope they came back with something positive but my suspicions are that they have not. I believe the State will need to put money up front. If we need to consider levies to get the money from the different industries and agencies, it will take a long time to accumulate through that method. Therefore we definitely need to put the money up front. I am concerned that we might need legislation in dealing with some of this.

We have seen something similar with the IMF and EU when it comes to interpretation. Will this be backdated? We do not want to get into an argument that this only applies from now and not retrospectively and I hope that does not happen. I also hope measures will be introduced to deal with this in the future with proper monitoring and proper accountability by all the industries concerned. We need to have a way of keeping an eye on this. We have not had accountability, which is something we need to address.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I am surprised Deputy Ellis would talk about building standards considering that some of his pals were involved in Priory Hall.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: No pal of mine was involved in Priory Hall.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I will certainly not accept responsibility for him anyway.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I will not either.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The conduct of some of the professions and builders involved in such projects leaves much to be desired.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: The Minister is right about that.

Deputy Phil Hogan: It had nothing to do with the Building Control Act of the day. Unfortunate people find themselves in their present position because the building standards of the time were not observed. I agree with Deputy Clare Daly that the home owners have waited a long time. I am the first Minister to do something about it in order to identify the problem and a potential solution. I will - after two days - now sit down and read these reports. I have only received them in the past couple of hours - 30 September was just two days ago. I will read what the stakeholders have recommended and will follow through if they have not given me the necessary proposals to deal with these matters effectively on behalf of these people who through no fault of their own are in these situations.

I have not been in discussion with stakeholders. In July I asked them to make recommendations on a voluntary industry-led basis in order to deal with these matters.

Deputy Clare Daly: In his earlier contribution the Minister said: "I immediately began a series of discussions".

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): The Minister has the floor now.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I have asked them to come forward with a voluntary industry-led solution. The term "discussions" would mean that I would be meeting them on a regular basis - I met them once and asked them to report by the end of September.

Deputy Clare Daly: I was quoting from the Minister's speech.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I do not need to ask them to come forward again. I will impose a solution of my own if they have not come forward with the necessary proposals as I requested in July.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Can the Minister give us an indicator of what those would be?

Deputy Phil Hogan: In due course.

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Bill entitled an Act to amend the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 in relation to the membership of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, in relation to the recognition of professional qualifications obtained outside the State, including the implementation of certain provisions of Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of Professional Qualifications, and to provide for related matters.

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I move: “That Second Stage be taken now.”

Question put and agreed to.

Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill 2012: Second Stage

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address this House on the Second Stage of the Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill 2012. This is a relatively short technical Bill, with 20 sections in total. The Bill proposes to amend the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 to provide for the enhanced and effective functioning of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the registration boards established under the Act. It will also amend the Act to better provide for the assessment and recognition in Ireland of qualifications obtained outside the State and to ensure compliance with the relevant EU instrument.

The 2005 Act provides for the establishment of a system of statutory regulation for designated health and social care professions. The regulatory system comprises a registration board for each of 12 designated professions, a Health and Social Care Professionals Council with overall responsibility for the regulatory system, and a committee structure to deal with disciplinary matters. These bodies are collectively known informally as CORU. CORU is responsible for protecting the public by regulating health and social care professionals in Ireland. It promotes high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among the registrants.

The Health and Social Care Professionals Council was established in 2007. Its functions include the governance and co-ordination of registration boards and the provision of administrative support and secretarial assistance to registration boards and their committees. Although the annual cost of running the council is currently being funded by the Exchequer in the main, the intention is that the regulatory system will, in time, be fully self-funding through the annual fees payable by registrants as is the case with all other health professional regulators.

The following 12 health and social care professions are designated under the Act: clinical biochemists; dietitians; medical scientists; occupational therapists; orthoptists; physiotherapists; podiatrists; psychologists; radiographers; social care workers; social workers; and speech and language therapists. In addition, the decision of the previous Government to rationalise the Opticians Board into the Health and Social Care Professionals Council will see another two professions, optometrists and dispensing opticians, being regulated under the Act in 2013.

Under the Act, I, as Minister for Health, may designate other health and social care profes-

sions if I consider it is in the public interest to do so and if the specified criteria have been met. I am conscious that some professions, currently not designated, made a case to be regulated under the Act. However, my immediate priority is to proceed with the establishment of the registration board for the professions designated under the 2005 Act. Then and only then can consideration be given to the registration of other professions. That is not to say that work cannot be ongoing in that regard. To date two registration boards, the Social Workers Registration Board and the Radiographers Registration Board have been established. The Social Workers Registration Board has established its register, has held elections, and has made the necessary by-laws on education and training qualifications.

The board has also adopted a code of professional conduct and ethics, which was subject to public consultation. When the statutory transition period ends two years after the establishment register next May, the professional social worker will be fully regulated under the Act. The Radiographers Registration Board will soon be in a position to open its register and commence its two-year transition period. This will also facilitate the commencement of the fitness to practice provisions of the Act. The Act provides for grandparenting - a transitional period of two years during which existing practitioners must register on the basis of current specified qualifications. After this only registrants of a registration board, who will be subject to the Act's regulatory regime will be entitled to use the relevant designated title.

While progress in establishing all 12 registration boards has been slower than expected, this is due in the main to unforeseen legal technical and resourcing issues. However, the learning obtained in establishing these two registration boards has been immense and is informing the work under way on the establishment of a further four registration boards before year end. These are occupational therapists; speech and language therapists; dieticians; and physiotherapists. The remaining boards in respect of those professions designated will be established by 2012.

In line with the Government's decision on transparency in board appointments, my Department sought and received expressions of interest from professionals and laypeople for appointment to these boards over the summer months by public advertisement via the public appointments system. My intention is that these boards will be established in coming weeks with the exception of the physiotherapists registration board which would be closer to year end.

The Bill has three main purposes. The first is to amend the Act to allow the Minister for Health to continue to appoint professional members to the council until each of the registration boards has been established in respect of the 12 professions designated under the Act, has held elections and is in a position to nominate one of its elected members.

6 o'clock

The second is to incorporate the provisions of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications into the principal Act and to provide for the assessment and recognition of other non-Irish qualifications which are outside the scope of the directive. Third, in order to enhance the effective operation of the council and registration boards, other amendments are proposed. These relate to items such as fees payable to members of the council, registration criteria and the updating of fines for offences under the Act.

I will now briefly explain the technical difficulty that has arisen with the appointment of professional members to the council. The Act provides that the council consists of a chairper-

son and 24 ordinary members, with each of the 12 registration boards nominating one of their elected members for appointment. As is usual in such cases, because no registration boards will have been established, the Act empowers the Minister for Health to directly appoint these 12 professional representative members. The phased establishment of the 12 registration boards and the resulting lapse of time have, however, meant that in the absence of registration boards which can then nominate council members, professional representative members cannot be appointed to the council to fill the vacancies arising from the completion of the terms of office of the original members. Currently, 12 professional members are attending council meetings in an observer capacity with my consent so that the perspective of the professionals can be maintained. This is an interim measure. Those attending do not have voting powers and cannot fulfil the requirements of a quorum. The Bill, therefore, proposes an amendment to the Act to allow the Minister for Health to continue to appoint professional members to the council until such time as the registration boards have been established, have held elections and are in a position to nominate elected members for appointment to the council.

The Bill also takes account of the provisions of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, which was enacted following enactment of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. This directive is an internal market measure aimed at facilitating the free movement of persons within the European Economic Area, EEA, space. While health professionals are the largest single professional category availing of its provisions, the directive applies to any regulated profession. The Department of Education and Skills, in light of its role in qualifications, has overall responsibility for the directive in Ireland.

Deputies may be aware that discussions are currently taking place at EU level to modernise the directive. These are expected to conclude during the Irish Presidency of the EU. It is necessary, in the meantime, to give effect to certain aspects of the current directive in this Bill. The directive makes it easier for qualified professionals, including certain health and social care professionals, to practise their professions in European countries other than their own, while providing appropriate safeguards to ensure public health and safety and consumer protection. This means that applicants' qualifications and post-qualification work experience are assessed to ensure that they meet the qualification entry requirements to that profession in Ireland.

As qualification recognition is the first step in a statutory registration process, it was always the policy intention that the registration boards would assume responsibility for the qualification recognition function under the directive. The Bill, therefore, provides that each registration board will be designated as a competent authority under Directive 2005/36/EC for its designated profession. Currently, the Minister for Health is the competent authority for most of the health professions designated under the Act and qualification recognition currently is for the purpose of eligibility for recruitment to the publicly-funded health sector. The introduction of statutory registration will mean that all persons with non-Irish professional qualifications who seek to exercise their profession in Ireland must have their non-Irish qualification recognised under the directive. The amendments contained in the Bill will also provide a legal basis for the assessment and recognition of qualifications obtained outside the State, which are outside the scope of the directive, namely, the non-EEA qualifications of EEA nationals and the qualifications of non-EEA nationals. The Bill provides that the processes for the assessment of these qualifications are the same as provided for under Directive 2005/36/EC, including the provision of explicit appeal mechanisms.

The main provisions of the Bill can be summarised as follows. Section 1 sets out that the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 is the principal Act. Section 2 inserts a num-

ber of definitions into the principal Act. Section 3 provides that the Minister for Health will continue to appoint representatives of the designated professions to the council until such time as all registration boards are established and are in a position to nominate elected members. Section 4 provides a legal basis, when the council is self-funding, for payments to members of the council and its disciplinary-fitness to practise committees, subject to the approval of the Minister for Health and with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Section 6 permits each registration board to prescribe certain practise and training requirements for professionals who have not practised for a designated period of time.

Sections 11 and 13 increase the maximum fines for offences committed under the principal Act. Sections 15 and 16 provide for some changes in relation to “grand parenting” and in respect of the use of professional titles during the transitional period in which practising professionals may apply for registration. Sections 17 and 18 give the Minister the power to appoint members of the council and registration boards for a period of up to four years rather than the current fixed term of four years.

Amendments are also proposed to the principal Act in sections 5 to 12, inclusive, and 14 and 15 to provide for the assessment and recognition in Ireland of qualifications obtained outside the State. Section 5 inserts a new section 27A to provide that, when their registers have been established, registration boards will be designated as competent authorities under Directive 2005/36/EC, empowered to act as competent authorities for their designated professions under Directive 2005/36/EC and empowered to assess qualifications obtained outside the State, which are outside the scope of this directive. This section also provides for necessary transition arrangements in relation to applications under the directive.

Section 6 amends section 31 to provide that a registration board may make by-laws relating to procedures for the assessment of professional qualifications, training, experience, aptitude tests or adaptation periods of applicants for registration whose professional qualifications have been obtained outside the State and are outside the scope of the directive. Section 7 amends section 38 to update and simplify the approved qualifications criteria in section 38(2) so that there are three categories: Irish qualifications; qualifications approved under Directive 2005/36/EC and other qualifications; and to insert new definitions and remove others no longer necessary.

Sections 8, 9 and 10 relate to procedures and appeals for non-Irish qualifications. Section 12 relates to the use of title in the provision of services on a temporary and occasional basis. Sections 14 and 15 amend the registration process for existing practitioners to comply with the processes of Directive 2005/36/EC, which provide for the assessment of formal professional training and post-qualification professional experience. Section 19 provides a minor clarifying amendment to the list of optional qualifications required by an existing practitioner-radiographer in order to register during the transitional period.

This Bill will enable the health and social care professionals council to continue to fulfil, in a more effective way, its objective, namely, to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among registrants of the designated professions. I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive outline of the Bill before us. The Fianna Fáil Party welcomes the introduction of this legislation, the details of which we can go through on Committee Stage. There is an obligation on us at this time to ensure

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regulation and oversight of health and social care professionals, as provided for in the 2005 Act and in this amending legislation which seeks to address some of the technical issues outlined by the Minister.

The Minister, wearing two opposite hats, will be aware of the importance of protecting the integrity of professionals, in particular professionals in the health and social care areas, which are two key areas wherein breaches of trust and the guidelines can have serious consequences for individuals, the professionals and the integrity of that profession. It is important we maintain the highest standards in these areas.

As a pro-European and someone who welcomes free movement of goods and services and the transfer of qualifications between the States, I welcome the transposition of Directive 2005/36/EC. However, in ensuring the free movement of goods, services and people and the transfer of qualifications between member states, it is critical to have in place some form of governance at EU level to monitor oversight in all member states, because in challenging times of economic difficulties and political upheaval, it could happen that oversight in a particular member state ceases to be sound and robust. However, one would be obligated to recognise the qualifications of medical and care professionals of that state even though one's ability to check out the individuals may be somewhat diminished. In such a situation it is very important to have oversight and monitoring at EU level of directives passed by the Council and European Parliament and transposed by member states. I am not necessarily concerned about this with regard to the Bill but it may arise in future.

Previously, we spoke about Indian and Pakistani doctors coming here. It is important we welcome them and that they are treated with dignity and respect. Unfortunately, this has not always happened. In certain cases they were put up in boarding houses and given less than what I would consider appropriate accommodation. It took some time to assess their qualifications and competencies and in the meantime they were left in limbo. We wanted and welcomed them, but when they arrived we were unable to deal with them in the manner to which they were entitled.

If oversight in any member state or country is questioned or diminished in any way, it brings into question the integrity of everyone who comes from there. We must ensure, therefore, that any country, inside and outside the EU, which provides excellent professionals who come here to dig us out of a hole, so to speak, engages in monitoring to ensure the continued integrity of those who are welcome here and that people cannot question the suitability of individuals. This can happen if the robustness of oversight, training, education, qualifications and standards is diminished. For all these reasons, this is a critical aspect of the directive, the broader internationalisation of medical professionals, and the transfer and freer of movement of people and services throughout the European Union.

Not necessarily related to the Bill is the issue of the PIP implants. Who is responsible for medical devices? The Irish Medicines Board is not responsible. We are told the European Union has an oversight role. At the same time, women throughout Europe who had received the PIP implants which were made of low-grade industrial silicone-----

Deputy James Reilly: I apologise for interrupting the Deputy but the Irish Medicines Board is responsible for medical devices in this country. The incident referred to by the Deputy was a case of fraudulent use of a synthetic industrial implant material.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I thank the Minister. The point I am making is that people are entitled to protection against fraudulent use of material which is then put into a person's body. The difficulty is that while the Irish Medicines Board may have oversight within the State, if something happens outside the State, people may have difficulty seeking redress afterwards. In fairness, the Minister and the Department responded in a very humane and passionate way when the issue arose to address the concerns of the many women who received the implants. However, there is no form of redress for the many people who were implanted with industrial grade silicone. The implants were approved in Germany or somewhere else at some stage - the company was in France but I believe the patent was German - after which they arrived in Ireland. The Minister, the chief medical officer and others moved swiftly to try to address the concerns of these women, but we cannot pursue anyone and it will be very difficult to seek redress for the fraudulent use of silicone.

