

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL OFFICIAL REPORT

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*Dé Máirt, 9 Nollaig 2014*

*Tuesday, 9 December 2014*

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2 p.m.

*Paidir.  
Prayer.*

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### **Business of Dáil**

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 9 p.m. tonight; the sitting shall now suspend until 2.30 p.m. and the business to be transacted then shall be the motion of confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government, and the proceedings thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after three hours and the following arrangements shall apply: the speeches of the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and leaders of Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, or persons nominated in their stead, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case and such Members may share their time, the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case and such Members may share their time, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes, and the order shall resume with Leaders' Questions; Oral Questions to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht shall be taken following the Order of Business for 75 minutes; Topical Issues shall be taken on the conclusion of Oral Questions; and Private Members' business shall be taken on the conclusion of Topical Issues for 90 minutes.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I propose to-----

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Can we have a written copy of that please? It is a different version

from what we were given at the door and there is a lot in it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Could we circulate it? We will circulate it.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** We need to circulate it now.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Do not panic. We will wait until the document is circulated to allow-----

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Should I read it again? A version has already been circulated via e-mail.

**Deputy Ann Phelan:** At 12.37 p.m.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** At 12.37 p.m.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** This was what was at the door for Deputies coming into the Chamber. I assumed this was the Government's programme. It is not what the Chief Whip read out.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the Deputy talking about the Order of Business for later or is he talking about the arrangements? This is just the arrangements for-----

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** I understood the arrangements for the motion of confidence. Then the other business for the day was gone through very quickly and it is important we know what is being proposed.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This is dealing with the arrangements-----

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** It is in the Deputy's e-mail.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** -----for the motion of confidence first, including the time allocated to each group. It then goes on to state that the order shall resume with Leaders' Questions, Oral Questions to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Topical Issues and then Private Members' business shall be taken on the conclusion of Topical Issues.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Correct, and then the-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** It is a mini order of business if one likes.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** The Report Stage of the-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** No. That is to be dealt with later on the Order of Business.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** It would have been helpful if all that had been in the paper we were given.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** A Cheann Comhairle,-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Would you please go through it again.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Can I be helpful here?

*(Interruptions).*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please, be quiet, will you?

**Deputy Alan Farrell:** The Deputy cannot be wasting our time.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** This was circulated at 12.37 p.m. to every Member of the House.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Would you read it out again?

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I will read it slowly this time for some people.

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 9 p.m. tonight; the sitting shall now suspend until 2.30 p.m. and the business to be transacted then shall be the motion of confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government, and the proceedings thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after three hours and the following arrangements shall apply: the speeches of the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and leaders of Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, or persons nominated in their stead, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case and such Members may share their time, the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case and such Members may share their time, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes, and the order shall resume with Leaders' Questions; Oral Questions to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht shall be taken following the Order of Business for 75 minutes; Topical Issues shall be taken on the conclusion of Oral Questions; and Private Members' business shall be taken on the conclusion of Topical Issues for 90 minutes.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is that clear now? Is everybody happy? Is that agreed?

**Deputies:** No.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I will allow each leader to speak.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** I want to object very strongly. Sinn Féin put forward a motion of no confidence and called on the Taoiseach to resign as part of our Private Members' business. Rather than allowing that to proceed, however, as a competent Government with an unprecedented majority, the Government overturned the entire Dáil schedule for today. That is why we have this sort of ad hocery creeping into how we do our business. There was no consultation, certainly with Sinn Féin, on this issue and I presume therefore with none of the other Opposition parties either. It puts the commitments to political reform into some sharp relief. This is all so that the Government can put a motion of confidence in itself, as opposed to allowing the normal business of an Opposition party putting its motion of choice.

We want to strongly object to the way in which the Government has undermined the right of the Opposition, as well as of those who give us a mandate to come here, and has therefore undermined the Oireachtas.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** I oppose this proposal on two grounds. First, the debate should be tomorrow evening after tens of thousands of people have come onto the streets of Dublin to demand the abolition of water charges. They will have voted no confidence in the Government. It should be a real vote as opposed to the charade that will go on here.

My second objection - I have a proposal in this regard - is that we need much more time for this particular debate. In the time allocated, it is impossible to unravel the totality of the posturing, propagandising and sheer mendacity of this Government.

All weekend, for example, on platforms provided by her embedded friends in the media, the Tánaiste was working herself up into quite a state of fury about €280 million that was supposedly to be paid to bondholders. She said: “How dare they, these vulture capitalists?” Joan of Stoneybatter was in full flight in defence of the little people. Then the Taoiseach, Sir Galahad of Castlebar, rode in to support her - “How dare these vulture capitalists expect to get this money?”, they said.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** What about Don Quixote?

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Then we realised that this was the pair who for four years have shovelled billions of euro of little people’s money into the maws of vulture capitalists, parasites and hyenas in the financial markets.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Absolute rubbish.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy can have his say later.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** That is absolute mendacity.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We are only dealing with arrangements now.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** That is only one issue that we need to expose here. The second issue that is of critical current importance is the policy concerning water charges.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** No, I am sorry Deputy.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** The conservation crusade has disappeared and has turned into a save our political skins crusade.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Hold on a second, Deputy.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** We need an explanation as to the Government’s change of policy on this. I am not talking about the housing crisis or hospitals.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This is purely a technical arrangement to allow this debate to take place.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Yes. I am drawing my remarks to a conclusion. I am explaining why we need far more time. I propose that the debate be extended to six hours as opposed to the three hours the Government is proposing.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Why not until 12.30 a.m.?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the Deputy putting a formal amendment?

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Yes. I move amendment No. 1:

That the debate be extended to six hours as opposed to the three hours the Government is proposing.

**A Deputy:** Joe is washing his car.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** When the Opposition tables a motion of no confidence in the Government, there is always a precedent for the Government to respond by way of a motion of

affirmation or confidence in itself. However, there is absolutely no need to do what the Chief Whip is doing today concerning the schedule of the Dáil, as well as political reform and Dáil reform. If I understand it correctly, we now have the ludicrous situation whereby the Water Services Bill will be debated tonight from 10.55 p.m. until midnight. This is madness and it is ludicrous. There will be people marching tomorrow, so one might suspect that the Water Services Bill is being deliberately buried at midnight when very little attention will be afforded to it.

**Deputy Paul J. Connaughton:** What is the Deputy talking about?

**Deputy Dan Neville:** It is not buried.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I do not know. I am making the point.

**Deputy Michelle Mulherin:** We are all-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Will Members stay quiet?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** We are meant to be experiencing a democratic revolution and this is all meant to be changed. Having Leaders Questions, for example-----

**Deputy Derek Keating:** We have changed the sitting hours of the Dáil.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I would trade any time on my record in the Dáil or in committees as a Minister answering questions. I would do that any time.

**Deputy Ray Butler:** The Deputy's Government wrote enough reports on the topic.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I never had any difficulty in that regard. We are having Leaders Questions at 5.30 p.m. The Order of Business will be at 6 p.m. or 7 p.m. tonight.

**Deputy Derek Keating:** Is that too late for the Deputy?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That will be after spending six hours in here.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Is it past the Deputy's bed time?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Does it not strike anybody as being a bit absurd or ludicrous? Business will be ordered after it has already been ordered and having had questions on it.

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** We do that every day.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Not at 7 p.m. and after a debate.

**Deputy Gabrielle McFadden:** Where was the Deputy on Friday?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** A more sensible approach would have been to have the Order of Business and Leaders Questions now, with the confidence debate afterwards for three or four hours. It brings the Dáil into disrepute to have a very significant issue like the Water Services Bill - let us not pretend it is insignificant - at 11 p.m. until 12 midnight.

**Deputy Ray Butler:** Was the Deputy here last Friday?

**Deputy Robert Troy:** There were not too many Government Deputies here on Friday. Look up who spoke in the debate.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** We know what the backbenchers did the last time there was a late night debate.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Will the Deputies stay quiet? I am trying to get the business agreed.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That would have made more sense. Recent late-night debates have not been very good value for the Dáil in terms of public image, so we need some cop-on and common sense. That is why I object to the manner in which this is going on, although I have no difficulty in debating the motion of confidence, giving it some degree of priority or the Government taking the initiative and putting up a vote of confidence in itself. That is not unusual. The rest of the scheduling of business is absurd and makes no sense.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I will begin by replying to the last speaker's comments. Deputy Martin should roll back his memory to 2010, when there was a motion of confidence in the former Taoiseach, former Deputy Brian Cowen. There were similar arrangements to those before us today on that occasion.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** The Government was elected on a mandate of democratic revolution.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Deputy Adams is quite correct in that he put down a motion of no confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government but we have put forward a motion of confidence. We are giving three hours-----

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** The Minister of State is telling me what I already know.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** -----and that is similar to what the party would have had for Private Members' business.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Note the language. They are "giving" them three hours. That is instructive.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** Crumbs from the captain's table.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Deputy Joe Higgins agreed with the business at first but when Deputy Adams disagreed with it, he had to stand up in order to disagree with it. I do not know who is following who on the left. We are sticking with the order.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That was brilliant.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** The Government is following Fianna Fáil.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the amendment proposed by Deputy Higgins agreed to?

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 44; Níl, 72.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Bannon, James.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Barry, Tom.</i>
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>

<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Butler, Ray.</i>
<i>Creighton, Lucinda.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>
<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>	<i>Byrne, Eric.</i>
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Conaghan, Michael.</i>
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Terence.</i>	<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>Costello, Joe.</i>
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>
<i>Higgins, Joe.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>
<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>	<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>
<i>Kirk, Seamus.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
<i>Kitt, Michael P.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>
<i>McLellan, Sandra.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Hannigan, Dominic.</i>
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
<i>Ó Feargháil, Seán.</i>	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>Keating, Derek.</i>
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	<i>Lynch, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	<i>Lyons, John.</i>
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>
	<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>
	<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>

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	<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>
	<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>
	<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>
	<i>Neville, Dan.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Derek.</i>
	<i>Ó Riordáin, Aodhán.</i>
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>
	<i>O'Mahony, John.</i>
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>
	<i>Phelan, Ann.</i>
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>
	<i>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>
	<i>Reilly, James.</i>
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>
	<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>
	<i>Twomey, Liam.</i>
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>
	<i>Wall, Jack.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Joe Higgins and Ruth Coppinger; Níl, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe.

Amendment declared lost.

Question put: "That the proposal re the sittings and business of the Dáil be agreed to."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 70; Níl, 43.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Barry, Tom.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Creighton, Lucinda.</i>

<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Byrne, Eric.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Conaghan, Michael.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Terence.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>Higgins, Joe.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Kirk, Seamus.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Kitt, Michael P.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McLellan, Sandra.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Hannigan, Dominic.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Keating, Derek.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Lynch, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Lyons, John.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	

<i>Neville, Dan.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Derek.</i>	
<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Mahony, John.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
<i>Phelan, Ann.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Twomey, Liam.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Wall, Jack.</i>	

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

Question declared carried.

### **Confidence in Taoiseach and Government: Motion**

**The Taoiseach:** I move:

That Dáil Éireann reaffirms its confidence in the Taoiseach and in the Government.

Almost four years ago the people voted this Government into power, asking that we do four things, namely, rescue the economy, resuscitate the banks, restore Ireland's reputation and, above all, get our people back to work. At that time Ireland was three months from running out of money and the Government faced the prospect of no cash for public services or salaries. The economy was in free-fall, the banks were bust, house prices were diving and mortgage arrears were soaring. With a quarter of a million jobs lost in the previous three years, the dole queues heaved with our brightest and best. The bailout troika strode not only into the Department of Finance in that bleak mid-winter but deep into our national psyche. Inside their homes, people sat dazed and horrified. They had gone from being awash with cash to drowning in debt.

When the Government of Fine Gael and the Labour Party came into office in 2011, we had a plan to rescue Ireland from a bleak and hopeless future. While the past few years have been difficult for our nation, we have put our country on the road to recovery. This is possible be-

cause in following a specific plan, Ireland is now recognised as the fastest growing economy in Europe, a fact unthinkable three years ago. This is no accident; it is a reflection of the recovery plan we have steadfastly implemented since day one of government. It is a recovery plan that has been opposed at every turn by parties of soundbites, negativity and misinformation.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** Fine Gael and the Labour Party promised in the last election that we would overhaul the flawed bailout agreement made by Fianna Fáil. We reversed job-destroying increases in income tax and the cut in the minimum wage. We saved taxpayers billions by negotiating cheaper rates on our debt, liquidating Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide, replacing the penal promissory notes and, most recently, reaching agreement to repay expensive IMF loans at an earlier date.

Our strategy of consistent and determined engagement with our international partners has transformed our international reputation and resulted in real gains and real benefits for our people. The line of foreign direct investment remains very strong. The billions saved will be invested back in our society, including through better services for our people and better infrastructure for our economy. If we followed the Sinn Féin policy in 2011 of telling the troika to go home with their money or telling Europe to bugger off, Ireland would be trapped in a vicious cycle of forced bailouts and loss of national sovereignty.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** The result of our strategy was to deliver our country from the bailout almost to the day a year ago, without the need for a second bailout or other conditional arrangements.

We also took action to deal with the demons of Ireland's cold and heartless past. In my first speech here as Taoiseach, I spoke about how a wound heals from the edges in. We began immediately to put that healing process in place for our country. First for the women of the Magdalen laundries, then by looking after mothers and their babies by way of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013. We took care of the families of Priory Hall and those living in pyrite homes. We are now working to help the women who endured symphysiotomy procedures. We are preparing for a referendum on same-sex marriage, something that will mean so much to so many couples, their friends and families the length and breadth of this country. Just this week in the House we are moving on to the debate on homelessness, which the Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, and the Minister of State, Deputy Paudie Coffey, are working so hard to resolve.

In every aspect of this work, I wanted to make sure we would banish those demons, those old cultural spectres of inhumanity. I was determined that Ireland would never again be such a cold house for its people. I remain so determined. We are on a path of economic and social recovery. I understand that many listening to this debate still have not felt that in their lives. I am as impatient as everyone else that the benefits of recovery are felt right across our country. Today, much to the disappointment of the Opposition, we are out of the bailout programme and back in the economic markets. The banks have been reconstructed and are stable. There are over 80,000 new jobs. In other words, 80,000 people in all four corners of Ireland get up every morning with a new sense of hope for the future as they go to work. The dole queues are at their shortest in five years. We are the fastest growing economy in Europe. The crushing deficit is down and will be eliminated completely by 2018. Better debt deals mean we have billions more to invest in public services to make life a bit easier and somewhat better. Personal taxes

are down and people will benefit further from other tax restructuring in forthcoming budgets. Within the month, they will begin to see a bit more in their pay packets as the first tax cuts come into play. This will be the first occasion in a long time that people will get something back and that they will start to see the benefits of the recovery for which they have suffered so much. It is for us to thank them for their sacrifice.

No person is perfect, no government is perfect and nor am I.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** Of course we did not get everything right along the way - I would be the first to acknowledge that - nor have we achieved all of the things we hoped for when we took office. We must and will learn from our mistakes. We must also do better for the people in the future. I believe 2014 will be seen as a watershed year in Ireland's economic recovery, when our economic policy delivered the resources needed to build our communities and our society. This economic momentum will be maintained next year. After seven difficult years, the people can expect rising living standards, more disposable income and increasingly reformed public services. These are the fruits of economic recovery. We must ensure that all people in all parts of Ireland begin to feel that recovery in their daily lives.

Since entering government, we have focused on rescuing the economy. However, economic recovery is not enough and never was. It is not a goal in itself and does not represent the end of the Government's plans or ambitions. What is a recovery without humanity? What is economic success without dignity, respect or compassion? What is national wealth if it does not take account of community, heart, mind or spirit?

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** My God, the Taoiseach sounds like a member of the Opposition.

**The Taoiseach:** What is reputation when men and women live and die on our streets?

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Now he definitely sounds like one of us.

**The Taoiseach:** Our work is not yet done.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** After four years.

**The Taoiseach:** The Government of Fine Gael and the Labour Party has an ambitious agenda for the future of Ireland. I want this to be seen as a country of opportunity-----

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Go to the people.

**The Taoiseach:** -----in which people are free to achieve anything they set out to do and to reap the rewards of their efforts. I want it to be a country where no lack of jobs, housing or services will hold individuals back in terms of their ambitions. Our first priority is to complete the task of recovering all of the jobs lost during the recession in order that no one will be left unemployed or under-employed against his or her will. We call this full employment and we have an ambitious plan to achieve it by 2020. That plan will involve the continued transformation of welfare and job support services in order to transition everybody who is long-term unemployed back into paid employment. There will be major reforms in this area in 2015 as we continue to roll out our JobPath initiative. Next year, by means of our construction and social housing strategies, we will work to establish a sustainable construction sector that will provide the housing our people so desperately need. New job creation and a growing economy for our

ambitious reform plans will also help us to deliver better services designed to help people reach their full potential. We have outlined such reform plans in respect of the areas of education, health care, social welfare and many others. There will be changes in those areas not only next year but also in the following year.

The Government and I, as Taoiseach, have succeeded, by working in partnership with the people, in bringing our country back from the brink of the economic abyss. We remain fully focused on our plan for Ireland's recovery. Nothing will distract us from the important work of improving the lives of our people. We will finish the task we were given by the people and secure the recovery for the benefit of every single person. I have no intention of creating any instability by calling a general election in 2015. My preference for government after the election in 2016 is for a continuation of the coalition of Fine Gael and Labour that has restored our economic sovereignty.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** That is not going to happen.

**The Taoiseach:** On 9 March 2011, this Government and the people took a leap of faith: faith that we can better ourselves, faith that we can renew government, faith in a confident, shared future for ourselves, our children and our children's children, and faith in our ability to make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to do business, raise a family and grow old with a sense of dignity and respect. I commend this motion to the House.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** In evaluating how far one has travelled, it is necessary to remember the starting point. In November 2010, the US financial journalist Michael Lewis visited this country to write about Ireland's economic meltdown under the previous Government. His article was published in *Vanity Fair* in March 2011, the same month that Labour and Fine Gael came into office. It is worth quoting a segment of that article to remind ourselves where this country found itself at that time:

In recognition of the spectacular losses, the entire Irish economy has almost dutifully collapsed. When you fly into Dublin you are traveling, for the first time in 15 years, against the traffic. The Irish are once again leaving Ireland, along with hordes of migrant workers. In late 2006, the unemployment rate stood at a bit more than 4 percent; now it's 14 percent and climbing toward rates not experienced since the mid-1980s. Just a few years ago, Ireland was able to borrow money more cheaply than Germany; now, if it can borrow at all, it will be charged interest rates nearly 6 percent higher than Germany, another echo of a distant past. The Irish budget deficit—which three years ago was a surplus—is now 32 percent of its G.D.P., the highest by far in the history of the Eurozone. One credit-analysis firm has judged Ireland the third-most-likely country to default. Not quite as risky for the global investor as Venezuela, but riskier than Iraq. Distinctly Third World, in any case.

This is what one of the best-known financial commentators in the United States wrote about Ireland. That was then, however, and this is now. Mr. Lewis wrote about Ireland being distinctly Third World. This was the reality, as judged by neutrals, of the situation this Government inherited. Now, less than four years later, Ireland is set to record the fastest growth in the eurozone, and we are creating thousands of new jobs every month.

Almost 125,000 people have left the live register so far this year to take up work, and unemployment is down to 10.7% and falling rapidly. Our borrowing costs have fallen to record lows and we have slowly but surely reduced our debt and restored our financial sustainability as a state. The deficit will fall below 3% of GDP next year, as the Government continues a prudent and sensible course in order to secure the economic recovery.

In the recent budget, we have begun the process of building the social recovery, by ensuring the benefits of a repaired economy are spread over time to every person, every family and every community. That is why I have absolute confidence in the Government, including the Taoiseach. Labour and Fine Gael, working together, have built an economic recovery and are now building the social recovery also. The Taoiseach's leadership — and that of my predecessor as both Tánaiste and Labour Party leader, Deputy Eamon Gilmore — has been central to the process. In 2011, under their stewardship, Labour and Fine Gael agreed a programme for Government. In it, we acknowledged that Ireland faced one of its darkest hours as an independent state, and that an unprecedented level of political resolve would be required to deal with an unprecedented national economic emergency. The Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and Deputy Eamon Gilmore showed that resolve.

As a Government, we promised to get the economy moving, restore confidence, fix our banking system and support the protection and creation of jobs. We said the success of our economic plans would lay the foundation for the rest of our agenda for change.

When I was elected Labour Party leader and nominated as Tánaiste in July, there were plenty of naysayers who said our strategy could not possibly work and that the Taoiseach and I would clash pretty much incessantly and be incapable of building a professional working relationship for the betterment of our country. I am happy to say we have demonstrated the opposite, quickly agreeing a statement of Government priorities which spelled out how we would work to secure and deepen the economic recovery in a manner felt in people's daily lives, in other words, that the ongoing programme of economic repair would be accompanied by an equal emphasis on social repair and progress.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** They are all happy-clappy.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** We set six key priorities: strengthening the economy and prioritising new jobs for the unemployed, delivering better living and working standards, improving housing availability and affordability, responsible and sustainable management of the public finances, rebuilding trust in politics and public institutions, and protecting and enhancing peace in Northern Ireland. We then set about delivering those priorities.

Coalition governments are not easy. By definition, two parties with different political outlooks will disagree on issues from time to time. That is as it should be – robust debate is to be welcomed, not feared. The key is compromise – to find an agreed solution that works in the country's best interests. To find compromise, there must be trust and professionalism – that is at the heart of any coalition government. The late US President John F. Kennedy, once said, "Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer." That is the core of the agreement that the Taoiseach and I reached - at all times seeking the right answer that will best serve the people of Ireland.

The Taoiseach is a man of integrity who has nothing other than Ireland's best interests at heart. The trust at the centre of the Government has created the room for vigorous debate on

policy that need not be taken as a crisis every time there is disagreement. We had plenty of vigorous debate in advance of the budget but in the end, agreed a package that met our mutual objectives as laid down in the statement of Government priorities.

The recent budget marked a decisive shift, completing the first phase of the recovery and beginning the second - restoring living standards for families, older people, and low and middle-income workers. It combined modest, but focused, increases in public expenditure to address clear and identifiable needs, with highly progressive adjustments in USC and taxation that give the greatest proportion of the gains to low and middle-income workers. Those adjustments in taxation will be seen in workers' pay packets from January, and every worker will benefit.

Having already taken 310,000 workers out of the USC net in 2011, we removed an additional 80,000 workers from the USC net in the recent budget. We made a series of other tax reforms that ensured 33,000 workers have been taken out of the top tax rate, tax has been reduced for those earning between €33,800 and €70,000, and the gains are capped for anybody earning over €70,000.

Also from January, we are increasing child benefit by €5 for all families to assist with the cost of raising children, and we will repeat that in the next budget. We have restored a 25% Christmas bonus for social welfare recipients this year, including pensioners, persons living alone, those with disabilities and carers, and we are providing for additional spending and new initiatives – through the Pathways to Work strategy and the Action Plan for Jobs – to increase the momentum on the employment front and to help jobseekers return to work.

We are providing a record €3.8 billion for social housing and have started to recruit more teachers in our schools – including special needs assistants - and more gardaí on our streets. That is the social dividend, the investment dividend into Irish society. We are rolling out a national broadband plan to assist economic growth, job creation and social inclusion in every community. However, we must do much more than that, and we will. The Government is committed to getting more people back to work, helping small businesses to prosper, building social and affordable homes and new schools, investing in health and reducing inequality. In other words, the Government is committed to ensuring that the recovery works for the many and not just the few.

Work and fair wages are front and centre to that aim. Full employment must be our key priority, because the strongest protection against poverty is decent, secure and fairly paid work. Labour is the party of work. That has been my abiding conviction since I first entered politics and it is my abiding conviction as leader of the Labour Party. Many in this House who identify as being on the left devalue people going to work.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** That is rubbish.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** They seem to want welfare only. That is to insult working people. It is for this reason that budget 2015 provides an additional €3 billion in resources for the domestic economy compared to previous plans, to place job creation front and centre. It is for this reason we have established a strategic bank to drive credit into small and medium enterprises. It is why we are progressively reducing taxes for low and middle-income earners in this budget from January, and will continue to do so in the next budget, so that they share in the recovery, and it why we are delivering collective bargaining for workers and have established a low pay

commission to address wage issues.

The Government's Construction 2020 and social housing strategies will, between them, bring tens of thousands of new affordable and social homes every year, and provide jobs for the 80,000 construction workers currently out of work. We are commencing a new cycle of investment in public services, because quality public services are essential to reducing inequality. In addition, we are embarking on a new phase of political reform to restore trust in our institutions and public life, building on the very significant work already carried out by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin.

Let me be clear and this is where we differ from some of the people who call themselves left wing. We want every teenager in this country to have an opportunity to get an apprenticeship, traineeship, or college place. We do not want our young people on the dole.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** They are in Canada or Australia.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** The Tánaiste is in government. She should do something.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** The Tánaiste should pinch herself; she is the Minister.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Members should settle down.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** I have mentioned trust a couple of times in this speech already and I wish to briefly return to the topic. Trust is an essential part of public life. The next general election will be about trust.

**Deputy John Lyons:** People should trust Finian.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** People should trust the Independents.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Members should stay quiet.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** I have absolute confidence that when the members of the public are asked whom they trust to secure and deepen the recovery and spread it to every household, they will place their faith in this Government to continue doing exactly that. While we are providing an additional €3 billion in resources for the economy, we are also ensuring at the same time that we proceed with the ongoing repair of our public finances and comfortably exceed our deficit reduction targets. One could ask why. It is because this Government will not do anything to imperil the recovery. There will be no return to the Fianna Fáil-style recklessness of the past and nor will we succumb to the type of future recklessness so casually advocated by Sinn Féin.

It is just one year since Ireland's exit from the bailout. By and large, we have stopped talking about the bailout because as a country all of us wish it never happened and as a people we are still living with its after-effects. However, it happened and it was caused largely by Fianna Fáil's ruinous bank guarantee which left the country in financial rubble.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** The Tánaiste wants to spend more.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** That was the reality which this Government faced upon taking office.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Sorry, Tánaiste, your time is concluded.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** The rubble was at our feet and we had to find a way to rebuild the economy and begin the recovery. I heard Deputy Adams recently on a radio programme telling Europe to bugger off or sod off, or whatever phrase he used. That is a recipe for begging the Irish people and the Irish economy.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** Time up.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** During all the debates he continually wanted to default and now he wants to default in the future precisely when that would be one of the most nonsensical things to do. Not even most of the Independents would agree with a policy of defaulting now.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Tánaiste.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** If that is what it means to have a thought-out economic policy, it would imperil the future-----

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** That is a very poor comparison.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** The Tánaiste is over time in every sense.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** -----of every child in this country and put us trundling back into the arms of the troika. It is incredibly irresponsible to suggest at this point in time that this country can default again.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Sorry, Tánaiste, I have to cut you off now, please.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** This Government will finish the job it was elected by the people to do. We will work with might and main on behalf of the people to bring the recovery to every individual, every family and every community.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Suigh síos.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A bit of order for Deputy Martin, please. Members leaving the Chamber should leave quietly.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Reflecting on the debate and the speeches we have just heard, I would like to remark that the great phrase, “Frankfurt’s way or Labour’s way”, does not sound too dissimilar to “Europe can bugger off”.

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** Is this one you heard earlier?

**A Deputy:** Is this one you prepared earlier?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** No, it is not. It is on foot of what I have just heard. In many respects, the debate is a perfect illustration of why the people have for a long time and in ever greater numbers lost confidence in this Government. Elected with the largest majority in our history and even backed by the genuine goodwill of non-supporters, Fine Gael and the Labour Party had an unprecedented opportunity to implement reform. They had the space to put in place a vision for a fairer Ireland. They also had a lengthy media honeymoon to keep some of the normal pressures away. However, they chose a different way. There has been no new social or economic blueprint for our future. There has been no attempt to change how our country is

governed. There has been no interest in reaching out to those without political power. This is an arrogant, out of touch and increasingly out of control Government which has been deeply unfair and divisive. With its trail of broken promises and obsession with spin, it has broken faith with the people who elected it. It has been deeply divisive in its policies and blind to the destructive impact it has had in area after area.

Time and again, major problems have been allowed to develop directly because of Government policies and have only been addressed when there has been a massive public backlash. The Taoiseach has repeatedly come to the House to tell us how everything is going fine, only to see hospitals, schools, the Garda Síochána, property tax, water charges, medical cards, household debts, personal pensions, job insecurity, housing, drug abuse and area after area of public services slide into crises. As we have heard yet again today, this is a Government which is so out of touch that it does not have the faintest idea why it is so profoundly unpopular and continues to spark loud resistance.

Yet again we have heard the fairy-tale story of a selfless Government which came to office and turned everything around and only has problems because of how hard it has been working on our behalf. There are occasional admissions of small mistakes, but the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and their dwindling band of followers basically believe that people are not giving them the credit they deserve. According to them, anything bad they did was only because they were forced to do it. This is a story which is as dishonest as it is discredited.

In its nearly four years in office the Government has never produced a plan for the economic and social development of our country. In fact its very first decision as a coalition was not to negotiate a new fiscal framework. For its first three years it followed the broad guidelines of the plan it inherited and, by the way, had campaigned against in the general election.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** And the mess.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Earlier the Taoiseach attacked people who opposed the plan. No one opposed the plan more persistently and consistently than the Taoiseach himself, the previous Tánaiste and the current Tánaiste. They voted against large measures of the plan for which they subsequently claimed credit. However, Fine Gael and the Labour Party did begin one decisive shift in policy. They have made taxation and public spending significantly more regressive. They have repeatedly ignored ability to pay when imposing taxes and charges and they have targeted cutbacks on the weakest sections of the community.

As every independent study has shown, the budgets introduced by my late colleague, Brian Lenihan, were ones where the wealthiest bore the biggest burden. As every independent study has also confirmed, Fine Gael and the Labour Party have implemented four budgets out of four where struggling families have borne the biggest burden.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** From day one, the Government has put politics before substance. It has seen every problem in terms of how to spin it. After an enormous defeat in May's local elections, after rising discontent on the doorsteps and in the streets, and after a forced reshuffle, following an uprising in the Labour Party and disquiet in Fine Gael, the Government still does not get it. It still does not understand the anger, frustration and basic everyday struggle of families throughout the country.

This debate has been framed as a new start, the moment when the Government gets its act together and starts communicating its message. The Taoiseach set it off yesterday with his launch of Fine Gael's budget calculator, to be accompanied by leafleting in every constituency. According to Fine Gael, the calculator is there to show everyone how much money it is putting "back in your pocket". The calculator shows that the average family will get dramatically less than a high-income family, but the real revelation is to be found buried in the section termed "assumptions". There one finds two incredible statements, that "Local property tax liabilities (if any) are ignored" and that water charges are not included and "The tax credit in respect of water charges paid during 2015 will be given in 2016". Once again, the Government just does not get it. It is a Government that implements damaging and unfair policies but thinks it can spin its way out of trouble.

It is important to note that the Labour Party fully shares this commitment to selective and dishonest spin. This week it too has launched a post-budget offensive, with a claim that nearly 1.2 million children will benefit from the child benefit increase it claims it has secured. It takes a special level of cynicism to cut something one said one would never touch and then ask for credit when one gives a bit of it back.

**Deputy Dara Murphy:** You cut everything.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is true that fiscal consolidation has been important and unavoidable. Those parties which like to pretend that all hard decisions could have been avoided are as dishonest as those who pretend that they have had no impact. In his claims about bringing the budget under control the Taoiseach, of course, again refused to acknowledge that two thirds of the required measures were brought into law before he came to office. As I stated earlier, he also failed to mention that he voted against the bulk of measures for which today he is trying to claim credit.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Like cutting the blind pension.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Unsurprisingly, the Taoiseach has found no room to acknowledge how European policies negotiated by others and automatically extended to Ireland gave him billions towards achieving targets.

Today our economy is undeniably stronger than it was, and equally undeniable is the fact that the core reason for this has nothing to do with the Government.

**Deputy James Reilly:** You were talking about spin a few minutes ago.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Deputy Reilly was removed from the health portfolio because of his miserable failures in the Department. That is why the Taoiseach did that to him.

**Deputy James Reilly:** Deputy Martin was removed from government because of his proposals.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** With the greatest of respect, he is the last person in Cabinet who should open his mouth today because he is the personification of why people have lost confidence in the Government.

**Deputy Gerald Nash:** Commission a report. You would want a strong shelf for your reports.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Let us get back to the debate.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is the skills and hard work of the people that have helped our economy, not the short-term, damaging and divisive policies of the Government. These skills were built up over decades, and the areas of the economy which have grown are ones which were present and growing before 2011, particularly foreign direct investment.

This week there will once again be major demonstrations over the deeply unfair water charge and the manner in which it was implemented. As the Minister, Deputy Noonan, apparently confirmed in an angry letter to the European Commission, this is a policy which has been fully at the discretion of the Government. This is what he has just said to the Commission and what he still claims. The bloated and wasteful utility, Irish Water, is one of Fine Gael's longest standing policies and goes back to 2009.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Jobs for the boys.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Minister, Deputy Coveney, knows all about it because he conceived it.

**Deputy Tom Hayes:** You said the same about the ESB.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The usage-based charge was defended by the party from the very start in the NewERA document. We have ended up with a situation where a charge is being imposed to fund meters which are pointless, to maintain a bureaucracy which no one wants and to justify an accounting gimmick which may not work. The Government has no one to blame for this fiasco but itself.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** They are drowning in it.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** This was a defining issue in May, whether the Government likes it or not. The Taoiseach said he understood the message loud and clear. The Cabinet spent four months preparing a final answer, which lasted four weeks. Why can the Government not just bow to the inevitable and end this issue? Irish Water should be abolished and this charge should be suspended immediately.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** If things keep going as they are, we will end up with a huge hole in the national budget and people will be paying for declining investment in water services.

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** Will we go back to Deputy Martin's solution?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** This increasingly chaotic approach to policy, where ministerial actions ignore and make major problems worse, has been seen in nearly every Department and there is no reason to believe it will end soon. As Fianna Fáil pointed out repeatedly during the past year, housing pressures were escalated by the Tánaiste's decision to restrict housing benefit and cut and cap rent supplement. To make room for Fine Gael's higher rate income tax cut, she directly caused enormous problems for families and individuals. I am not just saying this. Focus Ireland, Simon Communities and every housing agency has consistently stated this over the past year.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** You had ten years and you did nothing.

**Deputy Gerald Nash:** You did not build a single house.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** At local level, the Tánaiste's party in Dublin, with Fine Gael support, earlier this year tried to cut homeless services until forced to retreat by our councillors.

I welcome the new commitment of the Government to allocate emergency funding for homelessness-----

**Deputy Simon Coveney:** That is good of you.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----but this will be merely a sticking plaster if the more serious policy mistake of cutting housing benefit and rent supplement is not reversed. Unfortunately, we have heard nothing from the Government to suggest it understands this. There is growing evidence that the combination of neglect and targeted cutbacks is allowing the scourge of drugs to spread in more and more communities. This is the first Government in three decades not to have a Minister assigned to either community development or combating drugs.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Shame.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** This shows itself in the reality of what has been happening. There has been a sustained withdrawal of State support for marginalised communities and drugs have been seen as only important as a public order issue. The social devastation that drugs cause is nowhere on the Government's agenda and was missing from the complacent and self-satisfied speeches of the Government we have heard to date. In the face of this, it shows something about the priorities of the Taoiseach and his party that his only specific commitment for the next budget and for the years ahead is to cut taxes for the highest earners.

In health, yet again claims of adequate funding have fallen apart within days. The damage done in three years of failed policies has not been reversed. At best the rate of decline will be maintained. The Government has not given the HSE the funds required to maintain adequate services. The massive rises in waiting lists, still dismissed by the Taoiseach, will not be halted but will get worse. While the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, implies he knows it is flawed, the Government remains committed to implementing a health funding model which would lead directly to a massive health tax. It would create a monster which would make Irish Water look like value for money.

In education, schools face a growing funding crisis, with those who serve poorer communities suffering disproportionately. Protests are being made by communities throughout the country as they see the impact on local life and on their children. This is the direct result of regressive and avoidable policies. The abolition of postgraduate grants and the elimination of career guidance counsellors' ex quota positions are two examples. The approach of trying to implement policy without discussion or review led directly to last week's second-level school strikes and is part of a wider problem of refusing to engage with public servants. This arrogant and dismissive approach allowed the biggest crisis in the modern history of the Garda to develop. It has also led to the withdrawal of community policing as the defining characteristic of An Garda Síochána.

The pattern of neglecting problems and allowing them to become crises has also shown it-

self regarding Northern Ireland. When Fianna Fáil pointed out the collapsing public confidence in the behaviour of the DUP and Sinn Féin, and the danger this posed, we received sustained abuse in response, not just from those parties but from the Government. The Taoiseach even gave a speech saying things had never been better. With growing problems on the street, rising sectarian tensions and an Executive which is destroying public trust in the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement, this week the Taoiseach will for the first time attend a negotiation with the parties. That is not a record to be proud of.

The failure of the Government to implement even one significant reform of politics and government confirms how it mainly cares about retaining power. Appointing an advisory group on the Seanad without consultation about its role or membership confirms that nothing significant will be implemented.

The Taoiseach must bear responsibility for the growing crisis in his Government and the collapse of public trust in it. He busies himself with photo opportunities-----

**Deputy Gerald Nash:** Bertie.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----and brief comments but has been the least accessible Taoiseach of modern times when it comes to detailed interviews or debates.

**Deputy Tom Hayes:** Get into a bit of depth, Micheál.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** He simply will not participate in them. He retreats behind over-written political attacks and empty claims instead of directly engaging with opponents or the people he is here to serve.

Tá easpa fise i gcoilár an Rialtais seo agus ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, is léir nach bhfuil an Rialtas i ndáiríre. Sin é an fáth a d'éirigh an iar-Choimisinéir Teanga as oifig, de bharr an easpa oibre ón Rialtas.

The Government had the opportunity to set a vision for a country that treats its younger and older citizens decently and to build a recovery felt by all. Instead it has caused deepened divisions and inequality. It has been unfair and it has been increasingly incompetent. Without the guidance of other people's blueprints to follow it has stumbled from crisis to crisis. It has no economic plan for the years ahead. It has no social plan for the years ahead. It is in office but not leading. All it has is the ever-more desperate desire to find a way of holding on to power.

The people have shown that they have no confidence in the Government to address their concerns and the needs of our country. Dáil Éireann should also have no confidence in a tired, arrogant and complacent Government which will not acknowledge let alone address its many and growing failings.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** We did not cut the blind pension. Who did that?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Adams.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** What about the respite care grant?

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Who cut the blind pension? Does Deputy Martin remember that?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is your name Deputy Adams?

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I am sorry a Cheann Comhairle. The man is suffering loss of memory.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Would you stay quiet please?

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** The respite care grant was cut by 90%.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** Tá an Rialtas seo ag dul trí ghéarchéim mhór agus tá a chumhacht cailte aige anois. Tá na fáthanna leis seo an-soiléir. Bhris páirtithe an Rialtais gach gealltanais a rinne siad roimh an olltoghchán deireanach.

Sinn Féin tabled a motion of no confidence in the Taoiseach to be debated in tandem with tomorrow's right-to-water demonstration, as is our entitlement. However, the Government was determined at all costs to stop that. A Government that is so frightened at the mere prospect of debating an Opposition motion is not fit to lead this State through the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The distance between the Taoiseach's election rhetoric and the reality of this Fine Gael-Labour Government did not begin this week or last. It is over two years since the Taoiseach and Tánaiste of the day termed as a "seismic shift" and a "game changer" the Eurogroup commitment in June 2012 to separate banking and sovereign debt. What has the Government done about that since? It has failed to convince any of our European partners that Ireland deserved retrospective recapitalisation. The truth is the Government has not even made the effort. It is all spin and no substance.

We saw how Labour and Fine Gael mishandled the GSOC affair, and the whistleblower controversy around Garda corruption which culminated in the firing of the former Garda Commissioner, Mr. Martin Callinan, and the resignation of the then Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter.

The local and European elections last May sent a very clear message from the citizens to the Government to change direction. However, in what has become the hallmark of Labour and Fine Gael, they refused to listen. The former Tánaiste and leader of the Labour Party was sacrificed but nothing else changed. Since the summer, the Government has been plunged into yet another series of controversies. We had the McNulty-gate affair, which showed a clear insight into the Government's shameful attitude to the arts and its offensive sleeveen attitude to State boards. Then there was the complete rejection of Labour and Fine Gael by the electorates of Dublin South-West and Roscommon-Leitrim South. The Government also lost its Seanad majority.

The overriding theme has been the pursuit of a deeply unfair economic policy, which has imposed brutal and destructive austerity measures on struggling families and vulnerable citizens. The Government's budgets have been among the most regressive the State has ever seen. Budget 2015 is the fourth regressive budget in a row. It widened the rich-poor gap and deepened inequality. For God's sake, what is the point of Labour if it does not uphold equality? Budget 2015 represented an opportunity to give citizens a break. Instead they got water charges, property tax and a cut to the top rate of tax, rewarding a wealthy minority.

**Deputy Tom Hayes:** What tax would we get from Sinn Féin? It would be a wealth tax.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** In the period from 2008 to 2015, budget changes in tax and social

welfare have had the greatest impact on two groups in particular - welfare-dependent households and working-poor households. As I said earlier the Government still refuses to listen. It refused to listen to the huge demand of citizens in 2011 when it elected Fine Gael and Labour to put an end to the failed politics of the past. It refused to listen to those elements of civil society and organisations which repeatedly warned of the disastrous social consequences of its policies.

The Taoiseach has refused to listen to his own backbenchers and the growing list of critics within his party. He refuses, all the time, to listen to the Opposition here in the Dáil, no matter what propositions we put forward. The Government has used its huge majority to force through policies which have increased poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Hundreds of thousands of citizens have been forced to emigrate on the Government's watch. In the past eight years almost 500,000 of our citizens - young people mostly - have been forced to leave this State with desperate communal, societal and other consequences for families in particular.

In cut after cut, the Labour Party, in particular, has attacked the very people it has always claimed to protect. Is it Fine Gael's way or Labour's way? Deputies should check it out. The Government cut the respite care grant by €325 annually. The Cabinet sat down and decided to cut the respite care grant by €325. It cut the fuel allowance and household benefits package, which some of the poorest households including the elderly and people with disabilities depend on to heat their homes, by six weeks or €120 in the case of the fuel allowance. The Cabinet sat down and took that decision collectively.

It abolished the bereavement grant. The Cabinet sat down and took that decision collectively. It abolished the telephone allowance, taking €251 from the annual budgets of people over 70 years of age. It cut State pensions by hiking the pension age from 65 to 68. It shortened the payment period of jobseeker's benefit by three months which amounts to a cut of 33% in this core weekly payment. Again this was a collective decision of the Cabinet.

It first taxed maternity benefit and then cut it. The majority of maternity benefit recipients will now see their weekly payment cut by €32. It cut the rate at which the invalidity pension would have been payable to 65 year olds by €36.80 per week. The Cabinet, sitting round the table, took that decision.

Under this Government the State's shambolic health system continues to crumble. The Taoiseach stood by his former Minister for Health, even when primary care centres were conveniently located on the Minister's doorstep.

Then there was the debacle about the removal of discretionary medical cards when citizens with acute medical conditions and disabilities had their medical cards taken from them. For a long time, perhaps over a year, the Government refused even to accept what its own backbenchers were telling it about this huge injustice being inflicted upon those families. First we were told that there was no such thing as a discretionary medical card. Who told us that? A Labour Party Minister. The Government capitulated and decided to return cards to some 15,000 people. It did not, however, decide to return the cards to all those from whom they had originally been removed. Last month we saw so-called reform of the medical card scheme, but citizens on discretionary medical cards are still in danger of losing them.

The troika is now gone, but I have my own little theory. When the troika was here and the Government just did what it was told, things were okay. However, when the Government had to deal with issues as they arose, it completely lost its way. According to the well known maxim, it

is not what happens to you in your life but how you respond to it which is the important matter. This Government has been unable to deal in a competent, thought-out, strategic way with any event or crisis that has arisen on its watch. Its cutbacks to funding for health services, education and training, as well as the failure to deal with funding for drug and alcohol addiction services, are having dreadful social repercussions. So too is its refusal to build sufficient social housing to address the housing crisis and its refusal to stand up to the banks in defence of families in mortgage distress. That says it all. The Government is deferential to the elites and the big people while being absolutely dismissive of the small people. I have said that many times in this Chamber.

Sinn Féin does its best to voice the concerns of countless thousands of citizens. That is our mandate, but the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste will not answer a straightforward question put to them across the floor of this Chamber. People have seen through this because citizens are not stupid. They have seen through the patronising responses and insulting remarks. The actions of the Government in this Chamber in failing to be straight with the Opposition or with citizens is damaging faith in the political system. Every time the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste evade questions and duck and dodge their responsibilities, they merely expose this Government's arrogance and incompetence. It is the arrogance of power or what passes for power in this Oireachtas.

The Government has no progressive policy on the Irish language. The Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge is a non-policy. Gaeltacht areas are being subverted by the failure to look after what are essentially the wells of Gaeilge. According to a recent report, only 1,000 children are cainteoirí dúchais - only 1,000 native speakers in the Gaeltacht areas.

In his remarks, the Taoiseach never even mentioned the North. The last time he had to make a keynote speech here he did not mention the North either. The Government's approach to the North and the peace process has been totally inadequate. He sees Sinn Féin as electoral rivals, rather than partners in peace-making. That is a profound mistake which fails all of the people in the North - Unionists and the rest of us - as well as citizens across this State. The Government has failed in its obligations by refusing to stand up to the British Government as equals on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements of which the Government is a co-guarantor.

For many Irish citizens, and particularly for people in the Six Counties, the success of the current discussions will be judged on whether they deliver justice to the many families injured and bereaved during the conflict. We have the Eames and Bradley reports, and most recently, the proposals put by Meghan O'Sullivan and Richard Haass. However, in a current paper to these talks, the British Government has invoked a national security clause to block victims and survivors from accessing information, thus keeping the truth hidden. This Government cannot be complicit in this. The Taoiseach must seek to have that national security clause removed because the families of Dublin and Monaghan, of Pat Finucane, of Ballymurphy and others expect nothing less.

The Government has no intention of properly marking the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising. It has no plan and no vision. Under recent pressure from the relatives of the 1916 Leaders, the Government produced a glossy brochure which was, however, devoid of historical substance or details. The video which launched "Ireland 2016" made no mention of the Easter Rising or of the signatories of the Proclamation. The truth is that Government will not mark the Rising appropriately because it is opposed to the political, social and economic intent of the

Proclamation.

