



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 1 Iúil 2015

Wednesday, 1 July 2015

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 9.30 a.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Priority Questions

European Investment Bank

1. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken to date to ensure access to European Investment Bank funds for the development of agriculture, food processing, rural development and forestry; the progress made to date; when it is hoped these funds will be available to be applied for; the amount of the funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26199/15]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As the Minister knows, his erstwhile colleague, the ex-Minister and current Commissioner, Phil Hogan, was in town last week. He outlined to us the super-availability of European Investment Bank funds. What progress has been made to date in getting our hands on these funds? Will there be State co-funding, etc.? I am sure the Minister will give me a very comprehensive answer and we will have great news today.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I think we will have good news. The need for continued investment and support in the agrifood and forestry sector is well established, and the recent approval of the forestry programme and the rural development programme are key supports in this regard. As a complement to the traditional grant-based approach to our schemes, the European Commission has announced that it plans to double the usage of financial instruments in co-funded programmes such as the RDP. Financial instruments can take the form of loans, guarantee funds or equity investments. The funding for any such financial instruments would have to draw on our existing RDP allocation of European agricultural fund or rural development funding, as well as national Exchequer funding. It is also possible to incorporate funding from other sources, and it is in this context that the pos-

sibility of EIB funding has arisen.

In our RDP, we have made a commitment to examining the potential for the use of financial instruments. Accordingly, I have asked officials in my Department to engage with the European Commission, the EIB and other stakeholders to identify areas where financial instruments could be implemented to best strategic effect and to explore the practical steps which are required to implement financial instruments. Any such financial instruments are required by EU regulation to be structured on a clear investment strategy which identifies real market failures and economic needs.

In addition, my Department has been exploring new and more competitive sources of funding and will continue to do so in the context of evolving market requirements. For example, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, which includes the EIB, is one of the funding partners and has recently announced a new agriculture investment loans product. This credit is available at favourable terms for investment by agricultural SMEs involved in primary agricultural production, the processing of agricultural products or the marketing of agricultural products.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Most people understand that what will be available are loans and the EIB money that is available is being made available to the agriculture and forestry sectors. I understand the Minister has to grant the money through some vehicle in Ireland if he is to proceed. Allowing for all the steps he has to take, such as negotiations and then establishing a vehicle through which to disburse the funds, will he indicate when he thinks farmers or those involved in forestry or processing - I take it all three are involved - might be able to apply for these funds? Are minimum and maximum amounts involved?

Deputy Simon Coveney: The level of detail in terms of minimum and maximum amounts is not yet available. What is under discussion and quite close to agreement is a product involving large Irish dairy processors. They have been negotiating with the Commission and the EIB to try to make available a new finance product for loans for dairy expansion. Such loans would involve long-term repayment conditions at relatively low interest rates. There is a view that even though Irish banks currently make a lot of money available to agriculture, the competitive nature of interest rates linked to those loans does not compare favourably with other European countries. The EIB is anxious to put finance into the sector.

It will take us a little bit longer to consider how we can use the existing funds we have to spend on the rural development programme, which total more than €4 billion, to leverage loan facilities on the back of that. We had a conference in Dublin last week at which Commissioner Hogan spoke. I spoke at a meeting of the EIB and a series of other stakeholders also contributed. It is an area about which people are very excited and products will be available to farmers and the food industry in the not too distant future.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I thank the Minister. Many farmers have a very simple question and he knows what it is, that is, whether loan funding will be available to match the grants available under TAMS, for example, which is a capital investment scheme. Younger farmers, in particular, might find the interest rates of the current products available from financial institutions rather burdensome. Will the Minister indicate whether a three-month timescale is involved, allowing for the fact that Europe closes for August? Will funds not be available until 2016 to farmers under TAMS, for example? Will he indicate the interest rates involved? Will they be 3%, 4% or 5%? What will be the maximum loan periods? These are crucial questions

on which people would like some indication at this stage.

Deputy Simon Coveney: They are very fair questions. It would be irresponsible of me to start outlining the terms of what will be, in effect, a commercial loan facility for farmers. The idea would be that they would be made available at more competitive rates than are currently on offer. I have said many times that if one considers the current volume of lending by Irish banks into agriculture, in particular dairy, one will find it is very significant. I do not think it is as competitive as it could or should be compared with what farmers have available to them in other parts of Europe. We are encouraging the introduction of new financial products for Irish farmers. Only this week we announced a €50 million fund for the latest dairy TAMS product, TAMS II. There will be significant uptake of that, but we should not forget that people have three years to spend the money on their farms. There is no mad rush. People should apply and look for the best financial products. More financial products will be available before the end of the year.

Horse Racing Industry Development

2. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is aware of the effort of the Irish Harness Racing Association to stage races at Dundalk race track, County Louth, the objection to this by the publicly funded Horse Racing Ireland and the obstacle this is to the development of the sport of harness racing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26202/15]

Deputy Martin Ferris: Is the Minister aware of the efforts of the Irish Harness Racing Association, IHRA, to stage races at Dundalk race track? Being an all-weather track, it is the only suitable race track in the State, to my knowledge. Is the Minister aware of the objection by the publicly funded organisation, Horse Racing Ireland, HRI? It is my understanding HRI has members on the board in Dundalk. I have seen a letter in which it objects to any harness racing taking place there.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I am glad that the Deputy has asked this question. I have met a number of people interested in developing the sport of harness racing in Ireland to match the standard in other countries. It could be a big sport and industry in Ireland, if managed properly.