With European integration comes obligations for the European Union. It is fine to agree a directive and for member states to transpose it into national law, but oversight is very important and it must be supported at European level in terms of resources and cost. It is unacceptable that a situation such as the PIP implants can arise or that a member state could have diminished ability to oversee the domestic competency of qualifications, training and education.

The Minister stated four councils will be established by the end of the year and that others will be rolled out. Considering the medical and care professionals included in the scope of the Bill, it is important we have oversight and that the councils are established to ensure proper training, education, qualification assessment and continual monitoring. The Bill deals with high level qualifications including clinical biochemist, dietician, medical scientist, occupational therapist, podiatrist, physiotherapist, psychologist, radiologist, social care worker, social worker and speech and language therapist. The difficulty we have had in recent years is recruitment and attracting highly qualified people in the various professional categories outlined in the Bill to work in Ireland. Now our highly trained professionals are beginning to drift abroad to seek opportunities in other countries. This is a disturbing development. We all say the fees, salaries and remuneration of general practitioners and consultants should be addressed, but we must be conscious of encouraging people to enter these professions and keeping a percentage of them in the country after they are trained for our own health and social care services.

We welcome the experience that people gain and bring back when they go abroad, and high-end professionals will always move in and out of the country. However, we have a difficulty if there is only one-way traffic and everyone is moving out. The Department of Health, the HSE and the various professional bodies which oversee their membership must be very conscious of this and monitor it to ensure the people who go abroad and gain experience bring it back to this country. During the 1980s the most able people drifted away and it caused difficulties. They returned in the 1990s and the first decade of this century and had a major impact through bringing new ideas and procedures, especially in medicine.

I will not delay the House much longer. The establishment of the various oversight councils is to be rolled out and I would like the Minister to make a commitment that this will happen. People will always have concerns about the conflict of interest in respect of self-funding, self-regulation and discipline and what flows from that in the event of a fitness to practise meeting or professional misconduct hearing. People may sometimes have a view that there could be a conflict of interest in self-assessment, self-regulation and self-monitoring. I believe the legislation is robust enough in terms of ensuring that is not the case and that, in general, there is no major conflict.

The Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill before us is a follow-on from the 2002 report entitled *Statutory Registration for Health and Social Professionals: Proposals for the Way Forward* and the 2005 Act that flowed from it. In bringing this legislation to the Dáil, which is an obligation, we continually upgrade the oversight of health and social care professionals in every way to ensure it is flexible in dealing with the changing environment that exists. We should ensure there is flexibility, opportunity, oversight and strong regulatory powers in terms of sanction if there are breaches of professional conduct or what can flow from an internal inquiry which may find a person to be in breach of professional conduct. That is critical but what is as important is that if there is a view held by the State or individuals that there is no proper oversight or disciplinary procedures by one of the quora, there is a mechanism in place for the State to step in and have a fully independent inquiry if there is a serious breach by a individual professional under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 and the amending legislation.

It is important to do this to give people confidence and belief in the quality of the people providing health and social care. Deputy Ó Caoláin has raised this issue numerous times, such as, for example, the Dr. Neary case and many others that have flowed from that. That, in itself, is an issue of concern. We had the debate in this House on symphysiotomy and there was all-party agreement. People will debate the rights and wrongs of symphysiotomy but there are many whose lives have been destroyed because of this barbaric act. We heard at first hand stories that were very emotionally told and felt by those who listened to the impact it had on their lives. I am not saying that the people who carried out symphysiotomy were doing something that was illegal at the time. However, when there is clearly an evolving technology and change of practice, it is important there is continual training and re-evaluation of what is considered the norm in medicine and social care. Let us be quite clear, many practices carried out in psychiatry for a number of years would now be considered almost barbaric. There has been a changing and evolving ethos about how we deal with people with mental health and psychiatric issues and in general medicine itself.

It is for those reasons that there is an obligation on the various quora under this legislation to ensure that, as the Minister referred to, there would be training, continuing evaluation, upskilling and professional development. We see it in many other areas and I believe it should be in the medical and care profession as well. What can very often happen is that individual professionals are very competent and eminently qualified but may not continue to evolve and train themselves in the most up-to-date techniques, procedures and thinking in whatever profession they are involved in. That can have disturbing effects for people down the road. I have cited a number of cases, with symphysiotomy being the very obvious one. This was practised in this country up to the 1970s, after which it was considered to be a procedure that should not be visited on anyone except in the most exceptional circumstances. Even at that, there was a strong body of medical evidence in this country, across Europe and especially in the UK that it should never be used and that a caesarean was the way to deliver a child if there were huge difficulties in delivery. We have had discussions on this issue and I am not sure whether the individuals said this was the right procedure based on the ethos of the hospital or a religious ethos or whether they just did not continually upskill in the most modern techniques and changes in practice in the medical profession. The same is true of social care and psychiatry, with the move from institutionalisation to dealing with and treating people in their immediate home and community environment. That is very welcome but there are still people within the professional community who would say that perhaps we might look at that again. Continually training and upskilling and continuing personal development are very important in the quora

overseeing the qualifications of people.

Those are my thoughts with regard to this Bill before us and the 2005 Act. In other fora over the years, I have raised the issue of how oversight and governance at European level should be resourced at European level and the need for a centralised system to ensure all countries play by the same rules in respect of scrutiny of professionals' training and qualification. This is something about which I feel very strongly because all we need is for one or two people from other countries to be found not to be eminently qualified or to have done something wrong in their professional conduct and straight away it will be used by bigoted people and racists to undermine people who are here for a good reason, namely, to assist us in the delivery of our health care. This is why I have always said, as I did at the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, that people who have come from abroad are welcome and must be welcomed with open arms and that we must insist on the highest standards, not just for ourselves but for their integrity in order that people would have absolute confidence in them. If not, the sinister element in society could jump on a particular incident and use it to further their own narrow-minded, bigoted agenda.

I welcome the Bill and hope the Minister moves expeditiously in establishing the various councils of the professions and that we would continually upgrade and monitor things to ensure there are additions and the ability to add quora to oversee varying professions.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I wish to record my objection to the fact that the Minister has, for whatever reason, chosen not to stay for opening statements in response to a Bill he has just put before the House.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I wonder where that is from.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This is a technical Bill amending the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. It is uncontroversial, seeking to ensure the continuing and effective functioning of the structures established under the 2005 Act - the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the registration bodies for the 12 designated health and social care professions.

The main purpose of the Bill is to allow the Minister for Health to continue to appoint professional members to the council until such time as the 12 registration boards are established under the Act and are in a position to nominate elected members. We are told in the explanatory memorandum that the Minister has been unable to appoint professional members to the council on the completion of the terms of office of the 12 members appointed when the council was first constituted. We are told this was due to "unforeseen circumstances". In the interest of clarity, I ask that the Minister explain those circumstances. We should have a detailed explanation of the reason he has not been able to proceed as initially intended.

This Bill is being introduced in very different times from those that saw the principal Act introduced. In 2004 and 2005, the years in which the Health and Social Care Professionals legislation was processed in the Oireachtas, there were unprecedented opportunities to transform health services and create a truly equitable and efficient system. Instead of availing of them, there was bureaucratic change, with the establishment of the HSE. The two tier system remained firmly in place and was reinforced by the privatisation policy of the former Minister, Ms Mary Harney, and the rest of the then Government. We are now in dire economic straits. Cruel cuts are being imposed by this Government on public services and the privatisation policy

remains in place. What does this mean in practice? It means that a system that should be wholly designed to allow patients to receive the best care and to allow health and social care professionals to provide that care is instead built around the HSE bureaucracy and the private profit motive.

The system values professional expertise more for the profit it can generate than for the good health outcomes it can help to bring about. As a result, our public health services are short in all of the 12 professions listed in the Bill. Public patients struggle to gain access to the expertise that is readily available. It would be readily available only if access were assured. The recruitment embargo denies patients access to timely care and qualified young people the opportunity to work.

The speech and language therapy profession is one of those listed in the Bill. Let me quote from a letter, dated 29 May 2012, from the Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists to the *Irish Examiner*, a paper I am sure the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, reads given her roots in a certain part of the island.

There is huge demand for speech and language therapy for adults and children in services across Ireland. There are significant numbers of unemployed fully qualified therapists. The recruitment embargo has meant that services cannot recruit for vacant posts and few new posts are being created.

Some graduates are working in volunteer positions and these can vary in terms of content. These can provide excellent opportunities for skills maintenance and professional development. However, they are not equivalent to working as an autonomous speech and language therapist under professional supervision and are not considered under the competencies framework for full membership of the professional body.

[T]here is both a supply of qualified, highly skilled therapists and a demand for their services, but in the current situation there is a gap between the two, such that children and adults wait unacceptable durations for access to the fundamental human right to communicate.

That is a very measured, thoughtful and accurate description of the reality faced by health professionals and patients today. This reality is not peculiar to speech and language therapists. We can all relate to it because I am sure every Deputy in this House knows of examples of children and adults with special needs who have not received the professional speech and language therapy they need. It is shameful, especially in the case of children. Children's most vital language learning years pass so rapidly that the system put in place by successive Governments fails to match patient need with professional service provision. The same could be said of the other listed professions, including that of social workers. We are very conscious of this in the context of the referendum Bill we passed in this House last week.

I wish to raise the issue of cross-jurisdictional recognition of qualifications and cross-jurisdictional working of professionals. That is addressed in sections 11 to 15 of the Bill which implement EU directives and are especially relevant to Ireland given the continuing existence of partition. The North-South feasibility study on cross-Border co-operation in health care provision, which was carried out jointly by the two Departments, North and South, and on whose publication and content we had to wait for such a long period, addresses this issue. I wish to cite the report extensively because I believe absolutely that there are powerful gains to be made

and real progress to be achieved by turning around two back-to-back health delivery systems on this small island and having them face each other and work together in the common interest and good. The study states:

5.19 Both jurisdictions face significant challenges in terms of sustaining high quality, highly specialist tertiary services normally only provided in centres servicing large populations. The availability of appropriately qualified and skilled staff for such specialist areas is key and for populations of either jurisdiction, the small number of hospital consultants providing care in these areas inevitably means that services are inherently vulnerable.

5.20 In a number of service areas, increased sub-specialisation is evident and in newly developing services it is inevitable that the expertise will reside among a small clinical team. For such highly specialised services the population based in either jurisdiction may not be sufficient to sustain a team of appropriately trained skilled clinicians and the longer term sustainability of a high quality service may only be possible if considered on an all-island basis. Where patients have to leave both jurisdictions for treatment, the impact on individuals and their families is very significant in terms of patient well-being and accessibility for the family in sometimes very traumatic circumstances. Combining resources for the provision of such services on a North-South basis makes sense.

5.21 The development of new highly specialist acute and certain other services and the changing pattern of increased specialisation in existing acute services provides a unique opportunity for both jurisdictions to work together. In principle, both jurisdictions should consider developing these services in a collaborative manner, particularly where low patient throughput makes it difficult to sustain highly specialised services and for health professionals to maintain their skills.

It continues:

5.46 It is recognised that both populations would benefit from flexible working arrangements which would enable staff to work in another jurisdiction, for example, practitioners with scarce clinical skills might reasonably offer a service to both populations. However, there are some obstacles to workforce mobility, which can be effectively dealt with provided there is a clear focus on tackling such issues. These aspects include indemnity for staff working out of jurisdiction and mutual recognition of qualifications between professional bodies in both jurisdictions as well as registration and pension issues associated with working in both jurisdictions.

5.47 While great progress has been made, further work needs to be undertaken to extend the facilitation of cross-border working for health and social care staff. Furthermore access to an effective resource, which sets out procedures and protocols, to facilitate work across jurisdictions, would be advantageous.

These recommendations are not from a Sinn Féin election manifesto, nor are they taken directly from the health policy that I anchored and published with colleagues in 2005 for my party. I have just cited a jointly commissioned report. For all the same and practical benefits that it recounts, I again commend to the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, to impact with her senior Minister, if that is at all possible, and to acknowledge this as an area of neglect. There is little evidence of focused endeavour, North or South, to bring about the promise of such an agreed report. However, a willingness clearly exists. It is a significant step forward and

should be seized in the interests of ordinary people the length and breadth of this island. All that holds us back is a nervousness of a new step forward and a sense of ownership over whatever part of the island on which we live.

At the end of the day, if the Minister and the Department do not take the initiative to give life to the promise of that particular report, including the section I have just cited on the record, it will be lost again and the report will be left to gather dust on a shelf. I urge the Minister of State not to allow that to happen and to help ensure health professionals on this island can provide the best possible service to patients, which is what they are trained to do and is what the overwhelming number of them want to do. It is the reward of their lives' choice that they get the opportunity to deliver their skills on a continuous basis and have the prospect of development within their chosen career paths. I commend the report strongly to the Minister of State and I am happy to record that I will support the Bill.

An Ceann Comhairle: I understand that Deputy Catherine Murphy wishes to share time with Deputy Mattie McGrath. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: As the Minister stated, this is a technical Bill to facilitate his nomination of people to the Health and Social Care Professionals Council. Ten of the disciplines have not been properly established on the council, yet the Minister has no power to extend the terms of the council's appointees. Given the fact that the Health and Social Care Professionals Act was enacted in 2005, why have these disciplines not been properly constituted yet? Not all of the period in question was a time of financial stress or cutbacks. Since 2005, everyone has learned what can occur when there are regulatory failures. The idea behind the council is to put proper regulation in place. It is not just in terms of finance that we need regulation. We need systems that can anticipate developments and work in co-operation with and deliver services to the public.

The explanation of "efforts have been made" offered by the Minister and the Bill's digest is anodyne. What efforts have been made? Has an onerous obligation that cannot be met been placed on the individuals coming forward? Is there a campaign of not co-operating? Why have the other disciplines not been established? Do they view the council as unnecessary? What dialogue has been held to determine why the council has not been properly constituted, something that has made it necessary for the Minister to intervene and introduce this legislation?

The disciplines in question, including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, social work and speech and language therapy, are the primary care areas with which we have been engaged for the past two weeks. In many cases, the quality of the service they deliver, especially in the public system, depends on one's address. Some parts of the country might have no waiting lists while other parts could have two year waiting lists. Deputy Ó Caoláin referred to speech and language therapy. There is a world of difference between diagnosing a three year old, delivering the therapy then and sending him or her to school at five years of age and making him or her wait two years for that therapy.