The Government's imposition of domestic water charges in the face of such widespread opposition is proving to be the final straw for many families. Irish Water is this Government's Frankenstein creation and is a child of Fianna Fáil's. It has been characterised by excessive spending on consultants, bonuses and cronyism. In fact, it has become synonymous with everything that is wrong with this Government - political manipulation of State boards, threats to citizens, and escalating taxes on struggling families. Irish Water is now a toxic brand. The Government should reverse its unjust water policy and scrap water charges.

Tomorrow's demonstration outside the gates of Leinster House will leave the Taoiseach in no doubt where citizens stand on this issue. I am sure he is in no doubt, anyhow. He has underestimated the level of public anger at the Government's record. The Taoiseach's attitude stands in stark contrast to the deferential way he deals with elites in the EU or the banking fraternity, as opposed to ordinary, decent citizens.

What is needed is a complete change of political direction and a realignment of politics in this State. A fairer way forward is required, involving economic stimulus, investment in public services, progressive taxation, and the abolition of water charges and the property tax.

The Taoiseach has said he sees the next election as a choice between Fine Gael or Sinn Féin. The fundamental ideological difference between Sinn Féin and this deeply unpopular Government is that we believe in a real republic - a citizen-centred, rights-based society. This Government believes in austerity, not rights, and in elites, not citizens.

The Taoiseach should take courage in his own hands. If he is really serious, he should resign, call a general election, have a real democratic revolution and let the citizens decide. I urge Deputies from all sides to reject the Government's counter-motion. They should reject the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Government generally.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputy John Halligan is sharing with Deputies Finian McGrath, Richard Boyd Barrett, Joan Collins, Thomas Pringle, Shane Ross and Clare Daly. Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy John Halligan:** As the Taoiseach knows, I come from the Waterford constituency which has one of the highest levels of unemployment and lowest levels of investment. It has suffered severe job losses in recent years. In proportion to cities of the same size, Waterford has lost more SMEs than anywhere else.

I run 13 advice centres and I have two offices in Waterford. People from all walks of life seek advice in my offices, including employers, employees, the unemployed and families. In recent years, they have told me the same story of the pain and suffering that has been inflicted on many of them. I believe that unnecessary pain and suffering has been inflicted on the people due to greed and avarice, as well as reckless investment, spending and borrowing.

Those who have had to pay the most are not responsible for what has happened. The public are all too aware of the consequences of repaying this debt over the past six years. We do not have enough teachers in classrooms or beds in hospitals, and waiting lists for critical services are increasing. Thousands of children with disabilities are waiting years for assessments and supports. No matter how much Government officials attempt to massage the figures, these are the facts. We have one of the most expensive child care systems in the world and more than

750,000 of our people, including 200,000 children, live in poverty. Food poverty is experienced by 10% of the population and we have very stark income related health inequality. Calls to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul have increased by 100% since 2009 and the organisation is spending almost €80 million per annum helping individuals and families in need. Parents wave goodbye daily to children who cannot find work here and indigenous small and medium enterprises and brave entrepreneurs - which should have been given every support possible - are on their knees.

The Taoiseach can see where I am coming from and I tend to be at one with the people who come to my office and the very many people I speak to every day. In the little time I have left, I will tell a story about a woman called Paula Bergin, who died at Waterford Regional Hospital a short time ago. She had private health insurance but shared a ward with four men and while she was dying, there was a soccer match on television, so the men were shouting and jumping up and down. The Taoiseach may have read about this in the newspapers or heard about it. What a way to die and what an undignified death. Her husband and child could not hear her last words. In 2014, that would not happen in most other countries or in the Third World. Does the Taoiseach believe that family in Waterford would have confidence in the health system or this Government? The Taoiseach knows where I stand. I stand with them.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak to this very important motion of confidence in the Government. My criticism will not be personalised but refer to Government policies and its record. This vote will be about overall Government responsibility. It is about competence, leadership and the way our people were being treated in the recent past. That is why I will be voting that I have no confidence in this Government. There can be no fudge on this very important issue by any Member of the House. This is about serious political issues and the future of this country.

We all know difficult decisions had to be made in the recent past but there was injustice in many of those decisions which hit the old, sick and disabled. We have seen cuts in services to people with a disability, with a 19% cut in the respite care grant. We have seen Fine Gael and the Labour Party implementing the home tax despite opposing it in the past. The same people who said they were opposed to water charges have now implemented them, and there was a debacle in forming Irish Water. At the same time, there is talk of cutting taxes for people who are better off in our society.

In the other Ireland, there are disadvantaged areas and communities riddled by drugs, crime and mass poverty, as well as people devastated by gangland crime. We have also witnessed the issues surrounding discretionary medical cards. These are the reasons I support the call for no confidence in the Government. The school completion programme had a budget to help the most disadvantaged children in this State, but it has been cut from €32.9 million to €24 million over recent years, which is a cut of 33%. For this and many other reasons, I am calling for a vote of no confidence in this Government.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** There is something completely shambolic and surreal about holding a confidence vote in this Government in the Dáil when everybody knows the real confidence vote will take place on the streets tomorrow when, at 1 p.m. at Merrion Square, tens of thousands of people will assemble in the real people's parliament. They will cast a decisive vote of no confidence in this Government.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** The Parliament seems to have no role.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** They will vote against the injustice of the water charges and the Government's failure to listen to what the people have said on that issue. They will vote against the equally cruel, unjust and regressive universal social charge and home taxes. They will vote against the cruelty of leaving people needing vital operations on waiting lists for over a year. They will vote against the fact that we have some of the most overcrowded classrooms in Europe and that all of this has been done when the big corporate investors in property and landlords are coining it and while hundreds of thousands of our citizens cannot put an affordable roof over their head and people are dying on the streets. They do this as the Government refuses, point blank, to levy even a small amount of extra tax on the super-wealthy or the corporations which are making absolute fortunes. That is why people are protesting and the Government has already lost the real vote of confidence from the people in this country. No matter what game or manipulation happens in this Parliament, the Taoiseach should remember that real power lies with the people and real change has always come from the people mobilising on the street. Reforms have been won in recent weeks because people have gone on the streets and refused to accept water charges or expressed their outrage against the homelessness crisis. That is more than anything achieved by the Government in the past four years and more reforms will be won as those protests continue. It is about time the Government listened to them.

**Deputy Joan Collins:** I agree it is shambolic that the Government has introduced the motion of confidence to the Dáil today, knowing that all the backbenchers will march in here and vote at the appropriate time to support the Government, the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** The Deputy is of course open to persuasion.

**Deputy Joan Collins:** The latest polls place Fine Gael at 19% and the Labour Party at 6%. We can compare this to the Red C poll of February 2011, when Fine Gael was at 40% and the Labour Party was at 20%. The Government is now as unpopular as the Fianna Fáil and Green Party Government which presided over the bank guarantee, the bank bailout, the economic crash and the troika bailout. That is some achievement.

The Taoiseach indicated he would overhaul the flawed bailout plans of the previous Government but he has done nothing of the sort and instead implemented it in full. The Government has defended bankers and the wealthy while imposing austerity on those who can least afford it. We are still waiting for the promised deal on the bank bailout, which is not even mentioned at this stage.

The Labour Party is the party of broken promises. We heard of "Labour's way or Frankfurt's way" but this quickly became Fine Gael's way. There were Tesco-style advertisements indicating that "every little hurts" produced by the Labour Party before the election. These argued that Fine Gael would increase VAT by 2% but if people voted for the Labour Party, that would be stopped. Fine Gael was supported by the Labour Party in introducing that VAT increase. The Labour Party argued it would stop Fine Gael cutting child benefit but it has supported those cuts in this Dáil.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** We have restored that benefit.

**Deputy Joan Collins:** Before the 2011 general election, the current Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, indicated that his party was not in favour of water charges and did not believe in a flat rate. He argued that everybody's home could not be metered. He and many backbenchers made that claim. Nevertheless, the Government introduced

and implemented those water taxes, which affect ordinary people.

The Tánaiste indicated that trust is an essential part of public life but the Government has lost that trust. Tomorrow, on international human rights day, the people will send the message to the Government that they have no confidence in it. I will be out there with them.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** As if we did not need another example of the betrayal by this Government of the citizens in this country, this morning I listened on local radio to people who are trying to restore mammography services to Sligo General Hospital. The radio show played a clip of the former Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, when two years ago he stated that mammography services would be re-established within 12 months, or quicker if he could manage it. That was a promise. We are two years down the road but the campaign group was informed yesterday that mammography services will never be reinstated at Sligo. That is another example of this Government's betrayal of the people. There may be an economic recovery in some parts of the country - perhaps on the east coast - but it is certainly not happening in the north west. That arises from this Government's betrayal of the people.

The Government lied its way into power and turned its back on citizens and the promises made to them. It picked up the programme brought in by Fianna Fáil, ran with it and kowtowed to its masters in Europe at every opportunity. The Taoiseach went to Davos and said we all par-tied and it was all our own fault. That is where the betrayal of the Irish people started and that is the betrayal that the Government has carried on and it can never recover from that.

The people have moved on. They have gone beyond the politics of this House. The people have no confidence in this Government and no matter what it does, it cannot restore it. The only thing it can do is to go to the country, have an election and let the people elect a Government that will respect them, respect their rights, respect their vote and act on their behalf and not on the behalf of its master in Europe to betray the people. That is what it has failed to do and that is why the citizens have lost confidence in it and why we say it must go now.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The U-turn the Government did on the economy is not a matter of shame but a matter of pride. When the Taoiseach talks to us about the figures, which he did today, he ignores the fact, to which Deputy Halligan referred, that many of us go into our constituencies and see hard cases on a daily basis. Imagine them reading the Taoiseach's speech today telling them not to worry that the deficit targets have been met, unemployment is down and the emigration figure is improving. Imagine telling that to people at the airport at Christmas saying goodbye to their third child going to Australia forever.

There is a complete disconnect between what is happening on the ground and what was in the Taoiseach's speech, which could easily have been written in the corridors of IBEC or the banks. I forgive the Taoiseach for his U-turn because I have got used to them. He did not do the easy bits; he did the hard bits. I do not forgive him for the fact he never tackled those great reforms he promised so openly. The easy bits, the bits that do not cost money, were never touched. What happened to the reform of the quangos? What happened to the reform of the banks? Bank boards are still picking insiders like there is no tomorrow. In his manifesto, the Taoiseach promised that the quangos would be reformed, the boards would be moved and there would be cost savings.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** All done.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** That did not happen at all because the Minister, Deputy Howlin, with his reforms, still comes back with the same old formula. Ministers, like himself, are still appointing their cronies to the boards of semi-State bodies. Maybe the Minister, Deputy Howlin, has never heard of John McNulty and perhaps that issue did not reach his ears. As Deputy Martin said, the response to that has been another bogus little committee to once again look at Seanad reform and to allow Ministers appoint their own people to boards and to the Senate, as they have always done.

**Deputy Clare Daly:** Methinks the Minister, Deputy Howlin, doth protest too much. If anybody was in any doubt about how out of touch this Government is, he or she would be shattered by the content and demeanour of what we have been subjected to today. That the Taoiseach would attempt to use elderly women, the victims of symphysiotomy, who were butchered in their youth as an example of how great his Government has been is a continuation of that abuse when he knows that as we sit here, they are assembled across the road with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Amnesty International to plead for the Government to overturn the scheme it has thrown in front of them. That is a graphic illustration of how utterly out of touch this Government is.

It is the case that it says one thing but the reality is entirely different for people outside these gates. I do not agree with the people who say this Government has not achieved anything. It has achieved something that nobody believed would ever be possible. It has succeeded in galvanising an opposition throughout this country from the self-employed to struggling farmers to unemployed people to people who have seen their children leave these shores and in unleashing a mass movement which is unprecedented in modern times in absolute opposition to the policies of this Government, best presented in its religious adherence to the toxic brand and dead duck, which is Irish Water.

The Government has pauperised and penalised the middle ground and driven them out of the ranks where perhaps they would have traditionally supported it into an opposition that is united against it. If the Government is as confident as it says it is - a confidence that was very much belied by the worried faces and sourpusses behind the Taoiseach earlier - end this lame duck Administration and go to the people.

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** To speak in favour of this motion, expressing confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government, offers an opportunity to answer one of the easiest and one of the most damaging accusations that can be put to a politician, which is “You’re all the same.” By its actions in recent weeks, Sinn Féin has established how untrue that accusation is. We are not all the same. We are not even similar – not in background, not in motivation and not in ideology. Above all, we are not the same when it comes to our responsibilities as public representatives.

I got into politics because, having been a social worker and an activist on women’s issues, I desperately wanted to improve the life prospects of children and families under pressure and to create a society that was just and where people had real opportunity. I do my job every day for that reason, as do my colleagues in government. It is because I believe that my responsibilities to children and families under pressure are so important, I would not engage in the cheap shot headline-grabbing and play-acting that characterises Sinn Féin and others. Play-acting is easy. Doing the right thing by the Irish people is not easy. It is not easy in the middle of the worst financial crisis ever faced by this country.

The people of Ireland have suffered greatly, of which there can be no doubt. When I stand on the doorsteps of my constituency and listen to individuals and families and listen to the stories of good people coping with one financial pressure after another, I am left in no doubt of their struggles. We are in touch. The one-sided narrative presented by Sinn Féin and others is that, in some way, the Government decided to impose tough decisions on its own people for the sake of it. That is not so.

Instead, this Government, led by the Taoiseach, Deputy Kenny, took tough decisions in order to save Ireland from the consequences of economic collapse. The Taoiseach and the Government held back the threat of disorder and chaos – economic and social chaos as witnessed elsewhere.

Political parties and individuals who trade in Toytown economics shrug that off. I cannot do that. I am in politics because of what I want to do, which is to protect families and children. I am committed to policies that keep disorder at bay and that ensure our services are kept working so that in better times they can be further developed for our people. Funding services and dealing with social issues require a functioning economy.

I notice Deputy Adams said very little about the economy and how well it is functioning. I would say that of other more recent contributors to the debate also. All of that was under threat and this Government fought that threat and won. It made Ireland a case study in economic recovery because the people of Ireland chose to believe in the diligence, the decency and the honour of the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny. They knew he was not a sound-bite and headline man because they knew we were not in a time when sound-bites and headlines mattered. This was down to the wire, as has been clearly illustrated in the speeches today. This was a time to look past show business politics. It was a time for people to trust and to hope for better times ahead. The people did that and we did what they empowered us to do under the firm leadership of a man not intimidated by the terror of the collapse – the Taoiseach.

We retrieved our financial sovereignty; we pulled our finances back from manifest disaster; and contrary to the narrative out there, we have been one of the most reforming Governments in the history of the State. However, we went further and we delivered on our promise to create the conditions that would create jobs.

For 28 months in a row the unemployment rate has fallen. The Government target of creating 100,000 jobs by 2016 will not only be met, but exceeded, based on current growth levels and job creation. This is not happening by accident. It is the result of a determined effort by, and the policies of, this Government. We have rebuilt Ireland's international standing. We have implemented our Action Plan for Jobs. We have pursued sector-specific initiatives such as the 9% VAT rate. In three separate deals, the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, working with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, secured a reduction in the high interest rates on EU loan repayments, cancelled the Anglo Irish Bank promissory notes and secured agreement to pay back International Monetary Fund, IMF, loans early.

Fixing Ireland's finances was immeasurably difficult but we have done that. Let us not forget why. At the beginning, when we took over, the job situation was so bad that people queued for the prospect of even a temporary, basic-pay position. It was so bad, couples in their 20s and 30s, looking at their children and their teenagers, had to assume the worst, that they would be forced to emigrate, as their peers had to emigrate in order to find work. That was the position

at the beginning but from the start, we promised we would find ways to create jobs, and create them we did. The reality, now, and let us neither miss nor forget it, is that, thanks to the strong, realistic hand of this Government, the children who were four and five when disaster struck, the teenagers who were 13 and 14 have a radically improved chance of getting a job, developing a career and building a life for themselves in Ireland. That is never recognised by the Opposition or commented on.

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** This motion has been tabled in response to yet another Sinn Féin political stunt, another cynical move for easy headlines, more soundbites with the usual aim in mind: to encourage discontent, stoke up anger and resentment, and divide communities, which is what Sinn Féin has thrived on in this State for the past few years. That is the hypocrisy of those opposite who attempt to undermine the mandate and legitimacy of a Government elected with a larger democratic majority than any other in the history of the State to do the very difficult job of cleaning up a Fianna Fáil created crisis that virtually broke Ireland and rebuild a new future that is fairer and more sustainable. The proposed motion of no confidence was the latest Sinn Féin kangaroo court, setting itself up as judge and jury, this time of the Government and Taoiseach, as if Sinn Féin was the only representative of the people. Sinn Féin talks about transparency, fairness, new politics and of course its Ireland of equals, yet it protects its own hard men, some of whom are rapists and child abusers. As always, a different standard applies to Sinn Féin soldiers, when the spotlight is on them for openness and transparency and justice, even relating to incidents long after the Good Friday Agreement. A man who claims such loyalty to his cause that he even denies his own involvement in it demands a new honesty and transparency in the politics of his Ireland of equals - what a hypocrite. His deputy leader claims to lead the fight on sexual abuse and women's rights but at the same time turns her back when challenged to deal with the disgraceful failings of her own party exposed by a brave young woman who was the victim of her people, all to protect and maintain a loyalty to her leader. We have had enough of that hypocrisy, these stunts, the sit-ins, the aggressive promotion of divisions within society that Sinn Féin promotes as its new way of politics.

Meanwhile, the Taoiseach and this Government are focused on providing a better future here and in Northern Ireland, on reform, recovery, job creation, supporting families, and vulnerable people who have suffered through hard times. Through some of the toughest times this country has ever faced our Taoiseach has provided leadership, optimism and an unflinching belief that our country can and will recover when many others opposite were giving up and despairing of the future. We do not have a perfect track record, not by a long shot, but we have achieved, as a Government, under the stewardship of the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, and our record stands for itself, if people are honest in their judgment, with 80,000 jobs created since 2012, unemployment at the lowest rate since 2009, an exit from the enforced bailout, a return to strong economic growth - the strongest now in the European Union - and a reduction in the tax burden for low and middle income earners for the first time in seven years. On social issues, such as the Cloyne diocese, the Magdalen laundries, marriage equality, homelessness, the rights of children, gender balance and much more, the Taoiseach has demonstrated a humanity and openmindedness to bring about real change for people who have been wronged and ignored by successive Governments.

This Government will learn from its mistakes. We have made more than we should have, particularly this year. We will try harder, motivated by what is right for Ireland and all our people, as opposed to trying to divide society. While others will continue to try to undermine the

progress and stability this Government has fought so hard and asked people to make sacrifices to build, Sinn Féin will try to replace it with something much more sinister, divisive and negative for the future of our country. We will work to bring people together behind a new vision of a changed, not perfect, but much better Ireland. We will finish the job that people elected us to do over the next 15 months or so. The Taoiseach and Tánaiste are leading that effort and have my full support and the support of both parties in government in this motion.

**Deputy Sean Fleming:** The motion before us here today states: “That Dáil Éireann reaffirms its confidence in the Taoiseach and in the Government.” The Taoiseach should enjoy his victory today when he wins this vote but he should remember it is a pyrrhic victory. It will not last long. History shows that many who feel the need to have a vote of confidence in themselves and their leaders come to a sticky end not too long after. This pyrrhic victory will give the Taoiseach a glow for this evening but the real test will be in the ballot box. I believe the public has already decided it has no confidence in this Government. The Taoiseach will win today. He should enjoy his hour of glory.

The people are cross because the Taoiseach promised a democratic revolution. He had, as Minister after Minister has said, the biggest majority in the history of the State but he squandered it. People expected more from him. He promised them more. He promised a democratic revolution but the public got nothing. It was short-changed and let down. This is why people are not happy with how politics is conducted in Ireland. The public, as we have seen in election after election, is not happy with any of the established political parties. That is in part because the two parties to which it gave the biggest mandate since the foundation of the State have let it down badly in promising reform and not delivering it.

People expected honesty and openness as the hallmark of this Government but not even the Cabinet is in the loop for some major decisions of the Economic Management Council. We have seen on some occasions, whether to do with banking or other EU issues, the Minister for Finance reading a script in the Chamber and members of the Government are so far excluded they do not know what will be on the next page. Not only is there no honesty and openness, but that does not even apply within the Cabinet ranks.

The Government has been in office for four years. For the first three years of that time the troika held its hand. It has been on its own for one year and what a year that has been. It has been a political disaster in the way the Government has managed the country. For the first three years its hands were tied. It had very little to do but show up and read pre-ordained scripts in here. It got along well for the first three years. People will disagree about whose programme it was implementing but it implemented a programme. Once it was left on its own the Government started to collapse almost immediately. In the past year, the Taoiseach has been forced to sack the Minister for Justice and Equality, the Garda Commissioner, the confidential recipient and many other people. He has been forced to sack the Minister for Health and to exile the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. It is clear that the Government learned nothing during all of this. I introduced legislation in this House last week, on foot of the McNulty affair and the sham appointments to State boards, to put such appointments on a statutory footing. I do not want them to be made by way of guidelines, which is what the Government is determined to do so that it can avoid a statutory process.

The medical card fiasco has continued in the past year. The probity review that was announced 14 months ago as part of the October 2013 budget has caused havoc in the health cards system. We have not got over that yet. The Minister is still talking about trying to provide for

more discretion at local level, but that has not happened to date. One of the problems with this Government is that it does not deliver on its promises. One of the reasons for that is that all of its budgets have been regressive. It has had options, but each year it has chosen to impose most of its adjustments on front-line services that affect people who are waiting to access accident and emergency services, to get outpatient appointments or to move up the fair deal waiting list.

The Government established the new Department of Children and Youth Affairs and held a referendum on children's rights. It blew that referendum. It has yet to be enacted because of the actions of the Taoiseach's office, the offices of certain Ministers or certain Government offices in seeking to use the people's money to influence how they should vote in the referendum. That referendum has not yet been implemented. I applauded the establishment of the new Department, which was outstanding. However, approximately 800 children are sleeping out of home tonight. They are in hotel rooms and bed and breakfasts. They are carrying their bags up and down the stairs. They do not know where they will be for Christmas. What kind of stress is that putting on their mothers and fathers? That is what this Department of Children and Youth Affairs is doing for children. It is doing very little. The impact on families is extraordinary.

I met a lady in Mountrath this morning before I came to the House for this debate. She told me she will scream if she hears once more that Ireland is out of recession. The Government has been screaming at the people that the country is out of recession, but the majority of people have not felt that in their own pockets. I know there is more spending in the shops. One third of the population is probably doing well. They probably have more money, but two thirds of people do not.

The Government also established the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and gave it the simple job of drawing up accurate budgets and expenditure plans.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** Simple, yes.

**Deputy Sean Fleming:** In 2012, after the establishment of the new Department, we had the biggest overrun in Government expenditure since the foundation of the State. That was exceeded last week when Supplementary Estimates of €1.184 billion had to be introduced to make up for the flawed budget of 13 months ago. We told the Minister the day that budget was introduced that the budget and Estimates process was flawed. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has failed and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has done nothing for children yet. I know new agencies have been set up, but that does not help the children who are sleeping in bed and breakfasts tonight.

Irish Water, which is a Fine Gael brainchild, was established during the course of this year. The Government promised to abolish quangos, but it did the exact opposite. We now have the biggest quango to be set up in living memory. It must be remembered that people are already paying for water services. The extra €140 million that will come in from this, after the payments from the Department of Social Protection are taken into consideration, is no longer fundamental to the national finances. That €140 million is not necessary. It is not worth the €700 million that the Government is sinking into the ground on meters or the amount of money it is paying to consultants. Why do we have this? The Government has started to use a new phrase. It says it is going to repair the water leaks off balance sheet and fix our water supply off balance sheet.

The Government promised in its Budget Statement two months ago that it would provide €2.6 billion for social housing over the next three years. Much of that is to be off balance sheet.

We will no longer build social houses from our own resources as we have done since the foundation of the State. It now seems that a social house can be built only if it is off balance sheet. The Government had announced that €3.8 billion would be provided for these purposes over an extended period. Two weeks ago, the Minister, Deputy Kelly, said that much of this will be off balance sheet. The Government's answer to everything is off balance sheet. The second half of its equation is tax cuts for the wealthy. This Government is the only one that is off balance sheet. People's water bills are not off their balance sheets. They will come out of their bank accounts. The homeless people and the difficulties on the street are not off balance sheet. The Government tries to outsource the solutions to such problems because it does not want to handle them directly.

Over the past two months, the Government has followed its mantra of tax cuts for the wealthy and off balance sheet solutions. The people of Ireland will not buy that. The Government made too many promises. The Taoiseach is looking after his own. Fine Gael people will probably thank him for that. In the budget, the Government announced a 1% cut in the top rate of tax paid by the highest earners in the country. It has promised a further 1% cut ten months out from the next budget. I never before heard of a tax announcement being made ten months before a budget. The Government's economic emphasis is on further tax cuts for the people at the highest income levels. More off balance sheet solutions will probably be proposed to deal with problems like homelessness, housing and water services.

This is a divisive and regressive Government. Every budget it has introduced has been socially and economically regressive. The burden of the adjustment in each of its budgets has been more heavily weighted in favour of expenditure cuts than taxation measures. Each of the Government's budgets has been unfair. They have lacked fairness. I actually think that is what Fine Gael wants. Fine Gael is happy with this divisive measure. It has made a divided society. I believe it suits some of the Members opposite to have a divided society. We saw that in the political pong-pong here this afternoon. They want a chasm in society. They do not want a homogenous middle ground. Most Irish people like to be in the centre. The Government wants a battle of the right and left. I believe it wants a divided society. It has divided society. However, the people of Ireland are very united in their determination to vote no confidence in Fine Gael and the Labour Party at the ballot box the next time they get an opportunity to do so.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister, Deputy Howlin, is sharing time with the Minister, Deputy Bruton.

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** I am pleased to have a brief opportunity to contribute to this debate, regardless of how ill-conceived the tabling of this motion of no confidence was. I was struck last week by a line in a piece about W.T. Cosgrave by the historian Michael Laffan, in which the endeavours of the last six years to rescue the State were compared to the task faced by Cosgrave in establishing the State in the first instance. There is a tendency in some quarters to talk down this country. In time, we will look back on the collective effort of the people of Ireland to rescue this country and we will be very proud of it. It will be seen as one of democratic Ireland's greatest achievements. Ireland has gone from being one of Europe's sick men - the so-called PIIGS - to being the fastest growing economy in Europe. This real success is a real tribute to the fortitude of the Irish people.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** And to yourself, Brendan.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** I accept that we have more to do and issues to resolve. That was

the case during the Celtic tiger years and it is surely the case now after six years of fiscal retraction. The Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, has led our national recovery alongside the former Tánaiste, Deputy Gilmore, and the current Tánaiste, Deputy Burton. The Taoiseach will go down in history as one of our finest taoisigh. He will retire with a record of real and substantial achievement. I am proud to have served in his Government. We have turned around the State's economic fortunes. We have been a real reforming Government. I am proud to have placed legislation supporting whistleblowers on the Statute Book for the first time and to have restored the freedom of information regime in the way it was originally designed in the 1990s. We have extended and strengthened the powers of the Ombudsman. This House sits longer than at any stage previously in our history. Contrary to popular belief, the guillotine is practically redundant. For the first time in decades, councillors at local government level are sitting down to make real decisions on the deployment of resources. That process, of itself, has been revealing.

The no confidence motion was tabled by an unholy alliance of those who created the mess from which we are recovering and those who are determined to make it worse. It is a limp affair, offered by parties that are going through the motions. Sinn Féin, the party led by the "Leader for Life", the Enver Hoxha of Irish political life, voted for the bank guarantee, socialising banking debt on the backs of the Irish people. Far from the radical party of the left, it proved to be the bankers' poodle on the one occasion when it really mattered.

It is joined by the real author of our financial collapse, Fianna Fáil, which is led by a man who almost stuck it out to the end before deserting that particular sinking ship. Having joined together to back this motion, are they offering an alternative Government? Should this Dáil vote itself into a general election today? They are not. Their policy alternatives are not real, but they know that. Nor are they even prepared to ally themselves together to form a Government. Hardly a day goes by when the leaders opposite rule out sharing power with each other. It is bizarre that the only party that all of the parties opposite want to share power with is my own. They are joined by the Independents, who seem to spend most of their time discussing how to lose their independence through some form of alliance. I listened with interest to their new apparent leader, the reinvented cheerleader of Anglo Irish Bank, Deputy Ross.

The Opposition tabled not so much a motion of no confidence in the Government as a motion rejecting governance itself. Government is a place where hard decisions are made. Democracy is not some form of juvenile game where individuals pursue heightened forms of personal purity. Democracy is the process by which people with competing interests and perspectives come together as adults to resolve real differences and take decisions, supported by the majority and protective of the minority.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** And keep their mandate.

**Deputy Brendan Howlin:** The Deputies opposing this motion are asking the people to embrace anarchy and to take another chance with chaos. As a people, we have stared down that barrel before, we have seen the track record of the people opposite, and we will not be going back there.

This Fine Gael-Labour Government has made real mistakes. We know and have said that. No doubt, we have actually made more. However, on the big question, the most fundamental challenge that faced this or any Government of recent times, we have steered the ship of State into the harbour from the rocks on which it was left foundering by our predecessors. I, for one, am proud to be part of this Government.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Nonsense.

**Deputy John Halligan:** Is the Minister sure it is Ireland he is talking about?

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I honestly say that the Taoiseach has exceeded all expectations. I can say that with some justification, as I have previously been one of his critics. He has been immensely strong at a time when we needed someone to step up, make hard decisions and understand people. There is no one better than the Taoiseach at understanding people, be they the women of the Magdalen laundries or the homeless on our streets. He is willing to go out and talk to them. He does not hide away. He is not out of touch. He has that humanity, but he also has an understanding of the considerable task that we faced as a country three years ago. It was an extraordinary time. It is easy to forget that 300,000 jobs had been wiped out. Some 20% of private sector jobs disappeared overnight. We were on the hook for €64 billion and were spending 50% more than we were taking in in revenue.

Parties opposite state that they are anti-austerity. Everyone is anti-austerity, but policies based on spending one's way out of trouble when one is already spending 50% more than one is accruing in revenue are madness. Those were the strategies being offered by the benches opposite. They continued in that vein. Year after year, Sinn Féin has stated that it would make 80% of the adjustment on the tax side. This would have meant the extraction of €5 billion more in taxes from our people and businesses during the past four years. We would not have had an economy in recovery.

Instead, the Taoiseach understood that we could not build over the old fault lines of the property culture left by Fianna Fáil. We needed to create entirely new sectors. He has driven the hunger to find those sectors and to build a strong economy on a sustainable basis. Not only have we created 80,000 jobs, which the rhetoric of those opposite completely denies, but they are located in every region. Some 94% of these are full-time jobs in sustainable sectors, not part-time, yellow pack jobs. We will create more. These jobs are fixing people's lives. This is not just about statistics. It is about people who can get up in the morning with a purpose and the ability to fulfil their potential. They can provide incomes for themselves and their loved ones. They can also provide money to help us as a Government to address some of the issues on our streets. We see them all of the time. Homelessness is the issue of today, but there are many others in the health sector that we need to be able to fix.

Remarkably, the recent budget, which was slated by the troika for not taking a further €2 billion out of our economy through taxes and spending cuts, saw us restoring €1 billion thanks to our progress. It is not a lot and people's patience is strained to breaking point at times, but it points to the direction in which the country is going. We can realistically have confidence in the vision that the Taoiseach so often articulates about wanting a country in which people can live and grow old in dignity and our young people have a future. We are creating that. When we entered office, net emigration was 34,000 people. That rate has decreased by 30%, but we are nowhere near where we need to be. We want the elimination of net emigration. We want any young person who wants to make his or her future in Ireland to have that opportunity.

When I listen to the parties opposite, I never hear a word about the importance of enterprise. The truth is that it is enterprise that will create employment. There is no Sinn Féin policy on enterprise. There is no Independent policy on enterprise. They believe that it just grows on trees, that they can load more taxes on employers and workers and do not have to create an en-

vironment that is good for start-ups but that it will all still happen anyway. They do not believe that they have to create an environment in which external investors, who once fled the country in their droves, are willing to invest money. One must work at these factors day in, day out. That is what the Taoiseach has driven in our economy. His enthusiasm and commitment have rallied people to find the energy to drive change. It is remarkable.

I am a long time in politics and have seen many glossy statements of intent being published by Ministers in a blaze of glory, only to see them shrink away when things fail. Under the Taoiseach's guidance, everyone is held to account for delivering on commitments. That is at the heart of our Action Plan for Jobs, Pathways to Work and every one of our strategies. Accountability represents a major change. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, is driving real change in our public service. We can be confident that we will not only have more resources, but that we will have a public service that has the ability to be performance driven. This is a fantastic achievement of the Government. It is what we will need in the coming five years as we continue to grapple with high levels of unemployment and create enterprise in new areas that are as yet undreamt of. We need the sort of Government that the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste have been offering. I am proud to be a part of that and to vote and speak in support of it.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Despite the Taoiseach's best efforts today, his language is jaded. So is his Government. The one point of clarification that has emerged is that all is well with him and the Tánaiste. I can only anticipate the sigh of relief across the country that they are playing happy families and having robust debates while none the less coming out on the same side of every argument. If backslapping was an Olympic sport, the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste would undoubtedly be gold medalists. I dare say that their Front Bench would take silver and bronze, too.

The Taoiseach clings to empty, meaningless refrains, asserting his commitment to fairness, social recovery and a social dividend. Who exactly does he think he is fooling? The Government's demonstrable track record is one of deepening inequality. This means children living in poverty and sleeping in bed and breakfasts, hotels and hostels. It means people sleeping on the streets. It means families living in poverty. It means vast numbers of people struggling just to get by, worrying night after night about their basic household bills. That is the collective achievement of Ministers opposite. If this is what they call success, I only hope we never witness what they might regard as failure. I note that the Minister, Deputy Howlin, in confessing to having made some mistakes, vows that the Government will go and make some more. I have no doubt that will send a chill down many people's spines.

The Taoiseach harked back to 2011 in his opening remarks, recalling a time when people were "dazed" and "horrified". It might interest him to know that people remain dazed - dazed by his relentless austerity, dazed by his detachment from the real lives and struggles of ordinary people. The public also remains horrified - horrified, above all, at the prospect of another year or more of this Government. The people want the Taoiseach and his Ministers to go, and they would like them to do so quickly and with some grace. However, the people are also prepared to face down the Taoiseach and his Government. The people are defiant and they have had their fill of Ministers' soundbites, negativity and misinformation. Tomorrow, Members opposite will see, at the gates of this building, the latest manifestation of that defiance. In order to prevent panic among the ranks of Government, I assure the Taoiseach, on the people's behalf, that this is not a stunt designed to distract attention from other pressing matters. Tomorrow will be a day of reckoning when the people's demand for the abolition of domestic water charges

will ring across this city. Tomorrow, the people's demand for water as a human right will echo across Dublin and beyond. Will the Taoiseach and Tánaiste listen to that message? Will they hear the people's simple messages or will they consider their demand to be ill conceived, as ill conceived as this motion which proclaims this Administration's competence to govern?

The Minister, Deputy Howlin, always strikes a very lofty tone when he talks about reform. However, what is notable in the response from the Government is the almost hysterical reaction when it is challenged and called to account. The Tánaiste congratulated herself and the Taoiseach earlier on their fight against unemployment. Both she and the Taoiseach placed inflated figures regarding job creation on the record. The fact is, as the Taoiseach knows, that for every job created by this Government, five people have emigrated. The number of young people in employment is 15,500 lower than it was in 2011. We have the highest rate of low-paid jobs in the OECD. We have the third highest rate of underemployment across the EU 28. How is that for Toytown economics, to use the phrase of the Minister, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald? For people who live in the real world, these facts are the evidence of poor economic policy, poor economic planning and poor economic delivery.

The Taoiseach's soundbites regarding Ireland's "cold and heartless past" and his claim to have dealt with past injustices inflicted by the State on the watch of his party and others do not tally with the reality. He mentioned the women of the Magdalen laundries. The truth is that the McAleese initiative and report was a whitewash. The United Nations has recognised that. The truth is that the penny-pinching *ex gratia* scheme the Government has offered to these women is utterly miserly. The truth is that the similar *ex gratia* scheme afforded to survivors of symphysiotomy demonstrates again a disregard in real terms for the experiences and trauma of the women affected. Needless to say, this Government's treatment of Louise O'Keeffe and her pursuit of justice laid bare its attitude towards dealing with victims.

I have been and remain a champion for all those who have suffered these types of injustices, every single last one of them. I have made that repeatedly clear on the record of the House, but the Government does not want to hear it. It is more convenient for Ministers opposite to attack Sinn Féin and, in a very personal way, to attack me. If that is the route they choose, it is of course their choice. However, it will not deter me or my colleagues from doing the right thing. When it comes to dealing with victims of mother and baby homes, county homes, orphanages and children's homes - Catholic, Protestant and State-run - we will be holding the Government to account to provide a fully inclusive scheme to bring truth and justice to those people.

The central catch-cry for this Government was a democratic revolution and the notion of political reform. I have not seen any real evidence of that. The instinct of the Government remains one of absolute conservatism. When challenged, members of the Government close ranks. In fact, it is nearly regarded by them as something of an insult or presumption should somebody on this side of the House challenge the Government on the way politics operates and who are the political insiders as against the political outsiders. That is very revealing and it has been revealed again in the course of this debate. The Taoiseach's colleagues in government have been hysterical in their attempts to defend him and his Administration. They demonstrate not just sensitivity but hyper-sensitivity to any form of criticism. Above all, they utterly discount any notion that there is an alternative to this Government. Indeed, that is really their problem with Sinn Féin and with people in the Independent ranks. They do not like the fact that a coherent alternative to their failed Government is now emerging.

I have no doubt that in the run-in to the election, Ministers will move heaven and earth, do

and say anything to convince the people that as bad as they are, they are as good as it gets. Let me tell them that is not the case. Let me tell them that the people, in increasing numbers, are on to them and their scare tactics. They talk about “sinister fringes” when referring to decent citizens who come out and stand up for themselves and their families. The Taoiseach should call it a day now. He would be doing everybody a favour of he did. If he shares the commitment to democracy about which the Minister, Deputy Howlin, waxed lyrical a few moments ago, let him test that democratic principle. Let him go to the people and show he trusts their judgment and their capacity to make the right decisions for themselves, their families and their communities. The Taoiseach and his colleagues referred to the instability a political alternative might represent. The only instability that bothers any of them is the possibility that they might be removed from their cushy jobs. That is another fact which is clear for people to see.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister for Health, Deputy Leo Varadkar, and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy James Reilly, are sharing time.

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I support the motion of confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government. When we assess the contribution and performance of any government, we must look back to what its members said they would do if they were trusted by the people with the reins of office. We said we would repair the public finances and do so without increasing income tax. That has been done and our public finances are now in good order. Not only have we not increased income tax, we actually reduced it in the latest budget. We said we would create 100,000 jobs. We are now up to 80,000 and set to reach our target before the next election, with unemployment having fallen 24 months in a row. We said we would bring about a smaller and more efficient public sector, and that has been done. We said we would bring about fair care. The first steps towards universal health care will be taken with the extension next year of GP care without fees to those over 70 and those under six, the oldest and youngest in society.

We stated that we would bring about a new politics. We do not always tell the story in respect of this matter very well and, before she left, Deputy McDonald asked us to provide examples of what we have done. I will provide three simple examples, namely: the ban on corporate donations, which has at long last ended the link between money and politics; the introduction of gender quotas for candidates, which will give people the choice to vote for women candidates in big numbers at the next election; and, very importantly, long overdue legislation to regulate lobbying and protect whistleblowers. These are just three examples but I could provide more.

Getting here has been very tough and the Irish people have made enormous sacrifices to bring the country to the position in which it now finds itself. That position is much better than the one the country occupied three and a half years ago. Once again, the future for Ireland is bright. We can look forward to a growing economy and increasing employment. A growing economy is not just for the sake of it. The reason we need the economy to grow is in order that we can put more money back into people’s pockets and find the resources to invest in improving public services. We are only getting started and neither the future nor the economy are secure. We can fall backwards and there are risks. I, for one, do not want to take those risks by handing over control of the country to the parties opposite. A clear division is emerging in the House, with the Government parties on one side and a potential Opposition led by Sinn Féin, and including Fianna Fáil and perhaps some Independents, on the other. It is a division between those who saved Ireland from bankruptcy and those who either brought us to the brink of it or who would return us to that point. It is a division between those who would cut taxes in order to create employment and support enterprise and those who would raise taxes, destroy jobs

and drive investment, business and professionals overseas. It is a division between those on this side of the House who respect the law, the Garda and stand up for law and order and those on the other side who engage in violent protest and intimidation and who traffic child abusers throughout the country.

Having outlined the position in respect of the Government, I now wish to turn to the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, in whom we are also being asked to vote confidence. When the history of the 21st century is written, the Taoiseach will be recognised for his leadership and for steering this country through the perilous waters of financial disaster left behind after years of mismanagement on the part of successive Fianna Fáil Governments. He is the pilot who weathered the storm. He did so by leading a coalition Government in making some of the most difficult decisions ever made in the history of the State. What he has done has not always been popular but good leadership does not always bring easy popularity. As the Taoiseach stated, our work is not yet done. We will continue to do the job of bringing prosperity back to the Irish people. Instead of trying to work with us for the good of the country, Sinn Féin and the parties opposite prefer to create ways to foment a storm of controversy. By doing so, they sacrifice good leadership for cheap political gain. If they were in charge, such an approach would wreck the country.

**Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor:** Yes.

**Deputy Leo Varadkar:** Instead, we are fortunate to have in charge of this country a Government and a Taoiseach who can rise above such petty rancour and provide real leadership. That is why I have every confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government to pilot us through the remains of the storm and back into safe harbour.

I am honoured to support the motion.

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** It is three and a half years - just over 1,300 days - since the Government came to office. It is worth recalling what things were like when we came to power. I refer to an article published in *The Irish Times* in March 2011, which states:

Ireland's appalling implosion still elicits a sense of astonishment. By far the prime response is to wonder how things became so bad so quickly in a country which seemed not long ago to have been doing so well. A small country held out as an exemplar for others is now quite the opposite. Changing that perception won't be easy.

The Government did not waste time wondering how matters became so bad so quickly. Instead, it focused on solutions. We all know that it has not been easy. We have been obliged to take decisions that no government would want to take and the Irish people have had to make tremendous sacrifices. However, those decisions and sacrifices are now paying dividends. We have reclaimed our economic sovereignty and Ireland's international standing has been repaired. The country is standing on its own two feet again and we are able to make choices for ourselves.

Ireland recently raised almost €4 billion on its first bond sale since 2009. This is testament to the international respect the country has regained. This could not have been achieved without the leadership of the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny. Few would have been strong enough to take on such an enormous task but this is a man who has dedicated his life to public service. No one has worked harder to secure Ireland's recovery during the past 1,300 days. I know that

the Taoiseach remains as committed and determined as ever to ensuring that Ireland continues on the right track. In the three and a half years since we came to office have we got everything right? No. Has every decision been absolutely correct? No. Let us consider what has been achieved, however. Where once Ireland faced complete economic collapse, now there is growing confidence in our economic management. Where once people feared losing their jobs, the Government's action plan has created more than 80,000 jobs. Where once people feared constantly for the future, there is now an increasing sense of security and confidence.

As a GP, I have seen at first hand the devastating impact unemployment has on families and individuals. Not only is there a financial crisis, there is also a crisis of confidence and what can often be a crippling loss of self-esteem. That is why the Government makes no apologies for placing jobs at the heart of its mission. There is no more important goal than to return people to work. Restoring international confidence in Ireland's economic management is crucial in this regard because it is key to securing the inward investment that generates jobs. During the past year over 140,000 people have left the live register in order to take up employment. For each of these individuals and their families, this represents the beginning of a process of healing. That process includes the restoration of workers' sense of self-worth, the return of families' confidence and the revitalisation of communities. In decision after decision, the Government - led by An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny - has made the right call in order to position this country for a new, more successful future built on wiser and fairer principles.

It is not just about economics but economic recovery is essential to rebuilding our society in order that each and every person will be respected and cared for. I have the great privilege to serve as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I am proud to be a member of the Government which created the first ever Cabinet Minister with responsibility for children and young people; delivered the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support ever embarked upon with the creation of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; committed an additional €26 million in funding to that agency this year; and maintained its commitment to provide a free year of early childhood care and education for every child in the country, despite the economic pressures that exist. The Government has not finished yet. An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, continues to lead us in the vital work of rebuilding our society. Not only are he and the Government committed to making Ireland the best small country in the world in which to do business, we will also make it the best small country in which to grow up and raise a family in order that we can all look forward to better outcomes and brighter futures.

I commend the motion to the House.

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan):** As Minister of State with responsibility for the diaspora, I have met many groups from across the globe. I refer to business groups and other organisations in various centres which provide support for Irish emigrants. The latter are completely supportive with regard to what is happening in this country at present. They are proud of our achievements and of being Irish. They are also proud of the fact that we are repaying our debts. Many of them are looking forward to returning to Ireland. That is a fact, not an exaggeration. Contrast this with what was happening in November 2010, when an article published in *The Economist* stated:

The public finances are in a dreadful mess. The government is on track to spend 12% of GDP more than it takes in taxes this year, even after spending cuts and tax rises worth €14.5 billion (\$19.6 billion). The deficit will be a staggering 32% of GDP once injections of capital into broken banks are taken into account.

On 2 December 2010, *The Wall Street Journal* stated, “The Irish banking crisis and bailout are affecting exchange rates and borrowing costs around the world, undercutting efforts to reduce trade imbalances and whittling the confidence essential to the global economic recovery”. Then there was the famous quote from *The New York Times*, which described the IFSC as the “Wild West of European finance”.

The Government has created assertive regulation, backed by a credible threat of enforcement, in order to change the image of Ireland abroad.

In January 2009, the business pages of *The Telegraph* stated the worst day in Irish financial history had occurred. One should contrast this with what people are now saying about Ireland. One headline reads, “Dublin: the tiger’s roaring tech hub,” and Reuters has stated: “Standard & Poor’s raised Ireland’s credit rating to ‘A’ on Friday, rewarding the former bailout recipient for what it said was solid economic growth, improving employment and a debt reduction path that stands out in the euro zone”. *The Guardian* stated: “In November, more than 20,000 delegates turned up for Dublin’s Web Summit, an annual event that has become the Cannes film festival of the technology world”. In Spain on 23 November, *El Economista* stated Ireland is top of the class, the reason being this Government’s action and also the leadership of the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** On the day the Taoiseach was elected and this Government was formed, he talked about his gratitude and humility. He told us we stood on the threshold of fundamental change. He told us:

The new Government will tell the people the truth regardless of how unwelcome or difficult that might be. We will tell it constantly and unreservedly. It is the only way because the people always have a right to know.