The option of a multidisciplinary approach is being missed because the council has not been properly constituted. The commitment of the specialties must be questioned.

Although Deputy Ó Caoláin was referring to Northern Ireland and the Republic when he spoke of cross-jurisdictional matters, county boundaries being crossed is also an issue. Children attending a special school in west County Dublin will receive speech and language therapy

if they are from the area, but not if their addresses are in, for example, north County Kildare. This is despite the fact that the same organisation is involved. The systems failures have progressed past being regulatory. They have to do with people's locations, the numbers involved and the architecture of the HSE itself.

The Bill is a modest measure to plug a gap, but it will not deliver a vastly improved service to those who need it, which is what is urgently required. We cannot say that often enough. The stupidity of the situation is that the five year old who starts school without having received therapy must be picked up by the education bill if he or she fails in school later. We also pick them up by way of underperformance in ability to work and so on. There is a certain element of economic stupidity about how this is handled and seen within a so-called silo philosophy.

I also wish to speak to the elements that are not included. Perhaps they are not appropriate to this Bill but I should highlight them anyway. For example, medical devices and the practitioners using them are not covered. There was a significant failure in regulation with the PIP implant case, and in the US in 2000, a failure in the licensing system in France was identified with regard to the company in question. The process involved the company being regulated by a German-licensed organisation. The problem could have been identified much earlier if the published material had been picked up by the professions. We can see how that played out for people.

The private clinic area, including those dealing with cosmetic surgery, is not taken in with these regulations. Where there is a failure and no one to pick up the problems, the State ends up picking up the issue through the public health care system. Regulation of areas not included in this measure is required urgently. I understand the European regulatory system is being considered, although individual member states have been warned that this may take some time to flow through by means of directive and legislation. It will be necessary to act on an interim basis in order that we can learn from those mistakes and ensure they are not repeated. There is a similar case with invasive implants like DePuy's hip replacements, which have also failed. These failures have caused individuals to have to endure pain and concern arising from another big operation. This is one of a range of other areas that must be tackled through regulation.

I would like to hear the Minister's thoughts on this when he wraps up the debate. I share the concerns of Deputy Ó Caoláin about the Minister not being present. I respect the Minister of State, Deputy Lynch, who will give a report to the senior Minister. Nevertheless, the Minister should have stayed in the Chamber to deal with this legislation and at least listen to the opening statements. It is very important for the Minister to revert to us on these issues. Not all of the problems occurred under his watch and the legislation dates from 2005. It is important to understand what is going on and why there is disengagement by these professions. The only person who can tell us is the Minister because he has been having the dialogue for the past 18 months. It is vital that he tells us about the dialogue and why there has been a failure that prevented a board being set up without this sort of intervention.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am delighted to be able to contribute to the debate on the Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill 2012. Although I mean no disrespect to the Minister of State, Deputy Lynch, I am also disappointed that the Minister, Deputy Reilly, left the Chamber so swiftly after making his opening speech on this Bill. The Act has been in force since 2005 but the Minister has only been in power 18 months. Nevertheless, we should have a proper debate and there are questions to answer. The Minister should try to explain some of these issues.

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The Minister indicated that the Act provides for grandparenting, or a transitional period of two years during which existing practitioners must register on the basis of current qualified specifications. The Taoiseach, if he has the chance to appoint his next Cabinet, might insert a grandparenting clause to keep the likes of the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, under control so as not to allow what we read about every day in the Department to happen.

I compliment the new Minister of State, Deputy White, at the Department of Health but I also pay tribute to the former Minister of State, Deputy Shortall. I served with her on the last Oireachtas committee dealing with social welfare and know her to be a tireless worker and advocate of the underprivileged. She is a champion for fairness and equity. She was forced into a position where she had to resign from office, which is both scary and disappointing. The Taoiseach has already lost two Ministers of State in 18 months, which is a concern. Nevertheless it is not my business but a matter for the Taoiseach to run his Government. While I would not dare to lecture him on how to do it, a small bit of common sense and mutual respect would go a long way.

As I noted, this legislation is originally from 2005, when a system of statutory regulation was designated for health and social care professions. We all know this to be badly needed. The regulatory system comprises a registration board of 12 designated professions and also allows the Minister to make 12 appointments. This begs the question as to why there has been a delay in getting these bodies up and running. There is plenty of expertise and legal advice around so we should have been able to foresee whatever problems may have been down the road with this legislation, which is less than seven years old. I know the Minister is only in office 18 months but the fact remains that the legislation has not worked, so I must ask why there is a delay.

Does this arise because it is part of the dysfunctional organisation of the HSE? There are many thousands of excellent staff in the HSE, both office and front-line workers, including all kinds of health care professionals. Nevertheless, there is a significant deficit and much baggage and administration, red tape and bureaucracy. We must tackle that problem.

The bodies involved in this issue are collectively and informally known as CORU, and they are responsible for protecting and regulating health and social care professionals in Ireland. CORU promotes high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence among registrants. That is something everyone in this House and the wider country wants and demands.

CORU covers some delicate areas, including biochemists, dieticians, medical scientists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, radiographers, social workers and speech and language therapists. Many of these people have made a career choice arising from career guidance and family or peer advice. They have dedicated time in third level institutions, doing research and masters degrees, ending up in a highly qualified position after a massive cost to the State and the individuals or families, which may have struggled to help the people achieve the qualifications. Deputy Murphy, on the other hand, referred to the people in many disadvantaged areas, waiting for treatment. Every Deputy knows of many cases of people waiting for orthodontic treatment, speech and language treatment and access to many similar such services.

7 o'clock

With the embargo on recruitment to the HSE and the health needs that exist, it beggars belief that people are told the special treatments their children need, having waited a year or two

years and then going into secondary, are not covered by the State. That is a huge cost on the family and a huge social pressure on the individuals who badly need the treatment. Whether it is speech therapy or dental treatment, they need it. They were recommended by health care professionals to have it and they applied for it. As was mentioned, some people have worked as volunteers. There are many people waiting for such treatment and there is a high demand for it, but many of our highly qualified people are emigrating and we are losing that valuable resource to other countries. Many of those people do not even work their chosen profession in the countries to which they emigrate. It is a disgrace.

I said during the debate on the children's referendum Bill that it is pointless passing laws and amending this legislation if we do not have the wherewithal, the resources and, most importantly, the vision and the passion to follow through on these measures. There is no point in amending Acts, putting them on the Statute Book and filling up the law libraries. We must make sure we are able to provide for what we legislate. I know we are in a deep dark recession but this legislation has been hanging around since 2005 and during the peak boom years of the Celtic tiger, but it is still not up and running.

I was interested to hear the research Deputy Ó Caoláin quoted. On an island the size of Ireland and having regard to the peace process and people coming together, the Administrations in both parts of the island must come together, pool, unite and share expertise for the benefit of all the people. This is still a small island even when one includes the populations of both jurisdictions relative to the size of our neighbours. My late brother could not understand how we had 13, or whatever is the correct number, health boards at the time and Manchester where he was working, which had a population of 3 million had one body looking after this area. When we consider many such cases, we can see where bureaucracy has got a grip. The health boards were disbanded because we wanted openness, transparency and accountability but we got the gigantic monster that is the HSE and no job was lost at the time. I am not blaming the current Minister for that but it happened and it got more unwieldy, entangled and bureaucratic and, worse than that, it operates at arm's length from ordinary people.

On the other hand, there are the private practitioners, some of whom are accounted for in the legislation, who have set up their own systems. I go back to the time of Barry Desmond and I saw him in the Dáil trying to break the grip the consultants had on the public hospitals. I have often said that if one is a veterinary practitioner, one must provide one's own specialist designated research, operating theatre and whatever. Why should consultants have access to public facilities and beds if they are not playing ball? Such access should be removed from them. They should get their own house in order if they do not play ball, cutting out the waiting lists and work longer hours. I cannot understand how there have been so many commitments to change this but it has not been changed. It is the stark naked fact that big powerful lobby groups in this country are the tail wagging the dog and they are refusing to budge. It is a long time since Barry Desmond - I think he is alive and well and I hope he is - stood in this House and as Minister tried to break that cartel and he failed. Successive Ministers have also failed to do so but it must be broken. What we, this Bill and all other legislation are about is service to our people and not to any particular sections or elite group of our people. These people have excellent qualifications and worked hard to gain them and they must be recognised for having done that and paid appropriately but not for having a logjam and a closed shop. We saw what happened with the pharmacists - young pharmacists could not become practitioners. Now there is the issue of the price of generic drugs. We have to deal with this matter. The Minister, Deputy Reilly, and the Labour Party promised that they would deal with it but they have not. It is not

easy to do so: they cannot simply wave a magic wand and have it dealt with but they have to deal with it because the public are tired of it. We are all tired of it because it has gone on for too long. In the recession we must examine the pooling of resources North and South on this island.

We must not allow a situation where racism against foreign national practitioners could be encouraged. They were encouraged to come here and we needed them. Unfortunately, most of them were working junior doctors. It was 18 months ago when the Minister, Deputy Reilly, embarked on a crusade abroad to recruit these people, whom I am sure were suitably qualified, but we found they were staying in bed and breakfast accommodation and all kinds of places and they could not operate. There were queues for procedures. I would not want anybody who does not have proper qualifications and certification working in our hospitals but they were recruited abroad to a set of standards, must have been interviewed and must have got the nod to come over here at great expense to the State, I might add, and then they were kept here in abeyance as if they were in some kind of quarantine. Then we had to do some kind of a cleansing in respect of them before they could work. It was horrible for those people to have been put in that situation plus the fact that we did not have them working at the front line where we needed them. That was another case of bureaucracy gone mad. I do not know who was keeping the door closed, keeping them out or did not want them here but that is what happened and it was not that long ago. I am sure it will happen again but it should not happen. Those eminently qualified people, regardless of their colour or creed, are entitled to work here and they have worked here. We cannot discriminate against them because some people are anxious, as others have said, to jump on the bandwagon and discriminate and denigrate people because of their colour, race or because of where they come from. That should not be allowed or contemplated anywhere.

Where does health and social care and the HSE fit into all this? It is all about health and social care but that is not being meted out to ordinary people who are trying to access ordinary, simple, basic treatments. In many cases when people get into the system they are very well treated but such access is not made available to many people. It is the preserve of those who are able to go private and access the system. I read in the newspaper today that VHI health cover will increase again. The minute any changes affect these people they pass on the cost to the insurers. We have to question the cost of treatments and bed nights in terms of insurance cover. They are too high. The rackets must be stopped. The cartels must be broken. Health and social care must be delivered to people. It is part of their civil right under the Constitution. That must be recognised and we must set out to deliver that. The delay from 2005 to 2012 in getting this legislation up and running and the need for it to be amended now to enable its unfolding is patent nonsense because that should have been identified at the time the legislation was introduced. I am not saying we are infallible but there are legal people who understand if there are legal pitfalls and blockages in the context of legislation. If there are, there should be a back-up model in order that the blockages can be cleared and dealt with and the legislation, as enacted, can be put into practice. It is all fine to hear pious platitudes but we must be mindful if there are various reasons legislation cannot be implemented or is not workable. Do we ever in the Oireachtas test if legislation is fit for purpose before we pass it? That applies to all legislation. One wonders if some legislation passed was ever tested to establish if what it proposed was sane, realistic or achievable or if it was all in deep chapters, which no one could unravel or implement. I thank the Minister for introducing this legislation now but why is there a need for it and why did it take so long to introduce it? Will he answer those questions? I know the Minister of State might attempt to and that the Minister is not present. I think he is one of the 11, like the Flight of the Earls, who will be flying off. It is important to be prepared for taking over the EU Presidency. I remember when I was on the opposite side of the House a few years

ago Ministers being criticised for travelling abroad for St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

If it was Halloween, I would say it was something else but this is similar to the Flight of the Earls with high powered Ministers, officials and their entourages. I do not know if that is necessary. If the troika can come over here to tell us what to do, surely the European officials could come here to meet departmental officials and say what they want out of it. I wish the Taoiseach and his Ministers well with the EU Presidency but is this amount of foreign travel needed? Nothing has changed since I sat on the Government benches other than the personalities on the seats and the public is growing weary of it.

Deputy Seán Conlan: I wish to share time with Deputies Paul Connaughton, Peter Fitzpatrick and Mary Mitchell O'Connor.

The Bill is an important legislative instrument, as it seeks to advance the establishment of the State regulatory scheme for professionals, which will regulate the registration of the various professions delivering services within our health system. The delivery of this registration process is central to ensuring those providing services under various professional banners are qualified to do so; the provision of their services is regulated by an appropriate authority, adequately equipped to ensure the patient receives a professional service and delivered by a person appropriately qualified to do so; and the delivery of that service is regulated by a reputable authority, which has the power to enquire into, and adjudicate on, contentious issues arising from the delivery of the service.

A total of 12 health and social care professions are designated under the original Act but only two have established registration boards and this is causing a delay in the delivery of this system, which seeks to safeguard the delivery of professional services from the targeted areas to the patient. This scenario cannot be allowed to prevail and, accordingly, we must ensure this legislation, which empowers the Minister to make the necessary appointments required to bring effect to the system, is passed in the interest of delivering a safe and efficient care to the patients involved.

Registration with whichever of these 12 boards is applicable to the profession they intend to practice is required before the professional persons can use the relevant title and the original Act provided for the establishment of the Health and Social Care Professional Council, which would implement the Act and bear overall responsibility for regulation. The problem has arisen whereby the Minister for Health has no provision to fill vacancies that have arisen in the remaining ten disciplines for which boards have not been established. This is causing the system to stall and it is essential that this legislation be put in place and that there is no further delay in the implementation of this process, as the adequate registration of professionals and the establishment of a regulatory authority authorised to examine the qualifications of professionals offering their services and capable of ensuring those practising are qualified to do so is essential to the confidence of the public in the services offered.

We are becoming a more cosmopolitan society and, with the influx of people from other jurisdictions, it is imperative that we have this process in place in order that professional people who present themselves and offer their services can be appropriately adjudicated regarding their qualifications and their fitness to practise. The Bill addresses the requirements of the professional's qualifications directive, Directive 205/36/EC, establishing rules for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications between EU member states and also provides for the recognition of qualifications obtained outside the EU. This is such an important area that

I fail to understand how the original legislation, which resulted in the appointment of the first council in 2007, still remains in limbo in 2012. That is a gap of seven years and this reflects either complacency on behalf of those charged with the implementation of the legislation or an unwillingness on their behalf to implement it. Whichever is the case, any further delay must not be tolerated and I commend the Minister on pushing ahead with this Bill to break the logjam. I urge him to proceed speedily with the establishment of the registration and regulatory authorities provided for in the Bill and ensure that, on this occasion, those involved are not afforded the opportunity to frustrate the implementation of this system and that the safety of the patients is placed before professional sensitivities.

I have no doubt whatsoever that is what the Minister will do because bringing change to a health service that had become dysfunctional and incapable of delivering the service the public wants is a task that was bravely accepted and undertaken by him and he is actively engaged in it. I am becoming weary of listening to those on the Opposition benches complaining every step of the way. These departmental cuts were coming regardless of who occupied the ministerial chair because those on the Opposition benches, who are complaining, left the till open and let everybody help themselves. They blew the money like drunken sailors and left their mess for the Minister to clean up.

Why was this legislation, which was passed in 2005, not brought into effect until the Minister came along? Why is it necessary to introduce a new Bill in order that he be authorised to appoint new members to the ten professions that failed to adhere to the legislation? It was not given effect because the Government that introduced the legislation comprised the same people who are attacking the Minister at every opportunity and who had a blueprint for dealing with the introduction of difficult or unpopular procedures. That blueprint was to ignore them and to let those adversely affected by them ignore them. That appears to be the only reason ten of the 12 identified professions failed to form registration boards. They were simply allowed the indulgence of proceeding on their merry way, totally ignoring the 2005 legislation. The then Minister did absolutely nothing about it. That way of governing has no place in a modern democracy and the Government and the Minister of Health will take the difficult path - the path which wins few friends - that will deliver the change so badly needed in the way we deliver health care to those relying on us.

Deputy Paul J. Connaughton: I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. As health and social care becomes increasingly specialised, it is only proper that professionals working in these areas are correctly registered and this is the rationale behind the Bill. A few short years ago, only five professions were subject to statutory registration: doctors, dentists, nurses, opticians and pharmacists. At the time, that was sufficient as that was the extent of specialisation within the profession. However, as scientific knowledge increases, so too does the need for registration and among the health and social care professionals covered by the Bill are dietitians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers and speech and language therapists.

The legislation will have the benefit of giving much-needed clarity to consumers wishing to purchase the services of some of these professionals. For example, a person procuring the services of a speech and language therapist for a child can be assured that if he or she is registered with the necessary board governing that profession, that he or she have the proper qualifications and that those qualifications have been checked and independently verified. Equally, if people let a social worker into their home or are engaging with a psychologist, they deserve to be assured that the person involved has achieved the necessary competence and that this has been

independently verified. The registration process will protect the public but will also protect the professionals involved in that proper entry requirements will be established and there will be a proper mechanism to oversee entry into the profession and ensure this is restricted to people who have the necessary qualifications.

At European level, the introduction of the professional qualifications directive set out the rules for recognition of qualifications between member states, an important consideration for the many professionals of Irish origin working abroad, and the Bill also provides for the recognition of qualifications obtained outside the State, which are outside the scope of the directive that was transposed into domestic law in 2009. The fact that the boards established under this Bill will determine fitness to practise complaints for each of the 12 listed professions is another important consideration. This was provided for in the 2005 Act, but had not commenced to date and the passing of this Bill will facilitate the speedy introduction of proper complaints procedures. For students currently in second level education, greater clarity will be provided in terms of career paths as a result of the legislation because one of the functions of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council is the approval of education and training courses.

I am concerned, however, about the slow nature of progress to date in the establishment of the various boards. For example, only two of the 12 registration boards proposed have been established. The first of these, the Social Workers Registration Board, was appointed in August 2010 and the register for social workers opened in May 2011. All practising social workers must be on the register by the end of May 2013. A total of 2,700 social workers are expected to be on the register by the end of May next year and much work relating to this process remains to be done.

Another concern must be the payment of an application fee and, subsequently, of an annual retention fee. This is a cost of going to work and should be recognised as such, perhaps with these fees being offset by tax credits. The procedures involved in the appeals system must be fair and it is only right and proper that applicants for registration who are dissatisfied with the outcome have the right to appeal and the list of grounds for appeal are listed in the Bill. I also welcome the fact that under the current Act, and also under the provisions of this Bill, applicants will have the right to appeal a registration board decision to the High Court to ensure their rights are safeguarded. As medicine and social care becomes increasingly specialised, it is fitting that a proper system be put in place to recognise emerging specialties and ensure all professionals claiming membership of a particular medical or social care profession have their competence independently verified and have complaints against them arbitrated on by a professional and independent body.

I welcome the provisions of the legislation in the context of the clarity they bring to the use of the 12 professional terms listed and the safeguards they provide both to the professionals involved and the users of their services.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Health and Social Care Professionals Bill. The Bill proposes necessary technical amendments to the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, which introduced a State regulatory regime for the designated health and social care professions not previously regulated. The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the Act to allow the Minister for Health to continue to appoint professional members to the council until each of the 12 registration boards established under the Act has held elections and is in a position to nominate one of its elected members. The 12 registration boards were established following the 2005 Act, which provided for the establishment of a system of statu-

tory registration for 12 health and social care professions.

The system comprises a registration board for each of the 12 designated professions, a Health and Social Care Professionals Council with overall responsibility for the regulatory system, and a committee structure to deal with disciplinary matters. In time, as each register completes its transitional period, only a registrant of a registration board will be entitled to use the relevant designated title. The Health and Social Care Professionals Council was established in March 2007. Its mission is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence through statutory registration of health and social care professionals.

I have witnessed at first hand some of the great work carried out by carers throughout my constituency of Louth and east Meath. Whether it is nursing, midwifery, occupational therapy or radiography, the standard of care provided in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda or Louth County Hospital in Dundalk is outstanding.

Social care is a profession where people work in partnership with those who experience marginalisation or disadvantage or who have special needs. Social care practitioners work with children and adolescents in residential care, as I have experienced in the setting of St. John of God's, Drumcar, County Louth. Other services include those for people with learning or physical disabilities, like the great work done by St. Brigid's Special School in Dundalk. I have seen support provided to homeless people in Dundalk by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. I have seen people with alcohol or drug dependency being supported by the Simon Community in Dundalk and Drogheda. Other organisations support families in the community and I have witnessed the support provided for older people by Older and Bolder in Dundalk and Drogheda.

To date, only two registration boards, the Social Workers Registration Board and the Radiographers Registration Board, have been established. This is the difficulty the Bill addresses. The current provisions of the Act do not allow for the Minister to make nominations for vacancies which have arisen subsequently, since the Act specifies that these should be elected members of, and nominated by, registration boards. The Bill, therefore, provides that the Minister may appoint members to the council in various circumstances, including where a registration board has not been established or has not yet held an election. This is one of the key benefits of the Bill and why I have no hesitation in commending it to the House.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: New and innovative therapies are being developed and internationally recognised all the time. I wish to draw attention to dance movement therapy, art therapy, drama therapy, music therapy and play therapy. All of these therapies have merit. As a former school principal, I have seen wonderful outcomes for children with emotional needs who have participated in play therapy led by qualified play therapists. Any therapy delivered by professional therapists that cuts down on medication and improves quality of life must be welcome.

I have particular regard for music therapy, which I have seen used in the children's unit of our National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire. Music therapy is based on the understanding that all human beings are able to respond to music, irrespective of disability or injury. Music has always been a powerful tool of expression. It can touch our emotions deeply and allows for a freedom of communication that needs no words and often no movement. Music therapy is an evidenced-based profession. A growing body of research demonstrates the benefits and importance of music therapy as part of rehabilitation treatment programmes. Music

therapy is the planned and intentional use of music-based methods to meet an individual's emotional, social, physical, psychological, behavioural and communication needs. Irish music therapists work closely with other professionals within the interdisciplinary paediatric teams using music-based methods to facilitate the children to achieve their rehabilitation goals. Music therapy is available as a core therapy in many international rehabilitation units and is an established part of interdisciplinary treatment within health, education and social care settings.

On 26 July I tabled a parliamentary question to the Minister for Health asking for statutory registration and recognition of these four therapies. Many Irish people have invested years qualifying in these areas. They have also invested significant amounts of money and they are professionals. However, there are many other rogue traders, such as people presenting themselves as qualified dance movement therapists, art therapists, qualified drama therapists and music therapists. It is confusing for people and leaves vulnerable people in a more vulnerable position. The present position is unsatisfactory for our citizens and for the therapists.

The object of the principal Act associated with this Bill is to protect the public. This will be achieved by promoting high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among the registrants of the 12 health and social care professions designated under the Act. In the principal Act, 12 professionals are listed and, in time, only registrants will be entitled to use these titles and the public will have confidence in the professions. This must be greatly welcomed. The answer to my parliamentary question of 26 July, which asked for statutory recognition for dance, art, drama and music therapists, indicated that the Minister for Health has power to include them if he considers it appropriate and in the public interest. When the regulatory frameworks in respect of the 12 designated professions are fully in place, I ask the Minister to incorporate these additional therapies - drama, art, dance, music and play therapy.

Deputy Dan Neville: I welcome the Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill. It is very important that the designated professions are regulated. I was closely involved in the debate on the original Bill in 2004. My contribution is based on the debate that took place at that time in respect of one profession that was excluded. The profession of psychotherapy and counselling was excluded specifically because the organisations involved in regulating the professions could not agree how it was to be regulated. That was the sole reason for the exclusion and the Minister of State at the time, Tim O'Malley, accepted that they should be included. He hesitated to include them while divisions existed among the various professional organisations on how to regulate. He asked the professions to agree on an approach. In 2008, the professions presented to the Minister a document on public protection entitled Submissions on The Statutory Regulation of Counsellors & Psychotherapists in Ireland. Tomorrow, I will outline and develop the reasons psychotherapy and counselling are not regulated at present. Anyone can practise and charge for psychotherapy or counselling in this country. Counselling can do great damage to vulnerable people. I will develop that idea when the debate resumes and I will propose that the Bill be amended to include psychotherapy and counselling, as was originally intended.

Debate adjourned.

Addiction Services: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

recognises:

— the scale of the problem of addiction throughout Ireland and the increasing demands on services;

— that poly-drug use has increased significantly due to the increase in the accessibility and range of dangerous substances, both illegal and unregulated;

— the increased risk to individuals using substances and lethal combinations of substances with respect to overdose, fatality and long-term ill health;

— the numbers of drug and alcohol related deaths each year are more than twice that of the numbers of deaths on our roads;

— the strong association between drug-alcohol abuse and suicide, and also accidental death;

— the increased use of technology in accessing harmful substances;

— the continuous on-street dealing in disadvantaged communities, the levels of intimidation and fear because of violence by drug gangs and the increased availability of firearms;

— that alcohol has been identified as a contributory factor in 90% of public order offences as recorded under the police using leading systems effectively, PULSE, system and alcohol related crime costs the Irish State almost €1.2 billion a year;

— that alcohol and drug related illness costs the health system a further €1.2 billion yearly;

— the link between economic and social disadvantage, including early school leaving, unemployment, housing conditions and problem drug-alcohol addiction and crime;

— the increase in the number of children with need for child protection because of families’ problems with drug and alcohol addiction;

— the links between mental health, homelessness and addiction; and

— the unacceptable levels of drug abuse in our prisons and the increasing emergence of ‘process’ addictions in gambling, food, sex, Internet usage and other compulsive behaviours;

acknowledges:

— the work of the drugs task forces, the partnership model, the pillars of treatment and rehabilitation, supply control, prevention and research and family support;

— the work and commitment of the young people's facilities and services fund in targeting those most at risk of drug abuse in funding services and facilities in many areas, particularly to those most vulnerable;

— the work of the Dublin north inner city community policing forum as an example of best practice in collaborative work between the communities, local authority and Garda to resolve local drug related and anti-social behaviour issues;

— the work of the various groups, Departments and agencies, the community and voluntary sectors and others in producing the national substance misuse strategy report;

— the work of the community and voluntary sectors and the projects in engaging those in addiction and in recovery from addiction in services;

— the work of fellowships and 12 step programmes for those in addiction and those affected by the addiction of a loved one; and

— the improvement in best practice and the range of treatment, rehabilitation and recovery for those in addiction; and

calls on the Government to:

— prioritise addiction as a health issue and not primarily as a criminal issue and ensure the necessary allocation of resources;

— continue to support and enhance the local, regional and national structures of the drugs strategy and drugs task forces involving community, voluntary and statutory services in the co-ordinated delivery of responses at individual, family and community level to the benefit of those most affected by problems of addiction;

— improve supports for those high risk lower socioeconomic populations experiencing underlying social disadvantage leading to addiction problems, and in particular to improve supports in areas of health care, education, housing and employment opportunities;

— improve care planning and case management for individuals in addiction treatment, rehabilitation and recovery, as envisaged by successive national drugs strategies;

— increase the availability and affordability of residential rehabilitation, including non-abstinence based options and respite for highly vulnerable individuals in addiction, particularly young people under 18 years of age, mothers of young children, individuals affected by mental health issues and homeless individuals;

— introduce legislation to deal with Internet sourcing and accessing of drugs, to apply the harmonised EU definitions of a medicinal product to a new psychoactive substance so that national medicines agencies can prohibit its unauthorised importation, marketing or distribution;

— provide clear oversight and leadership so as to ensure the implementation of the national substance misuse report, including minimum alcohol pricing, reduction

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in alcohol advertising and sponsorship, greater health promotion programmes to the entire population on the dangers of alcohol misuse and abuse and to indicate a time-frame for implementing the recommendations of the report;

— ensure that, while acknowledging the stabilising effect of methadone, it is seen as part of the treatment process and not a stand-alone treatment;

— implement the review of the methadone treatment protocol, ensuring timely availability of access to treatment through primary health care;

— fully implement the hepatitis C strategy in the areas of surveillance, prevention, screening and laboratory testing and treatment, particularly affecting injecting drug users;

— open the debate on decriminalisation of illegal drugs and safer consumption;

— make available the assets of drug related crime through the Criminal Assets Bureau to counter the negative impacts of drug related crime and to be used in support of communities in tackling drug-alcohol abuse and misuse;

— refrain from further cuts to the services provided by the community and voluntary sectors for those in addiction and continue to support the special community employment, CE, schemes for those in drug rehabilitation;

— ensure that the ring-fenced betting taxes, proposed to be re-invested in the racing industry, includes a contribution to resourcing programmes addressing gambling addiction;

— integrate mental health services with addiction services in responding to dual diagnosis of individuals, affected by substance misuse, experiencing mental health difficulties in recognition of previous recommendations of the national advisory committee on drugs;

— demand that prison programmes provide, at a minimum, parity of esteem with community programmes with respect to addiction services to minimise harm to individuals in prison and that integration of prisoner release dates with community-based programmes is improved to lessen the harm done to individuals with addiction histories resulting in unco-ordinated release; and

— promote innovative programmes that will support mental health and addiction issues such as mindfulness and applied suicide intervention support training, ASIST.

Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom comhghairdeachas a ghabháil leis an Aire Stáit as an phost nua atá aige.

There is a public face of addiction. It is the zombie-like drug addict we see on the streets or the alcoholic who is staggering home or falling off the bar stool, drunk. The private face presents differently. Not all addicts fit the stereotypes I have mentioned. Addiction affects many people in our society. For every person in addiction, at least six or ten other people are affected by it, often very seriously. We know the economic cost. It is more than €3 billion, considering the crime related and health related matters. I move this Private Members' motion to bring this matter onto the floor of the House and to look at the scale of the problem, what is being done to

address the matter and what is lacking in tackling these issues, and to ensure the issue does not end up on the cutting-room floor of the budget.

It is also important to look at the changing nature of addiction. We are now in the area of polydrug use of lethal combinations, including alcohol. Services must be able to keep up with these changes in use. Many of the statutory services are focused solely on heroin use. We must also consider the use of the Internet in sourcing substances. In acknowledging the scale of the problem, the point must be made that it is not confined to Dublin. It is a national problem. Alcohol was always there, but now the towns and villages of Ireland are seeing heroin, cocaine, head shop products and so on. We must also consider other addictions, such as gambling, food, sex and the Internet.

We know there is gangland crime. It is one part of the problem. The horrific recent killings, particularly in front of young children, were especially gruesome. I hope the other aspects of addiction will get the same attention and resources as the gangs are getting.

I am hoping for an honest, thoughtful and thought provoking debate. The motion calls for addiction to be prioritised as a health issue and not primarily a criminal issue. It is good to see drugs are now the responsibility of the Department of Health. That is a positive step.

Heroin first appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s in Dublin's inner city, where cynical operators and dealers targeted poor communities. The drugs were dispensed like sweets until the teenagers were hooked. I saw so many lovely young people taken over by heroin. Their families were devastated and their communities held to ransom. The lone voice of the late Tony Gregory brought the issue into the Dáil Chamber, where it was not taken seriously because officialdom had no real interest in tackling the issue then. The flat complexes in the inner city were known as heroin supermarkets at the time. Tony Gregory continued to make drugs a major issue in the Dáil and in Dublin City Council. This debate is so that the issue will not be off the agenda.

Currently, we are seeing a rise in heroin use. It is interesting that it is coinciding with another economic depression. Again, there are no geographic bounds. At a meeting this morning we were told of increases in seizures of heroin for personal use and supply in Dublin city. The European monitoring centre for drugs and drug addiction places Ireland top of the table of EU countries for heroin use. This is compounded by polydrug use, including alcohol use.

We are also seeing an alarming emergence of grow houses in suburbia, in rural areas and in rented apartments. It is not confined to poor communities. The growers' expertise is considerable. They are producing higher strength cannabis. The main psychoactive chemical, THC, is several times higher in grow house skunk than in hash. Project workers working with young people are concerned about this. It is being confused with the more benign name of hash which, whether we agree or not, has a different effect on people. I will not be like various Presidents of the United States or Ministers and admit to smoking the odd joint when I was in college. I did not. This is irrelevant, but I thought I would put it out there.

I have seen the long-term effects of significant use of cannabis. It is not good to see. However, we should open the debate on cannabis use and look at the arguments for and against. Ireland is the only EU country not to regulate the medical use of cannabis. The Netherlands is looking at classifying this high potency cannabis with cocaine and ecstasy. More young people are using skunk in Dublin. At one of the projects young people talk about paranoia and panic

attacks. Other substances are mixed with skunk and young users, in turn, mix it with Benzodiazepine and alcohol. There is great pressure on some drug projects because they are dealing with a broader array of drugs, rather than cannabis or heroin on their own. There is also crystal meth, crack cocaine and tablets.

It may be because the heroin epidemic began there that Dublin's inner city has become associated with drugs. The response in the inner city has been remarkable. We have excellent projects and services in the voluntary and community sector. There is SAOL, Soilse, Chrysalis, HOPE and Crinan, to name a few. They are taking on these challenges. The SAOL project produced the Reduce the Use booklet which is being used in Ireland and throughout Europe. There are other interesting initiatives on harm reduction. I was at the north inner city drugs task force today. I used to chair it when I was a teacher and I am now back as a public representative. I listened to project workers talking about their work, how they are coping with funding cuts and with their terror of the effect of further cuts to front-line services.

The late Tony Gregory once said, "Follow the money". That eventually led to the setting up of the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Ruairi Quinn, was Minister for Finance at the time. It took the murder of Veronica Guerin to get people moving. That is not good enough for all the other people who are involved in the addiction area. In 2007, Tony Gregory also spoke about the middle rank of dealers, and called for a mini-CAB for those areas where young people see dealers with extravagant lifestyles and no visible means of income. The motion calls for some of the assets of drug related crime acquired by CAB to go back into communities most negatively affected and used for treatment, rehabilitation, prevention, education and family support services. The money could also be used to deal with the intimidation and fear that families must deal with because of drug debt.

We know about death from overdose, lethal mixing and suicide. We have innovative programmes that are seriously at risk of being cut. I am talking about ASIST training, particularly for those dealing directly with vulnerable people. Statutory agencies sometimes send people to do this training and then do not use it, while community projects whose workers would use the training might not have the funding for it. Mindfulness also has a programme. It is a proven strategy for those in recovery. The Oasis Deora counselling centre in North Wall, Dublin, is one of the few that will deal with people in addiction. So many programmes wait until people are in recovery.

Between 20,000 and 50,000 are affected by hepatitis C but effective treatment is available. We know that injecting drug use, especially the sharing of injecting equipment, is the leading risk behaviour for the transmission of hepatitis C. The national strategy has set out a clear plan. The Government amendment refers to the expansion of needle exchange services. Will this include the provision of injecting rooms which are in some other cities but not in Ireland? This is controversial, but we need that debate.

We also need the debate on decriminalisation. We need to have a reasoned debate looking at the research.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Tom Hayes): The Deputy has used her ten minutes.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I will make a couple of final points. With regard to the methadone protocol, methadone has certainly had a stabilising effect on drug users. There is no doubt about that, but the problem is that people are being left on methadone for too long. There

is a need to address this. It is much cheaper to have somebody on methadone than to have them in a rehabilitation or residential centre.

My final point is about the alcohol strategy. A national substance misuse strategy was launched last February but the Government will have to take on a very powerful lobby, that is, both the drinks industry and the sporting organisations that accept sponsorship from the drinks industry. We have seen all the problems and we know the facts and figures about the effects of alcohol. I could use an extreme case. We could ask one of the drug barons in Dublin, Cork or Limerick if they would like to sponsor an event. We ask it of the drinks industry, which is also responsible for a drug. It is a much more harmful drug at times because more people are dying from alcohol related illnesses than are dying from all the other drugs combined.

I will conclude as I do not wish to take time from the other Members in the Technical Group. I will have more time to speak tomorrow night.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this motion. I congratulate Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan on drafting the motion and apologise to her for encroaching on her time. She was in full flow and could have continued. I also welcome the new Minister of State with responsibility for primary care, Deputy Alex White. I hope he has a successful tenure, at least more successful than his predecessor.

This Private Members' motion is very important because addiction is a serious problem throughout the country. I received a call from my local radio station today. It related to just one phrase in the motion which refers to opening a debate on the decriminalisation of drugs. I will address that issue later in my contribution. It is a pity that this single phrase has been picked on by some Members on the Government side as the important message of the motion, because the motion covers all aspects of addiction.

The biggest addiction problem in this country is addiction to alcohol and alcohol abuse. It is the number one issue in Ireland today. In 2010 a HSE report estimated the cost of alcohol related problems at €3.2 billion annually. That is a huge figure when one considers the costs of the HSE and the overruns it is dealing with at present. Addiction, particularly alcohol addiction, is the cause of that financial cost, as well as further problems. Alcohol related crime is estimated to cost approximately €1.2 billion every year. We really have a major problem with alcohol and alcohol addiction in this country and it must be dealt with as comprehensively as possible.

In the case of alcohol related crime, 97% of public order offences are due to alcohol, according to the Garda PULSE system, while in over 50% of murders committed in this country the perpetrators had consumed alcohol. For 76% of rape defendants, alcohol was a factor in the rape. One can see it is a huge problem. Financially, we must deal with it, quite apart from the cost to society and the cost to families and young people who are damaged and abused as a result of alcohol abuse. One of the biggest problems with alcohol is its availability. It is in every corner shop and supermarket. We just cannot get away from it. When I was young, parents complained about the fact that the sweets were always on display beside the checkout in the shops. Now, it is the off-licence that is on display beside the checkout, to encourage people to buy drink when they are paying for their groceries. We must deal with that. The previous Minister was putting together proposals and hoping to put measures in place to deal with it, so I hope this Minister will continue that work.

We talk every day about the reductions in the health budget and the cutbacks that are due to

take place in forthcoming years. Consider that in the context of the cost of alcohol abuse at over €3.2 billion each year. If we could deal with that and make real inroads, we could ease a great deal of the pressure on our health budget and have a more reasoned debate about it.

Drug abuse is a problem not only in the inner cities but throughout the country, including in rural areas. There is a complete lack of support and services for addicts in rural areas. There is a heroin problem in a number of areas in County Donegal, with many addicts in the local communities. Indeed, over the last year or so there were a number of deaths related to drug use in rural areas. Addicts in rural areas who wish to get on a methadone programme or who wish to deal with their addiction must wait six weeks for an appointment for a methadone programme. They must then travel to Dublin to get approval to attend the methadone clinics. That is unacceptable when drugs are available throughout the country. Young people's lives are being destroyed from drug abuse and the lack of support services for them.

This motion proposes a number of actions to be carried out by the Government. It calls for the assets seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB, to be made available to fund drugs projects. That is vital. They should also be used to offset the cuts that are being imposed. It calls for no further cuts to community employment, CE, schemes that are dealing with addiction services. That must be implemented. In the last number of weeks cuts have been made to child and adolescent mental health services in the HSE west area. This means that young vulnerable people and the many families suffering as a result of alcohol abuse and addiction problems cannot avail of the services they require to help them to cope with their daily lives. Those services must be reinstated to ensure young people will be able to cope and talk to somebody who could help them to live through their difficult situation.

It is vital that we have a debate on the decriminalisation of drugs in this country. In 2002 Portugal decriminalised the possession of drugs for personal use. Reports I have read show that this has reduced addiction and crime related to drug use. We must have that debate and it must be done without hysterical reactions. We must look at these models to see if there is anything we can transpose to Ireland which could help to reduce addiction. Anything that would lower the level of addiction and the problems people have with it must be welcomed.

The motion is comprehensive and I congratulate Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan on producing it. It is vital that we maintain services as well as putting them in place. If we could move away from a system of year to year budgets and think in the long term, we could make a real impact, reduce our costs and reduce the level of the problem in our society.

Deputy Clare Daly: This is an incredibly diverse motion which contains some excellent ideas for dealing with addiction in Irish society. In fact, any specific aspect of the motion could be a single motion in itself. I will use the short time available to me to deal with drug addiction as it pertains to prisons.

Any meaningful policy for dealing with drugs must take a particular approach to prisons for a number of reasons. First, there is the fact that crime is the central reason for so many drug addicts ending up in prison. Obviously, the individuals themselves are victims. In addition, on a purely economic basis, there are benefits to society in terms of saving money from ending a revolving door by dealing with the issue of addiction when people are caught by the system, as it were. When people are taken out of society and incarcerated with plenty of time on their hands it should be an opportunity to rehabilitate them. Instead, it is a training ground to get more people hooked on and involved with drugs. Unless we deal with this issue, we are

deceiving ourselves.

There are two issues involved. The first is the number of prisoners who have addiction problems and end up in prison as a result. A survey carried out on the psychiatric status of Irish prisoners in 2005 revealed that almost 60% of male prisoners sentenced had a drug dependency problem and 45% had an alcohol dependency problem. Only 26% of sentenced prisoners did not have an addiction problem of any nature. Other shocking surveys were carried out in the late 1990s and early in the last decade which showed that 21% of intravenous drug users first injected drugs while they were in prison. Our prisons are introducing people to a life of drugs rather than dealing with the issues while prisoners are in prison. This is despite the fact that there has been a huge shift in policy, with airport style searches being introduced since 2008 and a hard-nosed attitude being employed. That does not work.

We must go back to the drawing board and we need a rational, sensible and non-sensational attitude to this problem because it has been the official strategy of the State since 2002 to have drug-free prisons. That is an embarrassment when we look at the policy pursued by the former Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell. It was based on increasing the resources to deal with searches and surveillance, amending the rules regarding visitors and contraband, mandatory drug testing, increased punishment for prisoners who were drug offenders and a much more hardline approach but the reality is that it has been a complete failure and we must now consider a different way to work.

It is completely wrong that we have a scenario where such resources are spent on security when we only have 24 full-time drugs counselling posts spread over 14 Irish prisons, with 4,000 Irish prisoners reliant on nine detox beds. It is completely back-to-front. I had the misfortune to spend a month in prison in the Dóchas centre ten years ago where I got to see at first hand many of the antics that went on and again the approach was the wrong way around. While I was there a young woman was released, took an overdose and died that weekend. It was a normal conversation in the prison. This young woman had been in and out of prison all her life. The prison wardens would report young people coming in and for a while they are getting steady meals, their skin is improving and they are starting to deal with their issues if they can keep them off the drugs. Suddenly, however, they are back out into the same conditions on the outside that led them into addiction in the first place, they take a hit and end up dead.

We need joined-up thinking. I was appalled that while I was in the centre, there was not a single counsellor to deal with all the issues, stresses and strains faced by those young women and mothers as a result of a life inside. There was a hairdressing unit that could have taught them a skill that could get them a job when they were released but no one tried to deal with the training aspect of rehabilitation.