Where has that thinking gone? We cannot even get answers to questions on the floor of this House. What we have seen is a political culture that is more, and not less, entrenched in the old ways. There has been superficial box-ticking. The radical reform the citizens expected and voted for has not materialised. Instead of insisting and demanding that Europe share the enormous debt — 43% of the entire European banking debt, for example, was shouldered by just one country, Ireland — the Government did not even ask for a write-down. That is what was expected by people. The game changer that was promised has not yet materialised.

The Government said it would listen. However, the evidence is that the only time it listens is when it is forced to do so. Week after week, the Opposition highlighted the medical card fiasco, but it was only when the people spoke during the local and European elections that the Government paid attention. All year, the Opposition has been raising the Irish Water issue, but it was only when 100,000 people turned out on the streets that the Government paid attention. For more than a year, the housing crisis has been turning into a homelessness crisis. It was only when Jonathan Corrie died across the street, on Molesworth Street, that there was an outcry and the Government paid attention. What is most amazing about that is that the Taoiseach tried today in his contribution to turn his action on that crisis, which he helped to create, into a virtue. Despite this, he wonders why there is a question of confidence.

The reality is that since the Government has a large majority, the vote of confidence will be won, but the Taoiseach should not make the mistake of believing he has the confidence of the Irish people.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** I have no confidence in this Government and will vote accordingly. I am sure the Members opposite will vote to express confidence in their own Government and this Dáil, elected in its majority based on false promises that have now been broken. So what? It should be very cold comfort for the Taoiseach. Right now right across the country, people are preparing in huge numbers to come to Dublin tomorrow to pass judgment on his Government. They are preparing to flood the streets and march to show that all the tricks and black propaganda about sinister elements, sinister fringe elements and dissident elements demonising the protests have not worked. They are marching to show they have not bought or eaten the baby carrot of a tiny concession of a delay in uncapped charges until 2019. They are marching to manifest their absolute lack of confidence in the Government. This will be far more powerful and significant than any vote that takes place in this Chamber today.

Earlier the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, said he has been touring the country speaking to people and that, in the main, they have been convinced by the new regime of so-called modest water charges. How many people will it take tomorrow for him and the rest of the Government to eat their words? How many people on the streets tomorrow will it take for the Government to abolish water charges? How many people will it take for it to read the writing on the wall and go? Its time has passed. Tomorrow, not today, is judgment day for this Government. I have absolute confidence that people will mobilise in massive numbers at 1 p.m. at the back of the Dáil. People should do whatever they can to be there. If they cannot be there until after work, they should come in after work. The judgment they will pass is clear: no confidence in the water charges and the Government. It has to be brought down through people power. Tomorrow will be the start of the end of the Taoiseach's Government and will herald the building of a new mass political movement that will put the needs of the 99% before the interests and profits of the 1% and struggle to reshape our society.

**Deputy Mick Wallace:** The Dáil has been a different place for the past few months. There seems to be a different mood in here, and there does not seem to be as much work being done. There is less legislation being passed and it is felt there is an election coming at some stage. It is felt that the Government is in its final days.

The Taoiseach keeps telling us he has made Ireland a great country to do business in once again and that the economy is booming. It is very significant that the Government does not seem to have a problem with the fact that Ireland has the fastest-rising rate of child poverty in Europe. That is very significant in terms of how things have been done. The Taoiseach referred earlier to community. Sadly, most communities do not feel the benefits of the past four years.

The Government side referred to the Magdalen laundries and symphysiotomy. Truth be told, however, the Government was dragged kicking and screaming to these issues, and they are still not resolved. We all know individuals such as Fr. Peter McVerry have been screaming from the rooftops about homelessness for four years but someone had to die in a doorway just down the road before it registered. The housing problem has been staring us in the face for four years. We really have not done much about it yet, and we have not learned the lessons to be learned from the problems that were so stark during the crisis.

The body language today has not been good. The Taoiseach's job is a very difficult one and cannot be easy. It is only natural that it is very stressful. The Taoiseach is now showing the stress of the job; it must be very difficult. I do not believe the next 12 months will be good to or for him, nor will they be good for the people. I really believe it is time to call a halt to it.

The idea of tabling a motion of confidence in the Government is a bit hollow. Nobody should do it, no matter what anyone thinks of the Government's performance. It is not for us here to say whether the Government is the best or worst; it is only the people who can decide that. The sooner, the better.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** On seeing the Taoiseach table a motion of confidence today, I have to compare him to Comical Ali claiming he was winning a war when the tanks were rolling into Baghdad. The speeches I heard today were utterly delusional. When the Taoiseach believes he has saved the taxpayers billions of euro, the rest of us see that he has bailed out bondholders he said he would burn during his election campaign. When he sees reconstructed, stable banks, the rest of us see struggling mortgage holders who never got any help from this Government and who never got a write-down on inflated house prices. When the Taoiseach says Ireland is the best small country in the world in which to do business, tens of thousands of people regard it as the best small country to leave. I could not believe it when the Taoiseach said Ireland should never be a cold house for its people. He said so in the midst of the biggest housing emergency this State has ever known and about which the Government is doing little or nothing.

The Taoiseach's claim to be making progress on women's rights is also delusional. All we see is a medieval anti-abortion law. The Government has not the guts to take on this issue. I refer in particular to the Labour Party, whose members are sitting beside the Taoiseach. The law criminalises women for their decisions.

The claim of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, that not guillotining debate is one of democratic Ireland's greatest achievements is laughable.

On Friday, there was nobody sitting on the Government benches. They let the clock run down on the debate. That is the new tactic.

The charade that the Government is going through today is irrelevant. The real politics will be tomorrow, when I guarantee tens of thousands of people will be on the streets outside the gates of Leinster House to deliver the real no-confidence vote in the Taoiseach.  
*5 o'clock* In their elaborate speeches, the Ministers did not mention the dreaded words "water charges" once. Even at this eleventh hour, the Taoiseach could save himself and abolish the water charges. I do not know whether it would be enough because people have reached the stage where they want the water charges to go and they want the Taoiseach to go.

I raised the question a couple of weeks ago whether the Taoiseach or the Tánaiste were Del Boy or Rodney in trying to sell the dodgy water charges at a discount. Today, I see the Taoiseach is Trigger, in that he is living in a completely different universe from the thousands of people who will be on the streets outside this building tomorrow.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** In 2011, the people, especially in the west, went to the polls in anticipation of a new era, a more transparent way with fewer quangos and a listening ear. A few months later that same year, in Roscommon, east Galway and Leitrim, the people who had received a commitment a few months earlier by letter and a recorded interview got the shock of their lives when they heard that the accident and emergency department that they needed would be closed. With a broken promise, the doors closed. Medical doctors were replaced by spin doctors and the people in all that area were left to contend with two hours travelling to a hospital.

In the same year, I received a telephone call at 11.45 p.m. asking whether we would participate in a peatlands forum. I spoke to the Taoiseach for a while and I said that whatever could help a bad situation, we would try to make it work. The conclusions of that forum are there but what those who gave of their time voluntarily got two or three months later was helicopters, planes, emergency response units and the Garda all around them calling them criminals.

In the same era, we were told that not one red cent would be given away - Dublin's way or Frankfurt's way - and then we heard of a something called a game changer. When that part of history is now written, we see the reality. The people have been bullied. The Government and our representatives in Europe were not the whistleblowers for their people.

Only this week, I spoke to a young child. Some 380 letters have come to the west this week about evictions and all they want for Christmas is a home. The reality in education is the drop in capitation grants. We heard pledges on student fees, but what has happened is they have gone up. Europe, aided and abetted by the Government, is dictating the pace.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Heather Humphreys, is sharing time with the Ministers of State, Deputies Aodhán Ó Ríordáin and Michael Ring.

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The single greatest challenge facing the Government when we took office in March 2011 was to bring the economy back from the brink. Members should cast their minds back to how bad things were. This country was in a bailout situation and the people were left with a legacy of debt that will take decades to eradicate. In January 2011, we were locked out of the international markets and our reputation in Europe was in tatters. In January 2011, unemployment levels were literally spiralling out of control. In the three years prior to 2011, 250,000 jobs had been lost, that is, approximately 7,000 jobs a month. In January 2011, 7,000 people every month were having their lives thrown in turmoil and uncertainty due to unemployment.

Overcoming these incredible challenges not only required hard work and the support and sacrifice of the Irish people. It required the strong leadership that has been delivered by Deputy Enda Kenny since 2011. Since becoming Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny has worked tirelessly to restore this country's sovereignty, to bring back prosperity and to make Ireland once again a great place in which to raise a family.

The economy, which was in such a perilous state just three and a half years ago, is coming back. Sometimes I think our international colleagues are much more willing to recognise this than we are ourselves. According to the European Commission, Ireland will be the fastest growing economy in Europe this year, and *Forbes* magazine declared Ireland the best small country in the world in which to do business. We are well on track to exceed our target of creating 100,000 new jobs by 2016, a target that was originally scoffed at by the Opposition. Unemployment is at its lowest level in five years.

In my Department, I am extremely glad to be in a position to be increasing funding for the arts for the first time in six years. The Government is determined to continue with this progress. Unfortunately, the Opposition is focused on negativity, determined to do down the achievements of the people of this country who have shown such resolve to succeed. The Government fully recognises that the people have had an extremely difficult number of years. That is why, from January, every household with somebody in full-time work will be a bit better off.

As for the great populist party, Sinn Féin want to hike up taxes and destroy our jobs recovery. Farmers, the self-employed and those with savings should be wary of what a Sinn Féin Government would mean. They want to tax the economy out of existence. For example, a farmer with land worth €1 million, which is approximately 100 acres, and who might only earn between €15,000 and €20,000 a year from that land, would be liable for a wealth tax under Sinn Féin. Their high tax policies would drive foreign direct investment out of this country and unfairly penalise entrepreneurs, resulting in unemployment.

As has often been said, good leadership is humility with a strong resolve to succeed. The Taoiseach has shown humility in the face of adversity and an absolute unwavering resolve to succeed for the betterment of this country and its people. It is in the best interest of the economy and society that the Government stays the course and continues to deliver a better standard of living for all the people in the State. We will continue with this job. We will be undeterred by the stunts, the bogus policies and the empty rhetoric of those on the Opposition benches.

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin):** This motion of confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government has been tabled in response to Sinn Féin's motion of no confidence.

I take the opportunity to nail this idea that Sinn Féin is a left-wing party. Sinn Féin is an extremist Nationalist party. What extremist Nationalist parties across Europe do is attach their logo to everything that is popular and reject everything that is unpopular in order to get nationalist sentiment going. When they think the bank guarantee is popular, they support that and then they pretend that they did not. They say defaulting is a good idea even though we know the devastating effect that would have had on social protection, on public service jobs and on the country in general. That is not a left-wing position.

Sinn Féin states it is in favour of a wealth tax. The property tax is a wealth tax but, of course, Sinn Féin cannot see that. Only two months ago, when Labour councillors and Green Party councillors on Dublin City Council suggested that rather than having a 15% reduction in the property tax in Dublin city they would have a 7.5% reduction and have €4 million put into homeless services, Sinn Féin councillors voted against it. When faced with either a populist decision on a real wealth tax and a populist decision of defending the homeless, they opted for the populist decision on a wealth tax. They cannot get their head around the fact that the property tax is a wealth tax and they voted to reduce it by 15%, meaning that the average €1 million home owner in Dublin city got €375 back while the homeless of Dublin did not get the €4 million that we hoped they would get.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** We will bring in a different tax.

**Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:** That is Sinn Féin populist politics. If Sinn Féin members believe in justice, they should talk to the family of Robert McCartney and the family of Paul Quinn. They say they are in favour of gender equality. They should talk to Máiría Cahill and her family and listen to what she thinks about their protestations on gender equality.

Sinn Féin never talks about education. The left-wing credentials of my party is that we teach children to read. We put literacy at the heart of everything we do. What Sinn Féin does in the Republic and in Northern Ireland is teach children to be angry and to hate. As soon as anyone suggests that the influence of the Catholic Church in education should be reduced in Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin goes right back to its sectarian mindset and ensures it will never

stand over integrated education there.

Sinn Féin is not a left-wing party. It is an extremist Nationalist party. It has no interest in jobs, growth or the real interests of people in this country and it cannot abide the fact that the Labour Party in government with Fine Gael led by the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, is recovering people's pay and self-worth and is putting them back into employment in a country of which people can be proud compared with the country we inherited four years ago.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** Call an election. Bring it on.

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):** It gives me great pleasure to speak this evening and to tell the people that I have full confidence in the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and the Government. The reason I have full confidence in him is because he is honest, decent and there is no scandal surrounding him.

**Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** He will put this country first. That is something Sinn Féin would never know anything about.

**Deputy Robert Dowds:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** We took the difficult decisions. I accept that people got hurt but we are ensuring we can create the necessary jobs in order that people in this country can get back to work and to give them an opportunity. One could ask whether Sinn Féin and the Independents want that. No, they want to see poverty and protest, protest, protest.

I heard Deputy Mary Lou McDonald talking about catchphrases. The Sinn Féin catchphrase is protest, protest, protest and to have protest meetings. Protest meetings do not resolve anything. A strong Government resolves issues. When we came into Government in 2011, the people of this country were frightened for their families, jobs and future. They wondered what would happen in the country. I compliment the Tánaiste, Deputy Joan Burton, and the Labour Party on the part they played in the revival of this country, not for the first time and not for the second time. This is about the fourth time Fine Gael and Labour had to save the country because of Fianna Fáil. If Sinn Féin gets into Government, I do not think I want to live in this country. I love this country and I love the people in it. I do not think the people of this country will make the mistake of putting Sinn Féin in government.

Let us speak about tourism. In 2011 when the Government came to power, tourism was in disarray. More than 220,000 are employed in tourism in every corner of this country. The Gathering was a success. The Wild Atlantic Way was a success. The greenways were a success. As Minister of State with responsibility for sport I have rolled out two rounds of the sports capital programme and we will have another round. Those in opposition do not want to see anything happen. The media has a job and a role to play. Many positive things are happening. I cover every corner of this country and I see Irish men and women with hope, confidence and an investment in this country. Many good things are happening in tourism, sport and volunteering. People are prepared to put their shoulder to the wheel to help young people in this country.

I say well done to the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and the Tánaiste, Deputy Joan Burton. We will continue to do what is right for this country. Protest, protest, protest will not resolve anything.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** Up democracy.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** The Taoiseach tabled the motion of confidence in himself and his party. We should be talking about the real issues and problems. It was fair enough for the Taoiseach to table the motion. He believes in himself. From the rants of some of the Ministers, it is evident they have confidence in the Government too.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** Deputy Mattie McGrath jumped from the sinking ship.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** The parties in government are the only ones who have confidence in the Government. They are in a cocoon in this House. I am not in favour of protest, protest, protest but one sees the reality when one meets people. The Taoiseach cannot go to a constituency or turn a sod when there is good news – I welcome good news – because people are protesting.

People gave the Taoiseach the finest mandate anyone ever got. I voted for him as Taoiseach but I am bitterly disappointed. One could ask how the people feel. The Taoiseach has completely turned his back on them all. I accept there was austerity but the Taoiseach looked after the fat cats. He promised reform, openness and transparency but he has been an abysmal failure in all of those areas. The Taoiseach packed boards with people and packed the courts with his cronies. He tried to get rid of the Seanad. When people rejected that, the Taoiseach said he got a wallop. It is nothing to the wallop he is going to get. The Taoiseach will get many wallops. I could use stronger words but I will not do so.

It is an awful pity that he did not live up to any part of his mandate. Promises were made to the families affected by the Omagh bomb, and justice was promised to the family of the priest murdered in Offaly. Promises were also made to many other groups. The Taoiseach met Ms Cahill, whom I salute for her bravery, but he could not meet the families who wanted justice for their loved ones who were killed. The Taoiseach has been an abject failure to those people. All the Taoiseach had to do was to meet them. He was able to meet homeless people last week. Did he have to wait until the unfortunate individual died last week on the street 50 yards from Leinster House to know there was a homeless problem?

Will the Taoiseach call in the banks? Will he rein in NAMA, which is making people homeless? It is terrorising a widow in my county whose late husband ended his own life. Will the Taoiseach call off the hound dogs of NAMA and the officials and ask them to stop terrorising that decent family in County Tipperary, of whom he should be aware and should know? The Minister of State, Deputy Tom Hayes, and others know the family. It is a shame and disgrace.

People have made sacrifices. We all bailed out the banks. I was one who voted for that. It was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made in my life. Now the banks are piddling down on top of us and walking on us, with sanction from the Taoiseach and the Minister. The banks are being let off with aplomb and the Government is patting them on the back. Up to 100,000 people are awaiting eviction. The Government talks about solving the problem of homelessness. The Government should try to sort out the problem by calling off the hound dogs of the banks, Revenue and NAMA – the biggest and most dangerous entity. I could use a word beginning with C to refer to NAMA but I will not use it in the House. It is a merry-go-round. It identifies properties but will not sell them for the price offered by decent people as it is keeping them to sell them at a knock-down price to friends and contacts. NAMA stinks and is rotten to the core. What it is doing to ordinary families is disgusting. I am very disappointed about that.

The Minister, Deputy Varadkar spoke in the debate. It goes to show how confused the Government is. He said the Taoiseach is the captain that could steady the ship on the ocean. Does he not know a captain flies an airplane and that a ship is navigated by somebody other than that? Neither we nor the people have any confidence in the Taoiseach to navigate the ship of state anywhere anymore because he has lost all credibility and respect. I heard the former Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly, talk about what he did when he was in the Department of Health. He destroyed the health service. People are now waiting three months to access the fair deal scheme, an initiative into which we all bought and persuaded others to do, yet poor people are waiting for such a length of time. I heard a woman interviewed on radio today speak about her father who is 103 years of age who had been turfed out of a long-stay home and told to go someplace else because they cannot keep him. The Taoiseach taxed the hearse in the last budget and I said he would tax the shroud. I do not know why he did not do it in this budget, but he is doing it every day of the week because he took away the bereavement grant. He is also taxing medical card holders who spend more than 30 consecutive days in hospital after which they are charged so much a day, regardless of their income.

How low can the Taoiseach go? His party does not have a good record of looking after the ordinary, working class people of Ireland. He did look after them. He brought in honesty and openness and promoted his Ministers. He promoted the former Minister, Phil Hogan, to Europe after he wrecked democracy, banished town councils and forced Irish Water through the House and laughed about it. It took three hours with no proper debate. Look at the monster that has been created. Those on the Fine Gael backbenches were boasting that he was a great man, that he did all the heavy lifting. They said he forced Tipperary together despite my efforts. They said he was some man. He brought in property tax. Now he has gone to Brussels and will benefit from his pension scheme. He brought the gravy train with him. He did all the heavy lifting and now the sky is falling down around those in government and they do not know what is happening. They are mesmerised. As my good colleague, Deputy Healy-Rae would say - I sympathise with him on the death of his late father, Jackie - those in government have been in a coma for three and a half years. They have woken up suddenly because the people are awake now. They saw what was going on with EirGrid which was trying to destroy our country by putting up pylons for which there was no need, with no analysis or study, just to bail out the Government's friends by giving them the big business.

There is the case of Uisce Éireann. I said at the time that the only thing I liked about it was the name - I like the teanga and the cúpla focal Gaeilge but other than that it is a monstrosity that is hanging around the Government's neck and causing mess after mess. The Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, is a fellow Tipperary man. He put out his chest and he hopes his legacy will be like John F. Kennedy. I say that his legacy will be that he will be up to his oxter in water and something else before he knows it.

The former Minister, Phil Hogan, tried to say that the septic tanks were dirty and the cause of pollution. Now the Government is admitting every day that it is Ringsend and the 42 towns and the municipal districts that are causing that pollution. They try to blame the people when it suits. Anyone who ever drew water from a well knows that it is hard got and those are the people who know the value of water. I am not saying it should be free; I am saying that we do not need the fat cats of Irish Water nor do we need the people who sometimes failed in their senior positions in the public service to be rewarded again by getting bigger jobs in Irish Water with no accountability whatsoever. Accountable, my hat, along with transparency, openness and accountability.

The Government reformed the courts and it gave us an extra layer of judges, a new layer, with no definition as to how many cases they would hear. What about justice for the ordinary people? The Government brought out the gardaí in major numbers at Waterford court and other courts recently to stop advocates going in to help and to stand with families who could not afford barristers. It is some fair justice.

I said the Minister for Social Protection was tinkering with the Social Welfare Bill to try to avoid the mess and the damage done by Irish Water. Instead of dealing with people who are on the breadline and dealing with people who have been made homeless, she decided to pay people €100 to register for water and €100 if they have a septic tank and a well. I heard on the news the following morning that the Department of Social Protection was planning to take on more officials to administer this scheme. What, in God's name is going on? The Ministers on the other side of the House would need to pinch themselves and wake up because the people are out there and the Government's epitaph has been written for some time. The people will be ready. They will go into the ballot box in ones, the first chance they get and the Taoiseach's epitaph will be written. He will be banished to oblivion.

I was there in the worst days of the previous Government. We were not as headless and the people were not as frightened and as angry as they are now. They voted for the Government in good faith with the stroke of the pen. They were promised hospitals and they were promised there would not be abortion in this country. They were promised dozens of things but these were all turned to rubbish and put down the drain. I say shame on the Taoiseach and shame on the people who will vote confidence in him. We should be debating many other aspects here this evening.

The Minister, Deputy Bruton, spoke about jobs and so did the Tánaiste and the Minister of State with responsibility for the diaspora. The Government had to appoint a Minister of State for the diaspora because so many people have gone abroad there would need to be Ministers permanently overseas to try to look after them. They are scrambling trying to come home to help their families for Christmas. We should be dealing with joyous matters in the run-up to Christmas and not dealing with this Government motion which was tabled because they believe in their own rhetoric. The Taoiseach got rid of Frank Flannery, the former Minister, Phil Hogan, went to Europe, his famous Minister for Justice and Equality - the great reforming Minister - refused to bring in the scrap and precious metal Bill and many others. Since they have left him the Taoiseach is at sea and he cannot get his hand on the wheel to steady the ship.

Other Ministers and backbenchers might be talking confidence in the Taoiseach today but they are talking otherwise outside here and in the constituencies and they are saying they are voting against this and that. I tell the Taoiseach that his days are numbered and he should stand up and smell the coffee and not be visiting homeless people but rather he should visit the people whom the banks are terrorising. I asked him to visit a family in Tipperary who are being persecuted by NAMA, a State organisation paid for by the taxpayers and they are treating people like that - the Black and Tans did not do it as bad as what the Government is doing. That is fact and the Taoiseach knows it. He has closed down rural Ireland with diktats from Europe, added to the diktats from here and he has closed down rural towns. I was in Castlebar recently, his own town. We saw how his brother got into difficulties in the local elections. Rural Ireland, rural towns, are stifled with bureaucracy and they are stifled with the banks who will not lend a shilling to anyone and are only concerned with getting their bank levels right.

I say to the Taoiseach that he has some neck to table a motion of confidence in himself be-

cause he cannot have confidence. I ask him to look in the mirror to see the failure he has been, to see the Omagh bomb victims and see the other people to whom he promised justice and how he has failed them miserably and disgracefully.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Noel Harrington is sharing time with Deputies Connaughton, O'Mahony, Mulherin and O'Donovan.

**Deputy Noel Harrington:** I suppose it would be too much to have expected something positive in that ten minutes. I ask the House to imagine Deputy Mattie McGrath with a seal of office because it would be something else.

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Noel Harrington:** I am pleased to rise to support this motion of confidence in the Taoiseach and the Government, which has been provoked by Sinn Féin. In doing so, I have absolutely no confidence in the Sinn Féin leadership. The unstable, obstructive, childish antics engaged by their so-called best and brightest, should be a wake up call to the Irish people of the dysfunction that is the cult of Sinn Féin and that their project of social ordering would inevitably lead to a failed society. Peddling misery and squalor on this country is the vehicle to help them reach their political ambition.

The timing of this motion deserves greater examination. Sinn Féin could not table it any later because things are improving for the Irish people and it was a case of now or never. This Government has achieved what many would not predict. The economic fortunes of Ireland have been rescued and we are firmly on the right path. Great credit must go to the fortitude, resourcefulness, pragmatism and wisdom of the Irish people. However, in order to allow the people to face these challenges, leadership was and is still required to deal with the achievements made and the obstacles yet to come. The Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny and the Tánaiste, Deputy Joan Burton, have provided that leadership.

The stamina, courage, experience, wisdom and leadership shown by the Taoiseach since March 2011, is in stark contrast with the miserable, petty, incoherent, populist, stage-acting rhetoric that is thrown before us masquerading as though it was a viable or credible alternative. There is no question but this Government has made mistakes and perhaps will again, but the decisions that this Taoiseach and his Ministers have taken has built the foundations for a country where a sustainable economy will provide for a future where people will find reward for their initiative and there will be compassion for the most vulnerable. Of course we are not there yet. This country was left in such a pitiful state by the previous Government it was never going to be fixed in one, two or three years, but we are getting there steadily with the help of the people, guided by this Taoiseach and this Government.

**Deputy Paul J. Connaughton:** I wish to state my full confidence in the Taoiseach and the Labour Party. It is great to see Sinn Féin moving a motion and then leaving the Chamber without listening to the debate. The only one who has received a vote of no confidence is Deputy Adams from Sinn Féin's newest member. She sang the song, "Nothing Compares 2 U" but she obviously does not feel the same about Deputy Adams.

We have come a long way as a Government since 2011. The two parties of Fine Gael and Labour have faced many challenges. It has not always been easy and there has not always been agreement. However, no one can doubt that over the past four years our economic fortunes have changed and we are on the right road. We have not brought everyone with us. It is not

always a communications issue but rather at times we have made mistakes and people have punished us for them. However, as a Government we are moving on.

The next election will be in 15 or 16 months, by the way things will work out. There will be a clear alternative - either the road we are taking now or the road that Sinn Féin wants. I do not know what is that road because they are against everything.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** What about the gang of five? I thought Deputy Connaughton was in the gang of five.

**Deputy Paul J. Connaughton:** Sinn Féin voted against every single measure for the past four years. My favourite line is, “the progressive tax system”. What does that mean for middle Ireland? They want more money for the health services, more money for education, more money for justice but they do not like the USC and they want lower income tax. How will they pay for it? They will give people the alternative. We will set out where we started and where we are; Sinn Féin has to set out an alternative and there is no plan. The last people who want an election are the Opposition because its members would have to say what they want to achieve and they can achieve nothing. I want all the things they want but we will have to pay for it. I refer to this progressive tax system and I wonder what it will mean for middle-income earners, for middle Ireland and for taxation. Today’s motion is a charade. The party who tabled it have left the Chamber. That is how much they valued this debate from the first. It is time to move on and to grow up.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy John O’Mahony:** I welcome the opportunity to assert confidence in this Government and in our Taoiseach. The Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and Ministers have outlined how the economy has been repaired, how our credibility has been restored and our economy has moved from being a basket case in Europe to being the fastest growing economy in Europe. Legacy issues have been dealt with and we have learned from mistakes.

As a representative from Mayo I have witnessed first-hand how the Government led by this Taoiseach has delivered infrastructural projects such as roads and in the tourism sector or sports facilities and facilities in the Sacred Heart home. Unemployment in County Mayo had declined by 18% since 2011, even if emigration accounts for some of this figure. Members of my family who emigrated in recent years have returned and are now working as a result of the growth in the economy.

I will turn briefly to Sinn Féin, the instigator of this and many other stunts in recent weeks. I listened carefully to Deputy Adams proclaim his interest in a real republic that is citizen based. Is he referring to a model where transparency is sought in everything but given in nothing, for example, in the case of the child abuse affair of recent weeks? Is it the model where people want to have everything for free and pay for nothing? Is it the model that has been rolled out in the North, where members of my family live, under which every household pays a charge of between £1,500 and £2,000 per annum, which does not even include water charges? If such a charge were applied in the South, water charges would not be necessary.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy’s time has concluded.

**Deputy John O’Mahony:** According to a newspaper report, a copy of which I have in my hand, Sinn Féin Ministers in the North have approved 100 school closures in the past eight

years.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies may not display documents in the Chamber.

**Deputy John O'Mahony:** I note that most Sinn Féin Deputies have left the Chamber. Perhaps they have done so to process the membership applications of their new recruits.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy is over time. He must resume his seat.

**Deputy Michelle Mulherin:** As we have seen today, politics is characterised by posturing, manoeuvring, scheming and grand oratory, all of which-----

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** It is all around the Deputy.

**Deputy Michelle Mulherin:** -----makes for mesmerising drama for onlookers and political pundits.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** We are comatose.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies should be quiet.

**Deputy Michelle Mulherin:** We know in our hearts that something more down to earth is needed to achieve tangible results, namely, hard work, conviction and application. Fine Gael and the Labour Party were given a massive mandate to put the country back on track. Having been on the brink of disaster only a few short years ago, the country has clawed its way back to economic growth, financial stability, investment, job creation and opportunities for citizens who are of a mind to seize them. Economic recovery required more than political speak and hot air. To be more precise, action was needed and this required difficult, unpopular decisions. Taking such decisions is the last thing any politician thinking about saving his or her skin would be minded to do.

The man who took a stand and on whose watch Ireland has become the fastest growing economy in Europe is the Taoiseach. We have tangible evidence to give us every confidence in the ability of the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Government to rule the country. Let us not be distracted by the rhetoric of the Opposition as it plays games with reality and truth for political gain and popularity.

Sinn Féin has an almighty aversion to people with any wealth. It seeks to crucify farmers with land, carpenters, electricians, subcontractors, people in business and families on middle incomes who pay for everything. The mind boggles when one considers that people on incomes in excess of €33,800 are already treated as high earners under the tax code. How will much needed houses be built if tradesmen are not incentivised to work? Perhaps Sinn Féin expects them to grow from the ground.

While the Government is regularly accused of engaging in a capitalist conspiracy of favouring big business, who is calling the shots for Sinn Féin? A report on the "Today with Sean O'Rourke" show recently laid bare the racketeering of paramilitaries, fuel laundering operations, peddling illegal fuel-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy's time has concluded. I ask her to resume her seat.

**Deputy Michelle Mulherin:** I was interrupted.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Resume your seat.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** I express my confidence in the Taoiseach and Government. I welcome Deputy Colreavy back to the House. He was clearly not fit to be in the chorus given his party's new found interest in music. We must remember that the party which started this debate defines a wealthy person in a country that is recovering as a teacher on a salary of €35,000 or €40,000. What does Sinn Féin have in store for teachers? It would have a standard rate of income tax of 42%, plus incremental annual increases in tax of 7% per annum for three years, giving a 21% increase over three years. To this income tax rate of 62%, we need to add a further 13% to account for PRSI, the universal social charge and everything else Sinn Féin has in store for people. This would bring the standard rate of income tax for a teacher to 75%.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** That is a lie.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** In the case of a teacher who is married to a small farmer in west Limerick who owns a few heifers, it also has a wealth tax in store. This tax may generate €40,000 or €50,000 from bad or marginal land in my part of the country over the lifetime of a Sinn Féin Government.

Deputy Colreavy is in an awful hurry to have an election.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** Yes.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** I challenge you to tell farmers in Carrick-on-Shannon, Mollahill, Sligo and other parts of the west that your party plans to tax their land and the worse the land, the more you will tax it. Your spokesperson on agriculture-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy O'Donovan must address his remarks through the Chair. He is inviting disorder.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** Sinn Féin's spokesperson on agriculture told the House that unworked farm assets will be taxed when Sinn Féin gets into government. An unworked farm asset in my part of the world is bad land. Deputy Colreavy, who is from the west, proposes to introduce a tax on land that cannot be farmed and for which payment may need to be made by the litre rather than by the acre. That proposal will certainly go down well.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** We certainly would not tell farmers lies.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies should stay quiet. They may not try to shout down the speaker.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** When Deputy Colreavy travels around the country with Deputy Mattie McGrath, with whom his party hopes to form a Government in the near future, he must not forget to tell people that his party's solution for agriculture is to introduce a land tax on bad land in constituencies such as mine across the west. I do not have any problem supporting the motion of confidence.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am extending the time for the debate because of interruptions.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** To understand the reason confidence in this Government has fallen so dramatically since it received one of the biggest mandates in the history of the State, we need only contrast the commitments made prior to March 2011 by both the Fine Gael Party and

Labour Party with the actions of those parties in Government in the period since then. The so-called democratic revolution has given way to democratic revulsion as to how the Government conducts its business.

In the three years and nine months since the Government took office, we have witnessed some significant achievements. The economic recovery of recent months is extremely welcome in a country that has endured six financially difficult years.

**Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin:** Well said.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** The unprecedented actions taken by the former Minister for Finance, the late Brian Lenihan, cannot be divorced from the current robust recovery. All Deputies will agree that his actions and plan have contributed to the positive news we see today. Brian Lenihan showed great bravery and courage in his role and this should not be forgotten when discussing the level of economic resolution and correction that is taking place.

We were all proud of the successful visit of Queen Elizabeth II, which changed forever the relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom. It showed Ireland in its best light and symbolised the significant improvement in relations between our countries. It also showed how the political leadership of Governments of all political hues had successfully led Ireland, North and South, to peace. These were proud moments for the entire nation.

The Government has also disappointed and sometimes even disgusted citizens, however, through the manner in which it has governed. For a time, goodwill was shown towards the Government and all parties and citizens realised that the political system had to change. Fine Gael and the Labour Party threw away this goodwill, however, by engaging in the same old tired politics that had been practised by all parties and none in the past.

The first and most striking reason the Government lost the confidence of the people was the Taoiseach's action on Roscommon General Hospital. On 8 February 2011, in front of hundreds of citizens gathered in Roscommon town, the then leader of the Fine Gael Party called on all voters in the constituency to vote for local Fine Gael candidates to secure and defend the accident and emergency unit in their town. Speaking about the unit, the Taoiseach stated: "We will protect and defend that... We are committed to maintaining the services at Roscommon General Hospital." This commitment could not have been clearer - it was to "protect and defend" the accident and emergency unit when in office. The citizens of Roscommon had no reason to doubt such a simple promise and commitment, especially as it was so clear. Despite this, in a betrayal that indicated the cynical approach to politics that was to become a characteristic of this Government, the then Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly, closed the accident and emergency unit of Roscommon General Hospital in July 2011, less than five months after the Taoiseach's original pledge was made. What made matters worse was the Taoiseach's initial denial that he made a commitment to keep the unit open during the election. Only when a recording emerged did he finally accept that he had made such a promise. The audacity of this approach of spinning until caught red-handed has continued through the life of the Government.

We saw a similar example of this approach during the medical card fiasco. The Government began culling discretionary medical cards to reduce budget overruns in the Health Service Executive, HSE, but it was never announced as official policy. When extreme cases of hardship were raised in the House by Deputy Martin and others outlining the outrageous swiping of medical cards from people most in need, the official Government line was to deny, deny

and deny, day in and day out on Leaders' Question. We were told by the Taoiseach there was no problem and no change in policy. He stated the number of medical cards was not being reduced. Only when public anger grew at this increasingly perverse policy in the run-up to the local and European elections, and particularly after the drubbing it got in the results, did the Government finally acknowledge its inhumane policy and sought to address it. Notwithstanding these changes, medical cards are still not being returned. When my office contacted the HSE about this, it was informed the policies have not yet been implemented even though they were announced more than ten days ago.

We saw the same approach in justice where honourable members of An Garda Síochána sought to highlight serious malpractice in the force, only for them to be told by the responsible Fine Gael Minister that they would be got if they raised concerns about accountability or malpractice. The Government had no place for whistleblowers to go, until eventually an independent report sided with those whistleblowers and commended their bravery in speaking out when political pressure was pushing them to stay quiet and disappear. Yet we are still in the dark as to why the former Garda Commissioner, Martin Callinan, resigned and as to the Taoiseach's role in that event. We are still waiting on the commission of investigation to be established to investigate the issues of serious concern arising from the Guerin report.

Even the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has not escaped the Government's cynical political approach. Fine Gael and Labour showed their utter contempt for the arts and cultural sector by seeking to undermine the arm's length principle with regard to government interference in the arts. It has reduced the arts budget year on year while our national cultural institutions are struggling to function on their ever decreasing budgets. The boards of our national cultural institutions have been used by the Government for purely cynical and political ends. The recent controversy surrounding the appointment of John McNulty to the board of IMMA, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, showed the promised democratic revolution was nothing more than an election gimmick.

Other commitments have led to further disappointment among our people. Our health service waiting lists are soaring while there appears to be no clear policy on how best to reform our health service. The Government sought to abolish the HSE but did not outline with what it would replace it. It has watched over the past four years as a housing crisis on an unprecedented scale developed, leaving hundreds homeless, thousands in fear of being evicted and families giving up on their dream of owning a home of their own. We have seen no action to address the drug problem witnessed across the country, the increasing waiting lists for nursing homes and the appalling abuse of so many families in their inability to get access to the fair deal scheme. There is now a waiting list of up to 15 weeks for the scheme which is putting enormous hardship on families. The scheme is worse than it ever was but the Government claims it is a backlog. It is not. It is about saving money. There are times, if the Government confessed to the people that it finds itself in difficult circumstances, that the people would understand.

**Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor:** Of course, the IMF was not here, was it Deputy?

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** The people have taken and given a lot and would work with the Government. It is this continued spinning of half-truths and half-answers that is causing problems for people. We have had it over the past two days. The Minister of State can put his head in his hands and feign some kind of mock indignation about my ability to recognise what the people expected.

**Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:** You said the IMF was not here.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Through the Chair, please Deputies.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** We have seen the spectacle over the past two days where the fallout from the IBRC, Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, liquidation has led to the potential where junior bondholders ultimately might be paid back. The Government's spokespeople have hedged, ducked and dived on this rather than coming out stating the facts.

**Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:** The Deputy should stop. He is on seriously shaky ground here.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** The Tánaiste did such a fantastic job at the weekend, stating she would solve the problems and that there was no way on her watch would any of these junior bondholders be paid back. The facts belie what she said. Some of the more honourable Government spokespeople have said the junior bondholders will be paid back if the resources are there. If the €1 billion that can only be attributed to the taxpayer in that particular formation is paid back, then the bondholders get paid back. The Tánaiste has indicated that this will not happen. That will be an interesting discussion at the EMC, Economic Management Council, which she fought hard to be on. We will see how she will bring forward special legislation to give effect to what she desires. I presume she hopes the returns from the liquidation of IBRC will not be as beneficial as might be. If it overachieves, however, she will have one hell of a problem resolving what she said at the weekend.

Rural Ireland feels abandoned too by the Government as Garda stations are closed, schools are threatened and post offices face an uncertain future.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** Fianna Fáil closed more post offices when it was in government.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** While I have already welcomed our improved economic growth, I equally condemn the fact it is a two-tier one. Rural Ireland feels left behind, a fact which the Government continues to fail to address.

We have also witnessed a total failure to reform the political institutions of our State. If anything we have seen the people's trust in our political institutions fall even further under this Government. Stroke politics, cynical politics and politics for the elite is practised by Fine Gael and Labour instead of the new politics they promised us in the 2011 general election.

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** Some Ministers and backbenchers fail to accept that they promised something different but they have gone back to age old politics of the past. They are still coming in here believing they can hoodwink the people. I do not believe that will work in this instance.

**Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:** Fianna Fáil's EMC was its tent at the Galway Races.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** It has all changed.

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** This is a motion about leadership. Ireland in the early weeks of 2011 was a country devoid of hope. Some commentators question whether the experiment of an Irish State had failed. The people

gave this Government under the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, a mandate to fix the economy and to rebuild the State. That work is now well under way.

As a Government, we have not gotten everything right. Mistakes have been made. Our successes, however, have far outweighed our mistakes. The country is in a better place than it was just three years ago. The achievements of the Government under the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, include rebuilding our economy and exiting the bailout. The number of people in employment is growing monthly and the impact of the Action Plan for Jobs under the leadership of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, has started to take hold. The minimum wage has been restored with the low-paid taken out of the universal social charge. A process of tax reform for middle-income earners has been started. The Government has allowed the tourism sector to be reborn through initiatives such as The Gathering and the reduction in the VAT rate to 9%. The Government has carried out more reforms of the Oireachtas than any other Government in the past. Steps have been taken to reform our political system at local and national level. The Government has faced up to some of the most tragic episodes of our past, such as abuse in institutions and the Magdalen laundries, in an open and honest way. These are just a few of the achievements under the leadership of our Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and this Government.

The Opposition wants to vote no confidence in the Government and bring about a general election. It is unfortunate that Deputy Adams who tabled this motion is not in the Chamber now.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** It was the Government which tabled this motion.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Has his party confidence in him? Is it forced to have confidence in him out of fear, instead?

The Opposition parties ask us to trust them. I would not trust any of them to run this great country. What does the Opposition offer in the way of leadership? Contrast the leadership provided by our Taoiseach, our Tánaiste and this Government over the past three and a half years with the critics on the other side of the House. The Fianna Fáil Party, led by Deputy Martin, offers nothing positive. He was a Minister who sat at the Cabinet table under Bertie Ahern and Brian Cowen, a Minister who was involved in the decisions which destroyed the economy.

Sinn Féin under the leadership of Gerry Adams offers nothing. A man who has failed repeatedly to answer the questions raised by Máiría Cahill and the leader of a party with an economic policy that would devastate this country and reverse all the hard work and gains of the past three years is no real alternative. The collection of Independents offer only criticism and are unable to provide any policies that would offer the people of this country any hope for the future. They are groups that argue with each other just to argue with each other. The Opposition has nothing to offer but hopelessness. It will drag this country back to the economic turmoil that existed before this Government came to power.

This Government and this Taoiseach will fulfil its mandate and serve the people of this country until the spring of 2016. When people go to the polls in 2016, it will be in  
*6 o'clock* a country with a thriving economy where things are better than they were when we took over in 2011. As a Government, we will put our record of achievement before the Irish people and ask them to support us. On a daily basis, I work alongside An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and see at first hand his leadership skills. I am honoured as a citizen of

this country, a member of Fine Gael and a member of this Government to vote confidence in An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, and in this Government.

Question put.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A division has been challenged. As this is a motion of confidence in the Government, in accordance with Standing Order 71(1), the division will proceed through the lobbies.

Question again put: "That the motion be agreed to." The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 55. TáNí-IBannon, James.

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 55.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Barry, Tom.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Creighton, Lucinda.</i>
<i>Byrne, Eric.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Conaghan, Michael.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Higgins, Joe.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Keaveney, Colm.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Kirk, Seamus.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Kitt, Michael P.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>

<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>McLellan, Sandra.</i>
<i>Hannigan, Dominic.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Mathews, Peter.</i>
<i>Hayes, Tom.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Keating, Derek.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Lynch, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Lyons, John.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>	
<i>Neville, Dan.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Derek.</i>	
<i>Ó Riordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Mahony, John.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Joe.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
<i>Perry, John.</i>	
<i>Phelan, Ann.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>	

<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Twomey, Liam.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Wall, Jack.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	

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

Question declared carried.

### 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 Dominic Hannigan - the need to include chartered engineers on the list of witnesses who can sign section 7 of a passport application; (2) Deputy Terence Flanagan - the processing of medical card applications in the primary care reimbursement service; (3) Deputy Billy Timmins - the way in which funding for greenways was allocated in May 2014; (4) Deputy Pat Deering - the need for signs on the M9 and other tourist services and facilities at St. Mullins in County Carlow; (5) Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív - the proposals that Teagasc has for its research station in Athenry, County Galway; (6) Deputy Peter Mathews - the need to intervene to secure deferred pensions for members of the Irish airlines superannuation scheme; (7) Deputy Paul J. Connaughton - concerns over the use of compulsory purchase orders on the Dublin to Galway greenway; (8) Deputy Noel Harrington - the future source for funding for community development under SICAP for the non-Gaeltacht inhabited islands of Hare, Bere, Whiddy, Sherkin, Long, Dursey, Inis Boffin, Inis Turk, and Clare; (9) Deputy Dessie Ellis - the impact of proposed increases in rents for council tenants; (10) Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy - the proposed closure of Ulster Bank, Ferbane, County Offaly; (11) Deputy Billy Kelleher - the loss of routes and reduction of services at Cork Airport; (12) Deputy Derek Keating - the interface between the Health Service Executive and Dublin Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service; (14) Deputy Eric Byrne - the online appointments system at the Garda National Immigration Bureau; (15) Deputy Mattie McGrath - the plans to develop a fair commonage management plan for hill farmers; (16) Deputy Thomas P. Broughan - the need to review the methadone treatment scheme; (17) Deputy Michael McGrath - the loss of routes and reduction of services at Cork Airport; (18) Deputy Timmy Dooley - the delays in booking a national car test appointment; (19) Deputy Denis Naughten - the need to review the care and admission policy of acute psychiatric patients; (20) Deputy Clare Daly - the CIA report into rendition, detention and inter-

rogation methods; (21) Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil - the position regarding the scheme to support national organisations funding; (22) Deputy Mick Wallace - the CIA interrogation methods report; (23) Deputy Robert Troy - the need to provide assistance and funding to services for the homeless at St. Martha's hostel for men and Bethany House for women, County Longford; (24) Deputy Ruth Coppinger - the recent revelation of abuse in care homes of people with mental disabilities; and (25) Deputy Patrick O'Donovan - the need for a review of the laws on speed detection cameras and the use of Go Safe vans on roads here.

The matters raised by Deputies Noel Harrington, Dessie Ellis, Dominic Hannigan and Timmy Dooley have been selected for discussion.

### Leaders' Questions

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Last week, there was a special "Prime Time" programme on the ambulance service. It monitored various counties and also looked at ambulance response times in Dublin. The programme was shocking as it showed interviews of staff and family members who made 999 calls, some of whom received appalling responses.

For example, one man explained how he rang 999 as his father had chest pain. Even though they could see the Wexford hospital from their own home, the ambulance took more than 50 minutes to arrive and unfortunately his father passed away. This man could not understand why ambulance control did not explain that there would be a delay, as he would have been able to drive his father to the hospital within a few minutes. When he queried this afterwards, he was told that people were not normally told there would be delays unless they asked.

A whistleblower from the mid-west was interviewed. She said that ambulance crews from the mid-west were run ragged and "going without food for hours" trying to respond to patients because of a lack of ambulances. She is an emergency medical technician. She said: "There are still not enough vehicles to cover an emergency. If a plane crashed, there are definitely not enough ambulances for it." She also said: "The situation of late response times for ambulance call-outs in Limerick is serious. There wouldn't be a day that would go past that you wouldn't be stuck somewhere for an ambulance going 'Oh, God, we've no ambulances to send there'."

The Health Information and Quality Authority report published last week confirmed that ambulance calls continue to rise by about 10% per year.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A question, please.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Worryingly, it also found that staffing in some control centres fell below the required safe levels.

Does the Taoiseach accept that ambulance response times are far from acceptable? What does he intend to do to address this situation? Does he accept that it is time for a fundamental review of how the ambulance system in the country is organised to ensure proper and effective ambulance response times in all areas of the country, particularly in rural areas?

**The Taoiseach:** The ambulance service over the years has always been one where controversy has raised its head on many occasions. I recall being on a health board many years ago and the clapped-out ambulance vehicles in many cases were a source of constant engagement at the meetings.

Since 2011, there has been a major programme of change to reconfigure how pre-hospital emergency care services are managed and delivered. Last year, there were 280,776 calls, 14,000 more than in 2012, which is a significant number. In 2011, there were no targets set for ambulance response times. When the Minister, Deputy Reilly, was in charge he raised the bar for response times. For 2014, a new target has been set for 80% of life-threatening calls to be responded to in under 19 minutes. The 2013 target was for between 68% and 70%. For the first time now hospital turnaround data are being collated on a national basis, which is important. That will allow an assessment of performance in the handover of critically ill patients in the system as a whole, in the response times and in the collection times. That will obviously allow for determination as to how the system can be improved. I accept it is not perfect by any means.

The HSE has acknowledged that at times of high demand with the emergency care system there is clearly a potential for delays in the transfer of patients from ambulance to emergency department and this results in delays in the release of ambulances from emergency departments and reduces the availability of ambulances elsewhere. That is why a national collation system has now been put in place.

There has also been a whole new further set of details on the ambulance emergency department framework. That clarifies the process of clinical handover, establishing where are the lines of responsibility. There is a €5.4 million increase in the ambulance budget for next year, which I think everyone will welcome. There will be 50 replacement ambulances next year, which I think everyone will also welcome. The DELTA and ECHO response times are improving, but the HIQA report recognises that patient outcome is actually more important than response times. The clinical audit will begin next year for the first time.

It is an evolution to a point where national data are now being collated. We have increased investment in the provision of new ambulances and in the collation of the data. Most important of all is the health of the patient.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach needs to stop referring to things happening “for the first time” because that is the classical political response to very serious issues. The HIQA report was quite clear that over a ten-year period, there was very significant progress in the training of emergency medical technicians. The whole pre-ambulance care council and so forth which was established more than ten years ago changed dramatically what had been happening prior to then.

The key point is that the lack of any strategic planning is now evident. Something has gone fundamentally wrong with the reconfiguration. What is the response to that person in Wexford who was within eyesight of the hospital and yet it took 50 minutes for the ambulance to get there? There are probably Deputies in all parts of the House who can instance cases where the response times were simply too long. The money that has been allocated for replacement vehicles had to be allocated because the HIQA report revealed-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A question, please.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----that up to 47 vehicles were way beyond the seven years and 500,000 km criteria for emergency ambulances in the State. They had long passed those criteria and still had not been replaced and will not be until next year. We welcome that fact, but it is too late and shows a lack of proactivity. The report, which backs up the “Prime Time” programme, says that EMPs are not being adequately trained, there is a lack of strategic planning, and qual-

ity assurance of clinical care is limited.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We are over time. The Deputy should put his question.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It also strongly criticises the issue of ambulance capacity being lost due to the delay in handing over to accident and emergency departments. It is not just a question of saying that it is far from perfect. There are serious issues which are crying out to be addressed-----

**The Taoiseach:** Yes, I know.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----in terms of the reconfiguration and the move to centralisation. Would the Taoiseach accept that something has gone wrong concerning people's access to ambulances and the response times.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes. I accept that it is not perfect and that there are serious issues, but they are being addressed by the Minister. I think the Deputy accepts that a €5.4 million increase in the ambulance budget next year is important. That is recognised by the Minister and it is now in place. Some 50 replacement ambulances will be provided. These are brand new ambulances. I had an opportunity quite recently to deal with a private company on the issue of a number of new ambulances and their facilities are absolutely first class.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** But it is the public sector that should have them.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes, I understand. The former Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, brought in targets for the national ambulance service whereby, when a life-threatening condition occurs, a patient-carrying vehicle should be on the scene within 19 minutes for 80% of those calls. That does not actually deal with the problem, however.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** Like most of the things he brought in.

**The Taoiseach:** I will tell the Deputy why. Target times are only one element of an ambulance service. At present, if an ambulance responds in under 19 minutes to a call in respect of a life-threatening situation and the patient unfortunately passes away, that is recorded as an ambulance meeting its target. On the other hand, if an ambulance responds in 20 minutes to a call in respect of a life-threatening situation and the patient makes a full recovery, it is recorded as an ambulance missing its target. The determination of times, therefore, does not give a comprehensive response, although it is one element of it.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** Whose fault is that?

**The Taoiseach:** The emergency aeromedical service support was a 12-month pilot project between the NAS and the Air Corps providing dedicated aeromedical support for the NAS in the west, specifically where roads were poor and land ambulance transit times were more severe. A review of that project found that a clinical need exists for the service.

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

**The Taoiseach:** It recommended that it be established on a permanent basis. The 2015 HSE plan includes a specific target for turnover at hospitals for the first time, so that is an improvement. We also have an air ambulance for the midlands and the west, which is important. It is not perfect but the air ambulance for the midlands and west is now *in situ*, which is a big

improvement in terms of access and travel times for hospitals.

**Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** Must our voiceless in care depend on whistleblowers, unannounced HIQA inspections and RTE's "Prime Time" programme to expose the wholly unacceptable behaviour of some who work in our care homes and facilities? I know at first hand the great work that so many employed in these settings perform. I have a brother with an intellectual disability in a HSE care home. This drip, drip exposé of dreadful behaviour by some must also deeply hurt those who are true carers in these settings.

For all concerned, but especially for those who cannot speak for themselves, like my brother, this behaviour must be rooted out once and for all. In the case of Áras Attracta, HIQA had inspected, made recommendations, returned and felt that all had been addressed. These inspections are not enough and we cannot depend on them alone. A special RTE documentary to be broadcast tonight showing the RTE investigations unit's examination of the standards of care in an Irish residential care facility for adults with intellectual disabilities will once again raise this issue. The focus of tonight's programme is bungalow 3 at the Áras Attracta care home in Swinford, County Mayo. It is now the subject of investigations by the HSE, HIQA and An Garda Síochána following this exposé. A litany of 19 issues have been raised by the RTE investigations unit.

That home is geographically close to the Taoiseach, but the issues being raised are always close to me and my family, and to all families of loved ones with intellectual challenges in such placements. It is imperative that these matters are addressed. Accordingly, what real steps are the Taoiseach, his Government colleagues and the HSE going to take to ensure that this particular problem that presents time after time, in one incident after another is substantively addressed once and for all?

Let us ensure that we are not looking at people starting to believe that we have a culture of abuse of our most vulnerable in such care settings. As a sibling of one who is so placed, I do not accept that there is such a culture. We run the risk of people believing that, however, if we fail to take appropriate action. What action do the Taoiseach and his Government intend taking?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin for his question. I know that from his personal family circumstances he can empathise in a situation like this so much more deeply than others who may not have those particular family circumstances.

I was called about this last week by the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, and I took her call with a sense of dread and anger. I have since been briefed on it by the Minister for Health. I believe I speak for the whole country when I say that the idea that men and women with intellectual disabilities would be slapped or sat on - as I understand is shown in the footage of this programme - is utterly intolerable and unacceptable to us as a Government and as a people. Every person who uses our disability services is entitled to receive supports of the highest standards and to live in an atmosphere and environment of safety and care. There is no excuse - none whatever - for abuse or conduct in the circumstances that I understand have been outlined. I have not seen footage of the programme but I intend to watch it later on this evening or tomorrow morning.

The HSE alerted the Garda Síochána and HIQA immediately. In the interests of protecting residents and staff themselves, it put a number of staff off duty while the allegations are being investigated. I support the HSE's immediate initiation of an expert investigation into these se-

rious allegations, which is chaired by Mr. Christy Lynch who is the CEO of KARE, whom the Deputy may know. He independently chaired the review of services provided at this facility, led by Dr. Kevin McCoy who is a former chief inspector of the Northern Ireland Social Services Inspectorate.

The director general of the HSE wrote to all the staff emphasising the serious responsibilities on them personally to ensure that individuals supported by the HSE in any setting are treated with respect and dignity. He also reminded them of their absolute duty to report incidents of maltreatment or poor practice concerning any person. As the Minister has said, the HSE is also planning to initiate its own undercover investigations into operations in HSE facilities to supplement the programme of inspections already in place. We had this before with Deputy O'Dowd a number of years ago in the Leas Cross situation.

The Minister has been fully briefed and has assured me that instructions have been given to the HSE to keep both himself and the Minister of State fully informed. I have also been assured that the HSE's priority is to protect the valued services that people residing in Áras Attracta receive as a critical support for them and their families.

I recall when this place was opened. As the Deputy rightly points out, there are many people who work in the health service who do an excellent job and provide a first-class service. This kind of activity does them down, ruins the reputation of health care workers and is an insult to the wider family of the persons involved. Let me assure the Deputy, the House and the families of those in Áras Attracta and elsewhere that the law will follow its course. HIQA, the HSE and the relevant Minister are fully involved in following through this, as are the Garda. It may well be that criminal charges may arise from this. That is a matter for the authorities involved.

There were 59 recommendations made in respect of the HIQA investigation into the facility and they have all been implemented. Two practice co-ordinators have been assigned to Áras Attracta, effective from 2 December 2014, reporting directly to the director of services and liaising with the national head of operations and service. I have provided the names of the investigators there and the assurance review team.

I know the facility, which is close to me. Unfortunately, this is another incident in a long line of incidents over the years. As the Minister indicated, the HSE will have its own undercover investigation team. RTE should be commended for the service it has carried out in this regard and I hope the investigations, when complete, will be followed through. There is no place in our society for this kind of conduct.

**Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** The Taoiseach has made the point about Áras Attracta and other settings. This is important as that is at the core of the issue. This is not only about Áras Attracta. This is not an isolated incident and there has been a range of other settings exposed for malpractice over these years. The critical matter is not just the address of the individual care home setting. There is a need for a root-and-branch re-examination of the level of training, management and oversight right across the board. That is what is required. As I have stated, I do not accept that everything is being done. Real steps must be taken.

I noted the commentary of Mr. Tony O'Brien, the director general of the HSE, with regard to wider use of undercover surveillance but that is such a reactive step under the assumption that things are wrong. We must take the required steps to ensure the highest standards are understood in the first instance and implemented by those we trust to look after those defenceless

loved ones in our respective families. My brother is non-verbal and I can understand what was said earlier today by the sibling of one of those who will be most particularly focused upon in tonight's programme. These people are incapable of voicing or giving expression on whatever treatment they are being subjected to. It is a terrible position to be in. It creates great fear for families, especially for parents and siblings. They do not know the truth of each day of the lives of their loved ones.

Mr. O'Brien's point is well taken but that is not the full answer. We must examine care settings right across the board and instill through retraining and uptraining the highest standards in the first instance in management and oversight in every care setting in the land. Will the Taoiseach take that on board?

**The Taoiseach:** I will take it on board and the Deputy can rest assured that the Government will support the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, the Minister of State, Deputy Lynch, and the HSE in carrying out a proper evaluation of the entire process. The HIQA inspectorate and the HSE complaints are clearly inadequate in the case that has arisen in Áras Attracta. The first response was to the families directly affected by those persons with intellectual disability in the particular unit. All of the others were written to on 1 December and meetings were initiated with 56 other family groupings. They have all been offered meetings but some did not require a meeting, having been assured by telephone that the relevant family member was not in this specific unit.

I take the Deputy's point that there is no argument against this. It can be trying in many of these circumstances. The Deputy speaks from a fraternal perspective but I cannot speak in the same depth of understanding of what it means 24 hours a day. I assure the Deputy that having raised the matter, this is not acceptable under any circumstances. The analysis being carried out by the HSE, HIQA, the Minister and the Minister of State will have the support of the Government. The authorities are involved and the Garda are investigating the matter. It is one of a number of investigations which I expect to be carried through by the authorities.

The point made by the Deputy is a central issue, as this is probably not an individual or isolated case. We have seen similar cases in the past, and it is now a case of attempting to deal with the entirety of the issue in a way that stands up to the utmost scrutiny and standards. These particular and very special people and their families should be guaranteed to live in an environment of comfort, care and consideration, with those who serve them living up to the highest standards set by the principles of the HSE. I thank the Deputy for his question.

**Deputy Mick Wallace:** The Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, recently signed into law Part 3 of the Criminal Justice (Mutual Assistance) Act 2008. This refers to targeted surveillance, meaning the person or persons whose information is intercepted would be the subject of a particular criminal investigation, that the request shall be detailed and make a reasonable case for the necessity of the interception of information. The reality is very different. As was exposed by Mr. Edward Snowden recently, billions of Irish communications are being actively recorded and stored by the British GCHQ and shared with other intelligence agencies. They have tapped into a cable under the Irish Sea and it appears that Vodafone has been paid tens of millions of euro for facilitating the activity. This is nothing short of mass surveillance and the indiscriminate targeting of all citizens of this country, regardless of whether people are innocent or guilty. It seems people are now guilty until proven innocent.

It seems that in a world where everything is collected and monitored, anyone who challenges unjust laws will be silenced. This undermines democracy. There is no system of judicial

oversight instituted by this legislation signed into law by the Minister. The Minister has given extraordinary powers that are not subject to scrutiny and there is a proposal to set up secret courts to deal with third party companies that do not comply with the Minister's orders, which is completely at odds with any notion of transparency and judicial oversight practices that would be regarded as essential for any country adhering to the UN convention on human rights.

Why does the Government feel it necessary to violate all notions of transparency with regard to this legislation? Will the Taoiseach indicate if the Government authorised the British monitoring of the undersea cables? If so, under what legislation was this done?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank Deputy Wallace for his question. The Criminal Justice (Mutual Assistance) Act 2008 implements the EU Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters between member states of the European Union of 2000. Part 3 of the 2008 Act deals with mutual assistance regarding requests to or from EU member states for assistance in the interception of telecommunications. The recent decision by the Minister to commence Part 3 of the 2008 Act arises from an obligation under the Treaty of Lisbon whereby the State would be in breach of its obligations to fully implement the provisions of the EU Convention on Mutual Assistance in criminal matters by 1 December this year. An EU convention is at issue, and this mirrors arrangements in other EU countries. Accordingly, it is open to the Garda in Ireland to request similar assistance from other EU member states if it is deemed appropriate. The convention applies only to criminal matters. It does not apply to intelligence gathering. Essentially, where a lawful interception order is in place in one EU in relation to the investigation of serious crime, it can be given effect in another country upon request in accordance with the domestic law implementing the convention. In Ireland, the arrangements in place will reflect the provision of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993. That includes oversight by a designated High Court judge. The provision relating to *in camera* hearings arises because it would not be appropriate in open court to disclose who might be the subject of an interception order in the investigation of serious crime.

I cannot comment on the allegation of wholesale interception of Irish telephone calls by Britain. That is a matter on which I will come back to the Deputy in the context of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Justice and Equality. I do not have the answer here.

**Deputy Mick Wallace:** I am disappointed the Taoiseach does not know whether we have illegally authorised the monitoring of the sea cable. I am sure the Taoiseach is aware that in April of this year, the European Court of Justice ruled in favour of Digital Rights Ireland and declared the European directive on data retention invalid owing to its serious interference with private life and freedom of expression, thus violating the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Taoiseach said we are signing up to a commitment made under the Lisbon treaty but Part 3 is part of an Act introduced in 2008 and things have moved on since then. The fact that Digital Rights Ireland won that case this year changes the goalposts a good bit. It is now possible that we may be breaking different rules in Europe by signing up to this. What assessment of the 2008 law was done following the judgment in Digital Rights Ireland's European Court of Justice case to ensure that the law is in compliance with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights?

We have a serious problem with mass surveillance. Recently, the US was found guilty of spying on Petrobras, the Brazilian oil company, an economic summit, the IMF, the World Bank and the international credit card system, all to gain economic advantage in international com-

petitiveness.

I refer to the type of industries around information which have set up in Ireland. The idea that GCHQ is tapping into cables and getting all the information it wants and sharing it with whoever it wants around the planet should worry the Government.

**The Taoiseach:** I saw the media reports that GCHQ in the UK was tapping into undersea communications cables. The media reports actually suggest that if such surveillance is being carried out, it is being carried out within the UK's own jurisdiction. Each country makes its own arrangements to have a capacity to intercept communications but I would expect that any such surveillance by any country would have to have a proper legal basis and that the interference is proportionate to the aim for which it is intended. As the Deputy pointed out, there would be understandable concern if the general principle of the privacy of communications was not being respected.

The need for the protection of people from terrorists and other criminal threats is acknowledged but the point must be made that it is necessary to ensure that the information is properly obtained and subject to appropriate safeguards, in particular in those cases. I would expect that the UK would follow these principles as well.

This matter is being investigated by the European Commission. As I said, these matters are governed by legislation in this jurisdiction and there is no question of any form of mass surveillance here. Furthermore, the relevant legislation is overseen by a designated judge of the High Court and the reports are laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. Ireland will reiterate its belief at international fora and elsewhere that the principles I just mentioned are adhered to.

The story was based primarily on the grounds that if there had been any tapping or interception of these undersea cables, it occurred outside our jurisdiction. While the article did not specifically address that issue, any tapping or interception of these communications would likely have occurred within the jurisdiction of the UK and would presumably be covered by EU law.

As the Deputy knows, these communications cables are owned by commercial companies. Irish companies, such as Eircom, have an interest in some of the cables. The report goes on to say that the Irish owned cables in question, including those which link Ireland with the US and Canada, are routed through the UK. The matter is being investigated by the Commission. There is no question of mass surveillance here and the collection of any such data would have to be in accordance with the legislation laid down, which, in our case, is overseen by a High Court judge. The reports are laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

## **Ceisteanna - Questions**

### **Economic Management Council Meetings**

1. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the Economic Management Council has met recently. [35603/14]

2. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach when the last Economic Management Council meeting took place. [36518/14]

3. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding the Economic Management Council. [37631/14]

4. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach when the last meeting of the Economic Management Council took place. [39817/14]

5. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Taoiseach when the last Economic Management Council took place. [41694/14]

6. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding the status of the Economic Management Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43794/14]

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

The Economic Management Council has been established with the status of a Cabinet committee and it has four members: the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Economic Management Council last met on 26 November 2014.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach did not answer Questions Nos. 3 and 6, which I tabled and which basically asked him to make a statement on the position regarding the Economic Management Council and the position regarding the status of the Economic Management Council.

**The Taoiseach:** I said it has the status of a Cabinet committee.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The reason I put the questions in that form was that I was amused by the Minister of State, Deputy Alex White, who on “The Week in Politics” programme articulated the view that there would be changes to the status of the Economic Management Council, that it would be the subject matter of a review and that he was not entirely happy with its position within Cabinet. Prior to becoming Tánaiste, Deputy Burton was very critical of the Economic Management Council and the degree to which it kept other Cabinet members offside and out of the loop in terms of decision-making and budgetary issues.

A number of articles have been written about the constitutionality of the Economic Management Council in that many key decisions are now taken by that council. By the time they get to Cabinet, they are *faits accomplis*. It is a very dangerous situation where the majority of the Cabinet is essentially excluded from the detailed decision-making required on a range of issues.

I would like to illustrate one example, the Irish Water debacle - the establishment of Irish Water, the decision to spend €500 million on water meters and close to €200 million on the establishment of the utility itself. The Economic Management Council signed off on that and the result has been one of the worst examples of a lack of fundamental accountability to the Cabinet, the Oireachtas and to the people of Ireland. It was a scandalous waste of money. We now have meters in the ground that will never be used. They are pointless in so far as we will have a flat charge for a number of years, which will probably continue. The danger and incompetence of the Economic Management Council, EMC, were demonstrated by its railroading through and rubberstamping of the expenditure on water meters and Irish Water, without proper consultation with its Cabinet colleagues or this House. As we remember this time last year, or close to it, the Bill was railroaded through the House in two to three hours with no adequate debate. It was guillotined. Since then the Government has made 12 or 13 U-turns on the water charges

regime. If the Taoiseach wants an illustration of how the EMC is ineffective and, worse, results in an appalling lack of accountability, the water debacle is one.

There are many more. The dishonest budget last year on health, for example, was the child of the EMC. It did the work on the budget and presented it to Cabinet. That was presented in the House and we now know those figures were dishonest and false because we see the largest health supplementary estimate ever asked for in this House. The books were cooked. The EMC and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform must have known this because as soon as the budget was published, the then Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, said they were not his figures and they belonged to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, who is a key member of the EMC. It is the first budget I have seen that took me two months to work out whether the figures were right or wrong. The figures presented to the Oireachtas proved to be hopelessly erroneous. Under the freedom of information legislation, we then learned that the Health Service Executive, HSE, had written extensively to the then Minister, pointing out that patient safety would be compromised if the Estimate went through. The discretionary medical card debacle arose from that. The length of and waiting time on waiting lists have gone dramatically wrong, all because of the budgetary work of the EMC.

There is a fundamental lack of constitutionality that Ministers are excluded from its work and four people make key decisions with officials who are not elected. A Cabinet is elected and appointed by this House for a specific purpose under the Constitution, and each Minister receives a seal of office on that basis. The Government has formalised an entity that has no constitutional basis or status, which has resulted in a lack of accountability in our democratic and parliamentary framework. I have instanced two cases to illustrate that. There are many more. Will the Taoiseach comment on that? Does he accept that the EMC got it particularly wrong in respect of Irish Water? Does he now accept that the €500 million to be spent on water meters represents a scandalous waste of money because there is no use to be made of them? Most of them are in the ground and will not be used.

I am amazed this has got so little attention. No one knows anything about the signing off of that €500 million which was allegedly off balance sheet because it came from the strategic investment fund. It did not seem to matter that it should go before the Oireachtas or be scrutinised in advance, or that a cost-benefit analysis be undertaken and shared with Members of this House. That is a lot of money spent on meters which because of the Government's latest U-turn will not be used. At some stage we need accountability from the Government on that.

The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy White, said he was unhappy with the Economic Management Council, that he understood it would be subject to review and that there would be changes to its status before the lifetime of this Government ended. Could the Taoiseach confirm if that is the case and does he have plans to change the status of the Economic Management Council?

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy started by saying he had asked me two questions that I did not answer and he finished up on meters and water, and all of that, through the EMC. Question No. 3 asks the position regarding the Economic Management Council and Question No. 6 asks the position regarding the status of the Economic Management Council and if I would make a statement on the matter. I answered the two questions and I made a statement on the matter but I will make it again. The Economic Management Council continues *in situ* and the status of the EMC is that of a Cabinet committee, which has only four members. The Deputy questions its constitutionality. It has been set up in accordance with Cabinet procedures and is a very

important entity.

I made a point last week in this general discussion which Deputy Martin should bear in mind. The last Government comprised his party and the Green Party with the support of Ms Harney. The problem was that for 12 months before it actually happened this country was on a slide into an economic abyss and the Department of Finance was not talking to the Department of the Taoiseach or anybody else. The Deputy was present at Cabinet meetings where I do not know whether this was discussed or not. The value of having an Economic Management Council was that the information relevant to the country's economic status was made available to the leaders of the parties and also the Ministers involved in this case. When this Government was appointed, we were able to share the information exactly as it was in its rawness and not have a situation where the Governor of the Central Bank was required to go into a telephone kiosk in Frankfurt and ring Ireland to say that the International Monetary Fund, IMF, was already in the country, while two of the Deputy's colleagues were on national television, saying they never heard anything about that, that they did not know it was in Ireland at all and saying, "Did you hear that?" and "I did not hear that either". The value of having it was to have an information flow between the senior members of Government, the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and in this case, the Ministers for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform so that we know the financial position of the country at all times. That is why, in part, by following a plan, and given the knowledge we had, we have been able to work with the people to bring the country to a point where we have now emerged from that and are deemed to be making a strong recovery. The next challenge is to build on that.

The Deputy has made the point about the Economic Management Council but not everything is discussed there, as he is aware. We had a Cabinet meeting this morning and there were 18 or 19 items on the agenda, none of which was discussed at the Economic Management Council because they were discussed, as everything else is, at a full Cabinet meeting. At a meeting before that there were 23 items and, as far as I can make out, one or two were discussed at part of an EMC meeting. Binding decisions are not made at the Economic Management Council; they are for that flow of information on the major economic issues. The Cabinet collectively discusses and debates those, if necessary, and comes to a decision. It is not a case of saying people must accept this but of having all the Ministers around the table for collective Cabinet responsibility and to make those decisions.

The Deputy also asked about water. I heard the comment of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy White, that the Economic Management Council served a purpose for a while when we were in an economic war. It still serves a very important purpose and will continue to do so. If I recall correctly, Deputy Martin supported and genuinely supports water contributions. It is hypocritical of him to come in here and say they should be scrapped, abolished and that there is no basis for it.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Irish Water should be abolished.

**The Taoiseach:** He set out a €400 charge with no relief.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That is not true.

**The Taoiseach:** We must get this right.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** This is more of the Taoiseach's dishonesty.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy's party put the Irish people first in line to suffer economically when it introduced the bank guarantee.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That is not true.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes, it is true.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** No. Fine Gael voted for it.

**The Taoiseach:** It is now changed.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** What about the October Paris statement?

**The Taoiseach:** The Irish people are now first in line to benefit from anything-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach is a hypocrite.

**The Taoiseach:** -----that might come from the liquidation of the IBRC.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** He voted for the bank guarantee.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** The Deputy introduced it when he was in government.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach voted for it as Leader of the Opposition.

**The Taoiseach:** The next thing is this.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It borders on the unbelievable.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputy Martin also made the point-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I think the bank guarantee was the right thing to do, by the way. It had to be done.

**The Taoiseach:** -----that €500 million has been spent on water meters.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach thinks the same.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Why does the Deputy want to walk away from it now?

**The Taoiseach:** Water meters will deal with two issues - conservation and the determination of leaks.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That is not going to happen. They do not determine leaks.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy never wants to listen.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** He cannot remember either.

**The Taoiseach:** I have to say I have learned about this myself. It is very important to listen.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach is not listening.

**The Taoiseach:** When a water meter is installed, it is easy to determine whether there is a leak inside the house or between the meter and the house. The more leaks that are determined, the less treated water is wasted and, therefore, the less cost there is in having to produce it.

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When the country has been metered, obviously it will be very easy to determine the output from reservoirs and the input and throughput through houses. The system will work effectively. Any good plumber will say that when he or she is doing a job on a house.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** They have told me the opposite.

**The Taoiseach:** The establishment of Irish Water cost approximately €170 million. That has been saved on the-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Stop the raiméis.

**The Taoiseach:** -----restructuring of the tender-----

**Deputy Jonathan O'Brien:** That money has not even been spent yet.

**The Taoiseach:** -----and the restructuring at Ringsend.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** This has nothing to do with it.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes, it does.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Deputy Martin was in favour of it.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Order, please.

**The Taoiseach:** The realignment-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Stop.

**The Taoiseach:** -----of the upgrading of the Galway plant saves €100,000 a month.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach is taking the people for fools.

**The Taoiseach:** It is about time the Deputy began to look at the bigger picture, for example with regard to what we will have to do in the next 15 to 20 years. How will Dublin city be supplied with water?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach has not told anybody that.

**The Taoiseach:** Is it going to come down through Poulaphouca and Ballymore Eustace?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** He has told no one anything.

**The Taoiseach:** Does the Deputy think that if Dublin city expands by another 50,000 or 60,000 people-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Those plans are there anyway.

**The Taoiseach:** -----there will be enough water to deal with that?

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** He does not know.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Order, please.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputy Martin's party allowed a situation in which nothing was done with this country's piping system for 50 years. Is the Deputy aware that there are pipes in this city

that are caked inside and the bore is less than two inches when it should be much more than that? All of that has to be replaced. More than 1 million people are on a knife edge with an inadequate water supply. While the establishment of the Irish Water entity was certainly not without its controversies, it was-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That is an understatement

**The Taoiseach:** -----the right thing to do in the interests of conservation. If we are to have an effective system, we need to be able to fix what is wrong and to invest for the future. That is what it is about. The Deputy strayed from the question of the Economic Management Council and its constitutionality-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** No, I did not. The Economic Management Council voted for that money.

**The Taoiseach:** -----to the question of water and water meters.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Economic Management Council took the decisions on water.

**The Taoiseach:** I just thought the Deputy should know those things. The next time he is talking to a good plumber in Cork, he will be told that the value of having a meter is that it allows people to know what they are using and what they are losing.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** They cannot even read them.

**The Taoiseach:** That allows them to be fixed and investment to be made for the future.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** If the Economic Management Council has a function, I presume it is to try to set out the economic priorities of this Government, to look at value for money when it comes to big projects and to decide the broad parameters of raising revenue and collecting taxes. I expect that the four senior members of the Government - the Taoiseach and the other three Ministers - come up with recommendations and argue in favour of them at Cabinet meetings. I imagine that is broadly how it works. I would say the members of the Economic Management Council get their way most of the time within the broad parameters of economic priorities, tax policy and the big headline issues in terms of expenditure. It is very relevant to ask how the Economic Management Council got it so wrong in this case. The evidence that it got it so wrong has been manifest on the streets in recent weeks as people have reacted to the budget, the broad parameters of which were undoubtedly set out by the Economic Management Council.

I do not doubt - the Taoiseach can correct me if I am wrong - that the Economic Management Council must have discussed the response to the unprecedented popular protest after the budget, particularly on the issue of water charges. The proposals announced by the Minister, Deputy Kelly, were drawn up in response to the unprecedented outrage of the people of this country who told the Government that it got this wrong, that it was not listening to them, that it did not understand their needs and priorities and that they fundamentally disagreed with it on the issue of water charges and the whole Irish Water project. It is very relevant to ask how the Economic Management Council got it so wrong. Does it not prove that it is a dysfunctional entity? It is not the way to go about framing policy and making decisions on the key economic issues facing the people of this country. That is the lesson. There is much speculation about how many people will be on the streets tomorrow. I can tell the Taoiseach that it is going to be

massive. Any illusion he may have had that-----

**Deputy James Bannon:** Will there be 1 million people there?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** There will be a minimum of 50,000 people there. It will be probably be a hell of a lot bigger than that.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I thought the organisers were talking about 150,000 people.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I remind the Deputies that tomorrow is a weekday. It will probably be a lot bigger than that. For that to happen on a weekday, after the Economic Management Council has signed off on the package I have mentioned, will be an enormous vote of no confidence in the Government and the Economic Management Council, both of which have failed to understand what the people of this country are saying about water charges and more generally about the Government's economic priorities and tax policies. That is what is being said. It will be said again in the most unequivocal terms. Is it not time for the Taoiseach to step back? I absolutely guarantee him that this is what will happen tomorrow. I wonder what his reaction will be. Will he have the humility to say "we got it wrong and we are going to listen"?

I have to make a further comment on the whole issue of value for money and metering, etc. I do not know who is writing this spin for the Taoiseach. If he wants to talk to a plumber about metering, conservation and value for money, he will be told that district meters are a much cheaper and more effective way of ascertaining whether there are major leaks out of pipes in any particular area.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** That is not true.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It is true.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** It is rubbish.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I did not ask Deputy Durkan.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is true.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** It is not true.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Other technicalities are associated with domestic meters.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Has the Taoiseach discussed district meters? Plumbers and people who work in the water infrastructure system tell me-----

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** You cannot detect individual leaks with district meters.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I did not ask you, Bernard.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** This is rubbish.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** People who have worked in the water infrastructure system for decades have told me that just one district meter, rather than hundreds of meters, could cover all the households in an estate or a local area.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Will they show where the leak is?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** They can be used to determine how much water is going into that locality.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I did it before.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** The Deputy does not want to hear this because it drives a coach and horses through the Government's argument.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I lived with it.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Will you please ask him to shut up, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle?

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I ask Deputy Boyd Barrett to conclude. I am sure the Taoiseach wants to answer the question.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I am sorry, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. The Deputy was making a Second Stage speech.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** They know what the average usage for a household is. If it exceeds the amount of water going into a particular area, they can work it out.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** That is not true.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** By the way, it measures the amount of water in the pipes going into the area, rather than the amount of water between the meter and the household. It is more effective. A much smaller number of meters is needed. It is much cheaper. Did the Economic Management Council discuss things like that? Can the Taoiseach confirm that Siemens offered to do the whole thing much more cheaply? I understand it offered to do it for free. I have a big question. What was the procedure for giving the contract for the metering to GMC Sierra? Were all the procedures complied with fully? Some serious questions need to be asked about the process of tendering this out. Did it fully comply with the protocols for outsourcing these things? It appears that there were cheaper offers. I am not in favour of metering at all, but it seems that there was a ready-up in terms of who was going to get the contract. My fundamental point is about how the Economic Management Council, EMC, has got it wrong. Has that not been proven by what we have seen on the streets and what we will see there again tomorrow? Will the Taoiseach go outside and listen to people tomorrow when they tell him that the EMC got it wrong?

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Where does one start?

**The Taoiseach:** First of all, the Deputy made the point about the Economic Management Council and the work that it does. Then he branched into the pipeline for water. The Bill dealing with that will be debated later tonight. There is plenty of time over the next period to discuss that.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It is about the Taoiseach's role in it.

**The Taoiseach:** The Economic Management Council has a duty to consider some of the major implications in terms of infrastructure that we have to look at for the next number of years. For instance, what does one do in terms of financing broadband for the country outside

the cities and bigger towns? How does one do that? Is it to be by private contractors? Is it to be by the ESB being able to form a company or a relationship with a supply company and bring it in on the wires? What is the duty of the State in terms of providing its contribution to this where commercial companies might not go? If we are serious about providing broadband throughout the country, how is that connectivity to be provided: public-private partnership, PPP, direct build, commercial entities or the State? Is that, for instance, to be considered for some of the funding that may come from the Juncker investment scheme?

The same applies in the case of social housing. The Government has put up €2.2 billion in this respect. Is there an opportunity for further funding, for PPP investment, for social housing? These are matters that need to be considered and reflected on.

For instance, what does one do with the remainder of the share that Ireland holds in Bank of Ireland? We put in €4 billion; we have got back €6 billion. That is a profit for the taxpayer. The Minister is very clear, in that he is not going to sell the shares in Bank of Ireland, yet we own the vast majority of AIB, as the Deputy is aware. How does one value that? What does one want to do with it? Does one make a decision to test its value by putting up a portion of it for analysis and, if so, how? These are the bigger matters that need to be considered in the interests of the country, and it is right and proper that things of that scale should be considered by the Economic Management Council.

In regard to Irish Water, the Economic Management Council did not go through all of the details. It has had the 34 local authorities, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Irish Water itself, the regulator and so on. Each of these has its own responsibilities and its own matters to attend to. The Deputy seems to assume that the Economic Management Council was involved in tightening every jubilee clip and handling every monkey wrench that went out to put in meters.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** No, I am not saying that.

**The Taoiseach:** This is not the case. I do not know whether the Deputy was ever in a trench himself having to deal with one of those things but, believe me, it is an experience.

For instance, we discussed the question of homelessness. What does one do with an issue that has been around for a long time? The point was that, in addition to the Cabinet sub-committees, which I chair myself, the Minister, Deputy Kelly, and the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey - this was reflected at some element of the EMC in the past - conducted the meetings with the NGOs on Thursday, the lord mayor on Friday, came to the Cabinet committee yesterday and brought their business before the Cabinet this morning, where it was endorsed and set out as a way of dealing with the principal priority of rough sleeping in Dublin and other cities - Cork, to a lesser extent Limerick, to a lesser extent Galway and so on - and then making arrangements as to how one is going to get the voided units renovated and fixed up so that they are suitable for individuals or for families, and the bigger build by providing proper housing through the expenditure of the €2.2 billion. That is what is involved there.

Deputy Boyd Barrett asked me if I would be out listening. There is a debate on homelessness in the Chamber tomorrow, obviously arising from the unfortunate tragedy across the road that needs to be dealt with. The Minister, Deputy Kelly, and the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, are leading that. I hope to contribute to that debate at some stage, but I have listened to the people who came to my office. I have listened to the many people who protested and who rang

up, some in not very polite language, I might say, or some who sent messages of a particular kind. In any event, what they did say was that they wanted clarity, they wanted certainty, they wanted to know about affordability, they wanted to know about the entity of Irish Water and it being retained in public ownership, and they wanted to know what was going to happen after 2019. All of those issues have been dealt with as fairly and as clearly and as definitively as can be by the Government. The cost, as the Deputy knows, for somebody who registers and gets €100 back is €1.15 per week for a single person or for a single person with children under 18 and €3 where it is two or more adults in the house, with children being free. There is no cut-off. There is no reduced pressure. The first leak is fixed. It is possible to beat the meter, unlike what Deputy Martin says, by being able to conserve water and understand it. Obviously, Irish Water will be retained in public ownership. Legislation will be drafted so that if some future Government were to say “We want to privatise it”, it would have to go and have a referendum. Nobody is going to do that anyway. The last public entity that was sold was Eircom, and we saw what happened there with asset stripping over a period, which turned out to be a complete disaster. The Deputy knows who did that.

There is a situation that Deputy Boyd Barrett will understand. Across rural Ireland, water has been paid for for very many years. Some people have had to put in private wells. It might be €5,000 or €6,000 to bore a well - the pipes, the pumps, the chemicals, the salt and all of that.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** The State should have paid for that, too.

**The Taoiseach:** It is a contribution every year of a pretty significant amount. Let me give the Deputy an example of three very small rural schemes down the west of 1,200 houses, fragmented holdings, long boreens and all of that, bad sources and everything. They are paying serious money every year.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** They should not have to.

**The Taoiseach:** They bundled them all together with the local authority at the time and the then Department of the Environment, fenced off the sources, put in proper pumps, fixed the leaks, and put a meter on every farm for every trough and for every house. In the first year, those 1,200 houses saved 500 million litres of water. Those people are very happy in the knowledge that they know exactly what they are using and they are paying a hell of a lot less than they used to before. It is about the conservation of water. The more leaks that are fixed, the less treated water is lost and, therefore, the less the cost of producing water. Therefore, one is going to have a much more efficient system.

Deputy Boyd Barrett is a vociferous Deputy who lives in the greater Dublin area. This is a conurbation that needs attention in terms of water. All of these kilometres of pipes that are ruptured and are leaking 40% of the water in them at the moment need to be fixed. In the next 20 years, long after I am gone out of this House, the situation in so far as this, an expanding city, is concerned is that it will need a new major supply of water. It is not going to get it just coming out of the heavens. One has to be able to invest for the future.

I made the point - I think to Deputy Martin - the other day that 1,000 boil water notices went out to Williamstown in east Galway, as the Leas-Cheann Comhairle will know, and right over into west Roscommon. There are small schemes with turloughs and poor surface supplies. That needs to be dealt with properly and in a coherent fashion. The solution identified in the longer term is to supply that from Lough Mask, which currently supplies most of south Mayo

and off into that region.

That is where we need to be. That is the story that Irish Water will be for the next 50 years - to invest and supply and provide a proper scale of clean water. When major pharma companies decide to site in Ireland, they require huge volumes of water, as do software companies. It is very important for consumers, for business and for industry alike that we have this.

The Deputy asked me about humility and getting it wrong. I would say that we certainly did not get it right, but we did listen to the concerns of the people. In respect of clarity, definition, affordability, fairness, the future, public ownership, first leak, no cut-off and no reduced pressure, all of these things have been answered and dealt with. They are now clarified. The Bill is going through the House. I might add that there has been no guillotine this year, and there will not be any guillotine this year. If the House has to sit Saturday, Sunday and Monday, that is what will happen.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Will the Taoiseach explain how the Economic Management Council relates to the full Cabinet? Are there any written formulations in regard to what powers the Cabinet has given the council and whether the latter can work independently of the Cabinet in some circumstances? For example, if there is no Cabinet meeting after a serious decision is taken at the council, is that decision deemed to be Government policy and does it go ahead?

The Taoiseach referred to the two hapless Fianna Fáil Ministers who apparently did not know that secret discussions were going on behind the scenes in 2010 to bring the troika - the representatives of European and world capitalism - to this country to ensure the financial system it represented was not in any way threatened by the Irish people refusing to pay off debts that were not theirs to bankers and bondholders. I remember all of that well. However, did the Taoiseach not leave his Cabinet colleagues in the dark on a related issue not too long after he came into Government? Will he tell us about the infamous day that Monsieur Trichet, the then President of the European Central Bank, telephoned him and the Minister for Finance when he got wind that they were talking about burning some bondholders and that the Minister for Finance was going to come into the Dáil - as I recall, it was to be at 4.30 in the afternoon - to make an announcement along those lines? The Taoiseach and Minister were threatened by the President of the European Central Bank that a financial bomb would go off, not in Frankfurt but in Dublin, if that was done. They ran into this Chamber like scalded cats, having crossed out the part of the Minister's speech that would have relayed the burning of bondholders, with that action dropped completely. Will the Taoiseach confirm this happened with no consultation with the full Cabinet and, in fact, that a previous decision of Cabinet was overturned by the Economic Management Council?

Since she was appointed to that role, has the Tánaiste confided in the Taoiseach whether she is still experiencing the angst she previously referred to with regard to the working of the Economic Management Council? Her view before her elevation was that the council was too powerful and too centralised, did not fit with the idea of open government and excluded what she considered important members of the Cabinet like herself? Does she still suffer these misgivings about the exclusion of her Cabinet colleagues now that she is inside the tent or has she accommodated herself happily to this power structure?

I am a little reluctant to start talking about water charges, but I will say that the Taoiseach should have listened to the people on this issue. He should have gone the whole hog, because his concessions will not be accepted. People are not fools; they know that as soon as the pres-

sure is off, the initial plan for massive charges and €1 billion to €1.3 billion being taken from the pockets of the people, moneys they have already paid through their general taxes, will proceed. If the Taoiseach still does not listen, he will be faced with a huge boycott next April that will dog him right up to the general election and have a huge impact in that election. I advise him, in the quietness of the Chamber, to cut his losses and abolish the water tax, full stop. He should, for once, do what the people want.

The Taoiseach and his Fianna Fáil colleagues have a neck to portray themselves as water conservationists. Since Fine Gael went into Government in 1994, some 500,000 new homes have been built. In that period, neither Fine Gael in Government nor any of the Governments led by Fianna Fáil made the changes we called for during our anti-water charges campaign in the 1990s. We called at that time for conservation measures to be included in the building regulations and factored into the construction of homes by developers, and outlined how it should be done. Nobody in Government lifted a figure over that period, with the result that billions of litres of pristine drinking water, purified at the expense of the people, are going into the sewers. That would not be happening if people in government had listened and brought about the types of conservation measures that other countries - even capitalist countries, like Denmark - have implemented in order to reduce consumption. This Government has no credentials when it comes to conservation. As it happens, conservation has disappeared from the narrative in any case. Perhaps the Taoiseach will tell us where it went. It has been disappeared as effectively as any Stalinist politburo could disappear an issue when the line changes, with no discussion of why it changed or whether it was a mistake that it was initially put forward.

I hope the Taoiseach has taken note of these points and will come back to me on them one by one.

**The Taoiseach:** I take the Deputy's point regarding conservation, and he is right about it. This matter has been a source of discussion at local authority meetings and Department meetings over the years. We have seen on the Continent, going back a number of years, a far sharper and more effective method of collecting rainwater for use in gardens, for car washing and all of that. I see water conservation being part of the reconstruction and renovation of houses scheme in respect of which a €200 million investment is being made. Energy refits are part of all that. I note that a number of firms are designing water collection tanks to suit the particular contours of houses and garages. I have heard several people on different radio stations outlining various tips and methods householders can use to conserve water. I am sure people will follow that advice because it is very informative.

I always say to Deputy Higgins that he knows well, as a man from southern Ciarraí, that somebody must pay for the clean water that comes out when one turns the tap. Perhaps it is when the Deputy crosses the border of the Pale and into Dublin that his attitude changes and he decides this resource should be free. Yes, people pay their taxes generally, but when these taxes are all put on the table and divided up between hospitals, schools and other bits and pieces, there never has been enough for water or sewerage infrastructure. That is why it is important to set up Uisce Éireann and have it be able to invest independently of Government. On the occasions when I am in that beloved part of our country that the Deputy calls home, I see that the people of Daingean Uí Chúis know very well that when one invests in taking water from a reservoir or wherever, somebody has to pay for it. It is the same in this city and everywhere else. The water that falls from the sky and the water in our lakes and rivers must be treated at a cost before being distributed through inferior mains in this city for the use of the people. What we are doing is asking them for a contribution to that.

I am not going to inform the Deputy about the issues discussed at meetings of the EMC. As the latter is a Cabinet committee, the matters it discusses and deals with are protected under the Constitution. However, the EMC does not replace the Cabinet, to which collective responsibility applies, in the context of making decisions. As I pointed out to Deputy Martin, what is involved is having an understanding of the scale of particular economic or budgetary issues and that this be reflected in the discussion between the Ministers and leaders involved with the EMC. When the council refers a matter to Cabinet, it is not a case of it being a *fait accompli*. Rather, the council's members will outline the situation and the options involved and then the Cabinet will make a decision.

The Tánaiste is a very thorough and fulsome contributor to the EMC. She makes very valuable contributions at its meetings-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** So when one becomes Tánaiste, one becomes supportive of it.

**The Taoiseach:** -----and she has done so on a number of occasions in respect of important issues. In all honesty, it is not a case of four people entering a room, making a decision and then stating that the Cabinet will accept it. We discuss matters of economic planning or, in some instances, budgetary issues to see if it might be possible to adopt a particular approach in respect of them and then ask the Cabinet, in turn, to discuss and make decisions in respect of them. I reiterate that the Tánaiste is a very worthwhile and fulsome contributor to the discussions the EMC has on such matters. The EMC does not replace the collective responsibility of the Cabinet and never will, nor was it ever intended to do so.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** In the context of Jean-Claude Trichet, did the Taoiseach revert to the Cabinet before announcing in the Dáil that the bondholders would not be burned?