Every society that places an emphasis on rehabilitation in such places sees it work because it is not just illegal drugs that are the problem, it is the pro-drug culture that exists in the prison. In 2010 we spent approximately €3 million on prescription drugs in the prisons. When I was there I was the only person in the prison who was not on drugs of some sort. People were either doing the illegal stuff or at night they queued for the tranquilisers and sleeping tablets that keep people sedated. It was scandalous that this should have been happening instead of proper intervention. We must look at this.

I fully support the idea being pushed by the Jesuits in particular about developing custodial treatment centres instead of sentencing, that people would agree to be sent to a treatment centre

instead of a prison, perhaps with a reduced sentence on the basis that they get treatment. It would cost a fraction of what it costs now, would stop the revolving door and society would win. Unless we deal with this how we are deceiving ourselves.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Like the other speakers, I pay tribute to Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan for bringing this comprehensive motion forward and highlighting the many important issues it raises.

It is timely that such a motion should come forward because alcoholism and drug addiction, particularly heroin addiction, have blighted our society for many years. We are now in an economic recession, with mass unemployment, austerity and cuts being visited in a serious and severe way on our society. We are recreating the conditions which have given rise to these problems at a serious level since the 1980s, and even further back with alcohol. We are now at a moment when we will create the conditions for all of these problems, which are already very serious, to get much worse if we do not take them seriously and deal with them in a sensible and rational way. More lives, families and communities will be devastated by these problems if we do not ensure it does not happen.

We do not need to quote statistics, although there are many, to know of the enormous overlap between alcohol addiction and heroin addiction and issues such as poverty, homelessness, poor quality housing and high levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. We might add to that list the issues of suicide and mental illness. All of these are complex, multi-faceted issues but there is unquestionably a huge correlation between them all. They must be dealt with if we are to make any serious effort to deal with heroin addiction, alcoholism or other forms of addiction.

It is no coincidence that the heroin epidemic first arose in this country in the 1980s during the last period of recession and mass unemployment. It ravaged lives, families and communities and we are still dealing with the legacy of the problems that developed then. Many of those problems have been passed down through the generations from parents to children and even to grandchildren. If we made any headway in trying to deal with those problems, it was because the communities most affected by them, the families and the rehabilitated addicts themselves, fought back, demanded resources, set up community initiatives, worked through community employment schemes to cope with and manage those problems and forced some sort of serious policy response from Governments over the last 20 years to a point where we did not resolve the problems but we were beginning to get a handle on how to address them.

Now, however, there is a threat that all that work could be undone if cuts are imposed on CE schemes that provide counselling services, drug rehabilitation schemes and outreach services to young people who are vulnerable. These CE schemes are holding together some of the most disadvantaged communities that are most affected by alcoholism and drug abuse and every cut to those services threatens to exacerbate the problem of heroin addiction.

It is rarely said, particularly about heroin, but there is an important distinction between heroin and many other drugs. It is almost a misnomer to talk about heroin getting people high, as if it is a fun drug. Heroin is a pain-killer; people take it to kill the pain. It is more akin to tranquilisers and legally prescribed drugs, which are also about sedating people with serious mental health and other problems. We must understand that it is the underlying problem of poverty, with many of those who have fallen into heroin addiction being the same people who went through industrial schools, sexual abuse and neglect and ended up in prison. We must deal

with the problems at the root cause.

8 o'clock

It means addressing issues such as homelessness and I note the strong correlation between homelessness, drug problems, alcoholism and so on. In addition, as previously noted, there must be a serious debate on decriminalisation, not in some sort of hippie way of thinking one should let it all hang out and let drugs be taken because it is cool but rather because criminalising the problem has not worked. It does not work and one must deal with it as a serious health and social problem. Moreover, one must ensure the provision of the resources and services necessary to deal with that problem and the underlying social causes, such as poverty and unemployment that create the conditions under which such problems can flourish.

Deputy Joan Collins: As previous speakers have stated, this is an important debate and I thank Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan for tabling this comprehensive Private Members' motion. As the budget will be announced within eight weeks of this debate and given the amount of kite flying that has been taking place in other areas regarding cuts, it is of particular importance to have a real debate on this subject over the next two days. In stating the obvious, there is a massive crisis. There must be urgent action on the part of the State and a real discussion on the problem because the measures taken thus far, while having some effect, really have made little progress or have had little impact. As my colleague has noted, the drug problem developed in Dublin's inner city in the 1980s and mainly manifested itself as a problem with heroin addiction. However, we now are faced with a national problem involving polydrug use, including alcohol, as well as a massive increase in gang activity around the issue, which is a major element to have developed recently.

I represent the constituency of Dublin South-Central, which is the most disadvantaged urban constituency in the country. While its people are very proud and well organised in their efforts to organise their community, that is the legacy of the Celtic tiger in my constituency. I refer to the poverty levels, unemployment and youth unemployment levels and the high numbers of early school leavers in that area. Moreover, there is serious drug and alcohol abuse within the community, as well as gang activity. An informed source told me the areas of Dublin 10 and 12 have the highest levels of drug seizures and highest drug use and supply in the entire country. There is an epidemic of hashish, which is not like it was in the 1970s but which is a potent, powerful and very expensive drug. It costs approximately €50 to buy a bag, from which one might get four joints. In addition, another dangerous drug, crystal meth, is beginning to make its appearance in the community.

The constituency has experienced a vicious feud between two gangs in the Dublin 12 area that has resulted in 29 murders, the most recent of which was the vicious shooting of a gang member in front of his child. There is a major problem of intimidation which must be addressed, although I acknowledge it has been addressed by some of the local task forces. During the past two years, I have been approached by community groups, such as Addiction Response Crumlin, ARC, and individual families with regard to the intimidation in the area. For example, one family was driven out of their home by gang activity recently. Only yesterday, I spoke to a woman who is being extorted of €10,000 by the gangs in the area. These are people who are in receipt of social welfare and this has been going on daily. For €40, they are willing to put in one's windows unless one pays up. This is the level of activity within the community that people are facing and it is not an exception but is widespread. The gangs in my area usually are based around criminal families, which groom troubled teenagers and children, some as young

as ten, to expand their operations. These children and teenagers are used to target families on behalf of those gangs and this cannot be ascribed to antisocial behaviour but constitutes organised crime in the community.

As a member of the local policing forum, my perception is there is a lack of urgency in dealing with such issues. I am sure the position is the same in other areas and I note Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan made particular reference to the inner city local policing forum. This must come from the top, that is, there must be a Government-driven strategy to deal with this issue. I recall that a special drugs policing forum operated in the inner city. It intervened in the community and did a very good job until its disbandment after a number of years of being in place. However, one is told the Garda cannot do much because families are not coming forward. There is a reason families do not come forward, which is they are afraid that their houses might be burned, petrol bombed or pipe bombed. They fear that their windows could be put in or, in some exceptional circumstances, that they could be shot dead. Anyone with any local knowledge knows who is involved in this gang war. There must be a strategy to target such serious criminals. There must be constant surveillance, raids, searches and constant arrests in respect of these criminal gangs. There must be CAB investigations to let them know they cannot act with impunity, which is what they are doing at present in many communities.

I also wish to address the issue of services. The Addiction Response Crumlin centre is a highly successful community response to the drug crisis. Working with more than 550 individuals and families, it runs a total of eight projects, which include three community employment schemes and family support for 80 families with an under-18 project. However, since 2008 the centre has had its funding cut by 22.7%. Its training allowance has been cut by 50%, its material grant cut by 53% and its administrators must juggle things around skilfully. A city-wide estimate of community drug services in general indicates they have had their funding cut by 29% since 2008. The dial to stop drug dealing initiative, which built up local knowledge and had been introduced highly successfully by all accounts, was abolished in January of this year without consultation. The cuts have devastated and undermined the community's response to the drugs crisis and another round of cuts in the forthcoming budget would be disastrous. Perhaps someone in government should explain this to the troika. Our communities are being devastated and we cannot take any more from that perspective. Finally, I fully support the point made about opening up debate in respect of legislation to legalise certain drugs at least, thereby removing organised crime from the scene. International experience shows the war on drugs is a complete and absolute failure.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: While I already did so in the Chamber earlier, I wish the new Minister of State every good luck in the years ahead. I wish him all types of success and hope he will be successful in an extremely difficult, demanding and tough role. I really mean this and wish him good luck. I sincerely thank the Technical Group. This is an unusual situation in that I appreciate the great work done by Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan and am thankful to the Technical Group for allowing me time even though its members did not know I am not fully in support of the motion before the House this evening. Their willingness to give time to a person who does not support fully the motion demonstrates just how open and understanding they are.

I have a number of issues and I wish to use the time allocated to highlight my concerns. First, if one considers our history regarding the abuse of substances, one must acknowledge our experience nationally with alcohol, for instance, is not good. If one takes the motion's call to "prioritise addiction as a health issue and not primarily as a criminal issue and ensure the necessary allocation of resources" and to "open the debate on decriminalisation of illegal drugs and

safer consumption”, I must reiterate that as a nation, our record with regard to consumption is not good. This is the reason I genuinely cannot fully support this motion. As for decriminalising some of the drugs that are illegal at present, it could make it easier. I acknowledge great arguments can be made on both sides and I listened attentively to previous speakers but when it comes to maintaining addictions, it could result in it being easier for people to sell drugs that would then be classified as being legal. Moreover, selling such drugs over the counter could lead to a false notion that consumption of such drugs was safe. It could mislead drug users and, in particular, young people into thinking that if it is legal, it must be okay. When one considers cigarettes, for instance, it is perfectly legal to buy cigarettes over the counter but at the same time, there is a massive industry in the illegal sale of cigarettes at present. I am not convinced and that is why I am more inclined to side with what I am hearing from the Government on this issue than with what is being proposed in the motion. I have real concerns and even though Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan is motivated for all the right reasons, it is just we do not always agree on everything at all times.

I return to the damage being caused by drugs. It is a major problem facing the Government and all of us, and should be our top priority. The incidence of suicide is very high in the country and I believe many suicides are as a result of poly-drug use, which is in the majority of cases illegal drugs or even legal drugs being taken in conjunction with alcohol. I believe this is a contributory factor to the enormous increase in the incidence of suicide. From our constituencies and from being involved with communities and knowing so many people, sadly we all recognise the enormous increase in the incidence of suicide. This wreaks devastation upon families, parents, children and neighbours. Communities are being torn asunder from this. There is not a family, townland, village or town that is not affected by suicide on a regular basis, which is terribly sad.

It is incumbent on the Government and all of us to ensure we do everything we can to tackle illegal drug use. I have reservations about opening the debate on decriminalising some illegal drugs on the basis that it might allow for safer consumption. I am not convinced of that argument which is why I am not in a position to support the motion before us tonight. The Government should be concentrating on sorting out the existing addiction problems we have such as alcohol rather than making other substances legally available. I do not believe the timing is right for that at present. It is no harm to have tonight’s debate on the floor of the House allowing everybody to make contributions. Whether for or against, everybody’s contribution is valuable and important. We need to get the message from both Government and Opposition that we are serious about taking on the crime lords who are wreaking such havoc. Because of their greed for money they are willing to take people’s lives and tear lives asunder by importing and making freely available illegal drugs on the streets of our towns and villages.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Tom Hayes): It is my pleasure to call upon the newly appointed Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy White, who has 20 minutes to speak. I understand he is sharing his time with Deputies O’Donovan and Catherine Byrne. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Minister of State at the Department of Health(Deputy Alex White): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“recognises:

2 October 2012

— the scale of the problem of addiction throughout Ireland and the increasing demands on services;

— that poly-drug use has increased significantly due to the increase in the accessibility and range of dangerous substances, both illegal and unregulated;

— the increased risk to individuals using substances and lethal combinations of substances with respect to overdose, fatality and long-term ill health;

— the numbers of drug and alcohol related deaths each year are more than twice that of the numbers of deaths on our roads;

— the strong association between drug/alcohol abuse and suicide, and also accidental death;

— the increased use of technology in accessing harmful substances;

— the continuous on-street dealing in disadvantaged communities, the levels of intimidation and fear because of violence by drug gangs and the availability of firearms;

— that alcohol has been identified as a contributory factor in 90% of public order offences as recorded under the Police Using Leading Systems Effectively (PULSE) system and alcohol related crime costs the State almost €1.2 billion a year;

— that alcohol and drug related illness costs the health system a further €1.2 billion yearly;

— the link between economic and social disadvantage, including early school leaving, unemployment, housing conditions and problem drug/alcohol addiction and crime;

— the number of children with need for child protection because of families' problems with drug and alcohol addiction;

— the links between mental health, homelessness and addiction; and

— the unacceptable levels of drug abuse in our prisons;

acknowledges:

— the work of the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, the partnership model, the pillars of treatment and rehabilitation, supply control, prevention and research and family support;

— the role of the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund in targeting those most at risk of drug abuse in funding services and facilities in many areas, particularly to those most vulnerable;

— the work of the Community Policing Forums in promoting collaborative work between the communities, local authorities and Gardaí to resolve local drug related and antisocial behaviour issues;

— the work of the various groups, government departments and agencies, the community and voluntary sectors and others in producing the National Substance Misuse Strategy Report;

— the work of the community and voluntary sectors in engaging those in addiction and in recovery from addiction in services; and

— the improvement in best practice and the range of treatment, rehabilitation and recovery for those in addiction; and supports the Government in its determination to tackle the issue of substance misuse and addiction through:

— continuing to support local, regional and national structures of the National Drugs Strategy involving community, voluntary and statutory services in the coordinated delivery of responses at individual, family and community level to the benefit of those most affected by problems of addiction;

— taking measures to strengthen the effectiveness of Drugs Task Forces;

— taking progressive measures, such as expanding the provision of needle exchange services around the country;

— continuing to implement the Irish Prison Service's Drugs Policy and Strategy, 'Keeping Drugs out of Prison', to develop drug treatment services and enhance supply reduction measures across the State's prisons;

— supporting the continued efforts of An Garda Síochána in tackling organised crime and those involved in drug dealing at local level in our communities; and

— its intention to bring forward a co-ordinated National Substance Misuse Strategy.”

I thank you, a Chathaoirligh, for your kind words and I also thank other colleagues for their kind words. I welcome the debate and I congratulate Deputy Maureen O Sullivan and her colleagues on tabling the motion. There is considerable agreement between us although not total agreement and therefore I believe it is appropriate to ask the House to support the Government's amendment in this regard.

At the outset I wish to recognise the very considerable work in which Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan has been involved over many years with her colleagues and collaborators - if I may describe them as such - back to the involvement of the former Deputy, the late Tony Gregory, who did such extraordinary work not just in promoting the debate and discussion, but in taking a very fearless attitude and public stance over much of what was happening in his constituency and indeed throughout the country. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan may be aware that I have some involvement in one of the organisations she mentioned in the course of her speech, the SAOL project, with which I am very glad to have been associated over a number of years. I acknowledge the work she mentioned that the SAOL project and others are doing.