**Deputy Jonathan O'Brien:** I do not know whether the Taoiseach's concluding remark to the effect that the EMC is not a replacement for the Cabinet in terms of its collective responsibility is true. Personally, I do not believe it to be true. When the Government first entered office, it was obliged to deal with the economic crisis and the troika and the Taoiseach obviously felt that the best, most cohesive and most coherent way to proceed was by establishing the EMC. As the Taoiseach stated, this probably had much to do with ensuring the flow of information in order that everyone would be aware of the exact nature of the challenges involved and decide how best to try to deal with them. If that was the case, that was the Taoiseach's prerogative. However, accusations have been made with regard to the nature of the EMC and the role it plays. Those accusations need to be answered.

If it is the case that the discussions which take place at Economic Management Council level involve putting a number of options on the table and then bringing them to Cabinet for decision, that is fine. However, an accusation has been made to the effect that a number of key decisions have been made by the EMC and then brought to the Cabinet to be rubber-stamped. As I am sure the Taoiseach is aware, I am one of the new cohort of Deputies and I have never been in government. I am not familiar, therefore, with the complexities relating to how the Cabinet works. I understand, however, that only two individuals who are not members of the Cabinet are permitted to attend its meetings, namely, the Attorney General and - I may be wrong in this regard - a secretary to the Taoiseach, whereas a number of senior civil servants and political advisers attend meetings of the EMC. If that is the position, is there not a risk that such civil servants and advisers are having an influence on the matters which can be decided upon by the council and passed on to the Cabinet for final decision?

The Taoiseach indicated that the EMC does not replace the Cabinet in the context of its decision-making powers. However, a former journalist who worked as a special adviser to Deputy Quinn when he served as Minister for Education and Skills recently authored a book, *An Education - How An Outsider Became an Insider and Learned What Really Goes on in Irish Government*, in which he stated that one of the decisions made at EMC level and brought to the Cabinet to be rubber-stamped was that relating to changes to the pupil-teacher ratio, PTR, announced in budget 2012. The individual in question stated that the matter was presented to Cabinet as a *fait accompli* and that the EMC had decided that to meet the particular challenges facing the Department of Education and Skills, changing the PTR was the way to proceed. The Taoiseach may be able to confirm whether that was the case or whether the EMC gives individual Ministers a particular pot of money and grants them complete discretion regarding how it is spent. Is it the case that decisions relating to changing the PTR are the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Skills or are these signed off at Economic Management Council level? It is critical that an answer be provided in this regard because we need to know whether decisions are being made at EMC level or by the Cabinet.

I do not really want to go into great detail in respect of water services. However, there is also an issue in this regard in the context of where the responsibility for making decisions lies. Deputy Martin referred to an amount of €500 million and other Deputies mentioned the water metering programme. I am of the view that what is happening is a fiasco. The Taoiseach states that water meters are required outside every individual home and that such meters serve a purpose in the context of conservation. I represent the same constituency as the Minister of State, Deputy Dara Murphy, with whom the Taoiseach is having a conversation at present. The Minister of State may be aware that water meters were recently installed in a particular estate in the constituency. There are no footpaths in the estate - which encompasses Roches Buildings - and when people exit through their front doors, they come straight out onto the road. The meters which were installed have been rendered useless because they were destroyed when bin trucks drove over them. That is the type of planning which marks the process to install water meters. There is an argument to be made regarding the value of this process.

Will the Taoiseach indicate whether it is the case that decisions on policies relating to Departments are made at EMC level or are a number of options presented to the various Ministers, who then have autonomy to make their own decisions?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Will the Taoiseach also investigate the possibility of installing the district meters to which I refer?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I put three questions to the Taoiseach in respect of the Economic Management Council. He dismissed any concerns relating to the EMC. However, it was the Tánaiste, Deputy Burton, who first articulated major concerns about the council. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Coveney, and the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy White, have done likewise. As Deputy O'Brien indicated, a former special adviser to the previous Minister for Education and Skills has confirmed that the Cabinet simply rubber-stamps decisions such as that relating to the cut in the pupil-teacher ratio and that those decisions are actually taken by the EMC. The bottom line is that there are some serious constitutional implications regarding the EMC as an entity. The council makes the major decisions in respect of the budget.

The Taoiseach might say that there are 19 or 20 items on the agenda at any Cabinet meeting. Many of these might relate to appointments to State boards or the adoption of the reports of

semi-State bodies for publication. However, there is no doubt that the core decisions relating to budgetary matters have been taken by the EMC. The remaining members of the Cabinet have been made to look like puppets on a string. For them, it is a case of “do what you are told”. The Taoiseach stated that the reason for establishing the EMC was to facilitate the flow of information. That is not the reason. He also engaged in his usual cheap political commentary regarding the previous Government, etc. Two thirds of decisions relating to the fiscal correction this country has endured were taken by the previous Cabinet in its entirety. We did not need to establish an entity such as the Economic Management Council to do what was necessary or to identify where cuts should be made. The cuts and decisions which, unfortunately, had to be made and were discussed by all Ministers collectively.

**Deputy Dara Murphy:** Did the members of that Cabinet discuss the fact that the economy was spiralling out of control and that jobs were being lost?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and many of the other Deputies opposite voted against the measures introduced by the previous Government but they are now claiming credit for them. They are also claiming credit for the work the late Brian Lenihan did as Minister for Finance. However, that is politics.

The rationale put forward by the Taoiseach in respect of the establishment of the Economic Management Council does not hold water. Deputy Higgins made an extremely important point to which the Taoiseach, quite deliberately, failed to respond. Almost all of those in Cabinet were sitting over there on the fateful day to which the Deputy referred and we were all sitting here. There was a delay of over half an hour because the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, was not present. Why was that? It took a long time for us to learn - the Government was not forthcoming with the relevant information - that the Governor of the Central Bank had contacted the Minister for Finance by telephone. I do not believe he rang from a telephone kiosk, but he rang and said a bomb would go off. He said it would not go off in Frankfurt, but in Dublin, if any attempt was made to burn bondholders. That was not shared with the Oireachtas that day when the Minister came in late. The feedback to the journalists afterwards by the Cabinet Ministers was that they were taken aback and surprised. They were led to believe at the Cabinet meeting that there would be burning of bondholders and that the Minister for Finance would announce that. They were very shaken and surprised when he did not. There was a complete lack of transparency in the Oireachtas. This gives the lie to the rationale that the Taoiseach put forward for the establishment of the EMC, but it is Ministers themselves who have articulated that.

With regard to the bank guarantee, the Taoiseach keeps making charges. He voted for the bank guarantee and told the then Minister for Finance to do whatever it takes. He carries on as if he did not vote for it at all.

My view is that a guarantee was required at the time in question. It has been renewed by the present Government. The Taoiseach is on public record as accepting the position on bondholders was imposed by the European Central Bank on the then Irish Government. The Taoiseach said it publicly on the record, and repeated it in this House. Despite this, he comes in here and says different things when it suits him for cheap political point-scoring. He should be a little more honourable in regard to the bondholder question. The edict Mr. Trichet gave to the Minister for Finance demonstrates a similar position, by the ECB, on the burning of the bondholders and the failing banks. There was no bank resolution mechanism at the time in question and it did not want banks to collapse after the Lehman affair. That is the bottom line. In any event, those are the realities.

With regard to Irish Water, Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett is correct in so far as the Government now has to invent reasons to justify the expenditure of €500 million on water meters. The Taoiseach is now going around the place pretending the whole thing was about conservation in the first instance. However, if one looks at the original proposals, one realises the whole point of water meters was to deal with the allowances, thresholds of use and so on. The bottom line is now that the EMC agreed all this. It agreed with the off-balance-sheet method of funding and with spending the €500 million. The other Cabinet members just nodded this through without scrutiny or accountability. There was not even accountability in this House. Does the Taoiseach accept that? It was rammed through here in two hours. There was a walkout by all the Opposition parties on the day in protest over the Government's dismissal of democracy and the House itself in regard to the water charges regime to be introduced and the establishment of Irish Water, in particular. I do not believe there was any cost-benefit analysis undertaken by the EMC or the Government on water metering. I have not seen it.

The Taoiseach mentioned plans. There were lots of plans and more than €500 million was spent on water infrastructure. In my city, the main drainage project was built and this involved massive investment by the local authority. It was overseen by the then Government. There were similar infrastructural projects in other locations. Of course, much more remains to be done but there has been no plan presented in this House of which I am aware yet. There has been no plan regarding what is intended to happen and the priorities. Deputy Barry Cowen has been asking about this for 12 to 15 months.

To suggest, as the Taoiseach has done in his reply, that the EMC is just a mere Cabinet committee is to give a dishonest portrayal of what the EMC really is. The EMC calls the shots in this Government. Essentially, it represents a tier of decision-making that was never envisaged by the Constitution. I have one slight disagreement with Deputy O'Brien in that it is not the prerogative of the Taoiseach to do something like this. The Constitution lays down the framework for how Cabinet decisions should be taken. Essentially, a new tier has been established that is taking the real decisions, including fiscal and budgetary decisions, decisions on bodies such as Irish Water and decisions that affect every Department. One is required to accept them irrespective of whether one likes them.

The Taoiseach did not respond to my point on the health service. The former Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly, was told to accept the medical card probity figure. That is what caused the disaster of discretionary medical cards being taken from children with life-limiting conditions. An arrogant edict from the EMC dictated the budget and that the Minister must stick with it. That is what happened in this regard.

Unprecedentedly and incredibly, the former Minister for Health came into the House on budget day and announced the figure was not accurate or real and that he did not come up with it. He said he was told to live with the figure. That is how undemocratic circumstances became within the Cabinet. The former Minister should have resigned on that day because he could not stand over his own Estimate. If he was given an Estimate that was inaccurate, dishonest and untrue, he should have resigned there and then as Minister for Health. We now know the figure was untrue, that the presentation by the Minister for Finance on the day was dishonest and that the Cabinet signed off like a puppet to edicts of the EMC on how individual departmental budgets were to be allocated. Now the largest Supplementary Estimate on record is to be allocated in the area of health because of the dishonest Estimate in question.

I remind the Taoiseach that his Cabinet colleagues were the first to raise the undemocratic

nature of the EMC, and they were protesting loudly behind his back to anybody who would listen over the regime that had been introduced. Deputy Joan Burton, before she became Tánaiste, was very negative about the EMC. The Taoiseach now seems to have confirmed that such negativity is gone and that she is now a very positive contributor and has lost any reservations she might have had. They seem to have been passed on seamlessly to her rival in the leadership battle, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Alex White, who will now drum them up, perhaps for the next leadership battle in the Labour Party; I do not know.

### **Order of Business**

**The Taoiseach:** It is proposed to take No. 15, Supplementary Estimates for Public Services [Votes 35 and 36], back from committee; No. 16, motion re membership of committee; and No. 31, Water Services Bill 2014 - Committee and Remaining Stages, to adjourn after one hour if not previously concluded. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later and business shall adjourn on the adjournment of No. 31; and Nos. 15 and 16 shall be decided without debate and, in the case of No. 15, Votes 35 and 36 shall be moved together and decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and any division demanded thereon shall be taken forthwith. Private Members' business shall be No. 175, motion re Palestine.

Tomorrow's business after Oral Questions shall be No. 32, statements on homelessness. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the following arrangements shall apply in relation to No. 32: the statement of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed ten minutes in each case, and such Members may share their time; the statement of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case, and such Members may share their time; and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** There are three proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with the late sitting agreed to?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** My party is not agreeing to the late sitting. It is appalling and farcical what is going on. I genuinely say that. There is no need for this. We are debating the order of today's business at 7.50 p.m.

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** It is a joke.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is farcical.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** The night is young yet.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It would not happen in any organisation.

**The Taoiseach:** The motion of confidence-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** That is not the reason.

**The Taoiseach:** It is the reason.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is not the reason. We could have had the motion of confidence and the Private Members' motion, and that would be that. There is no need for this.

**The Taoiseach:** We just had it.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is just an awful ramshackle, ham-fisted-----

*(Interruptions).*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Sorry, please.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is a ham-fisted, ridiculous and farcical way of ordering the business of this House. I would ask the Taoiseach to postpone No. 31, for example, which is to be debated for just one hour before adjourning, which could potentially bring us through to 1.30 a.m. or 1.45 a.m.

**Deputy Emmet Stagg:** 2 o'clock.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** 2 o'clock? Have we lost our marbles in this House completely?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank Deputy Martin.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Has the Taoiseach not learned anything from the last occasion when we-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Martin has made the point.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** One second, a Cheann Comhairle; this is important - when we went beyond midnight-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I know it is important but it is also important-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----and how that disgraced the House and the public perception of the House? The Taoiseach is now going to say, as people prepare to march, that we will bury the water issue to the middle of the night. We are talking about trying to attract people, particularly women, into politics, and there are lifestyle issues. There is no basis whatsoever for meeting at 11 o'clock tonight.

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** All Deputies, when we meet in corridors, will ask each other-----

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** This is madness.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----what we are doing here.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Madness.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Who will be listening at midnight-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Martin has had his say.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----or 1 a.m. to us debating issues like this? It is unacceptable.

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**Deputy Noel Grealish:** They should put it on to Friday.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Am I in a position to table an amendment?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Unfortunately, Deputy Martin cannot. He can vote against.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I ask the Taoiseach-----

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Would they go to 3 o'clock on Friday?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Instead of keeping on saying "No", I am asking the Taoiseach sincerely. This is ridiculous. The debate on Committee Stage will adjourn, which means it can be continued again. We are talking about an hour for the Water Services Bill. I ask the Taoiseach not to take that this evening-----

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Put it on to Friday.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----and we could do it on another occasion.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Dé hAoine.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank Deputy Martin. He has made his point.

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Put it on to 2 o'clock on Friday.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Questions to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have to be taken tonight. In fairness to all those who are responsible, Topical Issue Matters and Private Members' business have to be taken.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** We have no problem with that.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** However, allocating one hour for the Committee Stage of the Water Services Bill-----

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Crazy.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** -----at midnight and going on until possibly 1 o'clock or after is completely unnecessary.

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Madness.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** There is provision for a Friday sitting to finish the Water Services Bill. I say to the Taoiseach to put that hour to Thursday and Friday. Otherwise, he will have Deputies going home to their families at 2 a.m. or 2.30 a.m.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** They are lucky if they can go home to their families.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Some of the same Members must be back in here at 9.30 a.m. for committees and for questions. We are talking about making the Dáil more family-friendly, etc. That is a simple issue to resolve.

**The Taoiseach:** As the Minister of State, Deputy McHugh, commented, it is lucky for some if they can go home to their families.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Every night.

**The Taoiseach:** This is the first time I have heard of an Opposition not wanting a debate on an issue that has-----

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** That has nothing to do with it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please.

**The Taoiseach:** -----been so controversial for the past number of years. Deputy Martin did not state that his party would give us a guarantee now that this will finish Committee and Report Stages on Thursday without a guillotine. I will not guillotine this Bill and the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Kelly, is adamant that there be one hour's debate on it this evening. The Government Deputies have no problem in staying here tomorrow, Thursday or Friday. None

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** That is his legacy.

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Why not put that hour onto Friday?

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** The Minister's legacy.

**The Taoiseach:** It is most unusual that the Opposition Members seem to find the heat in the kitchen a little too much here. They want to go home and have a rest.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Nonsense.

**The Taoiseach:** If they are here to work and legislate, then that is the business that we are in.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** The Taoiseach is in charge.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes. We are telling Deputy Higgins that, after the motion on Palestine, we will have one hour's debate on Committee Stage.

**Deputy Noel Grealish:** Why can we not have it on Friday?

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** It is Report Stage. It can be completed on Thursday and Friday.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputies.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** A Cheann Comhairle-----

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I am sorry, a Cheann Comhairle, this is clear-cut.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** No. I am putting the question.

**The Taoiseach:** I am quite sure if I said to Deputies Martin and Higgins that we will suspend this hour, they would be crowing about something else.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** The Taoiseach-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Martin should resume his seat. I am putting the question: "That the proposal for dealing with the late sitting be agreed to." Is that agreed?

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**Deputy Micheál Martin:** Hold on a second, a Cheann Comhairle. The Taoiseach's response has been ignorant, arrogant, dismissive and despicable.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** It is also despicable that Deputy Martin ignores the Chair and he should resume his seat.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** With the greatest respect, a Cheann Comhairle, there should be respect shown to this House. What the Taoiseach just did is an absolute disgrace.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Martin also must respect the Chair. He had his say. Would he please resume his seat?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** There is no question of anybody not wanting to debate something here-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Would Deputy Martin please resume his seat?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** -----but there is an issue about the order of this House, and going past midnight is an absolute joke.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Would Deputy Martin resume his seat and show some respect to the Chair?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** I am showing it correctly. With the greatest of respect, I have never initiated the kind of behaviour that others have in this House, but this is going a step too far.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please. Deputy Martin had his say and I put the question.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** To get that glib, arrogant, ignorant response from the Taoiseach is unacceptable.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** On a point of order-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The question has been put. There is no point of order.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** On a point of order-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Mattie McGrath should resume his seat. We are in the middle of putting the question.

Question, "That the proposal for dealing with the late sitting be agreed to", put and declared carried.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the proposal for dealing with Nos. 15 and 16 agreed to?

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** On No. 15, if I could get clarification, what Departments are involved there?

**The Taoiseach:** Defence.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is that proposal agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 32, statements on homelessness, tomorrow, agreed to? Agreed. I call Deputy Martin on the Order of Business.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** A speech was made in the House last Wednesday on a serious issue and material that was disseminated, individually, to members of the Committee of Public Accounts. I wish to invoke Standing Order 59. In essence, as a House we need clarification on this because names were mentioned in the House and those who were mentioned have categorically denied any assertions or allegations that were contained in that material. It was wrong and out of order for Deputy Mary Lou McDonald to name names in the context in which she did. In particular, the individuals concerned need to know how they can get redress or, in essence, get their names cleared on the record and their reputations cleared as well.

I ask the Taoiseach as well the status of the documentation and material that the authorised officer has disclosed to 13 members of the Committee of Public Accounts in terms of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. My understanding is that the parliamentary legal adviser to the Oireachtas is concerned that names could not be mentioned and that the Committee of Public Accounts did not have jurisdiction over the issue and could not inquire into it, and yet it seems that some sort of shadow inquiry is under way. The Revenue Commissioners were before that committee last week and there may be more discussions around it. We are either holding an inquiry or we are not. There is an issue around the legal advice pertaining to the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. These are important issues for all of us in the Oireachtas, but particularly for those who were named because they have had no chance to have their names cleared and no mechanism has been provided to them to enable them to have the allegations and assertions withdrawn.

There is comprehensive and extensive documentation on this issue within the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

Comprehensive material going back a number of years is available and the members of the Committee of Public Accounts have not had access to it. All of the material was sent to the Garda fraud squad, the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Revenue Commissioners, the Mahon tribunal and the Moriarty tribunal. All of those had extensive powers to investigate the issues raised. Their powers were far more extensive than those of the authorised officer as section 19 investigations are by definition preliminary. This is a legal matter. It has been laid down in law, and in the courts, that due to the very preliminary nature of a *8 o'clock* section 19 investigation, the material must be sent on to prosecuting authorities and bodies that can investigate. That has happened, but it seems to me that pending any deliberations by the committee or this House, it was wrong to name the names in that manner. Under Standing Order 59, I ask that either you, a Cheann Comhairle, would make a decision on the matter or that it would be referred to the Committee on Procedure and Privileges, in terms of the decision by Deputy Mary Lou McDonald to put the names on the record of the House, notwithstanding the categorical denials by the people concerned that they never had such accounts or were never involved in any way. They have said that publicly. There is a need for what was said to be withdrawn from the public record.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** An official written complaint has been made to me by a former Member, Mary Harney, and the matter has been referred to the Committee on Procedure and Privileges. It is hoped that it and other matters will be dealt with by the committee next week.

**Deputy Jonathan O'Brien:** I will be brief. Statements on domestic violence were due to take place this week but have been knocked off the schedule by the motion of confidence and

the Water Services Bill. Could I get an assurance that the statements will be taken next week if possible? That would be important given the time of year.

I also wish to inquire about the Constitutional Convention. The Taoiseach gave a personal commitment that time would be allocated to discuss some of the issues arising from the convention. Will discussion of the reports be scheduled for next week?

I presume the school admissions Bill will not be published in this session, but could I get a commitment or some indication of when the Bill will be published?

**The Taoiseach:** We have given a commitment through the Chief Whip on the discussions on domestic violence and the Constitutional Convention. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien is aware business was disrupted but it might be possible to have the discussion on domestic violence next week. If not, it will get plenty of time after Christmas. The Chief Whip will advise the Deputy in respect of the debate on the Constitutional Convention. It is not a case of not wanting to hold such debates; it is rather that the schedule was disrupted for other reasons.

**Deputy Jonathan O'Brien:** What about the school admissions Bill?

**The Taoiseach:** The Bill should be published before the end of this session.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I wish to ask the Taoiseach about two pieces of legislation, one of which is in view of the fact that EirGrid has now called for a proper public consultation. When will the heads of the EirGrid Bill be introduced in the Dáil?

In view of what I said earlier today about people being hounded by NAMA, when will the Central Bank consolidation Bill be introduced? I spoke about the destruction of a family in Tipperary where the husband, the breadwinner and main businessman, lost his life due to pressure from banks and his widow and family are being terrorised by NAMA, an organ of the State. We must control the action of the banks and ensure some manners and respect from such people.

**The Taoiseach:** I do not have a date for the Central Bank consolidation legislation. I expect the EirGrid Bill to be published by early summer 2015.

**Deputy James Bannon:** Significant progress has been made on the abolition of quangos and the merger of various Government bodies since the Government took office. We have streamlined a lot of services and made Government smaller and cheaper to run. We promised a wholesale reform of the public sector, including accountability, performance and transparency in this area. When can we expect the public sector standards Bill to come before the House?

**The Taoiseach:** For the information of Deputy Bannon, the public sector standards Bill is expected next year.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** When can we expect the publication of the retention of certain records Bill, which is to provide for the retention of records of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and also the Residential Institutions Redress Board and the residential institution review committee?

**The Taoiseach:** It will be next year. I will revert to Deputy Fitzpatrick with more detailed information.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** There is a Government proposal to underpin national climate

policy. The climate action and low carbon development Bill is promised. What is the progress to date in bringing the Bill before the House? Is the Bill might be expected to be passed by both Houses in the near future?

I understand a regulator has been appointed as per the terms of the Charities Act 2009. Are all aspects of the legislation likely to become operational in the near future?

**The Taoiseach:** The Bill has already passed but sections of it require an enactment order. The climate action and low carbon development Bill has been cleared by the Attorney General's office. It is expected to come before Cabinet next week and it should be published before the end of the session.

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** There is a proposal from Government to review national aviation policy. In the light of the proposal, is it possible for the Whips to arrange for a debate in the House on aviation policy, with particular emphasis on Cork Airport?

**The Taoiseach:** A Bill is not at issue but the House could have a useful debate on the matter sometime after Christmas.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** It is a bit late now.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Ó Feargháil.

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** That is Deputy Martin's legacy.

**Deputy Micheál Martin:** No, it is not. Deputy Buttimer got stitched up by his own side.

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** It is Deputy Martin's fault.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Did Members not hear me; I called Deputy Ó Feargháil.

**Deputy Patrick O'Donovan:** Do you not realise, a Cheann Comhairle, it is a county council meeting?

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** Could I ask when we can expect the public health (alcohol) Bill to come to the House? Have the heads of the Bill been considered by Government? We were given to understand that substantial work had been done in the area which involved examining minimum pricing, sports sponsorship and labelling of alcoholic products. We believe substantial work was done when Deputy Róisín Shortall was a Minister of State in the Department of Health. She is now long gone. Could the Taoiseach indicate what is happening to the Bill?

No. 101 on the C list is the low wage commission Bill. Much has been made of the low pay commission. Have the heads of the Bill been agreed by Cabinet as of yet and when is the Bill expected to come before the House?

**The Taoiseach:** Approval was given to draft the heads of the Bill and money was included in the accounts for next year for that purpose. In respect of the public health (alcohol) Bill, the heads were cleared by Cabinet and a good deal of work is going on in the Department of Health in that regard. I expect it will be early next year before the Bill is published.

**Deputy Frank Feighan:** When will the family leave Bill come before the House?

**The Taoiseach:** It will be early next year.

**Water Services Bill 2014: Second Stage (Resumed)**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A division was challenged last Friday on the question that the Water Services Bill 2014 be read a Second Time. In accordance with an order of the Dáil of 3 December 2014, that division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 71; Níl, 51.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Barry, Tom.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Creighton, Lucinda.</i>
<i>Byrne, Eric.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Conaghan, Michael.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>Higgins, Joe.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Keaveney, Colm.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Kirk, Seamus.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Kitt, Michael P.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Hannigan, Dominic.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>McLellan, Sandra.</i>
<i>Hayes, Tom.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Mathews, Peter.</i>

Dáil Éireann

<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
<i>Keating, Derek.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Lynch, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Lyons, John.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>	
<i>Neville, Dan.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Derek.</i>	
<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Joe.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
<i>Perry, John.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Twomey, Liam.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	

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

Question declared carried.

9 December 2014

**An Ceann Comhairle:** When is it proposed to take Committee Stage?

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Today.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is that agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 15 agreed? Would Members mind staying quiet until I put the questions?

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Others have to go and have their tea as well as everybody else. Please stop talking on the stairs and leave the Chamber if you want to have conversations. Did anybody hear what I said? Is it agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Derek Keating:** Where is Deputy Paul Murphy?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Sorry, would you mind your own business and stay quiet for a while?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** We know where he is.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** You would not get it in a crèche, never mind a primary school.

### **Estimates for Public Services 2014**

**The Taoiseach:** I move the following Supplementary Estimates:

#### **Vote 35 - Army Pensions (Supplementary)**

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €4,800,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2014, for retired pay, pensions, compensation, allowances and gratuities payable under sundry statutes to or in respect of members of the Defence Forces and certain other Military Organisations, etc., and for sundry contributions and expenses in connection therewith; for certain extra-statutory children's allowances and other payments and for sundry grants.

#### **Vote 36 - Defence (Supplementary)**

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2014, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Defence, including certain services administered by that Office; for the pay and expenses of the Defence Forces; and for payment of certain grants-in-aid.

Votes put and agreed to.

### **Membership of Committee: Motion**

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I move:

That Deputy John Paul Phelan be discharged from the Select Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality and that Deputy Fergus O'Dowd be appointed in substitution for him.

Question put and agreed to.

## Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)

### Priority Questions

#### National Cultural Institutions

87. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if it is still Government policy that all members of boards of national cultural institutions would serve on a *pro bono* basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47043/14]

**Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl:** This is like the start of the graveyard shift. The question simply seeks the Government to elucidate whether it and the Minister remain committed to the position as set out by her predecessor that members of the boards of the cultural institutions will serve on a *pro bono* basis.

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. In the context of the Government's public service reform plan published in November 2011, the Department conducted a critical examination of the structure and operation of a range of cultural institutions and bodies, including the National Gallery of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, the National Library, the National Museum, the National Archives, the Irish Manuscripts Commission and the National Concert Hall. The Government subsequently approved a number of key reforms arising from the review, including on governance, the reinforcement of curatorial independence and identity, shared supports and statutory underpinning.

The new arrangements envisage that, henceforth, the boards or equivalent structures at the institutions and bodies reviewed under the public service reform plan will operate on a *pro bono* basis. In advance of giving legal effect to these arrangements, the relevant bodies were requested to implement this policy on an administrative basis and all have done so.

The Department has drafted general schemes of Bills for a number of national cultural institutions, which have been approved by Government and submitted to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting. They have also been submitted to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht for pre-legislative scrutiny. A provision that the boards of the relevant institutions will operate on a *pro bono* basis is included in these general schemes.

**Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl:** I thank the Minister for her response and I acknowledge that when she recently made a detailed presentation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht we dealt with this issue, particularly as it relates to the Arts Council. I remain somewhat uncertain as to what is the position. In 2013, the then Minister, Deputy Deenihan, advertised vacancies with regard to the chair and five members of the Arts Council. It was indicated quite clearly at that stage that these members would serve on a *pro bono* basis. One assumes people looking at this advertisement and thinking about the possibil-

ity of providing the service could have been influenced by the fact there was no remuneration to be had, but subsequently it appeared the chair and members appointed had been remunerated. If the Minister is now saying this was done because there is a legal requirement to do so, will she please set out what is the legal requirement and whether there is a difficulty with the advertisement as initially published by the then Minister, Deputy Deenihan?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** The Department is in the process of updating legislation on the cultural institutions, which will include a provision that members of the boards will operate on a *pro bono* basis. In the meantime the cultural institutions are implementing this on an administrative basis. My predecessor sought to move the Arts Council to a *pro bono* model on a voluntary basis and the advertisement issued on that basis. I understand that my predecessor and the chair of the Arts Council subsequently agreed that while all members would be asked to waive their fees, it would be a matter for decision by each individual member as to whether to do so. Over the past number of years some council members have opted to waive their fees and I understand that full details on fees and expenses are published every year on the council's website. It is not intended to amend the Arts Act 2003 regarding fees.

The Deputy referred to people who might have chosen not to apply to serve on the basis on the basis that no fee was payable. That is speculative. I fully accept that what was done was done in good faith. It was done in the context of moving to a broad *pro bono* model in the arts and cultural area.

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** If moving to a *pro bono* basis was the objective, sadly it would appear that the objective has not been achieved. Are the chair and the five new members being remunerated or not? If they are, how many are being remunerated and how many have opted to serve in accordance with the original advertisement which suggested it would be done on a *pro bono* basis?

The Minister has said that she does not intend to legislate. However, she has suggested - if not here then at the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht - that an amendment of the legislation was necessary in order to achieve *pro bono* service from all the members of the board. Why is she not proposing to legislate?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** Full details of the remuneration and expenses paid to the Arts Council in 2011 and 2012 are set out in the report. Details of the 2013 payments will be included in the 2013 annual report which will be published shortly and will appear on the website. Some have obviously decided to waive the fees and some are taking their payment.

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** That is not satisfactory.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** However, that is the way it is. As I said, my predecessor and the chair of the Arts Council subsequently agreed that while all members would be asked to waive their fees, it would be a matter for decision by each member whether to do so. The Arts Council was not included in the public service reform plan. The public service reform plan covered a number of cultural institutions, including the gallery, IMMA, the Crawford Art Gallery, the National Library, the National Museum, the National Archives, the Irish Manuscripts Commission and the National Concert Hall. We are in the process of updating that legislation. That is currently with the committee.

*Dáil Éireann*  
**National Monuments**

88. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if, following Dublin City Council's rejection of the proposed Moore Street land swap with a private developer, she plans to initiate a full and independent battlefield site survey of the Moore Street area; and if she will bring together all relevant parties with the intention of developing a new plan to protect, preserve and develop this historic quarter of our city. [47012/14]

**Deputy Sandra McLellan:** Following Dublin City Council's rejection of the proposed Moore Street land swap will the Minister initiate a full independent battlefield site survey of the Moore Street area? Will she now bring together all relevant parties with the intention of developing a new plan to protect, preserve and develop the historic quarter?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** A comprehensive assessment has already been carried out as part of the application for consent under the National Monuments Acts for the proposed restoration of the buildings and the provision of a 1916 commemorative centre on the Moore Street national monument site. The methodology for the assessment was drawn up and agreed in advance by my Department's national monuments service and by the director of the National Museum of Ireland. The assessment was carried out by an eminent archaeologist and historian. I am satisfied with the quality and results of the research. I do not propose to seek any further assessment of the area.

I am disappointed that Dublin City Council decided not to support the proposal that recently went before it, whereby the council would exchange two modern 1990s buildings at Nos. 24 and 25 Moore Street, currently used as a cleansing depot, in return for full ownership of the national monument at Nos. 14 to 17 being transferred to the city council. The transfer would have been accompanied by NAMA funding to cover the full cost of the restoration project and the proposed commemorative centre for which consent was given under the National Monuments Acts in April 2014. I believe the proposal provided a real opportunity to have the project completed and the commemorative centre open in time for the centenary of the Rising in 2016.

Following the decision to reject the proposal, it is now a matter for the city council and the monument owners to consider the implications for the national monument buildings, for the NAMA funding for the restoration project and for the centenary commemorations in 2016. The granting of the consent under the National Monuments Acts in April 2014 essentially completed my Department's functions in this case. I will, however, continue to support all appropriate initiatives to secure the restoration of the national monument, consistent with my statutory function under the National Monuments Acts and with the roles and responsibilities of the other interested parties. In that context, tomorrow morning I will meet the members of Dublin City Council's Moore Street advisory committee to go through the process with them and to encourage them to try to advance a solution that would see the restoration project proceeding.

Responsibility for planning and development of the area outside the bounds of the national monument at Nos. 14 to 17 Moore Street rests with the planning authority, Dublin City Council.

**Deputy Sandra McLellan:** There are many people who will not only be disappointed in the Minister's position that the land-swap deal rejected by Dublin City Council was appropriate, but will be astonished to learn that she deemed the plan to demolish most of the Moore Street terrace as an opportunity. The Government consistently lacks ambition. It is beyond disappointing that the Minister's response to Dublin City Council's decision to respect and preserve

the historic site in its entirety in preparation for the 1916 centenary celebrations has been so churlish.

The Minister said that following the council's vote to reject the land-swap deal, progression of the Moore Street project is now a matter solely for the council. I note she said that she has a meeting tomorrow. However, she needs to clarify the statement. If the Government is dropping the Moore Street project ahead of the 1916 centenary celebrations, the Minister needs to be straight about it. She has already managed to raise the ire of the 1916 signatory families in her meeting with them.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly):** Deputy,-----

**Deputy Sandra McLellan:** To use the Minister's words, it was a heated exchange. The families presented evidence of the historic significance of the buildings that the council is seeking to preserve. I find it surprising that the Minister would so readily have washed her hands of it.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly):** The Deputy will get to ask another supplementary question later.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I wish to correct the record. I never used the words "heated exchange" because I did not have a heated exchange with anybody. My door has been open and I have met a number of the relatives - I will speak about that later.

I have indicated that a detailed assessment has already been carried out and I am entirely satisfied with the quality and findings of the research done. In January 2012, my Department asked the consent applicant, Chartered Land, which owns the national monument, to commission an assessment of the wider battlefield context of the national monument as part of the Minister's consideration of the consent application. The work included a battlefield assessment, inspections and fabric investigations of an area incorporating the block formed by Moore Street, O'Rahilly Parade, Moore Lane and Henry Place and some of the area south of Henry Place extending back towards Henry Street. The report, research, inspections and investigations reinforce the primary status of Nos. 14 to 17, most notably due to the degree to which the pre-1916 physical fabric survives and continues to convey an authentic and legible historical sense of the place within which the final critical hours of the Rising took place and how these buildings stand in marked contrast to the degree to which historical fabric within the wider urban landscape no longer survives.

**Deputy Sandra McLellan:** I do not believe the Minister's response is good enough. Those who went before us and secured the future of the State deserve much better. I suspect the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation, if they are looking down on us, would care little for the Minister's sense of disappointment and are bewildered by her abandonment of such an important project that they would not only celebrate our past but play an important role in articulating the vision we have as a nation for our future.

It is unhelpful to state that the granting of the consent under the National Monuments Acts completes the Department's involvement in the project. I ask the Minister to reconsider her position and instead pledge a full and independent battlefield sites survey of the Moore Street area bringing together all relevant parties with the intention of developing a new plan to protect, preserve and develop this historic quarter of our city.

If it is the case that the Minister is intent, on behalf of the Government, on abandoning the Moore Street project - as envisaged by the majority of Dublin City Council who represent the citizens of our capital city - will she state this clearly?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I want to be clear that I am not abandoning the Moore Street project. As I said, I was disappointed when the decision was arrived at by the city council. I have met both groups of relatives, one of which is entirely supportive of the proposals for the national monument. They are keen that it should progress.

I have also met Dublin City Council's Moore Street advisory committee and am meeting them again tomorrow morning to discuss the matter further in light of the vote on the land swap. The land swap would have put the national monument and the fully restored 1916 commemorative centre into the city council's ownership and under its management.

I have also visited the national monument myself and have been through the entire site. During the visit, I spoke to a number of traders on the street who are supportive of the plans for the monument itself and the proposals to redevelop the wider area. The matter is now fundamentally in the hands of Dublin City Council and the monument owners but I will do everything I can to encourage progress with the project.

### **Commemorative Events**

89. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will report on funding for the 1916 commemorations; the percentage of her Department's budget that was devoted to this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47010/14]

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** I wish to ask the Minister what percentage or proportion of funding for the arts budget is being devoted to the 1916 commemorations, compared with the rest of her departmental budget, and if she will make a statement on that.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** Capital provision of €22 million will be allocated in 2015 to a number of flagship projects, including the development of a permanent exhibition space and interpretative centre at the GPO; the restoration of Kilmainham Courthouse to enhance the visitor experience at Kilmainham Gaol; the provision of a permanent visitor facility at Cathal Brugha Barracks for the military service pensions archive; the development of visitor facilities at Teach an Phiarsaigh, Ros Muc; refurbishment works at Richmond Barracks; the development of a tenement museum in Dublin; and the commencement of refurbishment and development works at the National Archives and the National Concert Hall's Kevin Barry rooms. I have also secured an allocation of €4 million in current funding, which will complement the capital programme through the development of an integrated national plan focused on the commemoration of the centenary of the 1916 Rising. This allocation will support a wide range of activities and events, including local community activities and arts and cultural initiatives. There will also be a special emphasis on education projects, as recommended by the expert advisory group on commemorations.

A widespread public consultation process is now underway in order to encourage and facilitate the involvement of ground-up initiatives in the wider commemorative programme. I look forward to working with the Oireachtas all-party consultation group on commemorations, the expert advisory group, and a wide range of stakeholders over the coming 18 months to make the

events of Easter 2016 a very special and poignant tribute to all those involved.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** The information seems to be that all of the increase in the arts budget is being devoted to the commemoration of the 1916 Rising. Artists throughout this country are really struggling. Most people working in the arts are earning less than €8,000 per annum. It is believed that an artist's average wage is about €14,676 per annum. It was hoped that austerity would have ended for people in the arts sector, but it seems to be continuing. I have received emails from artists in my own constituency who have no heat for their studios and cannot afford paint or other materials to hone their craft. They are very disappointed that the 1916 commemorations are getting all the attention and all the budget.

I believe that the 1916 centenary is an important historical event whose pros and cons should be debated and discussed throughout the country. Its impact should be assessed on many different levels, but I do not believe it is the only thing worthy of Government funding. It would seem, however, to be where the lion's share of funding is going despite the best wishes of artists. For example, the budget for 2016 and 2017 is standstill funding and when one takes inflation into account, it is actually a cut in arts funding for the next two years.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** Just to clarify, I think the Deputy is referring to the Arts Council budget, which has remained the same as last year. The €4 million allocated for commemorations is additional funding. I want to ensure that the arts are involved in our commemorations and for that reason, while the finer detail has yet to be ironed out, the four main headings will broadly focus on local communities, arts, culture and education.

The arts budget, which is separate, has gone to the Arts Council and was maintained at last year's figure. We did get additional funding of €4 million for the commemorations.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** I was referring to the Department's budget. The Arts Council and the national cultural institutions have had their budgets cut by 40% to 50% between 2008 and 2015. The Department's budget is, as I said, the same but when one takes inflation into account all the increase is going on one event - the 1916 commemoration. I do not think 1916 is unimportant but there are questions over why the Government is only devoting an increase to that, while not assisting artists and community arts throughout the country.

I hope there will be a real involvement by communities and ordinary people in the 1916 celebrations. I hope it will not be a grand style event, with military and heads of state tripping over each other coming into the country. The way the Minister is devoting money to 1916 with high profile events for the country is full of rhetoric. She is not giving any assistance to the arts, however, despite heralding a recovery and the end of austerity.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** As the economy improves, it is my job to get additional funding for the arts and I will certainly be doing so. The Deputy mentioned the end of austerity and I will be seeking additional funding for the arts in particular. I was glad that we obtained an additional €2 million for cultural institutions which was only announced on Friday in the context of the upcoming revised Estimates. I will continue to fight for additional funding for the arts, as well as for the Arts Council.

**Seirbhís Oileán**

90. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad iad na tairiscintí agus cén plan atá aici chun seirbhís aeir a choinneáil d'Oileáin Árann; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [47044/14]

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Ba mhaith liom freagra cinnte a fháil ón Aire Stáit maidir leis an seirbhís aeir d'oileáin Árann agus, go háirithe, maidir leis an scrúdú atá á dhéanamh ag an Aire agus ag an Roinn ar an tseirbhís seo faoi láthair. An mbeidh an tseirbhís seo ar fáil i rith na bliana atá le teacht agus bliain i ndiaidh bliana as sin amach? Níl mórán dóchás ag daoine ó thaobh na seirbhíse de. Tá inní ar a lán daoine nach mbeidh an tseirbhís seo ar fáil go dtí mí Mhéan Fómhair an bliain seo chugainn.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá conradh faoi oibleagáid seirbhíse poiblí i bhfeidhm idir mo Roinn agus Aer Arann Islands chun seirbhís aeir a chur ar fáil d'Oileáin Árann suas go dtí 30 Meán Fómhair 2015. Mar is eol don Teachta, d'fhostaigh mo Roinn an comhlacht EY chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar riachtanas na seirbhíse aeir, i gcomhréir le Rialacháin an Aontais Eorpaigh. Foilsíodh an tuarascáil athbhreithnithe ar shuíomh gréasáin mo Roinne ar 28 Bealtaine agus cuireadh í faoi bhráid an Choimisiúin Eorpaigh. Is tuarascáil chuimsitheach atá inti a chlúdaíonn an tréimhse ó 2003 go dtí 2013. Aithníonn an tuarascáil na tionchair éagsúla atá ag an tseirbhís aeir ar shaol na n-oileánach. Pléitear costais éagsúla na seirbhíse agus treocht na gcostas le linn na tréimhse sin. Tabharfaidh an síneadh bliana atá curtha leis an gconradh aerseirbhíse go dtí 30 Meán Fómhair 2015 deis do mo Roinn an tuarascáil seo a mheas.

Maidir leis an gcéad chéim eile, tá sé ag dul do na páirtithe leasmhara go léir go scrúdófar gach a bhfuil sa tuarascáil chun go mbeidh mo Roinn ábalta tacú le riachtanais na n-oileán taobh istigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil. Nuair atá an scrúdú críochnaithe ag mo Roinn ar na moltaí atá sa tuarascáil, tógfar cinneadh maidir le cúnaimh mo Roinne don tseirbhís aeir amach anseo.

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Muna bhfuil plan ag an Aire, críochnóidh an tseirbhís i Meán Fómhar 2015. Caithfidh an tseirbhís seo a bheith ar fáil i rith na bliana go léir agus bliain i ndiaidh bliain, mar a dúirt mé. Caithfidh bheith cinnte mar gheall ar an seirbhís seo. Ba cheart go mbeadh plan ann ar a laghad ocht nó naoi mí roimh deireadh an chonartha. Ba mhaith liomsa go gcuimhnóidh an Aire Stáit ar na daoine aosta a úsáideann an seirbhís seo agus ar chúrsaí gnó ar an oileán. Ó thaobh spóirt de, bhuaigh foireann peile Oileán Árann craobh sóisearach na Gaillimhe i mbliana ach bhí orthu taisteal ar an mbád. B'fhéidir go mbeidh an aerseirbhís acu an bhliain seo chugainn ach cad a tharlóidh don seirbhís amach anseo? Tá sé an-tábhachtach go mbeidh an seirbhís leanúnach, bliain i ndiaidh bliain.

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Ba mhaith liomh comhgháirdeas a dhéanamh leis an bhfoireann as ucht a bhua ollmhór fosta. Tuigim an cheist seo agus an tábhacht atá ag baint leis an nasc idir an mórthír agus na hoileáin agus cás na ndaoine aosta agus cúrsaí gnó ar na hoileáin, mar a luaigh an Teachta. Tá cosaint déanta agam ar an mbuiséad reatha do na hoileáin i 2015. Dá bhrí sin, tá súil agam an tseirbhís aeir a choinneáil ar siúl amach anseo. Sin é an rud is tábhachtaí. Níl mé in ann gealltanais a thabhairt an seirbhís a choinneáil i ndiaidh 2015 ach is é an rud is tábhachtaí ná go bhfuilim i dteangmháil le m'oifigigh. Tá an seirbhís iontach tábhachtach do na daoine atá ina gcónaí ar na hoileáin agus ba mhaith liom gealltanais a thabhairt go ndéanfaidh mo chomhghleacaithe, m'oifigigh, na comharchumainn agus na páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla atá ag obair ar an gceist seo iarracht. Tuigim tábhacht na seirbhíse agus an naisc idir na hoileáin agus an mórthír.

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Tá a lán rudaí eile ag tarlú, ar ndóigh, mar gheall ar chúrsaí leighis agus daoine atá coinní acu sna hospideil i nGaillimh. Ó thaobh oideachais de, tá sé tábhachtach go mbeadh seans ag scoláirí agus múinteoirí taisteal go dtí na hoileáin. I gcásanna éagsúla bíonn múinteoirí ag taisteal lá amháin nó cúpla lá sa tseachtain. Tá gach gairm i gceist anseo. Tá na hoileáin seo an-ghnóthach i rith an tsamhraidh agus tá cúrsaí turasóireachta an-tábhachtach dóibh. Caithfidh go mbeidh an Aire Stáit in ann níos mó eolais a thabhairt dúinn, faoi na moltaí atá sa tuarascáil seo, mar shampla. An mbeidh an Aire Stáit in ann an seirbhís seo a choinneáil agus an mbeidh an Roinn in ann cúnaimh a thabhairt chun an seirbhís seo a choinneáil?

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Mar atá a fhios ag an Teachta, bhí an bád farrantóireachta an-tábhachtach fosta i rith an tsamhraidh ach táim ag súil go mbeidh sé ceart go leor. Mar shampla, bhí mé ar Oileán Thoraí den chéad uair i mo shaol coicís ó shin nó mar sin, agus ar Oileán Bhéara agus Inis Oircin freisin. Tá a fhios agam faoi thábhacht saol na n-oileán agus na dúshláin atá ann. Mar shampla, déanann oibríthe phobail an-obair ar na hoileáin lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht agus tá díospóireacht ar siúl anois i measc m'oifigí sa Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta agus i measc oifigí na Roinne Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtas Áitiúil fosta faoin infreastruchtúr seo, conas é a chosaint agus a choinneáil. Mar focal scoir, tá infreastruchtúr anois ar na hoileáin agus tá an infreastruchtúr seo, na haerseirbhísí, mar shampla, fíorthábhachtach. Tá suim mhór agam é a choinneáil agus a chosaint amach anseo.