There is a high degree of agreement among us particularly on the harms caused by addiction, be it drugs, alcohol or other forms, to individuals, their families and friends and society in general. There are approximately 14,500 known opiate users in Ireland. Current figures indicate that more than 12,500 are in receipt of drug treatment, of whom more than 9,300 are in

receipt of methadone treatment.

Alcohol plays a complex role in Irish society. Unfortunately, its consumption for enjoyment and sociability - along with its economic benefits - is overshadowed by the harm and health problems it causes when it is misused or consumed in a harmful and hazardous way. The National Drugs Prevalence Survey 2010-2011 indicated that 87% of adults aged between 18 and 64 years are classified as current drinkers. Some 58% of current drinkers, representing half of the State's population, are classified as consuming alcohol in a harmful manner. These are stark figures.

The Government is committed to maintaining the impetus in tackling the drugs problem through the full implementation of the national drugs strategy. It sets out a series of actions to deal with the drugs problem under the five pillars. I accept this requires a multifaceted and multifactorial approach and it cannot be reduced to one approach or another whether in the important criminal justice area or any other area - all of the areas must be brought together. Those five pillars are supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research, each of which is important.

Co-operation and interagency working between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors is crucial to the success of the national drugs strategy. Expenditure on drugs services by Departments, State agencies and others is in the region of €250 million per year. As I will outline, significant progress is being achieved across the five pillars of the strategy I mentioned.

On supply reduction, I can assure the House that drug law enforcement remains a key priority area for An Garda Síochána and the Government. An Garda Síochána continues to proactively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime. The Garda national drugs unit, works closely with divisional and district drug units and other national units, including the organised crime unit, as well as the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs.

The association between the drugs trade and the use of violence and intimidation, as adverted to by some earlier speakers, remains a significant problem and the State will continue to utilise all resources at its disposal in pursuing those involved. The recent brutal murders have shown the callous disregard some people have for human life and the Garda is determined to do everything it can to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Minister for Justice and Equality is in ongoing contact with the Garda Commissioner about all aspect of serious crime. The Garda will continue to bear down heavily on the activities of those involved in gangland crime including drug crime.

The use of intimidation in the pursuit of drug-related debts is a matter which is being treated as a priority by the Garda. A framework is being developed between the Garda national drugs unit and the Family Support Network to assist persons who may be subject to the threat of drug-related intimidation.

In targeting those involved in drug trafficking a number of strategies have been put in place by An Garda Síochána to address the sale, supply, importation and distribution of illegal drugs. This approach is continuing to result in significant drug seizures and the related arrests of those involved in this trade and other forms of criminality. Provisional Garda figures for the period January to August 2012 indicate that 11,263 drug offences were detected, with 9,743 related arrests made. Based on figures provided to An Garda Síochána by the Forensic Science Labora-

tory, it is estimated that drugs with an approximate street value of €59.3 million were recorded as seized during the first six months of the year. The seizure data do not include a number of significant seizures made at the end of the first six-month period which remain the subject of further analysis and which will be reflected in later Forensic Science Laboratory returns. For example, in June as part of an ongoing intelligence-led operation targeting organised crime, the Garda national drugs unit, working with colleagues from the Revenue's Customs service, seized in excess of 400 kg of cocaine following searches in west Dublin and Kildare and arrested a number of key players involved in the drugs trade. I commend An Garda Síochána and the customs authorities on their ongoing work in this regard.

This Government has taken concerted action to tackle the emergence of new psychoactive substances, often known as legal highs. Since the middle of 2010, more than 260 psychoactive substances have been declared controlled drugs under the misuse of drugs Acts. In addition, the Criminal Justice (Psychoactive Substances) Act 2010, made it a criminal offence to sell or supply substances which have psychoactive effects on humans. This combination of initiatives has had a huge effect on the availability of new psychoactive substances that were in the main being sold through head shops. The Garda report that the number of head shops operating here has been reduced from more than 100 to three. The Garda continue to monitor retail outlets involved in the sale of equipment that can be used to cultivate cannabis and investigate any incidents involving the availability of psychoactive substances through retail outlets.

As stated by colleagues earlier, under the Medicinal Products (Prescription and Control of Supply) Regulations, it is prohibited for a person to supply a prescription medicine by mail order, including over the Internet. Furthermore, it is an offence to produce, import, export, sell, supply or possess substances controlled under the misuse of drugs Acts and regulations, except in accordance with a licence. The Department of Health is currently reviewing the misuse of drugs regulations, to introduce additional controls on benzodiazepine medicines which are known to be traded illicitly. The new measures will require import and export licences and create an offence for persons who possess these substances without a prescription, licence or other authority.

The strategy recognises the vital importance of promoting a greater awareness and understanding of the dangers of problem drug and alcohol use. Prevention measures are in place, focusing on those most at risk as well as on the general population. National media campaigns are undertaken by the HSE and include the development and-or support of information websites such as *www.drugs.ie*, *www.yourdrinking.ie*, *www.healthpromotion.ie* and regional awareness raising events such as drug awareness week.

The Government is particularly focused on ensuring that there is an increased emphasis on moving people from drug treatment to a drug-free life, where this is achievable. The report of the working group on drugs rehabilitation, published in 2007, sets out the framework for a multifaceted approach to the delivery of rehabilitation. Considerable progress has been achieved, with an increased number of places in the opiate substitution programmes, more detox beds and more places in rehabilitation programmes. For example there are currently 142 beds available for medical and community-based detoxification and 642 residential rehabilitation beds for those suffering from addiction of various types, the majority of which are being utilised by people with problems relating to alcohol. Additional detox beds were recently provided at a number of locations, including in Bruree, County Limerick; Farnanes, County Cork; Tullow, County Carlow and Ballyragget, County Kilkenny. The HSE continues to prioritise treatment and is currently assessing demand for residential services, reviewing funding arrangements and

standardising service level agreements. There has also been an increase in the availability of needle exchange services, with the roll-out of the pharmacy needle exchange programme, in which more than 40 pharmacies are participating. The programme is being expanded over a three year period.

The HSE provides a wide range of services in respect of alcohol related harm. These include health promotion activities and campaigns, outreach and counselling services, addiction services, family support, treatment of patients presenting with alcohol related harm in acute hospitals and support of voluntary organisations. A review of the methadone treatment protocol in 2010 made a number of recommendations, including the involvement of more GPs in the methadone service, more emphasis on moving clients towards recovery, more opportunities for detoxification with appropriate follow-up and greater use of alternatives to methadone. Implementation of these recommendations is overseen by the HSE's social inclusion governance group.

The Irish Prison Service continues to implement its drugs policy and strategy, entitled "Keeping Drugs out of Prison". This drugs strategy was launched in May 2006 and significant progress has been made to date. The strategy seeks to reduce the demand for drugs within the prison system through education, treatment and rehabilitation services for drug-addicted prisoners. Initiatives include the provision of detoxification, methadone maintenance, education programmes, addiction counselling and drug therapy programmes.

Any person entering prison with a history of opiate use and testing positive for opioids on committal is offered medically assisted symptomatic detoxification. Patients can, as part of the assessment process, discuss with health care staff other treatment options which may include stabilisation on methadone maintenance for persons who wish to continue on methadone while in prison. Methadone maintenance is available in nine places of detention, accounting for more than 80% of the prison population. The Prison Service often engages with patients who have not accessed community-based treatment services. The drugs treatment policy has also led to a reduction in the incidence of post release overdoses, since there is a strong emphasis on continuity of care between prison services and the community services.

As part of the Government commitment to deliver focused services to people in rehabilitation, 1,000 CE drug rehabilitation places have been ring-fenced within the community employment sector. The drug rehabilitation places operate as CE schemes but with a special remit around rehabilitation and training to prepare participants to progress to employment. The line between rehabilitation and recovery on the one hand and employment and training on the other is often blurred. In the world of recovery from addiction, labour market participation is one of the surest ways to enhance self-esteem and reinforce stability and recovery. This balance between rehabilitation and training has been at the core of community employment on drug task force projects and is reflected in the national drugs strategy. In June 2012, there were 807 participants in CE drug rehabilitation projects. The CE drug rehabilitation projects are working with the Department of Social Protection to ensure that there is adequate funding for the continuation of the valuable work undertaken by such schemes.

The role of the family in drug rehabilitation cannot be overstated. The national drugs strategy states that families should be seen as service users in their own right; that service providers should actively seek the participation of families in the rehabilitation process and the reconciliation of families, if that is necessary. The HSE works with a number of agencies to support prevention measures with families. Some examples of these initiatives include roll-out of the strengthening families programme and delivery of a comprehensive concerned persons

programme in support of family members who experience significant difficulties arising from alcohol and substance misuse. The strengthening families programme is a 14 session, evidence based parenting skills, children's life skills and family life skills training programme aimed at preventing and reducing alcohol and drug misuse and anti-social behaviour and crime among young people.

The drugs task forces play an important role in tackling the drug problem in local communities. They support more than 400 community-based drugs initiatives, which operate a range of interventions covering treatment and rehabilitation, drug awareness and prevention, community safety initiatives and support for families of problem drug users. This year, the Department of Health is providing almost €31.5 million in funding to the drugs initiative, which primarily supports the activities of community-based drugs projects in drugs task force areas. A review of the drugs task forces and associated structures has taken place and recommendations will be considered by the Government shortly. The core objectives of the review are to strengthen the effectiveness of the drugs task forces, improve accountability for their activities and expenditure and streamline the funding arrangements to the community drugs projects.

I would now like to return to the question of alcohol and its place in our society. The misuse of alcohol is responsible for a wide range of health and social harms in society. A significant burden is placed on the resources of the State in dealing with the consequences of alcohol misuse.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Hear, hear.

Deputy Alex White: Let us take a moment to consider the facts. Alcohol misuse was responsible for at least 88 deaths every month in 2008. It is a contributory factor in half of all suicides and in deliberate self-harm. It is associated with the occupation every night of 2,000 beds in Irish acute hospitals and one quarter of injuries presenting to emergency departments. Alcohol abuse is estimated to be associated with 16% of child abuse cases. It was a trigger in a third of domestic abuse cases in 2005. In 2007, alcohol related illness cost the health care system €1.2 billion and alcohol related crime cost an estimated €1.19 billion. The cost of lost economic output in 2007 owing to alcohol was estimated to be €427 million. In addition to the terrible human loss and suffering involved, alcohol related road accidents cost an estimated €530 million in 2007. In addition, a range of disorders known as foetal alcohol spectrum disorders are caused by mothers drinking alcohol in pregnancy.

This state of affairs simply cannot continue. The time has come for us to rethink our relationship with alcohol. Irish people drink in a more dangerous way than people in almost every other country. Irish adults drank 11.9 litres of pure alcohol *per capita* in 2010. This equates to 482 pints of lager, 125 bottles of wine or 45 bottles of vodka. Ultimately, 1.5 million Irish drinkers drink in a harmful pattern.

It is imperative that as a society we reduce the overall level of alcohol consumed in our society and tackle the problems of alcohol misuse. The report of the national substance misuse strategy steering group was published last February. It made a number of recommendations focusing on the supply, pricing, availability and marketing of alcohol, along with measures for the policy areas of prevention strategies, treatment, rehabilitation, alcohol and substance dependency research and information. For example, it recommended an increase in the price of alcohol so it becomes less affordable, and the introduction of a legislative basis for minimum pricing and a social responsibility levy on the drinks industry.

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The extent of alcohol misuse warrants such policies to address this pervasive threat to Irish public health. Minimum pricing is ultimately a mechanism of imposing a statutory floor in price levels for alcohol products that must be legally observed by retailers. The primary function of this measure is to reduce at-risk levels of alcohol consumption, especially by those who drink in a harmful and hazardous way. It would also have a greater impact on discouraging children and young adults to drink. In turn, this should diminish the effect of the misuse and over-consumption of alcohol on public services, crimes and public health, along, of course, with productivity in the economy.

The national substance misuse strategy sets out the future direction of policy to deal with the use and misuse of alcohol. The Department of Health is preparing a concrete set of proposals on the basis of the national substance misuse strategy report, and it is intended to submit these to Government for consideration and approval as soon as possible.

The Government is fully committed to addressing the drugs problem, and as a Minister of State with responsibility in this area I intend to continue to drive the implementation of the drugs strategy and ensure that tackling the problem of addiction throughout Ireland remains very high on the Government's agenda. I acknowledge the progress achieved by my predecessor, Deputy Róisín Shortall, in advancing the national drugs strategy. I look forward to bringing proposals on an alcohol policy to the Government in the very near future, and in this regard I am confident my colleagues in government will support the timely finalisation and subsequent implementation of the national substance misuse strategy.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. I wish the new Minister of State, Deputy White, well in his role. I have no doubt the experience he brings from his work prior to being elected to the Dáil will be of huge assistance, particularly in the area of drugs and substance misuse. To repeat what previous speakers said, it is undoubtedly a scourge on society. The country has faced a drugs problem for generations and more recently we have seen the obvious effects of the misuse of alcohol. I pay tribute to the staff at Cuan Mhuire in Bruree, County Limerick, in my constituency who work in this area on a daily basis. They do sterling work in assisting people on their road to recovery. I find myself in the position of agreeing with Deputy Healy Rae, which is a first for me, as I am concerned about the blanket decriminalisation of certain drugs because I do not believe it is the path to take. Various jurisdictions have had mixed experiences of this.

We need greater co-operation, and the Minister of State's experience in a previous guise may help with this. This is not an issue for one Department; it is multifaceted requiring the Departments of Justice and Equality and Defence to play a major role. We saw the role of the Naval Service in the seizure of illegal substances off the west coast of Cork. It is important that naval services in Europe and elsewhere share information on the traffic into and out of our territorial waters. The availability of naval ships in Ireland is limited for the very good reason of budgetary constraints. However, one would not put a west Cork garda in a Ford Fiesta with only first gear to patrol the entire country. This is what we expect of the Naval Service. The time has come for us to look to our neighbours, particularly our nearest neighbour which has a far greater maritime capability than we do, and ask for the collection and sharing of information on traffic into and out of our territorial waters in certain instances for this purpose.