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Má théann an Aire Stáit go hÁrann, ba cheart dó cuireadh a thabhairt dom.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly):** Tá an cheist seo críochnaithe.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Fuair mé cuireadh agus táim ag súil go mór le mo dara thuras go dtí na hoileáin sa bhliain úr

## Job Initiatives

91. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the percentage of staff at cultural organisations in receipt of Arts Council or other such State funding who are on the JobBridge scheme or any other unpaid internship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46867/14]

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** I wish to ask the Minister about the percentage of staff at cultural institutions in receipt of Arts Council or other such State funding who are on JobBridge schemes or any other unpaid internships. My information is that unpaid internships and labour are now becoming predominant schemes in the arts and cultural sector.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** Whereas the arts strand of JobBridge was designed and brokered by the Arts Council, it is run by the JobBridge section of the Department of Social Protection with local authorities across the country. The gathering of statistics for the arts strand would, therefore, be a matter for that Department and the relevant local authorities.

I understand that when an extension of the JobBridge national internship scheme to provide for new internships in the arts sector was announced in April 2013, it was estimated that the initiative would provide up to 300 new places for arts practitioners through placements with local authorities. It is considered that this arts strand will continue to provide opportunities for those

interested in careers in the arts, allowing them to gain hands-on experience and enhance their skills. The extension of the scheme will foster emerging talent in the arts and also support local arts groups in theatre, film, visual arts, dance, music, literature and more. This as an important development because it will help people take the first step towards a career in the arts. In this sector, there is a long tradition of new entrants working alongside established artists, performers, practitioners and arts administrators.

On the wider issue, there is a long history of internships, formal and informal, paid and unpaid, in the arts, as well as a culture of volunteerism, especially for seasonal programmes. For example, a local festival might use interns in its busiest period, typically in the run-up to and during the festival. Done the right way, this can make the festival better, increase community support and give the intern valuable experience. Many artists and arts administrators got their start as interns.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** It is a common myth that people interested in a career in the arts, such as young people fresh from college, are going on arts internships. That is no longer the case.

It is an open secret in the arts fraternity that free labour is being used to displace people in full-time labour. A quote in the *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy* states:

“The reality is that the replacement and displacement of paid jobs by interns does happen”. Another quote in *Visual Artists Ireland* states that “Unpaid internships are becoming more common for a new generation of arts workers”. They prop up the sector and they falsify a situation that may or may not be sustainable in the face of reduced public spending.

The reality is that people are doing repeat internships. There are people in their 30s who have been on three JobBridge programmes or three internships in the arts sector. It is not that they are gaining experience. There are no jobs there for them.

We did a survey of three websites and we found 52 jobs advertised, 36 of which were internships, 19 were JobBridge, eight were CE schemes, seven were unpaid internships and two were unpaid JobBridge programmes. That seems to be proof that it is predominant.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I do not accept that free labour is being used to replace staff. My experience of JobBridge is that it has been very successful. I know many people who have been on this scheme and who have moved into full-time employment. In regard to internships, young people go to work in businesses and they end up getting full-time positions as a result of their work on JobBridge or as an intern.

I have spoken to business people who have found it invaluable in terms of training up somebody because when one goes into a workplace first, one does not have the skills set needed to do the job straightaway. This has allowed them to upskill and then get full-time employment.

It is important that the arts world avails of this type of programme so that young people, who come out of college and need a bit of experience on the job, are able to get it. I would not agree that free labour is being used to replace staff.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** We are all in favour of interns and people getting experience in the arts but my problem is that they are doing so without getting any money whatsoever. The €50 would basically pay one’s travel expenses to and from one’s job.

If the Minister is that concerned, why does she not look at what they are doing in Britain, for example? The creative employment programme of the Arts Council of England is designed to support up to 6,500 paid internships to give people real training. What we found in the survey we did of three different websites advertising jobs was 36 internships, which I do not consider to be a small number out of 52 jobs. There were only 16 normal paid jobs. It is time to stop doing the arts and everything else in this country on the cheap. Many people are now being forced to do three internships and then emigrate without having an arts job at the end of it.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** The eligibility criteria for JobBridge is based on the overall objective of labour market policy in ensuring a pathway to appropriate employment, training and education opportunities for those on the live register. There should be an arts strand to JobBridge. It is important that this continues to provide opportunities for those interested in careers in the arts, allowing them to gain hands-on experience and enhance their skills.

## Other Questions

### Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla

92. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an mbeidh foráil nua i mBille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú) 2014 chun go mbeidh 10% ar a laghad de na fostaithe sa státseirbhís in ann cumarsáid shásúil a dhéanamh leis an bpobal trí Ghaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [46788/14]

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Gabhann an cheist seo le Bille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú) 2014 agus an riachtanas ann go mbeadh 10%, ar a laghad, de na fostaithe sa Státseirbhíse in ann cumarsáid sásúil a dhéanamh leis an bpobal tré mheán na Gaeilge. Tá inní ar a lán daoine nach mbeidh siad in ann a gcuid ghnó a dhéanamh tré mheán na Gaeilge. An ndéanfaidh an Aire Stáit aon rud maidir leis an scéal seo?

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Mar is eol don Teachta, rinneadh athbhreithniú ar Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003 i gcomhréir leis an ghealltanas a tugadh i gClár an Rialtais 2011-2016. Mar thoradh ar an athbhreithniú sin, d'fhoilsigh mo Roinn cinn Bhille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú) 2014 i mí Aibreáin seo a chuaigh thart. Déantar foráil i gceann a sé den Bhille beartaithe go gcuirfear fo-alt nua isteach san Acht chun na poist i gcomhlachtaí poiblí a bhfuil riachtanas inniúlachta Gaeilge ag gabháil leo a shonrú i scéimeanna teanga. Eascraíonn an leasú sin as cinneadh Rialtais an 30 Deireadh Fómhair 2013 i ndáil le deireadh a chur le marcanna bónais a bhronnadh as oilteacht Ghaeilge in earcaíocht agus comórtais ardaithe céime na Státseirbhíse agus córas nua bunaithe ar inniúlacht a chur ina áit. Is í an aidhm atá leis an chóras nua ná an líon d'oifigigh le Gaeilge sa Státseirbhís a mhéadú. Ina theannta sin, ní miste a nótáil go sonrófar i bpleananna fórsa oibre Ranna agus oifigí Rialtais amach anseo na poist-réimsí oibre ina mbeidh gá le baill foirne atá in ann feidhmiú sa dá theanga oifigiúla. Ag féachaint do chur i bhfeidhm Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, iarrtar ar Ranna aird ar leith a thabhairt ar phoist atá lonnaithe i gceantair Ghaeltachta nó ag freastal ar na ceantair sin.

Tuigtear dom go bhfuil sé i gceist triail a bhaint as na socruithe nua earcaíochta sa chomórtas d'Oifigigh Cléireachais atá ar siúl faoi láthair ag an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí. Tá sé beartaithe go mbunófar fo-phainéal d'oifigigh le Gaeilge, a dhéanfaidh suas céatadán suas

le 6% den phainéal foriomlán d'Oifigigh Cléireachais. Ní mór do na hiarrthóirí a cheapfar ón phainéal seo a bheith in ann raon iomlán seirbhísí a chur ar fáil i nGaeilge.

Ní miste a chur in iúl chomh maith go n-éilítear ar chomhlachtaí poiblí, de réir alt 13(d) d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003, agus scéimeanna teanga á n-ullmhú acu, a chinntiú go gcomhlíontar na riachtanais Ghaeilge faoi leith a bhaineann le seirbhísí a sholáthar sa Ghaeltacht.

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Is é seo an chéad uair a bhfuair mé na ceisteanna roimh an tráth na gceist. Labhair an Aire Stáit ar athbhreithniú an Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla. Is í an aidhm atá ag an gcóras nua ná an líon daoine in ann feidhmiú go dhá-theangach sa Státseirbhíse a mhéadú. Is maith an aidhm í sin. Mar a dúirt mé, tá daoine ann agus iad ag iarraidh a gcuid ghnó a dhéanamh tré mheán na Gaeilge. Luaigh an Aire Stáit painéal d'oifigigh cléireachais agus luaigh sé figiúir de 6%. An dóigh leis an Aire Stáit go bhfuil sé sin indéanta agus go mbeidh daoine in ann a gcuid ghnó a dhéanamh tré mheán na Gaeilge?

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá mé cinnte faoi sin. Tá fios agam go raibh díospóireacht mhór ann roimh an cinneadh seo a dhéanamh, am nach raibh mise ceaptha mar Aire Stáit. Glacaim nach bhfuil i gceist ach figiúir de 6%. Ach is dóigh liom gur tús maith é. Mar a deirtear, is tús maith leath na hoibre. Is féidir linn tógáil ar an figiúir de 6%. Tá an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí ag eagrú comórtais earcaíochta éagsúla. Tá sé i gceist fo-phainéal, suas le 6%, d'oifigigh le Gaeilge a chruthú mar thoradh ar na comórtais sin. Maidir leis an mBille teanga, beartaíodh go mbeadh ar chomhlachtaí poiblí na poist a bhfuil riachtanas Gaeilge ag baint leo a aithint sna scéimeanna teanga. Is dul chun cinn suntasach é sin. Bhí díospóireacht mhór ann roimh an chinneadh seo a dhéanamh. An ceart figiúir de 6% nó 10%? Ach is é an rud is tábhachtaí ná tús maith a bheith againn. Déanfaidh mé gach iarracht maidir le seo. Tá díospóireacht agus comhrá ar siúl fé láthair idir na Roinne áirithe san Rialtas.

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Tá imní ar a lán daoine faoi seo. Bhí trí máirseáil i rith na bliana - i mBaile Átha Cliath, i mBéal Feirste agus i gConamara. Chailleamar an Coimisinéir Teanga agus dúirt an iar-Choimisinéir a lán rudaí faoin gceist seo. Bhí brait ag na mairseálacha seo ag rá go raibh daoine “dearg le fearg”. Sin an teachtaireacht a bhí acu. Bhí siad ag caint mar gheall ar chothrom na féinne, mar cheap siad nach raibh cothrom na féinne don teanga ná do na daoine a bhí ag iarraidh gnó a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. Maidir leis na ranna Rialtaise agus Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte, tá a lán daoine buartha mar nach bhfuil siad in ann freagra a fháil agus gnó a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. Caithfidh níos mó a dhéanamh faoi sin.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Beidh mé i dteangmháil leis na hoifigigh sinseartha agus na hAiri idir na ranna rialtais éagsúla chun daoine a bhogadh chun tosaigh sa scéim. Tá dualgas orainn an teanga a chur chun tosaigh sna ranna agus sna seirbhísí poiblí timpeall na tíre. Is tús maith é 6% agus is dócha go mbeidh an tír in áit difriúil amach anseo. Is é an rud is tábhachtaí ná go mbeadh scéal difriúil agus dearfach ann. Aontaím nach bhfuil sé ceart nach mbeadh duine le Gaeilge acu ag freagairt an ghutháin sa Roinn sin nó i bhFeidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte. Is é sin an dúshlán atá romhainn anois. Is é an teachtaireacht atá agam do na daltaí sa bhunscoil agus sa mheánscoil, agus a dtuismitheoirí fosta, ná go mbeidh poist ar fáil nuair a bheidh an tír in áit difriúil agus beidh na ranna rialtais ag lorg daoine le Gaeilge chun obair sna ranna, sna comhairlí chontae, i bhFeidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte agus ar uile.

## National Cultural Institutions

93. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the current funding situation of the National Museum of Ireland; the way she will address the funding difficulties of this institution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46806/14]

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** This question was tabled in the context of the difficulties of the National Museum and the indication of its possible closure or introduction of charges. That came against a background of a 40% cut in funding over the past few years. Fair play to the Minister, I congratulate her on having secured the additional €2 million which hopefully will be used to the benefit of the cultural institutions.

**(Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. In the recent budget I was pleased to be able to maintain funding for 2015 for the national cultural institutions, including the National Museum, at the same level as 2014. This brought to an end the cycle of unavoidable cuts that have taken place at all of our national cultural institutions in recent years. I was, of course, aware of particular funding issues that continued to exist and I have been engaged in ongoing discussions with the chairpersons and senior management at several of our cultural institutions, including the National Museum, about addressing those challenges. I was delighted, therefore, to be able to announce last week that I have secured an agreement with the Minister for Public and Reform Expenditure, Deputy Brendan Howlin, to provide an additional €2 million in funding for the National Cultural Institutions as part of the Revised Estimates, to be published later this month.

The additional funding secured will be used to deal with several issues across the cultural institutions. I believe that it gives more certainty to the institutions and will allow them to continue to deliver on their core objectives, while attracting large numbers of people through their doors, including overseas and domestic tourists.

Our national cultural institutions are an essential component of our cultural fabric. Through their collections and exhibitions, they make a huge contribution to our society. I can assure the Deputy of the Government's interest in, and continuing support for, our national cultural institutions and I remain hopeful that, notwithstanding the continuing pressure on the State's finances, it will prove possible to ease the resource constraints on the institutions even further in the future.

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** I thank the Minister for her response which I welcome. It is positive. It begs the question whether this €2 million in funding will be secured in future. Will the Minister explain how she envisages the funding breaking down between the National Museum and the National Library? We are aware of the difficulties in the National Museum. There are serious difficulties too in the National Library where there has been an increase of 42% in visitors over the past 12 months, yet it has suffered even greater cuts than the museum, in the order of 44% in recent times. I heard the Minister refer in the national media to these institutions' becoming self-financing, which some journalists think is desirable. Can she give us an undertaking that she is committed to the public's having free access to these vital resources which are owned by the people of Ireland?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I am very much of the opinion that they should continue to be open to the public free of charge. In England whenever they introduce charging into cultural

institutions, the number of visitors drop by about 50%. I would not want that to happen here. That is why this additional funding is so important. I will publish a breakdown of the €2 million in due course. I intend to allocate funding to all of the cultural institutions and will decide in the coming weeks exactly how much will go to each institution. That has not been finalised. I have been talking to them, and on that basis, the allocations will be decided. The Department officials have been preparing proposals on the allocations in close consultation with the cultural institutions.

**Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail:** I understood that the National Museum required €650,000 to continue to operate as heretofore notwithstanding the constraints it is now under. I also understand that the National Library had indicated that it needed a 20% increase in its level of funding to be able to contain the additional pressure it is under due to the increased number of visitors. That is the extent of the commitment the Minister is being asked to make now. I very much welcome her statement that she shares our view that the public should have free access to these institutions. The institutions enrich Irish society. It is a great pleasure to stand outside this building and see the throngs of young people who visit these institutions daily. Long may that continue.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I agree with the Deputy. The museum has received almost 1 million visitors this year, which is a tremendous achievement. Things have been difficult for all of the cultural institutions, because their budgets were cut and this is the first time in six years there were no cuts. I pay tribute to the great work they do. I absolutely agree with the Deputy they make a huge contribution to our society, and attract visitors to the city and tourists to Ireland. The National Museum did indicate the figure the Deputy mentioned. The National Library had also mentioned the difficulties it was facing. The breakdown has not been published yet. It will be published shortly. I have had discussions with the directors and chairpersons of the different institutions. We will try to resolve the issues they have raised.

### **Air Strips**

94. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for the airstrips at Cleggan and Inishbofin, County Galway; if discussions have taken place or are planned with the Irish Coast Guard regarding the use of the facilities in its work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46858/14]

**Deputy Seán Kyne:** This question relates to the Government's plans for the airstrips at Cleggan and Inishbofin. Has the Minister of State had any engagement with the Irish Coast Guard on their use?

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Beidh mé ag streachailt i mBéarla anois. An bhfuil sé sin ar dóigh? As the Deputy is aware, my Department has developed airstrips at Cleggan and Inishbofin in County Galway. These airstrips are not open at present. They are not licensed for use by the Irish Aviation Authority. The landing of aircraft on the airstrips is prohibited.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht decided in 2013 to dispose of both airstrips. This decision was made in view of the economic downturn, the ongoing cost of maintaining the airstrips and the unlikelihood that the Department will at any time in the near future have the resources to provide financial support to an air service between Inishbofin and the mainland. The Department is assessing the disposal options that are available to it. A decision

in this regard will be announced in due course.

I can confirm that the Department has received inquiries from various parties, including the Irish Coast Guard, about the future use of the facilities. I understand the Irish Coast Guard has used the island's airstrip for daytime emergency medical evacuations. Night-time evacuations are not possible as there are no landing lights on either airstrip. My Department has been in contact with the Irish Coast Guard and has indicated that it will examine any proposals it may have in this regard.

**Deputy Seán Kyne:** I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him and the Minister for the additional capital funding for Údarás na Gaeltachta, which was announced today. I know the Minister and the Minister of State engaged in a great deal of consultation with my colleague, Seosamh Ó Laoi, who is a member of the board of Údarás na Gaeltachta, on this matter. Today's announcement has been welcomed in my local area.

I thank the Minister of State for response to Question No. 94. Has any timeline been set out for when a decision will be made? Has consideration been given to opening a period of consultation with the people of Inishbofin and the general Cleggan and Clifden area? Given that a great deal of investment was made to put the airstrips in place, it is a shame that they have been left in their current condition. Has the Government explored the options with regard to consultation with local people? Has the option of leasing the airstrips been offered to them? I imagine that the cost of purchasing them would be prohibitive. Has the Government considered that? If not, will it do so?

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le mo chomhghleacaithe, na hAirí, na Teachtaí Humphreys, Howlin agus Noonan as ucht a gcuid tacaíochta i rith an phróisis Mheastachán i ndiaidh an bhuiséid. Tá mé thar a bheith sásta go mbeidh airgead breise ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta. Rinne mé gealltanais i ndiaidh an bhuiséid fá choinne iarracht a dhéanamh ina thaobh. Tá sár-obair ar siúl ag an údarás. Thug an Teachta Kyne agus mé féin cuairt ar HID Global i nGaillimh i rith an tsamhraidh. Tá Údarás na Gaeltachta ag obair go dian dícheallach le Randox agus na comhlachtaí eile sna ceantracha éagsúla timpeall na Gaeltachta chun fostaíocht a chruthú agus a chosaint.

Deputy Kyne proposed that a timeline should be set out with regard to the two airstrips. I am open to doing something constructive here. The Deputy will be in touch with the various groups and comharchumainn on the ground in his backyard and his constituency. I would be interested in doing something about these two airstrips, which cost €9 million. That is the amount of money that went into the two airstrips, which are lying idle. As far as I am aware, the Irish Coast Guard has an interest in them. I have spoken to a few senior officers. The Deputy's question is a demonstration of his interest in this matter. Some of his colleagues in County Galway have been on to me as well. We have to try to move this forward. If the Irish Coast Guard is interested, maybe we should sit down and see how we can move this forward. I am open to the Deputy's suggestions. If he has ideas on how to move this forward, I will certainly be interested in hearing them.

**Deputy Seán Kyne:** I thank the Minister of State for his reply. Gabhaim buíochas leis as ucht an fhreagra. Given that we are coming up to Christmas, I would suggest that a brief period of consultation be provided for early in the new year to allow people to express their opinions. Perhaps we can take submissions of interest and proceed from there with a plan. Some of the

people who are interested in renting these airstrips believe options like unlicensed aerodrome activity should be considered. They have suggested that private aeroplanes could be allowed to land at these airstrips without them having to be manned. Ideally, we would want a commercial operation, but that might not be possible. We need to explore all options. Perhaps the Minister of State will consider setting aside a period of consultation early in the new year to allow people to respond.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** I am interested in doing something constructive with the many stakeholders and different groups in this sector. Galway County Council was heavily involved at one stage. Deputy Kyne has his ear to the ground and will certainly have ideas as well. I will speak to my officials on this matter. We will see how we can try to move it forward. If people have an interest in and are willing to use the existing infrastructure, commercially or otherwise, that should be considered. The Irish Coast Guard, which is primarily a voluntary organisation, has expressed an interest. We should be open to any ideas that might be proposed by the Irish Coast Guard, which does a great deal of professional work on the ground. If there are other ideas, they should be considered too.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly):** Question No. 95 is in the name of Deputy Durkan. As the Deputy is absent at the moment, we will move on to Question No. 96.

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** It is not very often that the Deputy is absent, especially if there is a question to be asked.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly):** Do not tempt fate. He could be on his way.

### **Commemorative Events**

96. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views about the discontent of some relatives of those who partook in the 1916 Rising with regard to the centenary commemoration plans; if she has requested a meeting with these relatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46807/14]

**Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil:** I wonder whether the Minister has met some of the relatives of the 1916 participants who have expressed their disappointment with the commemoration ceremonies. I hope she will meet as many as possible of the representative groups, disparate as they are, before final plans are made for the commemoration.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. Along with my Government colleagues, I am committed to ensuring the commemorations to mark the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising will be inclusive, appropriate and respectful. I appreciate the concerns of the relatives of those who fought and those who died during the Rising. I am actively engaging with them to ensure they will have a central role in a number of key State events. I recently met representatives of the various relatives' groups to highlight the important role they will have in the plans to commemorate the centenary of the events of Easter 1916. I have established a 2016 project office within my Department. It is tasked with co-ordinating all activities relating to the commemoration of 1916. The relevant officials are liaising with officials in the Department of Defence on matters regarding relatives, including the compilation of lists for events that will be organised to commemorate the centenary of 1916. The project office can be contacted at [2016projectoffice@ahg.gov.ie](mailto:2016projectoffice@ahg.gov.ie). I look forward to working with the Oireachtas

all-party consultation group on commemorations, the expert advisory group and a wide range of stakeholders over the coming 18 months to make the events of Easter 2016 a very special and poignant tribute to all those involved. I would welcome the involvement of the relatives in the commemorations, as well as their comments and views. The matter is open to consultation.

**Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail:** I commend the Minister on meeting some of the relatives. I encourage her to continue that work. Recently, I became conscious of the fact that there may be a large number of relatives, including internationally. Among the criticisms voiced about the commemorative ceremonies was the opinion that the Government was treating the situation like the homecoming or whatever we called that festival some time ago.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** The Gathering.

**Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail:** The Gathering. There may be some merit in reaching out nationally and internationally to people with direct connections to those who fought and died in this formative event in Irish history. Has the Department plans in that regard?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** Yes. I want to consult as widely as possible. In that regard, we will work closely with the embassies. I recently attended the Famine commemoration in New Orleans where I met many people of Irish descent. They were keen to get involved in the 1916 commemorations. I encouraged them, as I want them to make contact with us. We will make contact with a number of organisations in America. 1916 was about the people of Ireland. It is important that we have national and international involvement. In that respect, I will make every effort to make contact with the diaspora through our embassies.

**Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail:** A figure of €4 million has been mentioned in the context of the commemorative ceremonies. In the limited time available, will the Minister tell the House a little about that? Will the €4 million be channelled through the Arts Council? Is it for specific arts-related projects or is it for marketing and PR in respect of the ceremonies? Does the Arts Council envisage mounting schemes, programmes, competitions or whatever? If so, will they be public, will they be advertised and will participation be encouraged and invited?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** It is my intention to allocate the budget of €4 million in a manner that will facilitate the roll-out of an integrated plan focused on commemorating the centenary of the 1916 Rising. I intend to use the money to support a wide range of activities and events by interested groups, including local communities, as well as the arts and education sectors. We are considering a number of proposed commemorative activities. I intend for there to be a number of broad headings. It is important to involve the arts, community and education sectors. It is also important that we include our young people through the education system. The 2016 commemorations do not just belong to one part of the country, so I want to ensure that they are extended to the whole of the country so that people might engage. For this reason, the consultation process will continue until the end of March, giving people an opportunity to propose ideas. I want the cultural institutions to be involved. They are considering what they will do for 2016. The Rising was an important event in our history. Next year will give them good time to plan. The additional €4 million-----

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly):** I must interrupt. In light of the fact that Deputy Durkan has just arrived and given that we broke the order of questions, he should put Question No. 95 now. In deference to the next questioner, who has been waiting, we will only take the question and the Minister's reply before going straight into the next question.

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department continues to encourage economic development through the medium of the arts; the degree to which specific targets continue to be identified and met in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46816/14]

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I apologise for the lateness of my arrival, which was due to my being in transit. The question is self-evident. Will the Minister indicate the extent to which the arts and heritage sectors are being used to encourage job creation and economic development?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** As set out in the programme for Government, the Government's policy on the arts is to promote and strengthen the arts in all forms, to increase access to and participation in the arts and to make the arts an integral and valued part of our national life. The Government appreciates the importance of the arts, culture and the creative industries to our society and economy. The arts sector continues to offer vital opportunities for the provision of important cultural, social and employment benefits to communities throughout the country.

Primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The council is funded by my Department and is statutorily independent in its day-to-day operations, including its funding decisions. In 2014, the Arts Council received an allocation of €56.9 million. Details of all funding provided by the Arts Council to arts practitioners, groups and venues, including arts centres, are available on its website at [www.artscouncil.ie](http://www.artscouncil.ie).

The nature of employment within the arts sector encompasses a wide range of activities. It can include those engaged in the arts practice within specific artistic genres and can encompass areas that flow from such artistic pursuits. It may also embody the industrial creative sectors, including audiovisual production.

The Government appreciates and values the contribution that the arts sector makes to the internationally renowned artistic reputation of this country. Within the current economic constraints, investment in the arts, culture and creative sectors is more important than ever, having regard to the employment intensity of the sector. In October 2012, the Arts Council published its latest update of the "Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Arts in Ireland", which is available on the council's website.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I thank the Minister.

### **Genealogical Services**

97. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if, in the pursuit of a vital all-island approach to genealogical heritage, a conflict arises in the different legal regimes surrounding access to digitised records online versus digitised indexes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46866/14]

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** This relates to having an all-Ireland approaching to genealogical heritage services. Obviously, there are two legal jurisdictions involved. I wish to draw

attention to the General Register Office's birth, marriage and death records. We are out of synch with the North's progress. I presume the Minister will be able to address this matter.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I assume that her question relates to the indexes of births, deaths and marriages. As part of the Government's policy to enhance public access to our - I cannot say the next word; it is gone from me - heritage,-----

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** It is all right.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** -----online access to the indexes to births, deaths and marriages is in the process of being finalised through my Department's website *www.irishgenealogy.ie*. The provision of such access is a joint project between the Department of Social Protection, the General Register Office and my Department. I understand from my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, that the online availability of historical registry data is now provided for in section 27 of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014. The Act was signed by the President on 4 December and I understand that it will be subject to a commencement order in early 2015. Section 27 amends section 61 of the Civil Registration Act 2004 and provides for public access, via *www.irishgenealogy.ie*, to register entries in respect of births more than 100 years ago, marriages more than 75 years ago, and deaths more than 50 years ago. Currently, a member of the public cannot search the registers online. Instead, users may apply to the Registrar General, a superintendent registrar, a registrar or an authorised officer to search the registers on their behalf. The new provisions in the 2014 Act will allow a member of the public to directly search these historical registers, via online access, for the first time. The date restrictions are in line with international practice as regards what historic records are available online, and also reflect the current position in Northern Ireland.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** The website of the General Register Office of Northern Ireland, GRONI, provides indexes which lead the user to the actual records. The records that were made available on the website to which the Minister referred had to be taken down because the Data Protection Commissioner had a difficulty with the information that was thereby made available. Now, it seems, there is no such problem. However, we will park that issue for now. Will the Minister indicate when the information will be available online?

The GRONI website allows users, for a fee, not only to search the index entries but to see the records themselves. We should not be out of line with Northern Ireland in this regard. There was a major project done in Roscommon, at a cost of more than €10 million, where the records were digitised. Will those records, in addition to the indexes, be made available to the Department under the legislation to which the Minister referred and, if so, when is it likely to happen?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** The relevant provision of the 2014 Act allows for public access, via *www.irishgenealogy.ie*, to the register entries. That legislation was signed by the President on 4 December. As I said, users will be able to see entries for births more than 100 years ago, marriages more than 75 years ago and deaths more than 50 years ago.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** Will users be able to access the actual records or just the indexes?

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** They will be able to access the register entries, which I presume is the actual record. I am aware of the facility that is available on the GRONI website. I

will double-check to ensure the same facility will be available on our site. Users could previously click a link on the site and access the database that is controlled by the Department of Social Protection. That has been changed, but I will check with the Department and get back to the Deputy. *Written Answers follow Adjournment.*

## **Topical Issue Debate**

### **Passport Controls**

**Deputy Dominic Hannigan:** I thank the Ceann Comhairle's office for accommodating me in raising this issue. I express an interest at the outset by acknowledging that civil engineering is my profession. In fact, I understand I am the only civil engineer in the House. The contact I have had with Engineers Ireland regarding the idea of allowing civil engineers to sign section 7 of passport applications comes in the wake of that body's previous contacts with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Passport Office on this issue. Having spoken to a number of chartered engineers, both in Ireland and the United Kingdom, I have noted the differences that exist between the two jurisdictions. In the UK, engineers can sign passport applications on behalf of other citizens, a right that is shared with other professions such as Members of Parliament, dentists, fire service officers and even chiropractors. In Ireland, on the other hand, only a garda can sign section 5 of a passport application. Given that more than 600,000 people apply for a passport each year and it takes a garda, on average, five minutes to complete the relevant paperwork, that is the equivalent of approximately 30 gardaí being tied up with this task. Those 30 gardaí might be better placed fighting crime in communities. It is time to review our arrangements for approving passport applications.

I will focus this evening on section 7 of the passport application form, which deals with minors. Everybody under the age of 18 must have the consent of his or her parent or guardian to obtain a passport, and this consent must be witnessed. Witnesses can come from a number of sectors of society, including members of the Garda Síochána, members of the clergy, medical doctors, lawyers, bank managers, elected public representatives, commissioners for oaths, peace commissioners, school principals and vice principals, and accountants. Thus far, the Department has rejected repeated requests from Engineers Ireland for the inclusion of chartered engineers in this category of persons. As Engineers Ireland has pointed out, engineers have an ethical and legal status that is well established in law. It is entirely reasonable to suggest that a profession whose integrity is perhaps more intact in the public mind at this time than that of bank managers, lawyers or even some members of the clergy should be allowed to perform this particular function. Their doing so would reduce the paperwork burden on other professions and, as such, I do not expect that members of those professions would object to chartered engineers being afforded the same status as them in this regard.

I understand the Department keeps this matter under review. Will the Minister of State give an update on the status of the most recent request by Engineers Ireland for the inclusion of chartered engineers?

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Dara Murphy):** I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. The Passports Act 2008 requires that before issuing a passport to a child, the passport service should be satisfied that each person

who is a guardian of the child consents to the issue of a passport to that child. Section 7 of the passport application form addresses this issue by requiring all guardians to confirm their consent in writing in the presence of a witness. The witness, who may not be a relative, must come from a wide range of accepted signatories, including elected public representatives, notaries public or commissioners for oaths, peace commissioners, lawyers, school principals, police officers, accountants, bank managers, medical doctors and members of the clergy. Applicants are also advised that the passport service may undertake checks to validate the signatory for the purpose of ensuring that no attempts were made to apply falsely for a passport for a child.

The list of approved witnesses was prepared to provide generic categories which could be found not only in this State but also in other countries around the world. Whereas it might be possible within the State to identify those who are members of the profession of chartered engineers, as they are additionally members of Engineers Ireland, this would not be possible outside the State, where representative bodies vary from country to country. The passport service is of the view that the categories of approved witnesses who may sign section 7 of the passport application form are sufficiently broad. Accordingly, it is not intended to extend the list of witnesses further to include chartered engineers at this time. However, as the categories are kept under regular review, the question of extending further is something that can be considered again at a future date. For now, in the light of the sufficiently broad range of categories already covered, the Department is in agreement that there should not be an extension on this occasion.

**Deputy Dominic Hannigan:** I thank the Minister of State for his clarification, which is something we did not receive in the past. The reasoning as to why recognition is not being provided could be extended to other professions, which also have different representative bodies in various countries. Those bodies vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. We might consider the position with regard to the European engineer, EUR ING, professional qualification, for which chartered engineers in this country are entitled to apply, because it may provide a way forward. I will discuss the Minister of State's reply with my colleagues and the experts in the field. I will also ensure to forward a copy to Engineers Ireland because it may be of assistance in progressing matters. I thank the Minister of State for his time.

**Deputy Dara Murphy:** As already stated, no one would in any way suggest that civil engineers are not capable of fulfilling this very important function. I also indicated earlier that there is a need to have a generic or broad list of individuals from groups throughout the world who are clearly identifiable. It is not really intended that the list can never change. However, such a change is not envisaged at present. The list is kept under review. I again thank the Deputy for raising this important matter.

### **Offshore Islands**

**Deputy Noel Harrington:** I thank the Office of the Ceann Comhairle for selecting this matter. I also thank the Minister, Deputy Kelly, for coming to the House to take it. I know he is aware of some of the issues which are affecting funding for the non-Gaeltacht islands. There has been a differentiation with regard to the funding for Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht islands. The former are primarily funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, while there is a patchwork of funding streams for the non-Gaeltacht islands which dates back to the time of the rainbow coalition which held power from 1994 to 1997. The latter was the first Administration to commit to provide funding for non-Gaeltacht

islands. Funding was originally provided by the then Department of Social Welfare and was very modest in nature. From 2001 to 2009, funding was provided by the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs. Since 2009, funding for non-Gaeltacht islands has been delivered by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government via the local community development programme. Each of the islands in question would have service level agreements with Comhar na nOileán and Comhdáil Oileán na hÉireann, the Irish Islands Federation.

Much of the funding in question would have related to community development officers on a few of the islands. Some of those officers would have overseen multiple islands in the context of the provision of after-school services, play groups, services for the elderly, youth services, employment support, advocacy services, rural social schemes, rural transport and tourism projects. Such services are provided by a range of agencies on the mainland and tend to be taken for granted by citizens. The community development officers to whom I refer built up quite a track record in the context of delivery. In Civil Service speak, it might be stated that they had developed a competency or capacity in this regard. Essentially, this means that they were trusted by the relevant agencies and Government Departments to provide a one-stop-shop facility in the context of the delivery of State services. This has been the position on the non-Gaeltacht islands for some years. I recall stories to the effect that decades ago, before the funding to which I refer was put in place, the local national school teacher or parish priest would have been the go-to person in terms of getting what was required for a particular island. Those days are gone. The challenge for the islands is to obtain funding through the community development officers, who have done a fantastic job.

The Minister is aware of the difficulties being encountered by island residents, whether in terms of putting their children through national school, fighting for access to services and trying to obtain acknowledgement to the effect that life on offshore islands can be quite difficult and challenging. The maintenance of development funding, to be disbursed by community development officers, is critical not only in terms of the day-to-day running of the islands but also in the context of maintaining population levels and fighting to obtain additional services. Successive Governments have for too long seen the islands as being a burden on the State. That is not the case; they are a resource which should be funded.

I look forward to the Minister's reply. I am aware he has done a great deal of work on this matter. I thank him for facilitating dialogue in respect of it between his Department and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Progress has been made but there is more to be done.

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I thank Deputy Harrington for raising this matter. I am aware that it is extremely important to him and to most of the Deputies who live in coastal constituencies. Along with Deputy McCarthy and a number of others, he has raised this matter on previous occasions.

My Department's local community development programme, LCDP, is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The most recent programme officially ended at the end of 2013, having operated for four years and provided funding of €281 million during that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis for 2014, with a budget of €47 million, pending the roll-out of the new social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP, in April 2015. I believe it was the appropriate and necessary decision to make that intervention.

My Department currently provides LCDP funding to Comhar na nOileán Teoranta, the company with responsibility for delivering the programme to the offshore islands. In 2014 the Department allocated €527,272 to the company for the delivery of the LCDP to the offshore islands of Bere, Sherkin, Inishturk, Inishbofin and Clare. I am quite familiar with some of these islands and passed through the Deputy's constituency on my way to visit them. In terms of the successor programme, SICAP, the intention is that island areas will be eligible for inclusion in the tendering process, which is currently underway and is due to be completed in February 2015. The SICAP funding allocations are informed by a specific resource allocation model, RAM, which focuses on relative disadvantage of individual areas. Using this model brings logic and consistency to funding allocations and means each funded group receives a fair share of resources. The procurement process for SICAP was open to local development companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new programme. In stage 1, joint applications were encouraged and organisations of varying sizes, for example smaller organisations working in consortia with larger ones, were invited to submit joint applications.

Discussions have taken place and are ongoing between my Department and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, which has lead responsibility for the islands, in response to the issues raised regarding the continuation of funding for the development offices on a number of non-Gaeltacht Islands. This reflected the fact that the issues involved are broader than just those relating to SICAP, which I acknowledge. I assure the Deputy that both Departments fully understand the importance of the community development infrastructure on these islands. I and my colleagues, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Heather Humphreys, and the Minister of State, Deputy McHugh, who has a particular responsibility in this area, will be ensuring that both our Departments continue to collaborate to agree a workable solution into the future. In the meantime, LCDP funding for the groups concerned will continue until the end of March 2015.

**Deputy Noel Harrington:** I thank the Minister for his reply. I note the work that has been done in this area by the Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy McHugh, and Deputy McCarthy. As the Minister indicated, there is an uncertainty with regard to funding for Bere Island, Sherkin Island, Dursey Island, Whiddy Island, Long Island, Hare Island, Inishbofin, Inishturk and Clare Island because they are non-Gaeltacht islands.

I encourage the Minister to consider a more long-term solution to copperfasten funding for the non-Gaeltacht islands. The work the federation does is invaluable and it is under pressure. The population on each of the islands, bar none, is under severe pressure. Various censuses over the years show a very worrying trend. The loss of services results in a vicious downward spiral. Since this country is an island at the periphery of the European continent, we should look after our inhabited offshore islands and go a bit further to support them and recognise that they comprise a resource. They have tremendous tourism appeal. The Government has recognised the difficulties island farmers have in terms of access, and they are to get an extra payment owing to islands being areas of natural constraint. The islanders get increases in capital funding, also for access. The funding for the development offices and officers will provide continuing comfort for island inhabitants and ensure their health, welfare and education. It will enhance tourism and employment prospects.

As I stated, the advocacy group is a one-stop shop for liaising with the State agencies and Departments and highlights the difficulties island people have. These difficulties are not very well understood unless one has spent time and lived on islands. I thank the Minister and look

forward to further discussions and agreement on how the funding will be copperfastened over the coming weeks.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** I understand the issues facing many of these islands. I have been on them, particularly when I was an MEP or, more appropriately, when trying to become an MEP. The islands are fantastic places and there is general acceptance that the vital infrastructure already put in place needs to be maintained. Subject to available funding, we will do everything we can, working with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to ensure the structures and services that are in place will be maintained in the coming years. Whatever discussions and negotiations are necessary to ensure appropriate services are maintained will be engaged in. I have given this assurance previously, as I stated to Deputy Michael McCarthy, and I am offering assurance to Deputy Harrington this evening. I certainly believe that, through working with the other Department, we will be able to find enough resources to ensure services will be maintained within existing funding constraints. I am quietly confident, given the initial and ongoing discussions between the Departments, that we will be able to get there. I certainly believe the services on the islands need to be maintained. It is certainly the intention of the Government to maintain them.

### **Local Authority Housing Rents**

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** Over the past three years, there has been much austerity coming from the Government. This has made life harder for struggling people on low and middle incomes. Some of the lowest paid and most vulnerable in society are tenants of local authorities. This is because of the very narrow parameters one has to fit between in order to be able to apply for social housing and the even more narrow parameters required for a person to actually be housed. People who fit into the first set of parameters almost always end up in private accommodation, receiving rent supplement that costs the State nearly €350 million annually. Recent rent increases in the private sector have pushed rent supplement to the limit and have done massive harm to many families. Far too many people have been made homeless due to these rent increases, so much so that there are record numbers in need of emergency accommodation. This kind of accommodation is bursting at the seams due to the failure of the Government to protect tenants from rent increases by implementing rent controls.

In the case of local authority homes, rent is controlled and it is much less likely that a tenant will lose his home. This is welcome, but the Government needs to strike a balance by having rent that is both fair and affordable. This balance has been struck in many ways, but we are dealing with people who live on extremely tight budgets and who have been the victims of many cuts over the past three years. The cut to the dole for young people was particularly hard. Increases in utility costs and the cuts to the household benefit, in addition to all the supplementary payments that must be made, took their toll on people living in council housing. The impending water charges loom large in the minds of these people. They will not pay, simply because they cannot pay.

Next summer a new rent scheme will come into place that will set base levels and thresholds for rent, in addition to bands. These may not change much, but there are some projections indicating that rents could increase for some people who really cannot afford to pay anything more. It may be an indictment of our economy and many other factors, but it is a reality that must be considered when setting the basic criteria for how local authority rent is charged.

I wish to ask the Minister about voluntary housing bodies and their rent levels. We recently saw the obscene set of circumstances in which a property that the State helped to develop was left idle because a Catholic housing association in Dublin was refusing to accept rents in line with the reality of what people could pay. Instead, it wanted market prices. Of course, most approved housing bodies charge a fair level of rent, give good service and are always eager to have their homes occupied, but a lesson must be learned from that. Common sense eventually did prevail.

Councils and approved bodies must continue to allow people to rent at a fair and affordable price. Will the Minister commit to not changing the rent scheme in any way that would result in higher rents? Senior citizens and such people who pay a certain rent could be affected if the proposals are implemented. I have examined some of the rent levels and am extremely worried that the new rent scheme will be much more disadvantageous. I ask the Minister to consider it very carefully. I realise we will be debating it thoroughly in 2015, but I just believe we need to examine it carefully now. I am worried about the bands that are being proposed.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. With regard to the issue he raised about the housing body, I know what he was referring to. As he is aware, discussions took place last night in order to solve the problem. I am happy that it is certainly moving in the right direction. Having said that, I share some of the Deputy's concerns and attitudes in respect of ensuring common sense prevails.

Consistency and fairness are at the heart of the new differential rent framework. Responsibility for setting local authority rents has been devolved as an executive function to individual local authorities since 1986. Under the new scheme, this will become a reserved function. While all housing authorities charge rents known as differential rents, related to the income of tenant households, the amount of rent varies from local authority to local authority across the country. This has led to a situation whereby similar households in comparable accommodation are charged varying amounts of differential rent depending on where they live and the local authority letting the accommodation. The rent regimes in individual local authority areas also differ on issues such as the types and amounts of income that are reckonable for differential rent purposes. There is no justification for this disparate and inconsistent approach to rent setting for accommodation that is funded wholly by the Exchequer. There are many cases that cause great concern, so this needs to be addressed.

Section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 facilitates significant harmonisation of local authority rent levels while retaining the principle of having rents related to household income and leaving some discretion to individual authorities to determine rent policies in their areas. The new system, however, will be more equitable, transparent and consistent, with regulations providing for a base charge for each household member, amounting to €30 per week in the case of single-person households, which is identical to the rent contribution paid by single persons in receipt of rent supplement, and €45 per week for couples. Households with incomes in excess of thresholds to be set in regulation, which will be related to household composition, will also be required to pay a differential charge of a proportion of their income above the threshold. Individual housing authorities are already empowered under the Housing Acts to include charges in the rent relating to the costs of works and services provided to dwellings.

The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published a few weeks ago, indicated that the necessary statutory instruments will be made in the first quarter of next year to commence

the process of introducing the new rents framework. The elected members of each local authority will then have a number of months to make their first rent scheme under the 2009 Act within the parameters laid down in the regulations.

A further commencement order will be made later in 2015 introducing rent charging under section 31. On the introduction of section 31 rents, housing authorities will have a two-year transitional period during which they will continue to set rents at their own discretion thus affording them the opportunity to move in incremental steps towards the rent levels that will apply on expiry of the transitional period.

Under an amendment of section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, the new rent framework will apply also to rent contributions payable by beneficiaries under the new scheme of housing assistance currently being piloted by seven housing authorities. In the new year, I will prescribe the rent contributions payable in respect of housing assistance during the two-year transitional period for the introduction of the new rent framework.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** I agree that the practice in local authorities varies. That needs to be sorted out because it has been a hindrance and certainly has not been fair. I am totally in agreement with the Minister on that.

I am worried that in some ways this may cost a bit more. I mentioned the senior citizens and those who made financial contributions. Many of them made considerable contributions and ended up paying rent on top of that. In some cases in the past, I found tenants passed away within a short period and were still paying rent. Often they also pay, on top of their rent, for a boiler service and other matters.

There has also been a situation where differential rents, which has been used by Dublin City Council, have put the rents up so high. If a tenant's income increases, his or her rent goes as high, in some cases, as €200 or €300 per week. That does not make sense. Some voluntary housing bodies place caps on the maximum rent payable. We should be looking at providing for such a maximum and what that should be. It is ridiculous. I hold a local authority tenancy and I was paying €80 per week. Since I became a Deputy, I have been paying nearly €300 per week. It is wrong. We should be encouraging social housing, not discouraging it.

I note the Minister plans to reintroduce the tenant-purchase scheme. We should also include in it that the proceeds of the scheme should be ringfenced for social housing. In the past, it ended up in a pile and did not go where it should have gone.

I have reservations about this scheme. We need to look much more carefully at some of the band levels the Minister has set and discussed. He is setting them a little lower and that will cause serious problems.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** This is something on which Deputy Ellis has considered views. In fairness, we are not a million miles apart on it. We agree. The two-year interim period is the period that we will use to sort out any issues that may arise. That is why I wanted it to be a two-year period. We need something consistent and fair and that shows tenants in the same bands are treated in the same way. Over the local authorities, if one analyses some of the rents that are being paid in various different local authorities, they do not stack up side by side as regards being fair and equitable.

We outlined the process by which we will do this. The two-year interim period will iron out

any issues. I do not expect there to be many issues but that period can be used in that regard. I also point out that this is something that local authorities and many local authority members have requested. Of course, there will be a change in rents as a result of this. These changes will not be significant. I might also add that in some cases the rents will reduce. There will be an equilibrium.

In my time, which predates my time in this role, many local authority members across all political parties and none, and many local authority housing representatives, officials and CEOs, have requested that this be looked at. The framework, which leverages on previous legislation, including that introduced by previous Administrations, is welcome and is something that should be introduced.

I agree with Deputy Ellis on the tenant-purchase scheme. The tenant-purchase scheme is something I am initiating as part of the social housing strategy. I want to do so because it is critically important that we give tenants an opportunity to purchase their own homes. I also want to ensure the scheme is fair and equitable and that it will work. That is why a lot of energy will go in to ensure that happens. It is necessary because tenants should aspire to be able to purchase their own homes. I hope the scheme will operate in various different ways in order to facilitate tenants of different circumstances to be able to purchase their own home which is something we all desire.

### **National Car Test**

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** At the outset, I am disappointed by the way Topical Issues has been put to the end of the day's business. The introduction of the Topical Issue Debate was about improving this House's communication with the public. Topical Issues was about identifying issues of real concern to people that would be tabled at a time of the day that would allow it fit in to the regular news cycle, and be used as a methodology of communicating with the people. I am disappointed with the way the business has been ordered today, but that is as an aside.

I thank the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Donohoe, for being here. I appreciate his presence for what I believe to be an important issue.

The Minister is correctly dealing with the issues around death and injury on the road. He correctly decided, in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority, to introduce increased penalty points and the introduction of penalty points for the first time for a number of offences that heretofore were dealt with differently. It is part of a progressive and multilayered approach in this House to dealing with death and injury on the road.

There is some difficulty with the choreography. It is putting the cart before the horse. In my experience, across quite a number of NCT test centres, a delay exists in scheduling such tests. It can vary. In some instances, the delay can be up to four months. In others, it can be three months. Of course, there are areas where it is not quite so difficult to schedule a test.

The fact is, though, that there are drivers today who find themselves not having an NCT. They attempted to book a test a number of weeks ago and, because of the backlog of delays, now find themselves not only outside the law as they always would have been, but in a position where there is a potential to gain penalty points. That is particularly worrying and disturbing.

I accept that discretion can be exercised by gardaí but the introduction of these penalty points offences should not have taken place until such time as there was a relatively quick turnaround in providing citizens with access to an appropriate test. That is the first point.

In addition, the Minister will be aware of an issue that has arisen in relation to penalty points. We read with concern about it today on the front page of the *Irish Independent*, where the journalist, Mr. Niall O'Connor, has a story which seems to emanate from within the Department. It is irrelevant where it emanated from. It seems to be a serious issue. The Minister indicated he has referred this issue to the Attorney General and that in due course he will have some information.

Before the Attorney General comes back to the Minister, can Deputy Donohoe tell the House tonight what is the genesis of the problem that has raised his concerns? What is the extent of the problem? What is the scale of it? How many penalty points are involved here? How many drivers potentially have issues, either positive or negative from their perspective? How many drivers are affected? What is the Minister's perception of the impact of such a problem, if it exists? I accept and understand that the Minister is waiting for the advice of the Attorney General to establish whether there is an issue in the first instance, but pending that, could he answer some of the questions I have raised in that regard?

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I thank Deputy Dooley for raising this matter. He is correct that the entire objective of the session is to raise topical issues. The original issue raised related to the national car test, NCT, but I will also respond to the questions he has asked regarding the events of today.

First, I wish to refer to changes to the penalty points regime which came into effect yesterday, and the particular change to which Deputy Dooley referred with regard to the NCT system and the need for a certificate. The Deputy referred accurately to the history of the matter, but I wish to highlight one point for the record. Deputy Dooley correctly stated that it has for some years been an offence to use a vehicle on public roads without a valid NCT certificate. The only point I would add is that in the past this offence always involved a direct summons to court and the assignment of five penalty points on conviction. What has now changed is the introduction of a fixed charge notice system. If someone is charged with an offence, he or she will now be issued with a fixed charge notice and, on payment of the €60 charge, will have three penalty points assigned to his or her licence. The driver will continue to have the option of going to court, where five points will still apply on conviction. The key change is the option of compliance with a fixed charge notice and the assignment of three penalty points instead of going directly to court.

In response to the Deputy's point about current waiting times for NCT tests, I have been in constant contact with the Road Safety Authority, RSA, on the matter, and it has informed me that the best way for people to get their appointment is to call the NCTS call centre directly on 01 4135992 rather than booking a test on the website. I am currently examining regional waiting times. I have been in contact with the RSA and it is already aware of the issue. It has put extra staff in place for the period during which most of the tests are likely to be carried out. An additional 50 staff will be in place across the centres. I will continue to monitor the issue to ensure that as many people as possible get the NCT test as required.

The most up-to-date statistics indicate that for the week commencing 24 November, a total of approximately 25,000 NCT tests were carried out. Of those, 9,000 were late or very late -

meaning their due test date was in the past; a further 1,450 related to tests that should have been carried out in 2013; and 13,200 were early compliant requests - that is, taking advantage of the facility that was instituted in September to avail of early tests up to 90 days prior to the test due date. Additional staff are now in place. It is my information that 200,000 cars in the State currently do not have a valid NCT certificate. The change has been advertised since the start of September and additional staff are in place. I will continue to closely examine regional waiting times. I responded to the issue raised by the Deputy, but if he has further questions he wishes to raise with me on the other matter, I will respond to him.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** I appreciate the Minister's approach to dealing with the matter on a regional basis and I welcome his announcement of additional testing staff. I recognise that the Minister is not in a position to encourage the Garda to exercise discretion, but I hope that until such time as the backlog has been addressed, the penalty by way of fixed notice will not be enforced. I hope common sense will prevail, particularly in cases in which a test has already been scheduled. Perhaps some direction could be given to the Garda or a statutory instrument might be required to ensure that pending the alleviation of the backlog, having a test scheduled would ensure the certificate is valid until such time as a test has taken place and at such time the car would either pass or fail. I would prefer if the Minister would use the available time to address the other issue I raised.

**Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** I will continue to monitor the situation. The average waiting time for tests currently is 11 days nationally. I am looking at how it stacks up per centre to address the very point to which Deputy Dooley referred.

On the earlier point regarding the concerns aired today on the operation of the penalty points system - the Deputy also asked me questions on the matter at a meeting of the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications earlier today - I received notification from my Department that an issue had arisen with the implementation of some penalty points. Upon receipt of the information, I immediately contacted the Attorney General to find out the necessary course of action I would need to take to deal with the matter. I expect to receive formal advice on the matter tomorrow. Deputy Dooley inquired whether I could tell him what the specific offences are, but I cannot do that at the moment because if a potential issue needs to be dealt with, given that it relates directly to road safety and the integrity of our road safety system, I wish to be sure I know exactly what the issue is and how the matter could be addressed. In order to do that, I will require the advice of the Attorney General, which I expect to receive tomorrow morning. I absolutely understand how central the credibility of our penalty points system is and the need to deal openly with any points or concerns people have in that regard. When I have received the advice and it becomes apparent that I need to take a certain course of action, be it legislative or otherwise, I will organise a briefing on the matter for Deputy Dooley and also for Deputy Ellis so that people are aware of the issue. I will answer any questions on the matter before it comes to the Dáil, if that is the course of action required.

### **Palestine: Motion [Private Members]**

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Walsh):** I understand Deputy Adams is sharing time with Deputies Michael Colreavy, Brian Stanley, Dessie Ellis and Martin Ferris and also four Deputies from the Technical Group. Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Gerry Adams:** I move:

That Dáil Éireann---

notes that:

— in 2011, the Irish Government upgraded the status, titles, and functional privileges of the Palestinian Mission to Ireland to close to that of an embassy;

— in November 2012, Ireland voted in favour of the United Nations General Assembly motion granting “non-member observer state” status to Palestine;

— the long-standing commitment Irish Governments have given to the development of a viable, sovereign Palestinian state, and their support for the achievement of a sovereign state of Palestine existing in peace with its neighbours including the State of Israel;

— as of 8 December 2014, 135 countries have formally recognised the state of Palestine, including eight EU member states - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Malta, Cyprus and Sweden;

— Seanad Éireann, on 22 October 2014, unanimously accepted a motion calling on the Government “to formally recognise the state of Palestine and do everything it can at the international level to help secure a viable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”; and

— on 30 October 2014, Sweden became the first EU member state to formally recognise the state of Palestine while a member state of the EU;

recognises that:

— finding a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Arabs and Israelis in a broader context, is a key element of Irish foreign policy;

— the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to have their own state as well as the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure borders are unquestionable; and

— continued Israeli settlement construction and extension activities in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, as well as the continued expropriation of Palestinian land and demolition of Palestinian property by Israel is illegal and severely threatens the establishment of a viable Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders;

concludes that:

— the international law criteria for recognition of a Palestinian state have been fulfilled; and

— the achievement of a fully independent sovereign state of Palestine is an essential element to the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict; and calls on the Government to:

— officially recognise the state of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital, as established in UN resolutions, as a further positive contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;

— do all it can to assist in the development of the democratic and state institutions of the Palestinian state; and

— do everything it can, at the international level, to help secure an inclusive and viable peace process, and two-state solution, in order to bring about the positive conditions to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I welcome the Government's decision not to oppose the motion. That means both Houses of the Oireachtas will support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the recognition of the Palestinian state and sovereignty for the Palestinian people. This is a substantial and positive development which means that Ireland is now a significant part of the consensus for peace and progress in the Middle East. I have long argued that as a colonised people with a history of resistance and a peace process we could play a leadership role in the search for peace in the region.

This is the correct stand for Ireland. It is the moral stand. The motion is about advancing the position, which is very straightforward. It recognises the right of Palestinians to self-determination and, in the words of the motion, "to have their own state as well as the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure borders". It calls on the Government to "officially recognise the state of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital, as established in UN resolutions, as a further positive contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." It calls on the Government to do all it can to assist in the development of the democratic and state institutions of the Palestinian state and to do everything it can at international level to help secure an inclusive and viable peace process and two-state solution in order to bring about the positive conditions to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The motion is about hope. In a region where there is precious little hope and tensions are increasing daily there is an onus on the international community to provide meaningful leadership.

I travelled to the region last week. It was my fourth visit in eight years. Five years ago I spent two days in Gaza, as well as visiting Ramallah and Jerusalem. I saw for myself the devastating impact of the Israeli war of 2008 and 2009 on the people and infrastructure of Gaza. This time the Israeli Government refused me leave to visit and gave no explanation. The Israeli assault during the summer was even more shocking than that of five years ago. Some 2,200 Palestinians were killed, including 500 children, while over 90 entire families were wiped out. The physical damage to the infrastructure of Gaza was enormous. Thousands of families whose homes were destroyed now face a cold winter.

In Ramallah and Jerusalem I met President Abbas and others in the Palestinian Authority, with NGOs and representatives of Palestinian organisations. In Jerusalem I met Israeli activists and NGOs. Many Israeli citizens understand the deeply corrosive effect of the occupation of Palestinian land, the apartheid system which Israel has created and the brutality and dehumanising impact of the actions of the Israeli Defence Forces, IDF.

Over 5 million Palestinian refugees are scattered in camps in the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and Jordan. Children, parents and grandparents have known nothing but refugee camps, some of which came into existence in 1948. Last week I spoke to Yehuda Shaul, a former sergeant and commander in the Israeli army. He is a co-director of Breaking the Silence, an organisation made up of former Israeli soldiers who speak out against the actions of the IDF. Both he and his colleagues are deeply concerned about the moral price Israel and its citizens are paying to maintain the occupation, as well as the terrible impact on Palestinians. These former soldiers are Israeli patriots who believe speaking out against injustice is necessary to defend Israel, as well as to advance the rights of Palestinians. He dismisses Israeli Govern-

ment claims that its military operations are defensive and to oppose terrorism. He believes this is only a small part of the strategy. The reality on the ground is that Israeli actions have led to the *de facto* annexation of large sections of the West Bank. He also believes claims by successive Israeli Governments that the occupation is temporary and will end with a peace deal are not true. He believes the current Israeli policy of occupation, separation and settlements is not designed as a temporary measure but is intended to be permanent. In his view, “It’s all about maintaining Israeli military control over Palestinians.”

During my visit last week the separation wall was a constant oppressive presence. It is a scar on the land and the conscience of Israel and the international community. It stretches for 700 km; it is multi-layered, often with a 60 m wide exclusion zone and a concrete wall 8 m high. It snakes up and down hills, alongside motorways, down the middle of streets and through Palestinian communities. It prevents Palestinian farmers from getting to their farmland and captures within its boundary Palestinian land that is then annexed by the Israeli Government. It is all about control. The wall and the hundreds of IDF military checkpoints and road blocks drive a wedge between Israelis and Palestinians but also between Palestinians. For Palestinians to move around even within the West Bank, there is a monitoring system involving Israeli Government permits and permissions which significantly limit their freedom of movement and severely inhibit economic growth. In addition, the Israeli settlements which are illegal under international law also act as barriers to movement. Palestinians are forbidden to enter these territories. On a daily basis the Israeli authorities decide what goods are transferred from city to city and village to village. They decide what businesses can open, who can pass through the checkpoints and gets to school. Houses, motor vehicles, electronic goods and farm animals can all be taken at the discretion of a soldier. Sometimes they even confiscate people for use during training exercises to practise making arrests.

The fabric of life for Palestinians is rooted in fear; it is arbitrary and constantly changing at the whim of the Israeli authorities. This is no way for families, children and millions of Palestinian citizens to live, nor is it acceptable that the Palestinian Authority has sole jurisdiction over only 17% of the West Bank. That is the equivalent of the Irish Government being told by a foreign government that it has jurisdiction over just two thirds of Leinster. Almost two thirds of the occupied West Bank - known as Area C - is under total Israeli control. The separation wall and the sterile roads and streets - the term used by the Israeli authorities - from which Palestinians are banned are symptomatic of an institutionalised structured system of economic, cultural and social apartheid that brings shame to Israel and the international community because of its failure to take a stand against it.

Yehuda Shaul said:

Occupation takes place every day; it is an offensive act every day. [It is] a national security concept dependent on absolute control - a *status quo* that is not a frozen reality and is being entrenched every day ... The International community is failing Israelis and Palestinians. There is a lot of talk but no action. Nowhere in history did people wake up one morning and give up their privileges ... the international community has to raise the price for Israel of the current *status quo* ... No one will live in dignity or freedom here. Neither the Palestinians nor Israelis until there is a sovereign Palestinian state. This is the right patriotic position.

As the Irish people suffered centuries of colonisation and occupation, we understand all of these matters. We understand also the role of struggle in the achievement of freedom and independence. Consequently, Irish people identify with the circumstances confronting the Palestin-

ian people, but that does not mean that we are anti-Israel. On the contrary, our desire is to see two sovereign states established. The first step on this path must be a recognition that Palestine is a sovereign state. There are many others, including Alon Liel and Nan Baruch, whom I met and who are former professional diplomats who have written to all Members. They support the campaign to secure official government recognition by EU member states and others and have lobbied us to bring this about. They ask why the right of the Palestinian people, their sovereignty and statehood, should be dependent on Israel which is a state with an embassy in Dublin and other cities throughout the world. The Palestinians are represented here by a mission. That is wrong and I have raised the matter regularly with the Taoiseach.

We must stand with the Palestinian and Israeli citizens who want peace and are taking risks for it. The passing of the motion would be an important contribution. On the back of it being accepted, the Government should take a leadership role in pushing for greater action by the international community. It should also follow the logic of the motion and upgrade the Palestinian mission to a full embassy.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** I was just beginning to feel good about the Government accepting the motion when I began to hear rumours that Ireland had been classified in a UN report as a country that facilitated torture by the CIA. If these reports are confirmed, it will bring great shame on the people of this nation. In particular, it will bring great shame on the Governments which permitted the facilitation of this torture. I am not saying these reports are true, but if they are true we will have done so much damage to the credibility of this nation. I would like the Minister of State to check into this as a matter of some urgency.

This nation has always prided itself on being a defender of human rights and anti-imperialism worldwide. We have a proud history of sending peacekeeping troops into some very hostile territories and they have served with distinction. The men and women of our Defence Forces have served in areas such as the Congo and Lebanon. We have also played a role at the UN table throughout the history of the State. Notable occasions when the State made its voice heard include during the Algerian war of independence, when Ireland rightly condemned French atrocities on the international stage.

Today we have been given and have taken the opportunity to make our stamp as legislators on the world stage. We may come from towns and villages like Manorhamilton, Tralee and Youghal, but this moment allows us to send a message to the world that Ireland stands with the people of Palestine. The oppression of the Palestinian people for decades has been a dark stain on world leaders, particularly the many Western countries that have allowed it to occur. It is past time for the House to make this gesture and right this wrong.

When a vote was taken at the UN Human Rights Council on condemning war crimes committed during Israel's most recent onslaught on Gaza, the Irish Government abstained. We had a long debate earlier on whether the Government was in touch with the Irish people. The abstention on this vote was miles from where the vast majority of Irish people stand on this issue. The Government was not feeling the pulse of the Irish nation when this abstention was agreed. It was a terrible blight on the good name and reputation Ireland has in the international community. On 30 October Sweden voted to recognise the state of Palestine and became the 135th country to do so. The UN has 193 member countries, so by not recognising Palestine Ireland is indeed in the minority.

We should not fool ourselves into believing a vote in the Chamber will be a solution to the

Israel-Palestine conflict. It will not. A serious peace process must be embarked upon to bring a true and lasting settlement to the region. However, recognising the state of Palestine will aid in this process. The Palestinians should be viewed as equal partners in negotiations. It is also important to note that pre-1967 borders, which the PLO and the Palestinian national assembly recognise, are already mapped out. Ireland has had its own history of occupation and suffering. This institution was founded following a physical struggle for independence and self-determination from Britain. The walls of this institution bear the portraits of those who fought for that independence. If we have learned anything from our own history, it is that the oppressed need justice and liberation no matter where in the world they are. By accepting this motion we will send a clear message to the world that Ireland and the Irish people stand on the side of the oppressed.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion. I also welcome the signals from the Government that it will accept it. It will be truly historic if the House unanimously passes this motion, not just to support the ideal of a Palestinian state but to recognise the existing state of Palestine.

The people of Palestine have suffered many injustices, including war crimes by Israel and the denial of the most basic human rights of water, land and dignity. We all stood by and watched in shock the recent bombardment of Gaza, the damage caused to its infrastructure and the killing of more than 2,000 innocent civilians. The Palestinians have had obscenity heaped on top of obscenity over the years and a solution must be put in place.

Since the 1948 UN resolution which denied the Palestinians their state and the right to exist as a people, they have suffered humiliation, poverty and terror the hands of Israel. Much of the so-called civilised world has stood by while Israel did what it wished. The construction and expansion of the illegal settlements on the West Bank and East Jerusalem is nothing less than a land grab. The demolition of Palestinian property and the destruction of its infrastructure, which has driven Palestinians into poverty and fear, must end. Ordinary citizens throughout the world, including here in Ireland, have been horrified by the actions of Israel and are angry about a lack of action or, it seems, concern by much of the international community and powerful nations.

In 2012 the State upgraded the status of Palestine, and has given it some diplomatic status and a mission here. On foot of tonight's motion, if passed, we urge that this be moved to full diplomatic status immediately. In 2012 Ireland voted in favour of a UN motion to give Palestine non-member observer status, which can now change to full membership.

Successive Irish Governments have long supported the concept of a sovereign Palestinian state, based on the two nations solution. The next logical step is to give full recognition to the state of Palestine. Eight EU member states recognise the state of Palestine, and Sweden is the latest to join them. I hope we will do so tomorrow. A total of 135 countries in the United Nations have already given full recognition to Palestine. Israel, in its arrogance, buoyed up by the fact it has been allowed to act with impunity, has acted in such an outrageous manner that it has exposed itself before the world as a state guilty of nothing short of war crimes, bombing hospitals, schools and even UN centres. In the face of public outcry throughout the world, it ploughed on during the recent conflict. It continues to deny observer status to visiting parliamentarians and observers and those concerned about what has been happening.

Recently, the Seanad passed a motion to recognise the state of Palestine, which was a very

progressive move. We can do the same. At present we are clearly out of step by not giving full recognition to the state of Palestine. The fact that 135 countries do so shows we are out of step with international opinion. Unfortunately, earlier this year the Government abstained on a UN Human Rights Council decision condemning the war crimes committed by Israel during the recent bombardment of Gaza. Supposedly, Ireland was waiting for EU consensus. When my constituency colleague, the Minister, Deputy Charlie Flanagan, was questioned about this, he stated that he wanted to try to obtain EU consensus. We should not wait for EU consensus. We should be able to stand on our own two feet as an independent State. We have our own foreign policy; we should lead by example and stand shoulder to shoulder with countries such as Sweden. We should not wait for the say-so or the nod from the EU or anybody else to do so. We also failed to support a motion brought before a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency calling on Israel to sign up to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, despite the fact that we were its architects.

I welcome the signals from the Government that it will support the motion. It is historic. We must move to the next step quickly, and actively lobby for a two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. We must do all we can to develop full self-determination for the Palestinian people, work with them in doing this internationally, and give them every aid we can at international level.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** It is a great honour to speak on this important motion. As an Irish republican I am always mindful that we as a nation once stood before the world and demanded the recognition that had up until then been denied to us. The 1916 Proclamation called for our exaltation among the nations. In the Declaration of Independence we claimed for ourselves the recognition of the world that we were an independent and sovereign nation. We sought and in more and more cases were granted the support and recognition of the world for our people, our place and our sovereignty.

That is what the Palestinians want and is what the motion is about. The news that the Government will not stand in its way is exciting. We are returning the favour of that recognition granted by our earliest allies and supporting the right of a small nation to be free.

Some would paint support for the cause of the Palestinian people to have a homeland as an attack on the people of Israel, but it is not black and white. The absence of a Palestinian state is in reality only in the interest of warmongers and zealots. The President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, once described the efforts of his people as not a campaign aimed at isolating Israel or delegitimising it, but one that sought simply to gain legitimacy for the cause of the people of Palestine. We only aim to delegitimise the settlement activities and the occupation, the apartheid and the logic of ruthless force. We believe that all the countries of the world stand with us in this regard.

The state of Palestine is legitimate. The cause of the Palestinian people and the Israeli people to live in their homeland as equals, free from violence and bigotry, is legitimate. However, as President Abbas rightly states, the actions of the Israeli state in oppressing his people and state is not legitimate. The settlements which are still being built illegally on Palestinian land while an apartheid wall carves up the West Bank are not legitimate. Suggesting this is a conflict of equals is absurd and it is not legitimate to claim the shelling of children playing football on a beach is justified for defence.

Supporting the motion will not change all these things, but it is an important sign to the

people of the Middle East that there is hope that Palestine will one day soon be free and the conflict will end because the rest of the world might soon stop making excuses for slaughter and oppression. Tomorrow by passing the motion, we will join the majority of UN members by supporting the state of Palestine and recognising its right as a nation. It would be an almost imperceptible change for Ireland, but would mean a great deal for the Palestinian people and weaken further all those who wish to see the status quo continue and nothing to change in the Middle East.

It is also a very important step in reclaiming our dignity on the issue. Up to now the Government had seemed increasingly unwilling to be a voice for peace and justice in Palestine and Gaza in particular. Ireland recently abstained from a UN vote to condemn the war crimes committed in the shelling of Gaza during the summer. We shamed ourselves that day, refusing to stand on our feet and making excuses by referring the decision to the EU as a whole.

We then failed to support the call for Israel to sign up to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty that Ireland had championed. This was pure weakness. We utterly failed to be the strong voice for justice. We like to believe we are on the international stage. This week we are turning the tide on that shameful episode. We should see it as a new dawn for our State as an ally of all those who are oppressed and denied peace and freedom - otherwise we will have learned nothing from our own struggles and the generosity of those who stood with us. We must take this step and must work to promote the state of Palestine across the world and especially in those countries that continue to fail to stand up to the injustices of Israel's brutal apartheid and demand a free and sovereign Palestinian state.

**Deputy Martin Ferris:** Before I came to the Chamber I was watching CNN and other news stations. Deputy Colreavy referred to the rendition flights through Shannon Airport. It was heartening to see elected American representatives, including Senator John McCain, publicly confirming that torture took place and that people were taken away from various countries in the Middle East and elsewhere and obviously flown through Shannon Airport before some of them were taken to Guantanamo Bay. Again nobody on the Government side spoke out here. The usual people spoke out - the people who are concerned about the rights and entitlements of people, and about injustice and wrongs throughout the world. The Government just sat on its arse and did nothing about it.

Last year, Deputy Keating and I travelled to Jordan along with other European parliamentarians. We had the occasion to visit a 1948 refugee camp, a 1967 refugee camp and a current refugee camp on the Syrian border. We witnessed the plight of Palestinian refugees. They have been abused by many states. They cannot even avail of third level education because they are refugees in Jordan. It was enlightening for me to see what some human beings do to other human beings. There were tens of thousands of people living in the biggest concentration camps in the world.

There are many things on which to fight the Government and yet the Irish people in the cause of international solidarity came out in their thousands over the summer, on the last occasion that the Israelis assaulted Gaza. For the record, 2,200 Palestinian people were killed in Gaza and 64 Israeli soldiers were killed. Those are the figures currently available. The Irish people, who came out at that time, came out in solidarity with the Palestinian people over injustices perpetrated by big powers. I was really struck by the decency of the Irish people. They hate injustice and repression whether it is at home or abroad. There were demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza all over the country and we know from Sinn Féin's strong links with the

Palestinian people how much they appreciate our solidarity and moral support.

Moral support means supporting someone psychologically or with solidarity but the Irish people also stepped up when it came to material support to the people of Gaza to help relieve the immeasurable suffering of the people there and to help them rebuild after the devastation of Israeli bombardment and destruction by ground troops.

Any government which would call itself progressive has a role in leading its people. However, in solidarity with the people of Palestine as with all kinds of other issues, it was the Irish people who gave leadership, not the Government. The Irish people were ahead of the Government in their solidarity with the Palestinian people and finally the Government is listening. It is very encouraging that it is prepared to accept the motion before the House.

Instead of standing up against Israeli violations of international law and human rights abuses during the Gaza invasion, the Government along with many other governments stood back. Instead of taking an independent and morally correct position, the Government remained silent in the face of the suffering of the people of Gaza. For too long the Government hid behind the EU pretence that Ireland is too small to have an impact as if it had no independent foreign policy. The Irish people were embarrassed and ashamed, in the middle of the last onslaught on Gaza, when the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan, on behalf of the State, abstained on the United Nations Human Rights Council vote to condemn Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Yesterday's newspapers reported that 28 people in an extended family were killed in a bombing of a house. Eighteen of them were children. The Minister, Deputy Charles Flanagan, did not even have the decency to recognise that as a war crime.

This State should have been leading the way within the EU. Seven EU member states already recognise Palestine, although they did so before they ever joined the European Union. Sweden became the first EU member state to recognise Palestine when it joined 134 other members of the United Nations to do so.

By the Government's words today, Ireland is now part of that majority of full members of the United Nations that recognises the Palestinian state. The step to recognition is not a giant one and it is one the people support. As we have already upgraded the mission of Palestine, it is nearly an embassy already. In November 2012 Ireland supported the motion at the United Nations to upgrade Palestine's status as a non-member observer state. It is welcome that the Government has taken the next step to reflect the views of the people and openly and proudly declared its support for the achievement of a sovereign state of Palestine. This is our chance to do so and support the Palestinians' right to self-determination. Israel has no right to be building illegal settlements on the West Bank and in east Jerusalem. It has no right of veto over the Palestinian right to self-determination, yet Palestine has been blockaded and occupied.

I commend every Deputy who is supporting the motion and especially commend my colleagues in the Sinn Féin Party for taking the initiative.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan):** Deputies Maureen O'Sullivan, Thomas Pringle, Finian McGrath and Richard Boyd Barrett are sharing time.

**Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan:** First, I acknowledge Sinn Féin's role in having this issue

debated tonight. The motion is opportune because, as of now, we have 135 countries that have formally recognised the state of Palestine. I accept the right of the people of Palestine to a state, as well as the right of the people of Israel to a state, but each of them has to recognise the other's rights.

From my own visits to the area, I must ask whether this debate is taking place too late. I say this because of the increasing encroachment of settlements in Jerusalem and on the West Bank especially. Can there be a state of Palestine? Will there be sufficient land left for the people of Palestine to have a viable state? We can see this most graphically on maps of the area. We can see the shrinkage of areas for the Palestinian people. How can a state be created out of pieces of land here and there? They are areas which, as the crow flies, would take five minutes to traverse, but between walls and settlements, it can take from an hour and a half to two hours to get from one place to another. As for trying to navigate between the guidelines and rules for areas A, B and C, Palestinian people spend hours every day queuing. I stood at these checkpoints in Bethlehem and Jerusalem and felt for the Palestinian people who were unable to move freely within their country. That was an excessive burden of humiliation and indignity for them to carry. I also felt for the young Israeli soldiers. They were only teenagers in volatile circumstances, heavily armed and doing military service. As we know, it is a recipe for disaster.

The settlements are the biggest stumbling block to a just and lasting peace and they continue. Settlement building continues. We are in the throes of discussing homelessness in this country and right now Palestinian people are being forcibly evicted from their land. The settlements are illegal under international humanitarian law. There are massive environmental issues and no accountability for settler violence.

The Palestinian Authority has to step up to the mark for its people. There is massive funding from the European Union and I would like to see some of it going to the wonderful Palestinian cultural, artistic, disability and youth groups I met that do fantastic work in the arts, music, theatre, dance and education. These groups use drama and art to empower young people to promote non-violent resistance and peace.

I also acknowledge the Israeli groups, including Breaking the Silence, the Refuseniks, the Rabbis for Justice, and other Israelis who agree with what we are debating. I have met Palestinians who are not sure a two-state solution is the practical answer or that it is not a one-state solution with power sharing. It is important to support the motion which is an expression of support for the Palestinian people, especially in the hope it will bring an end to settlements.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** I thank Sinn Féin for sharing some of its time with the Technical Group in debating this joint motion. I recognise that the Government appears to be accepting it, which is important and progressive.

Over the summer I had the honour of hosting the Palestinian ambassador when he visited County Donegal. I was joined by my colleagues, Micheál Cholm Mac Giolla Easbuig and the cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council, Mr. John Campbell. We participated in a public meeting and it was heartening to see the support from the ordinary people of County Donegal for the Palestinian cause at a difficult time for them when their people were being slaughtered by the Israelis in Gaza.

The motion reflects the mood of all Irish people in seeking to recognise Palestine as a state. It is an important step for us to take as a nation, particularly when we abstained in a vote at the

United Nations during the crisis over the summer. We stated it had something to do with the European Union, but that abstention did damage to us as a nation. It undermined the independence of our foreign policy during the years and the progressive steps we had taken towards supporting the Palestinian people in their struggle.

Like other Deputies, I have received the e-mail from a group of Israelis with a petition asking that we support the recognition of Palestine. It may be useful to read it. They state

We the undersigned citizens of Israel who wish for it to be a safe and thriving country are worried by the continued political stalemate, the occupation and settlement activities that lead to further confrontations with Palestinians and quash any chance for compromise. It is clear that the prospects for Israel's security and existence depend on the existence of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Israel should recognise a state of Palestine and Palestine should recognise a state of Israel, based on the 4 June 1967 borders. Your initiative for recognition of the state of Palestine will advance the prospects for peace and will encourage Israelis and Palestinians alike to bring an end to their conflict.

The petition is signed by 900 prominent Israelis, including former high ranking soldiers. It is in stark contrast to the e-mail received from the Israeli ambassador this evening to all Members wherein he states "Pressure from outside, on one side or the other of the parties, will achieve nothing and can only further entrench hardened attitudes." The only hardened attitudes that will be entrenched will be those of the Israelis. When one considers that 900 Israeli citizens sent this petition to us, it is important to support them, as well as the Palestinian people. We must try to bring some sense to the Israeli Government and have a real and lasting peace based on the 1967 borders. While, ultimately, a single state solution is the best, perhaps by recognising each other's 1967 borders we might achieve a single state at some stage in the future.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan):** As Deputy Finian McGrath is not present, I call Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I thank Sinn Féin Members for sharing their time with us and raising this issue. I commend the Government on not opposing the motion. It is absolutely vital to recognise the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and statehood. It is a sign of the advancement of the Palestinian struggle that recognition is growing across the world.

I would not have become involved in politics were it not for this very issue. As an 18 year old, I travelled to Palestine and happened to walk into the middle of the first Palestinian intifada, although not deliberately - just as I arrived it was happening around me and I was shocked at what was happening. There has since been an extraordinary advance in the awareness of the terrible crime committed against the Palestinians and the need for them to find justice, freedom and self-determination.

One of the great ironies in this whole tragedy is that of the two greatest crimes committed against people in the past 100 years, one has been committed against the Palestinian people since 1948, while the other was committed against the Jewish people up to 1944 and 1945. The great irony is that a people who suffered so horribly in the Holocaust and who claim to represent that tradition are now responsible for the terrible oppression of the Palestinian people.

I would not vote against the motion, but it is always important to inject a critical note into any discussion such as this. I do not believe a two-state solution can work because it is predi-

cated on the divisions between Arabs and Jews. It is predicated on the belief there could be something legitimate as a Jewish state, but I do not accept this. I do not believe there should be racially or religiously pure states. The partition of Palestine in 1948 was the source of the conflict. The United Nations approved a partition and it legitimised the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians; it could not have happened without the partition of Palestine and as long as we fail to challenge the notion that there must be an ethnically or religiously pure state called “Israel” and something else which is an Arab state, there will never be peace in this region. It will always be at the expense of one or the other. The only concept we would accept anywhere else in the world is the idea that all human beings are equal under law, regardless of race, religion or creed. Accepting in any way that there should be a state giving priority to one religious group over another is a recipe for the oppression of one group over another. It will incite and encourage sectarianism, ethnic cleansing and violent conflict. We should know that from our own history.

It is a difficult issue. On the one hand, recognising the right of Palestine to statehood is vital in establishing the legitimacy of that people’s struggle against the brutal oppression they face at the hands of Israel. In truth, when we consider what is left of the Palestinian territories, there is no viability in a two-state solution and there is no moral legitimacy in accepting the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. All Palestinians dispossessed in 1948 deserve the right to return and to be equal citizens, whether they are Jew, Arab, Christian, secular or atheist. That is regardless of whether that one state is called Israel or Palestine. That is the only viable solution.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan):** The Ministers of State, Deputies Dara Murphy, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin and Gerald Nash, will be sharing time. They have 15 minutes, ten minutes and five minutes, respectively.

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Dara Murphy):** I welcome the opportunity to speak this evening and recognise the motion as a positive contribution to a discussion here in the Dáil. The terms of the motion are carefully worded, and there is a great deal in it that reflects consistent Irish Government policies, under different parties, and that will command support across the House. This is supported by the initial comments from the Opposition. For that reason, and in that spirit, the Government has not sought to oppose or amend the motion before us.

It has been the objective of this Government since it took office to work to bring about the achievement - in reality and not just in theory or in symbolism - of a fully sovereign state of Palestine. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan, and his predecessor, Deputy Eamon Gilmore, have consistently stated here and elsewhere that we looked forward to being able to recognise that state and to do so as early as possible. We have stated very clearly that it is long overdue for the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory to end and for Palestinians to enjoy the same rights of freedom and self-determination as others, and as we enjoy ourselves. All of the Government’s actions and policies on the Middle East have been designed to achieve that end. As the motion sets out, Ireland has already taken a number of deliberate steps to advance the Palestinian cause along the path towards statehood. The previous Government in January 2011 upgraded the status and titles used by the Palestinian mission in Ireland to a point just short of the full diplomatic status of an embassy. In October 2011, Ireland voted with a majority in agreeing to admit Palestine as a member of UNESCO and a critical stage was reached in November 2012 when Ireland voted in favour of seating Palestine as a “non-member observer state” at the UN General Assembly in New York. We have thus made clear our openness to the full achievement of a Palestinian state and our willingness to take steps to help this come about. We have therefore been clear all along about where we wanted to

go and the only issue has been about timing and about how we can best achieve our objective.

Broadly, there have been three main strands to our engagement. We have encouraged a reappraisal of the European Union's approach and how it can best contribute to creating the conditions for a resumption of purposeful negotiations aimed at the achievement of a two-state solution, as well as wider engagement with other key players. We have sought to help build Palestinian institutions capable of assuming the responsibilities of government and we have facilitated humanitarian support as well.

It has been the general position in Europe - held by successive Irish Governments and by the great majority of EU partners, including Sweden until now - that the establishment of a Palestinian state and recognition of it should come about as a result of a comprehensive peace agreement between the two sides in the conflict. The primary reason for this is that in practical terms a Palestinian state cannot exist without the ending of the Israeli occupation. Sweden's change of mind in October in deciding to take a different view and immediately recognising Palestine has revived interest in the question of recognition. I will return to that central question shortly but, first, I will address some other points arising from the motion before us this evening.

Successive Irish Governments have seen the promotion of a just and equitable peace in the Middle East as a key element of Irish foreign policy to be pursued both in our bilateral relations and in particular through our influence on the Middle East policy of the European Union. Ireland led the adoption by the EU of the central objective of a two-state solution to the conflict to bring about a fully sovereign state of Palestine coexisting alongside Israel. This remains the only vision of the future which can satisfy the aspirations, and ensure the security and prosperity, of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. I acknowledge that a number of Deputies had a different view on that this evening.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a major priority in Ireland's international diplomacy. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has actively used all appropriate opportunities, bilaterally and in the context of the United Nations General Assembly and the recent Cairo conference on reconstruction in Gaza, to seek to advance consideration of the issue. He has led efforts to ensure it is given due attention on the EU agenda and he has sought to frame a rethinking of the Union's approach on how best to create the conditions for progress and incentivise the parties to engage in meaningful negotiations.

As one of the member states with the strongest commitment to the Palestinian cause, it is sometimes frustrating for us that it can be so difficult to persuade the EU as a whole to move in the direction we might want. It is precisely our influence within the EU that gives us weight on this issue, and that was the principal reason for the abstention in the vote at the UN which has been referred to this evening. Retaining and maximising that influence is an important objective for us that we must consider carefully. Some have argued that we should recognise Palestine tomorrow but it would do the Palestinian people and their cause no service if, in doing so, we were to marginalise or weaken our own voice in the EU on this issue. We can only push the envelope if we are inside it. That judgment - when to lead by example and when to seek to build support - is one that we must make for ourselves, and the Government must do so.

The motion also calls on the Government to assist in developing the institutions of the future Palestinian state. This is a critical task, which goes beyond just readying Palestine for statehood, and one we have been engaged with for many years. This issue and the other element of our engagement on the humanitarian side will be addressed by my colleague, the Minister of

State, Deputy Ó Ríordáin, who is speaking next and is particularly concerned with these areas.

We are all conscious of the worsening of the Israel-Palestine issue. Direct negotiations have ended and an early resumption is hard to envisage. The relentless construction of settlements continues to eat away both the physical and political space where a state of Palestine can be constructed. The recent dreadful conflict in Gaza and the worsening position now in east Jerusalem reminds us of the violent possibilities just under the surface and the regional background to the problem has greatly darkened. Against this background, there is much soul-searching going on in the international community about what can we do to break the stalemate in the Middle East. Ireland has concentrated on pressing within the EU for a serious reappraisal of overall Middle East strategy and, in particular, for stronger action against the policies on the ground which are making a two-state solution harder to achieve, principally those related to settlements. This is a difficult discussion and one on which member states by no means agree but we are working to push it forward. This frustration has led some, including now the Government of Sweden, to see recognition as a possible way of breaking the stalemate and I think this is the sense in which this evening's motion has been constructed.

Recognition has potential symbolic value but it will not increase at all the degree of control which Palestinians have or do not have over their own lives. It is not a magic bullet. If international recognition of Palestine was going to break the stalemate, then it would have happened long ago. As the motion notes and as Members have said, more than 130 countries around the world have recognised Palestine, many of them for many years, without this bringing nearer an end to the conflict. It is important that we remain focused on our efforts to centre attention on negative Israeli policies on the ground.

We want to do whatever will help and that means we also need to think about any negative aspects to what we might be contemplating. Recognition, like many policies, may answer some questions but open others. There is an obvious problem in that the Palestinian Authority, which is the body that has changed its name to the State of Palestine, was set up under the Oslo Accords in co-operation with Israel and it controls only a part of what should be the Palestinian state - less than half of the West Bank and none of Gaza at present. It is an issue that the Fatah-Hamas split has prevented presidential or legislative elections from being held in Palestine for many years since they were due. It could be an issue if Hamas, a designated terrorist movement which does not yet accept the existence of Israel, again becomes the government of a state of Palestine, which we recognise and whose representatives would have diplomatic status here.

None of these issues, however, need preclude a decision by Ireland to recognise but they deserve careful consideration by ourselves and in concert with partners. We also recognise the powerful longing of Palestinians for their own state and the value of symbols and gestures. These have a weight of their own to be considered.

The support of the Seanad in October and I expect of the Dáil tomorrow are important considerations. As in most countries, however, recognition of foreign states is, ultimately, a decision for the Government to take. The key question for us and for the EU is whether recognition will help or hinder the search for a comprehensive peace. Until now, the general view has been that it would not help. That view may now be changing but, at present, it remains the view of the great majority of EU member states.

For Ireland there is a separate consideration, which I have already mentioned. Will recognition at this moment, in advance of other partners, increase our influence on the issue in the EU,

that is, our ability to achieve our goal, or will it leave us marginalised and less influential? Sweden, which long held the same position as most other partners, has recently taken the opposite view. However, even other Nordic states, with which Sweden forms a close knit group, have not yet followed its lead on recognition. There is now, however, a period of reflection going on in the EU on this issue, prompted by Sweden's decision and by frustration at overall events. Ireland is playing an active part in that reflection. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has made it clear that the Government has an open mind on the role which early recognition of Palestine might play in that regard. He has stated that against the backdrop of a worsening situation on the ground, he is open to any option which he believes would move things forward.

Speaking on behalf of the Government, I acknowledge that the terms of the motion before us are for the most part consistent with the Government's view of the situation. We have always looked forward to recognising Palestine as early as possible and that moment is now clearly a lot closer than it was even in 2011. We will take very careful note of the opinions clearly expressed in both the Dáil and the Seanad but we will also continue to take part in the EU discussion on recognition which we were instrumental in opening only last month. We will seek to create the conditions for a resumption of meaningful negotiations on a two-state solution and we will pursue our efforts with our partners to support economic development and build the necessary institutional capacity on the Palestinian side. The Government will decide on national recognition by Ireland at the point where we believe it will make a positive contribution to the objectives clearly expressed in this motion.

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin):** Cuirim fáilte roimh an rún atá os ár gcomhair um thráthnóna. For more than two decades, successive Irish Governments have provided financial support to build the institutions of a Palestinian state, to promote peace building and to meet the immediate needs of the Palestinian people. The motion before the House calls on the Government to do all it can to assist in the development of the democratic and state institutions of the Palestinian state. I believe we are already doing this.

Ireland, like other EU members states, is committed to supporting the Palestinian Authority as part of our overall programme of support for the Palestinian people. This support, which enables Palestinians to build institutions and provide essential public services, is critical to laying the foundations for a future State. We now provide more than €10 million annually in support to Palestinians to help them deliver on their development priorities, to support the promotion of human rights and to meet immediate humanitarian needs.

Ireland is one of five partners working directly with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education to support it in delivering its education development strategic plan. This year we have provided €1.5 million in funding, bringing our total support to €7.5 million, but Ireland also provides technical support to the education sector.

There is clear evidence that our contribution is helping the Ministry to provide better quality education services to more Palestinian children. I am aware from our contacts with officials across a number of Palestinian Ministries that our work with others in improving education is seen as making a real difference to Palestinian institutions and is held up as an example. Other EU partners have engaged in parallel work with other Ministries, such as finance, and the EU has for a number of years operated a significant police training mission, known as EUPOL COPPS, assisting the Palestinian police in developing and improving professional and human rights standards. Seconded Irish staff have played a valuable role in that continuing mission.

In our work to build up the capacities of the Palestinian institutions and prepare them to assume the responsibilities of a sovereign state, we know that merely reaching that goal of statehood is not enough. After decades of occupation, we want Palestinians to achieve a state that can be a model for a troubled region and can deliver real improvements in the lives of its citizens. A Palestine based on the rule of law and respect for human rights is the best guarantor of the longevity of any peace agreement, and the future security and prosperity of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

While we work to strengthen the institutions on which a Palestinian state will be built, we must ensure that the Palestinian Authority can meet the immediate needs of the people living in the West Bank and Gaza. Their capacity to deliver essential public services such as health and education is not only essential for the immediate welfare of the Palestinian people but also critical to the creation of a Palestinian state. In the current difficult context, delivery of public services is simply impossible without significant external support. Since 2008, working through a European Commission mechanism known as *Mécanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion de l'Aide Socio-Economique*, PEGASE, we have provided €12 million to the Palestinian Authority to deliver public services. Our support has been focused on services in the areas of health, education and social protection. I know, however, that strong institutions alone will not guarantee the viability of a Palestinian state. We are funding a number of Palestinian and Israeli organisations that are working to address human rights issues. They focus on addressing freedom of movement, absence of rule of law, rights of prisoners and detainees, women's rights, and democratic development. These organisations play an important role not only in reporting human rights abuses but in holding their own authorities to account, a key element of all democracies.

Regrettably, while we work to ensure that Palestinian institutions are ready for statehood, we continue to have to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. The humanitarian situation continues to be precarious, as the key drivers of vulnerability remain in place. The protracted crisis is compounded by recurrent escalations in hostilities, such as the appalling tragedy in Gaza this year, which increase humanitarian needs.

The conflict in Gaza this year had devastating humanitarian consequences. At present, approximately 100,000 people remain displaced and are in need of food, water, health services and shelter solutions. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, some 20,000 people are still living in schools in Gaza. It is estimated that 18,000 homes were destroyed or severely damaged, leaving approximately 108,000 people homeless. Damage to public infrastructure was extensive, and despite repairs to the water and sanitation network in Gaza, significant constraints still impair the delivery of these services. Electricity outages for 12 hours a day continue in most areas across Gaza. Critical infrastructure was severely damaged or destroyed: 50% of all medical facilities sustained severe damage, 22 schools were completely destroyed and 118 damaged, and more than 70 hospitals and clinics were damaged.

This latest conflict has compounded an already serious humanitarian situation with widespread poverty, an extremely fragile economy and aid dependency. Approximately two thirds of the population of Gaza were receiving food assistance prior to the crisis and after seven weeks of conflict, most Palestinians in Gaza can no longer meet their most basic needs. Earning a livelihood is simply impossible. We provide €4 million annually to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA; this year we responded to the crisis in Gaza by providing an additional €1 million to UNRWA. This support is helping to provide urgently needed food, shelter and medical aid to thousands of families, many of whom had to flee their homes. Over the next

two years we will provide a further €2 million to the Palestinian Authority and UN partners for long-term recovery assistance in Gaza.

Ultimately, of course, we see the end of the occupation as the essential step in addressing the problems of Palestine, including Gaza. My colleague, the Minister of State at the Departments of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for European affairs and data protection, Deputy Dara Murphy, has set out the ways in which the Government is working to achieve that end. Within that context, the Government will continue to reflect, both nationally and along with our EU colleagues, on the role that the specific step of recognition of Palestine could play. We have made clear that the Government has an open mind about any action, including early recognition of Palestine, which can positively contribute to the goal we all share of an end to the conflict and a secure future for Palestinians and Israelis. This Government will continue to do all we can to ensure that a future Palestinian state will be built on strong institutions capable of meeting the needs of the people of that state.

**Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash):** I agree with the proposers of this motion - and, I think, with all balanced and informed opinion - that the *status quo* is untenable and dangerous. We are also agreed that what is needed is an early resumption of negotiations, with clear parameters and with a specific timetable. I believe in a free, sovereign, independent and democratic Palestine living peacefully side by side with Israel. Much like our own peace settlement, we can already describe what the essential outlines of that settlement will be: it will allow for a democratic and sovereign state of Palestine, living in peace and security alongside Israel on the basis of the 1967 lines, with special provision for the status of Jerusalem in both states. There will ultimately be agreement on issues to do with borders, security, water rights, the status of Jerusalem and freedom of access to religious sites and outstanding legalities concerning Palestinian refugees, including resolving the problem of the right to return. Ireland and the European Union are committed to a two-state solution, which of course involves recognition of Palestine alongside Israel.

I should be clear, if any clarity is needed, that our ongoing commitment to a secure and peaceful state of Israel is not in any doubt. All our actions and policies should be designed to advance the goal of peace and to secure a comprehensive peace agreement. I repeat my belief that there cannot be a comprehensive peace without the two-state solution. So long as there is no real prospect of political talks resuming any time soon, there will be continuing loss of faith in political action as a way forward. The relentless announcements of settlement expansion continue, entailing continued evictions of Palestinians to expropriate land and resources for settlers. The result has been a rise in demonstrations, in the use of lethal force by Israeli authorities against demonstrators, and in random and deadly attacks on Israelis.

There is much soul-searching going on in the international community about what we can do to break the stalemate in the Middle East. Where there is no agreement at EU level, there is scope for member states to take national initiatives. Sweden's decision to recognise Palestine has focused attention on a possible new direction.

It is important to be realistic too. Recognition of Palestine before full statehood is actually achieved is not a magic formula that ends the occupation, advances the talks or even predetermines the outcome. Already, 135 countries have recognised the state of Palestine. Unfortunately, simply saying it is so does not make it so. State recognition is a serious business and should not become an exercise in collective make-believe, because this favours nobody. We in this country should know better than most that a sovereign territorial claim that exists only on

paper is no solution. In fact it can become a substitute for policy and a barrier to engagement on the real issues. It helped some people here to escape into an imaginary world of their own construction, where reality was never confronted. I would not support recognising a state of Palestine that exists only in the same fanciful world as our own Thirty-two County, rebel song republic. This would do a gross disservice to the people of Palestine and all those around the world who want to see a just and lasting settlement to this most intractable of problems. That is just one of the reasons it is important to stress that recognition of a state, both in terms of whether and when, remains constitutionally a matter for Government in the ongoing conduct of international relations. This motion, and the motion in the Seanad last October, are recognised as non-binding on the Government on those two points. None the less, this is an important articulation of the views of this Parliament on where we stand on the question of Palestine. In summary, we must continue to do all we can to bring the parties to the table. The key focus must remain on getting substantive negotiations going, bringing the occupation of the Palestinian territories to an end and bringing about a Palestinian state that exists in reality as well as on paper. In the interim, we should not rule out any option, including an early formal recognition of Palestine, if a united international and multilateral position on that point will help to bring the parties to the table and to get real and meaningful talks under way.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I would like to share time with Deputy Keaveney.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan):** Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** On behalf of Fianna Fáil, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the need for the Government to recognise the state of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders. We will be supporting this motion. I am glad that Deputies on all sides of the House are supportive of this proposal. We believe this House must send out a strong message in one voice on behalf of the Irish people that we stand with the people of Palestine and their right to self-determination. We acknowledge that this motion largely reflects what happened in Seanad Éireann on 22 October last. When a motion supporting the recognition of the state of Palestine - it called "on the Government to formally recognise the State of Palestine and do everything it can at an international level to help to secure a viable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" - was carried unanimously on that historic occasion, it was an indication of the strong democratic support in Ireland for such recognition. It reflected the strong desire in this country for a sustainable and secure settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, for peace for Israelis and Palestinians in their own states, and for equality, fairness and justice in the settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Fianna Fáil has been at the vanguard in supporting a two-state solution in the Middle East for a number of decades. Fianna Fáil in government led Ireland to become the first EU member state to declare that a solution to the conflict in the Middle East had to be based on a fully sovereign state of Palestine, independent of and coexisting with Israel. That policy position was launched in 1980 by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, the late Brian Lenihan senior, who said that the Palestinian people "had a right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State in Palestine". The motion passed by Seanad Éireann shows that we are moving further in this regard. We now believe the time is right for the Government to fully recognise Palestine as a sovereign, independent state. We have called on the Government to follow the lead of the French Republic's Parliament, Sweden and the UK House of Commons by recognising the state of Palestine. Our rationale in this regard stems from a frustration with the lack of progress in advancing the two-state solution in recent years. That is a message that has come from all speakers here tonight.

The recent war in Gaza and the unwillingness of the Israeli Government to engage in meaningful and constructive negotiations with the Palestinians have resulted in a mind shift across the world regarding how best to approach the conflict in the Middle East. We acknowledge that recognition by itself cannot end the occupation. Only Israel can do this. If Ireland and other EU states recognise Palestine, it could represent an important step towards unlocking negotiations. The recognition of Palestine would be anti-occupation, rather than anti-Israel. Given that Ireland already recognises the state of Israel, the recognition of Palestine would help to create a parity of status. Some 20 years after the Oslo Accords, the prospect of achieving a two-state solution appear to be more remote than ever. That fact should concern all Members of this House. It appears to any objective observer that Israel has done everything it can to undermine the chances of achieving such an outcome. We acknowledge that there have been many initiatives allowing for talks on peace, but they have continuously failed with the result that Israel has intensified its illegal occupation of Palestine. The illegal settlements on the West Bank have trebled in size as Israel has seized more Palestinian land and planted Israeli settlers on it. Israel has erected a huge separation barrier and implemented what must be called an apartheid regime on the West Bank that denies Palestinians the basic human rights their Israeli counterparts take for granted. Such actions are not those of an Israeli state that is preparing for a two-state solution. Such actions will not inspire and consolidate peace.

This summer, we witnessed Israel's third devastating assault in six years on the people of Gaza. Any hope the Gaza ceasefire might lead to meaningful peace negotiations was quickly dashed when, within one week of agreeing to it, Israel announced more settlements on the West Bank. This deeply provocative move fundamentally undermined any prospect of peace. As my colleague, Senator Power, outlined in the Seanad, these actions represented a deeply cynical, long-term game aimed at destroying any prospect of a viable Palestinian state. Unfortunately, these actions have been facilitated by a largely passive international community, including the EU, which has stood by as Israel has wilfully violated international law and ignored countless UN resolutions. As things stand, Israel has no incentive to engage in meaningful negotiations. It has successfully used its military might time and again to ensure it holds all the cards. Without wider recognition of the Palestinian state, representatives of Palestine have been in a weaker position at the negotiating table. It is time to redress this balance by joining Sweden and other EU member states in recognising Palestine and thereby making it clear that statehood is a right of the Palestinian people, rather than an Israeli bargaining chip to be played in further negotiations which are doomed to fail. The recognition of the state of Palestine would increase pressure on Israel to pursue a genuine peace process that has a real prospect of delivering peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

Fianna Fáil has always respected and celebrated the establishment and progress of the state of Israel. We have never questioned the right of the Israeli people to exercise their right to self-determination and self-defence. Our support of this motion and our tabling of the motion in the Seanad in October should not be seen as a slight against Israel or its people. Like any other nation, Israel has a duty to abide by internationally accepted standards of human rights, proportionality and responsibility. The Palestinian authorities must act in a responsible fashion in their interactions with Israel. They should condemn the recent lone wolf attacks carried out in Jerusalem and take action to prevent such attacks in the future. Ireland has traditionally and rightly been vocal in its support for the Palestinian people and proactive in lobbying on their behalf internationally. We do this because we understand what it is like to be a nation without a voice. We understand the difficulties of bargaining with a stronger power. We understand conflict between peoples. The lessons of our experience should inform our efforts to secure full

recognition for the Palestinian state and deliver a viable two-state solution to settle the conflict. We have the opportunity to outline our position now instead of seeking to hide behind the EU's lack of consensus on this matter. Sweden is not hiding behind the lack of an EU Common Position or accepting the Israeli line that the recognition of Palestine is something in Israel's gift in future negotiations. Nor should we. In supporting this motion and taking this step to help build a lasting and just peace in the region based on human rights and respect for international law, we are sending a clear message on behalf of all Irish people. We should take this step and join the many others in the international community who want a lasting peace in the Middle East. Now is the time to act. Now is the time to support the recognition of the state of Palestine. We should also use all other international fora available to us to encourage other states to make the same moves.

The Acting Chairman will recall how the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan, stated his belief at the last meeting of our foreign affairs committee that the EU had to take a more proactive approach in seeking a peace settlement. I hope that the Minister strongly puts to the European Council the message that, along with other members of the international community, the EU has a binding and moral duty to ensure basic justice and equality for a people who have been downtrodden for many decades.

I recall reading some essays on the work and political life of one of Deputy O'Dowd's predecessors in Louth, Frank Aiken, who served for many years as Minister for External Affairs and was one of Fianna Fáil's founding members. During his time at the UN in the 1940s and 1950s, he often spoke at length about the need for justice and equality for everyone in the Middle East. Many years later, we are speaking about the same subject. Unfortunately, there has been no progress for the Palestinian people.

**Deputy Colm Keaveney:** On 22 October, Fianna Fáil proposed a motion calling on the Government to recognise Palestine formally as an independent and sovereign state. The motion was passed by Seanad Éireann, having been unanimously accepted because of the careful work of colleagues in that House. I will take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication, commitment and, above all, action of Senator Power in securing the type of consensus that was required to ensure sufficient support for the motion.

The motion before the Dáil reflects the motion that was presented to the Seanad on 22 October. Unlike in the Seanad, however, the movers of this motion - Sinn Féin - did not seek to build the type of consensus that was required to see its implementation. It is unfortunate that Sinn Féin has tried to engage in a political trick by tabling this motion while failing to build on the momentum of the consensus in the Seanad. It has endangered that opportunity. The Government could have opposed it, meaning we could have been the first country in the EU to reject a proposal of this sort. It was dangerous not to pursue a cross-party approach to get this across the line in the interests of the people of Palestine.

**Deputy Sandra McLellan:** We did.

**Deputy Colm Keaveney:** I welcome the Government's acceptance of the motion. It has risen above itself and political strategy. I also welcome the fact that the Government has recognised the greater good by supporting the passage of this motion.

As quickly as possible, let us address the "whataboutary" that we consistently hear from those who are pro-Israeli and who lobby on and engage in this debate. I fully accept the right

of Israel to exist as a sovereign state. I fully accept its people's right to defend themselves, but only within the confines of internationally accepted norms, particularly in the conduct of war. As a sovereign state, Israel has a solemn duty to respect and honour international law as well as the human rights and, in particular, civilian rights of populations in the region. We should take this opportunity to condemn out of hand the attacks on civilian targets - hospitals, ambulances, schools and homes. These must stop, as we cannot have the horrific practice of imposing pain in what can be best described as the collective punishment of the most vulnerable people in the region as a consequence of the evils done by a small minority.

In line with this philosophy, I condemn terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens and call on Hamas to take whatever action is necessary to reflect on the efforts being made by the international community, including Ireland, and to step up to the mark where the lives of innocents in Israel are concerned. The Palestinian leadership must condemn this violence and rise above the brute force approach taken by its opponents. It must also respect sovereign responsibility and conform to the human rights standards to which sovereign states are bound.

The Palestinian people are a proud people with a long history, a rich culture and a strong sense of identity. Undoubtedly, they are a stronger people as a consequence of the suffering and misery they have had to endure. In the 1980s under a Fianna Fáil-led Government, Ireland became the first EU member state to declare that an essential feature of any resolution to the conflict in the Middle East had to be a two-state strategy. In the past decade, however, and especially this summer, Israel has sought to establish a new set of facts through a new type of engagement of violence on the ground. The future of any Palestinian state is only sustainable if the population has a chance to establish itself and develop a society, but that would not be in Israel's strategic interests.

We cannot deny the dignity of Palestinian individuals or their families and children who are being slaughtered by a military regime in pursuit of an unclear and unhealthy cause. Even now, the Israeli Government is attempting to colonise east Jerusalem. The Minister of State should take whatever action is necessary to outline to Israel's Dublin-based diplomatic unit our protest over Palestine's right to recognise that area of Jerusalem as its future capital.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputies Catherine Murphy and Healy are sharing time.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** I thank Sinn Féin for tabling this motion. I am happy to support it. I am glad the Government is also supportive of it. Obviously, this motion follows the work in the Seanad. I acknowledge Senator Power's work in particular. It has been important.

If this year has demonstrated anything, it is that we can dispel the notion that supporting this type of motion will shake the fragile peace process in the Middle East. This is because there is no peace process, and that is the real tragedy. The barbarity and severity of the *12 o'clock* bombardment the citizens of Gaza had to endure for 50 days this summer - known to the Israeli defence forces as Operation Protective Edge - has smashed the hopes of even the most naive that this Israeli Government is interested in pursuing a peace settlement. The UN figures are absolutely appalling, showing the death of 1,523 Palestinian civilians and six Israeli civilians, 519 of them children.

The reason we are debating this motion today is that the international community has grown exasperated waiting for the peace to come and watching these horrors unfold. Members have received correspondence in recent days from a large number of Israeli people from all

walks of life. It is very important that these 650 civilians, prominent figures all, have shown leadership where their government failed so to do. Yesterday, a former Israeli ambassador to Ireland told the *thejournal.ie* that recognition of Palestine was an essential part of a two-state solution. It is very important that the Israeli voices whose message we are conveying in this debate get the attention they deserve so we can help to encourage a solution from within this very troubled part of the world.

**Deputy Seamus Healy:** I compliment Sinn Féin on bringing forward this motion and welcome the Government's acceptance of it. Statehood is the right of the Palestinian people, as is increasingly accepted and supported internationally. Some 135 countries have now formally recognised the state of Palestine, including eight EU member states, namely, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Malta, Cyprus and Sweden. In addition, the British, Spanish and French parliaments and, in this country, the Seanad have called on their respective governments to recognise Palestine. It is particularly instructive that 900 prominent Israeli citizens have called on Dáil Éireann to pass this motion and give recognition to the state of Palestine. In their letter they say:

We, the undersigned citizens of Israel, who wish for it to be a thriving country, are worried by the continued political stalemate, the occupation and settlement activities that lead to further confrontations with Palestinians and squash any chances for compromise. Your initiative for recognition of the state of Palestine will advance prospects for peace.

There is no doubt that we have an opportunity here to help to build a lasting and just peace in the region based on human rights and respect for international law. In fact, the adoption of this motion and the recognition of the state of Palestine would be an important expression of support for Palestinian statehood and for freedom and peace in the region. International recognition of the state of Palestine is an important action that will increase diplomatic pressure on Israel to end its occupation and ongoing colonisation of Palestinian land and the apartheid system it operates against the Palestinian people.

Of course, recognition itself cannot end the occupation; only Israel can do that. In that context, I urge the Government to impose political and economic sanctions on the state of Israel until such time as it ends its occupation of Palestine and abides fully by its international obligations under international law, thereby allowing a truly independent and free Palestine to exist.

Debate adjourned.

### **Estimates for Public Services 2014: Messages from Select Committees**

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Select Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Vote 32.

The Select Sub-Committee on Health has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Vote 39.

The Select Sub-Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport has completed its consideration

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of the following Supplementary Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Vote 31.

The Select Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Vote 30.

## **Water Services Bill 2014: Committee Stage**

### SECTION 1

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I move amendment No. 1:

In page 3, between lines 25 and 26, to insert the following:

“customer”, “local authority”, “occupier”, “premises” and “property” have the meanings assigned to each of them, respectively, in section 2 of the No. 2 Act of 2013;”.

This is a technical amendment which provides that the definitions of terms used in the Bill are the same as those used in the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013. “Customer” is defined as the occupier of the premises in respect of which the water services are provided; “local authority” means a city or county council; and “occupier” means the person for the time being entitled to the occupation of a premises. The Water Services Act 2007 defined “premises” to include any building, vessel, vehicle, structure or land, whether or not there are structures on the land and whether or not the land is covered by water, and any plant or related accessories on or under such land, together with any put buildings and curtilage. The 2013 Act confirmed that “premises” also includes part of a premises. The definition of “property” includes land, equipment, pipes, sewers, structures, waterworks and wastewater works, as well as money, stocks, shares and securities, but does not include storm water sewers.

**Deputy Fergus O’Dowd:** I have no problem with this provision, but will the Minister indicate why it was necessary to include these definitions?

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** This amendment is part of the general noxious legislation the Minister is pushing through tonight. On that basis alone, it should be opposed.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** To clarify, this amendment is purely to address a drafting issue.

Amendment put and declared carried.

Section 1, as amended, agreed to.

### SECTION 2

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendment No. 2, in the name of Deputy Brian Stanley, and amendment No. 3, in the name of Deputy Stephen Donnelly, are out of order.

Amendments Nos. 2 and 3 not moved.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 4, 5, 7 and 8 are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Catherine Murphy:** I move amendment No. 4:

In page 4, line 9, after “Resolution” to insert “of not fewer than two thirds of the Members”.

The way in which the original Bill was drafted left it open to the Minister to cause the sale of Irish Water. There was cause for further concern in the data protection statements that were included on the Irish Water website. The first of these, for example, referred to the sale not only of Irish Water but of the PPS numbers and personal information of its customers. Of course, the Government kept on assuring us this could not possibly happen.

As a result of the most recent changes, a section containing a number of safeguards and designed to prevent a sale or to reduce the prospect of such a sale was included in the Bill. The greatest safeguard of all would be if Irish Water did not exist. The billing system being put in place is expensive and Irish Water is a very expensive quango. While I accept that there is a need to invest in water services, the last thing we need to do is put money into a massive quango. When Mr. John Tierney of Irish Water appeared before the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht, it emerged that it is estimated that the assets being transferred to the company - the intention was to work this matter through with each local authority - are valued at €11 billion. In recent days it has become clear that the relevant liabilities will not transfer in their entirety, which means that Irish Water is a much more attractive proposition in the context of its being sold.

The intention of the amendment in my name is to include some further safeguards in the legislation. The amendments under discussion have obviously been grouped together because of the variety of different ways of preventing any sale. My amendment suggests that a two thirds majority of each House would be required to allow shares to be disposed of. I would prefer it if we were not in the position of seeking ways to amend the legislation. Irish Water has become a major problem in its own right and the current approach must be abandoned.

**Deputy Denis Naughten:** I wish to speak to amendment No. 5 in my name. In that context, I will take up from where Deputy Catherine Murphy left off. This legislation is flawed and contains a number of major holes. The Government is rushing the process relating to the Bill, which will be put through the House by the end of the week. We are revisiting this matter because 12 months ago Deputies Timmins, McNamara and I were not listened to when we raised specific concerns with the then Aire Stáit, Deputy O’Dowd.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** Leading the charge.

**Deputy Denis Naughten:** I am of the view that we will also be obliged to revisit it at some point in the future.

Section 2 of the Bill comprises almost a full page of text and relates to a plebiscite on the ownership of Irish Water. What is proposed in it is nothing more than a three-card trick. On 19

November last, the Minister, Deputy Kelly, informed the House that “The Government believes that public ownership of water services is the will of the Irish people and I propose to legislate to ensure that, if any future Government sought to change this position, it would be required to put this matter before the people in a plebiscite”. That is not what the legislation before the House seeks to do. If the Bill is passed by both Dáil and Seanad Éireann by a majority of one in each case, the relevant proposal may be submitted by plebiscite to the decision of the people.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** It may be. The Deputy is absolutely right.

**Deputy Denis Naughten:** It is not the case that the matter shall be put to the people by plebiscite. Any Government, including that currently in office, with a majority of one in each House will actually be in a position to dispose of the assets of Irish Water without referring the matter to anyone else. There is absolutely no security whatsoever provided within the legislation on this matter. I tabled a very simple amendment which would have led to the inclusion in the Bill of the promise the Minister made on 19 November to the effect that the matter should be put by plebiscite to the people. However, that amendment was ruled out of order on the basis that giving the people of this country their say with regard to the disposal of this particular asset would involve a potential cost on the Exchequer. The legislation before the House is not worth the paper on which it is written. The Minister is serious in terms of the commitment he gave on 19 November but what he said on that date is not reflected in the legislation.

Those of us who were involved in passing the legislation which facilitated the sale of the assets of Eircom are of the view that we made a genuine mistake. When we debated legislation relating to Aer Lingus a number of years ago, the then Minister, the late Seamus Brennan, gave a commitment that a formal motion would have to be approved by a majority of either House before any shareholding in the company could be disposed of. More recently, the assets of Bord Gáis were not contemplated in the legislation relating to that company’s disposal. There is genuine concern regarding the assets of Irish Water because these are believed to be of such intrinsic value. As the Minister is aware, these assets are being used as a mechanism to leverage equity. The fear is that they may be forcibly sold at some future date.

As a result of the fact that I cannot table an amendment to the effect that the sale of those assets should be put to the people by plebiscite - which is what the Minister announced on 19 November - without it being ruled out of order, I drafted amendment No. 5 in order to guarantee that the assets of Irish Water will not be disposed of at any future date. Now that local government is clearly written into our Constitution, my amendment would require that every municipal district in the State would be obliged to approve any motion relating to the disposal of the assets of Irish Water. What I propose will provide a belt-and-braces approach in terms of ensuring that a sale cannot happen at the whim of any future Government or at that of the troika, should that entity ever return. Amendment No. 5 would ensure that the assets of Irish Water could not be sold without the approval of every municipal authority in Ireland. In my opinion, such approval would not be forthcoming. My amendment will provide the security people are seeking on this matter.

As already stated, the commitment given by the Minister on 19 November to the effect that there should be a plebiscite if any assets of Irish Water are to be disposed of is not reflected in the legislation. On that occasion, he also indicated that one of his other priorities is the removal of boil water notices and stated, “In the very near future, for the first time in many years, people in Roscommon will be able to drink water from their tap”. I received correspondence from Irish Water in recent days which indicates that it will be March 2017 - at least 12 months after the

next general election - before the people in north-east Roscommon will actually be able to drink the water from their taps. That eventuality is a long way down the road. In the interim and if they live in urban areas, these people will be obliged to pay €130 per year for the pleasure of receiving water which is below the proper standard.

Some 12 months ago, the former Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, provided the following commitment:

Irish Water should not be allowed to charge for water supplies that are subject to restrictions on health grounds. This is why the Act gives the Minister power to make directions in this regard. I have no doubt that people who do not have access to a safe and healthy supply of water should not and will not be charged for it.

I wanted this to be reflected in the legislation at that time but I was informed that there was no need because people would not be charged for water supplies that are subject to restrictions on health grounds. Under the Bill before the House, those who live in urban areas will be charged €130 per year for water that is unfit for human consumption. The Minister can say what he likes and provide all the assurances he wants. However, the reality is that it must be written into the legislation that the approval of the Irish people will be required. We have been given commitments in the past 12 months but these are not reflected in the Bill and, as I have just outlined, they have not been honoured by the Government.

The Minister's commitment that he gave here just less than a month ago, that is, that there will be a plebiscite if there is any disposal of assets, is not written into the legislation. It states there "may" be a plebiscite, so it is at the whim of the Government in power. If that Government has the troika or IMF breathing down its neck because of the dire situation the country is in, a financial motion or emergency motion will be introduced ramming this through. That is why I am asking the Minister to accept the amendment I have tabled, which would at least ensure all county councillors, who are directly elected by every legal resident over the age of 18, would have a direct say in any disposal of assets.

While my proposal does not provide the constitutional amendment many of us would like to have seen included in the legislation, or provide for the plebiscite the Minister promised but which he did not write into the legislation, it at least ensures the public will be consulted by their local public representatives, who have a constitutional role now because of the provisions in our Constitution in regard to local government. Each municipal district would, in its own right, make a decision as to whether any of the assets owned by Irish Water could be disposed of in the future. In light of the severe shortcomings in section 2 of the legislation, I hope the Minister will accept my amendment.

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** The fact that the Dáil is sitting after midnight, in the early morning of 10 December, to debate for one hour amendments to the Water Services Bill that could easily be debated in time allocated on Thursday and Friday is a tribute to the overweening arrogance of the newly arrived Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. He is newly arrived but already delusional about leaving a so-called legacy. Make no mistake: this is the Minister's two-fingered gesture to the tens of thousands of ordinary, decent people - the taxpayers of this country - who will gather tomorrow outside Dáil Éireann to say they do not want his noxious legislation or odious water charges, which they understand to be another bondholders' and bankers' tax. It is a Minister of the Labour Party who is giving the people the finger.

The Minister is a young and mightily ambitious man in a mighty hurry, but young men in a hurry should make haste slowly. I can tell him now what his legacy will be if he persists along this road with his water tax. He will be known for having started off by attempting to defy a mass movement of people demanding the abolition of this austerity tax called the water charge. He will be known for having been met by ongoing resistance. If he persists in spite of the mass boycott of the odious tax next April, when the first bills are issued, that movement will continue until the next general election if the charges are not gone before then. He will be defeated by that mass movement, be it in the next few weeks, April or in the general election. To the extent that the Minister, with his colleagues in the Labour Party and Fine Gael, arrogantly defies the wishes of a huge majority of the people, there will be a reduction in the number of Deputies, particularly from the Labour Party, coming back to this Dáil. That will be the legacy of this Minister.

It is quite incredible that the Deputies in the Labour Party and Fine Gael, who obviously wanted no debate at this ludicrous hour of the night and having heard the very rational proposal on how this debate should be ordered, had not the guts to vote down the Government's proposal and say the discussion should be made in daylight in full view of the people tomorrow, Thursday and Friday.

I support the amendments before us while wholly opposing the legislation. The idea that a buffer or blocks to the privatisation of Irish Water is included in the legislation is nothing short of the most incredible mendacity, as has been pointed out. If resolutions going in the direction of privatisation are passed, proposals may, if the Government decides to proceed, be submitted by plebiscite. There is no compulsion. In any case, as I pointed out before, this is cynicism from start to finish. No Government can tie the Government that will succeed it to the legislation it passes. The Dáil that succeeds can overturn this legislation depending on the combination of parties, if a majority of that Dáil wishes. Therefore, the desperate Labour Party, panicked by a movement of people power while arrogantly trying to defy it, is pretending it is taking account of the overwhelming view of the people that our water services should be in public hands and not in the hands of Irish Water, which they want to see the back of. The hapless Greens and a few other hapless individuals, including some trade union leaders who are, incredibly, supporting water charges, are putting forward the idea of a referendum as an alibi for their betrayals in regard to being responsible for the introduction of water charges in the first place. It is cynicism from start to finish.

With regard to the privatisation issue, Deputy Naughten should note that not all of us made a mistake in regard to Telecom Éireann and Eircom. I was a member of this Dáil at the time in question and my voice was absolutely opposed to it. I understood what was to happen and, unfortunately, it did happen.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Is the Deputy concluding?

**Deputy Joe Higgins:** I am about to. The Minister brought us here at this hour of the night so we will exercise our prerogative to the best of our ability in the time allotted.

Should a plebiscite be held, it should not be confined to the citizens of this State, as proposed in the legislation. My colleague, Deputy Ruth Coppinger, will move amendment No. 7. Why should a plebiscite be confined just to citizens? In the area I have the privilege of representing, approximately one quarter of residents are from outside Ireland. Many have become citizens but very many have not. However, they are taxpayers and residents. The Minister wants them

to pay his water tax so they should have a vote on any proposals for Uisce Éireann or Irish Water in the event that it will still be surviving in some shape or form after the Irish people have done away with this Government, its water taxes and all the rest of it. I hope Members of the Government parties who occasionally stand up and claim to have such a mantle of democracy support this extension of democratic rights to the residents and taxpayers of the country generally.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** People will be surprised to hear that the Government is not serious about a plebiscite to keep Irish Water in public ownership and is refusing to accept the word “shall” instead of “may” or any compulsion to hold a plebiscite. I agree with the proposal that any vote should be taken in local authority areas - in municipalities rather than on a State-wide basis.

I endorse what my colleague has said with regard to citizens. The Government has no compunction about taking money from the non-Irish who make up 12% of the population of the State, so it should also allow them a say in the fate of the water supply that they are being asked to pay for.

I also ask, under amendment No. 8, that the Minister accept that in any plebiscite the McKenna principles should apply and that public money should not be used to promote one side of the debate or to promote the selling off of the water system to a private entity. I am sure the Minister will accept that.

We should have brought the sleeping bags tonight. We may even need them tomorrow night, because the conduct of the Government has added to the cynicism that is out there and to the numbers who will protest tomorrow. The news earlier that the Government had proposed a motion of confidence in itself sent an air of disbelief and bewilderment around the country, and to hear that the Government proposes a debate at 12.30 a.m. on something as serious as the water Bill has also added to the air of disbelief about the Government's carry-on. The Government may have thought it was sticking two fingers up to the crowds, but this will probably result in an increase in the number of people who will come out and exercise their democratic rights tomorrow and deliver their message of utter lack of confidence in the Government, particularly after the carry-on of the Government today and tonight, having us here until 1.30 a.m., with massive interest on the Government benches as usual.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** I am disappointed that the amendment I tabled, amendment No. 2, was ruled out of order. There is considerable concern out there about the possible intentions of the Government or a future Government towards water services, and the Minister, Deputy Kelly, and the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, need to take this on board.

There is an amendment here from Deputy Naughten in relation to the word “shall”. According to the proposal of the Minister, it would require a resolution of the Dáil to hold a plebiscite, but all the Bill states is that the Government or a future Government “may” do so, and that raises considerable concerns. The intention of my amendment was to put this in the hands of the people and not to trust the Government or any future Government on this matter. The intention was to put a clause in the Constitution.

I am also disappointed that we simply get a message of six or seven words stating “The following amendments have been ruled out of order”. We do not get any explanation as to why that happens. I find that difficult. We put the work into submitting amendments to shape legislation

and have an input, and that is the level of response. The Government, in its weak-kneed and weak-willed response of trying to placate the public - or satisfy half of the public and dampen down the Opposition - then comes along with a weak Bill stating that a future Government may, if it so decides, hold a plebiscite. I fully support Deputy Naughten's amendment in that regard.

I also support Deputy Catherine Murphy's amendment. While it is not the one that I would favour as my first choice, as I stated, I would favour a constitutional amendment to put the decision into the hands of the people. Recognising that we are where we are, it is a step in the right direction to insert the phrase "of not fewer than two thirds of the Members" to ensure that Irish Water cannot be sold off without the agreement of two thirds of the Members of the Dáil, and it certainly makes it that bit more difficult for a future Government.

In reading the Bill and studying how these amendments are being handled, my worst fears are being deepened. I am very concerned about the Bill that has been introduced. There will be a number of problems with it. It adds further to the mess around Irish Water-Uisce Éireann and water services. We have been going down the wrong road since 1 January this year, when we transferred this out of the hands of the 31 local authorities. I heard both the Minister and the Minister of State say that we could not continue with a situation in which water services began and stopped at county boundaries. That was never the case. I live in a county that is surrounded by other counties, and there has been co-operation with all of those counties in the provision of water services. It is uncomplicated. The way it is done is simple. There is co-operation with Carlow, Offaly and the other counties.

I am disappointed about the way this has been handled. I support the amendments to which I referred, which try to make the best of a bad situation, but I am extremely disappointed that the Sinn Féin amendment to put a provision into the Constitution - effectively, to put the decision into the hands of the people now and forever - has been disallowed.

**Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly:** Rather than the plebiscite that the Minister proposes, I tabled a Bill looking to alter Article 10 of the Constitution - a simple line stating that the water supply could not be sold into private ownership - but it was ruled out of order by the Ceann Comhairle using a new Standing Order that was never meant to be used in that way. I wanted, in the Dáil, to criticise the Ceann Comhairle for his actions, which, I believed, were repugnant to good parliamentary work, but I was told by the Ceann Comhairle's office that there is another Standing Order that means I am not allowed to criticise the Ceann Comhairle for anything he does. Obviously, because I am not allowed to criticise the Ceann Comhairle, I will not suggest that he is acting contrary to the good working of the Parliament, but we could have an interesting conversation if he was not protected by that interesting Standing Order.

I resubmitted the provision as amendment No. 3 to this Bill, and it was ruled out of order. Because the previous Standing Order could not be used, a new Standing Order was used to rule it out this time. It was ruled that my amendment, which seeks to delete a provision of the Bill, does not speak to the provisions of the Bill. There was also a technical reason - that a Bill that changes the Constitution can only concern itself with changing the Constitution. While some of these rulings may be technically correct, as a Member of the Oireachtas, I feel that when I am trying to do the work of Parliament and table legislation that I and those I represent believe in, we are dealing with an apparatus and a set of rules that seems dedicated to stopping us from having sensible parliamentary conversation. There seems to be a body of work that needs to be done to change the Standing Orders of this House. Deputy Kelly is a member of Cabinet. I had four amendments tabled for this evening, all of which were very sensible, but three of them

have been ruled out of order. One amendment that was ruled out of order sought a reduction in charges for those who have no wastewater treatment, such as in Arklow, which would have reduced revenues to Irish Water. I had that ruled out of order on the basis that it would result in a charge on the Exchequer. How Irish Water not getting extra money from Arklow is a charge on the Exchequer is beyond me. I did a count and discovered that more than half of the 31 amendments tabled by Members of the House, other than the Minister, were ruled out of order. Deputy Naughten's amendment, which dared to suggest that a "may" should be turned into a "shall" also cannot be discussed by Parliament because that would incur a charge on the Exchequer. I am aware the Minister has nothing to do with the amendments being ruled out of order but he is sitting at the Cabinet table and it is impossible for us as Members of the Oireachtas to conduct proper parliamentary business when faced with a set of rules which seem dedicated to stopping us conducting parliamentary business.

**Deputy Jonathan O'Brien:** That is why they are there.

**Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly:** Perhaps the Minister could raise at the Cabinet table that these Standing Orders need to be changed to allow us to do the job of Parliament.

In terms of the substance of the change, I have no doubt the Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, as a Labour Minister, would act against any privatisation. The question is why I and others want to move beyond a plebiscite to constitutional protection. The reason is as follows. First, the public do not trust the plebiscite because legislation can be changed and, second, we do not know what is going to come from Europe. We saw the letter from Jean-Claude Trichet to the late Brian Lenihan. He demanded structural reforms. The ECB acted completely beyond its mandate in demanding structural reforms. Four weeks later the first memorandum of understanding, MOU, was signed and it contained two structural reforms. One of them was that Irish people must be charged for their water. One can be absolutely sure there is a view in Europe that the Irish water system should be privatised.

I accept the Minister's bona fides. I accept he would not vote for the privatisation of water but I do not believe for a second that a future Irish Government is not going to come under very serious pressure from Europe, potentially legally binding pressure, that says the plebiscite is all well and good but a new EU directive states we have to privatise the water supply. My question to the Minister is as follows. If he is dedicated to the Irish water supply never being privatised and if the plebiscite does not provide the guarantee that is required, will he explain to the House what the downside to a referendum is if it achieves what he claims and what I believe he wants to see?

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** This is a very important debate. I do not have any issue with when it is discussed because this is a democratic Chamber but I would much prefer that it was in the committee rooms or during normal sitting times because the public is very interested in the points being made.

I wish to respond to the point made by Deputy Naughten. He is absolutely right; as Minister of State at the time, that was the commitment I discussed with the Department and that had gone through the apparatus of the Department. I said it because it was agreed and it was in my speech. That has all been changed but that is what happened. Deputy Naughten is correct; people who cannot drink their water should not be charged for it. Part of the building up of a relationship between the Irish people and Irish Water, Uisce Éireann, is fairness and equity and going out of our way to make sure people who do not have a proper supply of water or who do

not have a safe, drinkable or potable supply of water do not pay for it. I wholeheartedly agree with that.

When I previously acted in the House as Minister of State I gave a commitment on the Water Services (No. 1) Bill that the Water Services (No. 2) Bill would contain a commitment that Irish Water could never be privatised, and that the company would always and forever be a public company. That was agreed, but when the No. 2 Bill was handed to me as I went into the Seanad on the day of the debate, the provision was excluded from the legislation. That concerned me greatly. The Department was fully aware of my very strong and forceful views at that time. I discussed the issue with the then Minister, Mr. Hogan, and with others. Eventually, the provision was brought in as an amendment to the Bill. I remain deeply concerned at other agendas – they may be European as Deputy Donnelly suggested – but I do not know where they are coming from. It was never articulated to me why we should not and could not have a referendum on Irish Water never going into private ownership. Enshrining the provision in legislation and copper-fastening it in the Constitution would ensure there never would be such a possibility. We have reason to be concerned.

When the Minister comes to discuss the section, which I know will not happen tonight, I ask him to explain why the Government has decided that will not happen. In terms of the acceptability of Irish Water and of the charges and issues concerning it, there would be a vote of between 80% and 90% in favour of a constitutional referendum to ensure Irish Water could never be privatised. I am convinced there are other forces at work. They may not necessarily be political forces. I do not know where they are coming from but they exist, they are active and they have an influence. I accept that people might not like what I say but it must be said. I am aware of other issues which I will bring to the Minister's attention privately when the debate is over, which might inform him of other areas to which he could look in the Department for confirmation of some of the things to which I refer.

At the end of the day the debate is about people having confidence in Irish Water. We should have a referendum. That is what the people I represent want. It is what people of all political parties want – Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin and those who do not subscribe to a political party. Why do we not have it?

**Deputy Seamus Healy:** This section deals with a plebiscite on the ownership of Irish Water. The measure is in the Bill due to the serious and understandable concern among the public generally that Irish Water, if it ever gets up and running, and if water charges are introduced, will eventually be privatised and sold on for private profit to super rich Irish or international organisations and companies, people who are already very wealthy and who are already involved in the Irish Water scene. That is very understandable because once water becomes a commodity then it is inevitable that full cost recovery will arise. The charge, though initially capped as an introductory offer by the Government, will sky-rocket and the company will eventually be privatised and sold on to private interests.

That is a reasonable and understandable situation for ordinary people because they have seen it happen before, in particular in the case of refuse charges, which were introduced at a very low cost but after a number of years we now have a situation where there is a very significant charge for refuse of approximately €300 per year per household. The waiver scheme has been abolished and the refuse service has been privatised. People are very much aware of that.

The notion of a plebiscite or referendum was initially introduced by Government supporters

and the Green Party, in effect, as a diversionary tactic to try to get people's mind off charges. We heard it first from Mr. Jack O'Connor of SIPTU; we heard it from the Green Party that was the initiator of the idea of water charges and we heard it from Deputy Joe Costello of the Labour Party. As has been said by other speakers, the formulation in the Bill reminds me of the fraud perpetrated on the people in the last general election, in particular, by the Labour Party which produced its Tesco advertisement with the warning not to vote for Fine Gael. It stated, "Vote for us and we will stop Fine Gael bringing in water charges". This is something very similar. The Minister came into the House a fortnight ago and gave the impression that water services would be given protection by being inserted into the Constitution in order that they could not be privatised. This is not provided for in the Bill and its provisions are worse than useless. It is sleight of hand and trickery. As other speakers said, the Bill does not provide for any specific or exact circumstance. It states the Government may do - not that it has to - if it so decides. This section is worse than useless and more trickery by the Government, the Minister and the Labour Party. It is worthless. Amendments Nos. 4 to 8, inclusive, are worthwhile, but if the Bill is to be useful, what is needed is an amendment to the Constitution to prevent the privatisation of water forever - full stop.

**Deputy Joan Collins:** The Minister has said he is listening to the people, but he has not listened to them on this issue. They want a referendum and constitutional protection to prevent the privatisation of water services. The Minister says he is providing protection, but that is not the case. Holding a plebiscite is not good enough and it is not good enough under the terms of the Bill. We do not know what will come from the European Union. The TTIP, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, is being discussed very secretly with regard to multinationals challenging governments and their public utilities. Therefore, holding a referendum is more crucial than ever to ensure the future protection of Irish Water.

I met the Detroit water brigade today. Its members explained how their water service had not been sold off but that every single piece of it had been privatised and contracted out to contractors to carry out the work involved for the city. The water service today bears no resemblance to what it was ten years ago. I, therefore, support the amendments.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** One of the reasons people are absolutely furious and have come out onto the streets in recent weeks and will come out again in huge numbers tomorrow - it is not just about paying water charges - is the dishonesty in politics, with political parties, Governments Ministers and Taoisigh thinking they can play the people for fools. The people are very angry about this. Every now and again the Government faces a crisis and people get really angry and then apparently we have ardent words from the Taoiseach and the Minister about how they are listening to the people. On the face of it, they seem to display a little humility and appear to be listening, but actually the spin, the dishonesty, the manoeuvring, the game playing and the attempt to play people for fools continue. We have seen it again tonight with this carry-on in respect of the late sitting. It is a peculiar, absurd little game that I do not fully understand and, frankly, I do not even care too much, as it is part of the continuous game playing. The Bill represents the same.

There is a commitment not to privatise when they know that the people have stated clearly that they do not want to see their water services privatised and they want cast iron guarantees that they will not be privatised. For the past week or two, after the Bill was published, the Government has been saying, "We have it now. They will not be privatised. It is included in the Bill that they will not be privatised and we have taken measures to make sure they will not be privatised." However, the devil is in the detail, as usual. There is no guarantee. It is utterly

meaningless and a pretence. It is another attempt to deceive and the Government keeps doing it. I wonder if the Minister thinks he will not be found out. Part of the reason people are on the streets is the way in which the Labour Party, having been humiliated on the issue of bin charges for its complicity in the privatisation of refuse services, continued to spin a line, "It was all those people who were boycotting bin charges who caused the privatisation of refuse services". Was this really the case? How is it that refuse services were privatised in rural areas first where there had been no boycott campaigns and no opposition to paying? The last places to have refuse services privatised were the places in which people resisted. They lasted ten years longer than anyone else precisely because they had resisted. Does the Minister think they have not worked this out? Does he think they have not worked out that if they have to pay five cent in user charges, it will only move in one direction and that the services will be privatised? Does he think they have not worked out that when the contracts to install the meters go to the richest man in the country, that, in fact, they have already been privatised and that all of his assurances mean nothing? Does he think they have not figured this out? Does he think they are stupid? He obviously does because he would not be saying what he is if he did not think he could play the people for fools. However, they are not fools. I cannot believe he believes what he is saying because he knows that once user charges are introduced, privatisation is inevitable, as everybody knows.

As for the off balance sheet stuff, we listened to the people from Detroit who described it as "financialisation", another word for bonds. They said the issuing of bonds in Detroit had led directly to charges sky rocketing to the point where people were being charged nearly \$1,000 a year and where three quarters of the charge was for water going out. They were being charged three times more for the water coming off the roof than the clean water going in. That is where financialisation led because the bondholders placed demands on the water company to jack up the charges to get their pound of flesh. The Minister should stop playing the people for fools because they are not, as he will discover tomorrow.

**Deputy Peter Mathews:** I wish to make a couple of quick points. I echo what Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett has said. The European Union has taken us for fools, as has the Government in turn. This is an island and the shoreline has always been in the ownership of the State and will remain so.

Water is an essential element for the life of the people living in the State. Therefore, it should absolutely be constitutionally within the ownership of the State and the people of Ireland. It is very simple. Off-balance-sheet financing is being used to try to fund an entity which will require approximately €10 billion to have it in working order, fix leaks, have proper reservoirs and capacity and water treatment plants. Here is a suggestion: if the Government showed a bit of courage and capability it would say to Draghi and the EU Commission that €25 billion of misplaced losses on the Irish people would be corrected and that €10 billion of it would be allocated in the first instance to the water supply and €15 billion to other capital projects in education, the health system, which is buckling, to support people who do not even have homes and to build homes. This €25 billion would go a long way and it should be used immediately. The bonds should be cancelled. It would give the necessary boost and resources to any Government to start the work of fair reconstruction of this country. The shoreline is always in the ownership of the State and water should always be in the ownership of the State. It is that simple.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** I did not rule out of order any of the amendments. These decisions were made beyond me. Section 2 is a very important part of the Bill as everyone is aware. The provision safeguards the public ownership of Irish water and it provides for the holding of a

plebiscite if any future Government proposes to change the ownership of Irish Water. Personally I do not think this will ever happen. I do not believe a future Government will in any way try to change the ownership of Irish Water. The section provides that where a Government proposes to initiate legislation to change the ownership, or would potentially do so, it must obtain a resolution from both Houses that they are in favour of the legislation. Subject to such resolutions being obtained, the Government would then hold a plebiscite of the people. The legislation could not proceed without the support of the people and this is quite clear. The section includes the provision that the details of the plebiscite would be set out in regulations.

The amendment tabled by Deputy Catherine Murphy refers to requiring the resolution from both Houses of the Oireachtas to be approved by two thirds of the Members. I cannot accept the amendment as it would place more stringent conditions on a future Government than applies at present. Amendment No. 5, tabled by Deputy Naughten, proposes that the holding of a plebiscite would require a resolution from each municipal district in addition to the resolution from both Houses of the Oireachtas. This condition is onerous and would be administratively quite cumbersome. Moreover I believe it is absolutely unnecessary and obviously I will not accept it.

Amendment No. 7 proposes amending the eligibility criteria for voting in the plebiscite. The Government believes the appropriate eligibility criteria to vote on ownership of such a vital national resource are the same as those for eligibility to vote in a referendum. Therefore I cannot accept the amendment tabled by Deputies Coppinger, Higgins and Murphy.

Amendment No. 8 proposes that a provision be inserted to state the Government shall not extend public moneys for the purposes of promoting a particular outcome of the plebiscite. Section 2(7) requires the Minister to publish details of the proposal and the reasons for it to be submitted to the people in the plebiscite. This amendment is unnecessary and I cannot accept it. Limits on the use of public moneys are detailed in electoral legislation so there is no need to repeat such provisions in this legislation.

Several other issues were raised by Deputies. Deputy O'Dowd raised some issues he feels need to be brought to my attention or the attention of the House. By all means he should please raise them here if he feels it appropriate to do so, or raise them with me in a private capacity, if that is appropriate for whatever reason.

Some of Deputy Donnelly's amendments were ruled out of order. The European Commission is obliged to protect national sovereignty in respect of the ownership of water services and has issued such communication to the Government in the recent past. I am quite happy to provide this communication to the Deputy.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again.

### **Estimates for the Public Services 2014: Messages from Select Committees**

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Select Sub-Committee on Children and Youth Affairs has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Vote 40.

The Select Sub-Committee on the Environment, Community and Local Government has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for Public Services for

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the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Vote 25.

The Select Sub-Committee on Public Expenditure and Reform has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimates for Public Services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2014 - Votes 12 and 17.

The Dáil adjourned at 1.05 a.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 10 December 2014.