An issue raised with me recently is mail-order drug dealing. A parent spoke to me about the damage being caused by benzodiazepines to families throughout the country. This issue is gaining momentum. I call on the Departments of Health and Justice and Equality to consider

the effective programme put in place to deal with the scourge of child pornography and the use of the credit card details of those who solicited such information from websites. Some of the websites selling drugs are hosted in countries where the law of the land is not the number one priority, but every one of these websites is dependent on an Irish bank or financial institution conveying information on the credit card details being used to make purchases. We need a code of practice or stronger legislation put in place to go after the banks and credit and debit card companies which allow this to happen. To a certain degree, an onus of responsibility should be placed on the sharing of information between those who transit the material into and out of the country, in particular couriers or post workers who bring large packages - these do not come in small packages - on a routine basis to the same people. Perhaps there is also a role for the State agencies in information sharing, but certainly the credit facilities offered by banks to purchase these drugs online should be examined. The work done to deal with child pornography was very effective.

The Minister of State is correct that the scourge of alcohol abuse has been well documented. However, there is another side to the alcohol and drinks industry. It is very easy for Members of the House to be critical of the industry, and I agree that to a certain extent it has gone out of control, but in towns, cities and villages throughout the country we have responsible family-owned pubs which are good houses run by people who are part of the community. They have been waiting for years for something to be done about the unregulated side of the market and I would welcome any measures taken in this regard. In doing so, the Minister of State needs to level the playing field and engage with the responsible end of the industry. These are ordinary people who pay their rates and exorbitant rates of tax on which we depend. No contribution made so far this evening referred to the amount of money raised by the Exchequer from the alcohol industry. A side of the industry is willing to engage with the Minister of State and wants to help address this problem. It is important not to tar all of the drinks industry with the same brush. I encourage the Minister of State to sit down with the representatives of the manufacturers, retailers and publicans. They are in communities throughout the country and provide employment. They do not want to act irresponsibly but, by the same token, they do not want pot shots to be taken at their industry every night. Not all publicans or nightclub owners are bad; there are a few rogues who need to be rooted out. I wish the Minister of State well and I support the amendment he has tabled.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Alex White, on his new role and wish him every success. The motion is very timely given the recent tragic events in the city linked to drugs and gangland activity. I hope in the coming months the Minister of State takes the opportunity to put his own stamp on this very important issue. The people at the heart of this issue are the addicts, their families and children and their communities. We need to focus on those struggling with addiction, whether to alcohol or illegal drugs. We need to help their families to support them in their battle to get clean and re-start their lives. We need to move forward with a methadone programme that does not keep people sustained on methadone but rather weans them off drugs altogether. We need to help them access proper rehabilitation services and counselling and not be left waiting on long waiting lists to go into rehabilitation. I welcome the review which has gone ahead, although I am not too sure what is in it. This comprehensive review of task forces is vital to assess the work being done on the ground and to ensure projects and services funded through the task forces are connecting with the people they are serving. There is a genuine need for accountability and responsibility. Those projects that do the most must be recognised for their commitment to the provision of vital services for addicts. Last month, I visited the Star Project in my own area in Ballyfermot where I met many

of the participants, many of whom have been there for the past two years while others have been participating for a short period of time. I heard one person describe how she had lost five family members through addiction. This issue needs to be tackled urgently.

I cannot talk about drugs and addiction without taking alcohol abuse on board. Here in this country, the levels of alcohol consumption is frighteningly high. It is tolerated and socially accepted. Young people now top up before they even go out on the town. It is seen as our tradition in some people's eyes, which is a very sad reflection on our country - the drunken Irish. Last week saw Arthur's Day, which was a great day but, by the evening, the city was in turmoil.

The drugs crisis in this country has existed for many years. I have lived and worked in an area where drug addiction has devastated communities. People were not allowed to go to their local shop and post offices closed down. One particular pharmacist was allowed to treat 500 people per day on methadone. Thank God those days are gone and people have taken on the responsibility of dealing with them. The mindless violence and unlawful killing we have seen appear to have become the norm. Criminals have taken the law into their own hands. This tit for tat killing in broad day light no longer shocks us, at least not until last week when innocent children saw their parents shot in front of them. What is happening to our country and what was once a civilised society? These are very worrying times for our communities and families. People are frightened. I met people from my area who will not even go to the local authority if they believe people are involved in drugs and gangland crime because they are afraid. I commend the Garda Síochána and the national drugs strategy on the work they have been doing to try to deal with criminal activities. People should contact the Garda, ring the helpline and not be intimidated because the people living there are the eyes of the community. They know what is happening every day and they are the people with whom the Garda needs to connect.

The local drugs task forces and the local police forums are excellent in every community and well worth attending. Some of the task forces are working very well but some of them are not working at all. When the Minister of State puts his stamp on this portfolio, he will be able to weed out the ones that are not doing the work and support the ones that are.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this very important debate. I thank the Technical Group for moving this motion, especially Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan, who has campaigned on this issue for many years, and her predecessor, the late Tony Gregory. In the early 1980s when I was growing up, even though I was from a rural part of Cork but one which was near the city centre, I was unaware of the tragedies unfolding in the inner city in Dublin. It was because of the campaigning of people like the late Tony Gregory and Deputy O'Sullivan that the drugs issue was brought to the fore.

I believe the reason it was not to the fore was simply because it was affecting people who did not have a voice. It was affecting inner city Dublin and people who were underprivileged and did not have a political voice. It was not until such time as it spread out and started to infest other communities that it became an issue of national prominence. It was a very sad reflection on ourselves as parliamentarians, political parties and a society that we ignored what was a serious blight on a generation of people in inner city Dublin. That had a devastating impact on the community, families and individuals in that area. We saw it culminating in many deaths, the arrival of vigilantes and all that flowed from that, such as the evolving criminality and paramilitaries moving into organised crime. The proceeds of that are, unfortunately, visiting our streets regularly in Dublin and elsewhere.

I congratulated the Minister of State and wished him the best of luck today in his absence. I wish him well and hope he has success in delivering on what is a very important portfolio in the Department of Health and Children. If I were the Minister of State, I would go back to the office, write out the delegation of ministerial functions order and get the Minister for Health to sign it tonight to make sure he has full authority and control over his destiny in delivering on primary care and all that flows from that. In essence, primary care is critical in respect of what we are talking about because GPs and social workers are at the heart and to the fore in addressing drug addiction and abuse in our communities, along with law enforcement and trying to cut off the supply.

I have gone through this motion and while there could be a difference of opinion with regard to one or two areas, we decided we would not move any amendment to it simply because it is a very detailed and thought-provoking motion before the Dáil. We can have the debate and we have a free parliamentary democracy where we can talk about decriminalisation and the opening up of that debate. I would have concerns about it even though I know that in respect of the Netherlands or Portugal, where they decriminalised all illegal drugs in 2001, reports from the Cato Institute and others show the issue should at least be discussed. Perhaps there are parts of it that are positive and which we could bring into our own system. I am not sure, however, that as a society we could cater for the complete opening up and decriminalisation of illegal substances, but I am willing to listen to all sides of the argument from those at the coalface, such as the professionals and those who, unfortunately, have substance abuse issues, feel criminalised and withdraw from support services for fear of conviction and being criminalised. Why not have this debate? My instinct would be that we may not be ready for it.

The one drug that is legal in this country is alcohol and is the cause of huge difficulties and social upheaval - domestic violence, child abuse and suicide. It is something we must address right across the board. Alcohol abuse is a key issue for the Government. It is having a devastating impact on society. These are not criticisms of the Minister of State and the Government, they are just observations as a Deputy, father and person who is interested in promoting health within our society. The Minister of State will know when I want to criticise. The issue of alcohol has been around for too long without us making any serious inroads into addressing the underlying problems and drift from alcohol use to alcohol abuse to drug abuse and all that flows from that. There is a body of evidence in reports, surveys and research that is clearly evidential and shows quite clearly that there is a strong link and that it has a detrimental effect on our society and individuals.

For all those reasons, the national substance misuse strategy steering group report and its recommendations must be acted upon very quickly because we are beginning to lose a generation of people again. We saw it in respect of the Swedish House Mafia concert in the Phoenix Park and we see it every night of the week, particularly at the weekends, in our provincial towns and cities. We know the consequences and causes of it. We know that too much alcohol is being consumed in a binge drinking type atmosphere and we know about the drift towards illegal drugs as well, such as Benzodiazepines, opiates, alcohol and barbiturates. When all these are mixed together, they can become a lethal cocktail. We see it too often in coroners' reports with details of alcohol and polydrug mixes causing death. Daily and weekly our accident and emergency departments are full. In his speech, the Minister of State said that 2,000 beds per night were being used in acute hospitals because of alcohol related incidents. I know we must broaden it out to talk about the other issues as well. However, it is surely within our scope as a society to deal with this issue.

Other speakers stated the problem is multifaceted and that there is a multi-agency aspect, which is clearly the case. Teachers tell us that children in national schools are experiencing difficulty because of alcohol abuse and use. Therefore, we must not put our head in the sand any longer and decide that alcohol is a bit of craic and part of what we are; we must not decide to park the problem in the belief that the next generation will not be affected. The problem is cyclical and ongoing. Something needs to be done.

The 14 drugs task forces did some ground-breaking work on rehabilitation, training, community employment schemes and getting people back into the labour market. The difficulty is that our labour market is very much diminished and, consequently, it is harder to make progress. We will, therefore, need more supports in the supported labour market area. We do not have the safety net that existed heretofore. If there are not more supported labour market initiatives, there will be a backlog among people on rehabilitation programmes who used to use illegal drugs. It is critical that we provide the supports. I am not making criticisms but observations.

Let us consider the use of methadone as a substitute for heroin. We know approximately 9,000 people are on methadone programmes at present. If one hands out methadone continually without putting in place very serious supports, drug users drift back towards heroin use. Evidence exists to support this view. While we can set up treatment programmes and offer rehabilitation, we will not succeed without a multifaceted, streamlined approach. Let us be honest: most of the drug users are very vulnerable and are under huge pressure. They are addicted to a substance and may not have family or community supports. They may have low self-esteem and all that stems therefrom. Therefore, there ought to be a conveyor-belt system of supports available to them. Any break in this process means one can slip back into drug abuse very quickly.

This area must be prioritised, for a number of reasons, if cuts to resources are being made. If we talk about drug abuse, we must acknowledge it is contributing to homelessness, self-harm and suicide. The figures in this regard are alarming. This ought to be a priority for the Government. All the supports should be built around the drugs task forces and made available at the coalface in communities, thereby giving people ownership of their destinies and the ability to deal with their community problems. Prescriptive diktats from Departments or Governments do not always filter down as intended to communities. The local drugs task forces are important in giving communities ownership and the resources needed to face their challenges. I support this approach. The fruits of it are to be seen. Deputy O'Sullivan and others referred to the good work being done by the drugs task forces. Politically, this matter may have fallen off the priority list. I hope the Minister of State will reinvigorate it and put it back at the centre of Government policy, making sure that scarce resources are provided for those who need them most.

In noting the motion's acknowledgement of the good work being done by the drugs task forces and through the implementation of various strategies, we must acknowledge that resources to deal with the difficulties are key. We must consider whether there are sufficient resources available to An Garda Síochána, the Customs and Excise, the Navy and Defence Forces to stop supply. Having a land border with another jurisdiction and a vast coastline, we realise it is very difficult to cut off supply. However, all the necessary resources must be made available. X-ray machines are kept in Dublin Port for a few days and then driven to Rosslare for a few. The drug smugglers wait in Britain until they find out the location of the X-ray machine and when they find it has been moved from a particular port they send their containers there. We must use the technology available to us in conjunction with Interpol and the British authorities to deal with this problem head-on.

Let us be clear: some of the drug finds were accidental. One of the biggest drug finds, which was off west Cork a couple of years ago, occurred when someone put diesel into a petrol boat. It was a complete accident that the vast quantity of cocaine was found in the region. If this was by accident, we must ask what is coming in unknown to us and under our noses. We must provide resources to combat smuggling.

It is not a criticism of those who are on the high seas daily to state there are more resources devoted to chasing a few fishermen around west Cork than to chasing smugglers coming from Colombia in yachts and catamarans to the Irish coastline, from where they move farther on into Europe. We must, therefore, get our priorities right if we are to be serious about cutting off supply. Cutting off half or quarter of the supply is no good because all this does is inflate the cost of the products coming in. This increases criminality, resulting in a circular problem. We must deal with the problem head-on on a number of fronts.

I urge the Government to prioritise surveillance and co-operation with Interpol and other agencies on a pan-European basis and globally, particularly with the United States and other countries that have good intelligence on where drugs come from - South America and Africa, for example. It should be within our gift to cut off the supply of major imports of drugs.

The criminal element and the activities of former members of the IRA, who are now moving into criminality and using their paramilitary experience in the process, are having a devastating consequence on cities. Drug dealing is lucrative and will continue without appropriate sanctions. To this day, the sanctions are not tough enough. If one is caught with over €14,000 of illegal drugs, one receives a mandatory ten-year sentence. I raised this in the House time and again. I wrote to the President of the High Court and President of the Supreme Court stating we must have a sentencing policy that puts suppliers away for a very long time.

Those who are using drugs should not be criminalised. We should regard drug use as a health issue. It is a health issue for those who are addicted to substances, be it alcohol, illegal drugs or, in some cases, legal drugs. We should have a good debate on decriminalisation but I have yet to be convinced that it would address the underlying problems in our society.

I ask the Minister of State, Deputy White, to put this matter centre-stage. He should make a name for himself. I know he will on the basis that he has done so already; that is why he is where he is. He should make a bigger name for himself by ensuring that the alcohol and drugs strategies are central to everything he does, not only with the Department of Health but also with the Departments responsible for justice and education and those with lead roles in combating this insidious cancer in society.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a ghabháil leis an Aire Stáit as ucht a phost nua.

Drug and alcohol addiction, substance abuse and their strong association with suicide comprise some of the biggest problems facing society. The sheer scale of the problem is massive, especially in the Dublin area. It is a very lucky family that has not been affected directly or indirectly by the societal fallout from the drugs crisis.

I have been a member of the Dodder Valley drugs task force since its inception. Daily I see at first hand how legal and illegal drugs are eating away at the fabric that holds communities together. Tallaght has the highest rate of reported burglaries in the State, and Rathfarnham has the fourth highest. Residents quite rightly ask why there are more break-ins in their area and

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they ask whether the figures are linked directly to the drugs epidemic, which is bubbling away under the surface.

I know of two people who were arrested recently by the Garda as they tried to rob a supermarket. The two addicts were robbing a supermarket every day to feed their out-of-control drug habits. I spoke recently to a number of families who lived beside a drug or crack house.

Debate adjourned.

The Dáil adjourned at 9 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 3 October 2012.