Horse Racing Ireland, HRI, is the commercial State agency charged with responsibility for the development and administration of horse racing. Its remit is laid down in the relevant legislation. In that context, it authorises race tracks for the purposes of horse racing, including the track in Dundalk. The terms and conditions of such authorisation are operational matters for HRI.

The Irish Harness Racing Association formed a limited company in May with the aim of developing the sport of harness racing in Ireland. Harness racing is a significant equestrian sport in a number of countries, notably France, Sweden, Italy and North America. However, it has been a minority interest sport in this country, with fixtures staged throughout the year at venues such as Portmarnock, County Dublin; Inchydoney beach in County Cork and an all-weather facility at Annaghmore, County Armagh. I understand the Irish Harness Racing Association is seeking to expand the sport in Ireland and believes it has significant potential for development to bring it more into line with the profile it enjoys elsewhere and for revenue generation which it would then seek to have reinvested in the sport.

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Following on from the establishment of a limited company in May 2015, I understand the Irish Harness Racing Association has applied for Ireland to become a full member of l'Union Européenne du Trot, UET, the umbrella organisation for national harness racing organisations in 22 European countries. This would open the way for Irish competitors to compete in Europe. In line with its ambition to elevate the sport to a more professional and sophisticated plane in this country, the Irish Harness Racing Association has been considering the feasibility of running fixtures at venues of a higher quality than those to which it has heretofore been confined.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I thank the Minister for his reply. A presentation was made here the week before last and it is my understanding the French harness racing association is prepared to make a significant investment and provide prize money for three meetings at Dundalk race track if the IHRA can arrange them. I also understand a harness racing meeting was held before at Dundalk race track and that it was quite successful. I have seen a letter sent to Dundalk race track from Horse Racing Ireland, stating the reasons it did not want harness racing to take place there, one of which was commercial, meaning competition. If that is the case, it is disgraceful. Horse Racing Ireland is an association for thoroughbreds. I do not accept that it has a right to do this, given that as a committee we allocate significant funding to it each year, as well as to the greyhound board. Many say HRI's objections amount to bigotry and that HRI looks down on the sport. That in itself sends a wrong message.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The Irish Harness Racing Association requested permission from Horse Racing Ireland to stage a number of harness racing fixtures at Dundalk racecourse, one in July 2015, one in December 2015 and three in January 2016. The association's intention is that the first of these events would enable the French and European authorities to conduct an audit which would guide their consideration of the association's bid for admission to the UET. I understand that, having considered the matter, Horse Racing Ireland decided that it was not within its remit to support the staging of harness racing at an authorised racecourse and that it had a number of concerns which it communicated to the Irish Harness Racing Association. Against that background, my Department has written to Horse Racing Ireland to ask if it would be prepared to reconsider the specific request from the Irish Harness Racing Association to hold the fixtures in July and December 2015 and in January 2016. I stress, however, that such decisions are ultimately matters for HRI and its board. I spoke to the chairperson of HRI about the issue on Saturday at the derby meeting at the Curragh. We live in a horse-mad country. Horse sports such as show jumping, eventing, racing and harness racing need proper structures and regulation to make sure we have it right from a welfare point of view and that we allow the sports to grow and expand in a managed, controlled, responsible and ambitious way. That goes for harness racing the same as it does for any other form of racing. I will engage with the organisations concerned to see if we can make some progress.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I am encouraged by what the Minister has said. The track in Dundalk is privately owned. It is not owned by Horse Racing Ireland, although it has two members on the board. It is disgraceful that HRI can exercise its influence over the track to deny the Irish Harness Racing Association the right to hold an event there. I am disgusted by it because I see it as a status thing. Because HRI is an association that deals with thoroughbreds, it looks down on harness racing. I have severe reservations about providing funding for HRI if this continues to be the case.

Deputy Simon Coveney: In defence of Horse Racing Ireland, it has a job to do in ensuring all authorised racetracks for horse racing are properly run and regulated. It also provides a lot of finance for many tracks. It does, therefore, have significant involvement in these matters,

although it does not own all of the tracks. Having said that, the position is that harness racing takes place in very different ways in different parts of the country. I certainly want to move away from the image of it as racing up and down the Cork to Mallow road or on the beach. Although the beach can be a good venue, we need more structures and regulations, particularly on the welfare of animals. In many countries harness racing is a significantly bigger sport than horse racing. There is an opportunity for us to build something, but we need to do it in the proper way and make sure the venues are right. Whether Dundalk race track is that venue needs further discussion. There is a commitment from me to try to have structures and regulations for this industry in order that we can deal with the welfare concerns many people have and the bad image of harness racing in the minds of the public which is unfair to the sport. We can do this if we work together.

Plant Protection Products

3. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will prohibit the use of glyphosate herbicide in view of the World Health Organization's finding that the substance is probably carcinogenic to humans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26373/15]

Deputy Mick Wallace: In November last year the Minister defended the use of glyphosate, more commonly known as the main ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup pesticide, on the grounds that it had passed a 2002 EU safety evaluation. He said the comprehensive health assessments conducted by public authorities in the past 40 years had consistently concluded that glyphosate did not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment. He might, however, have noted the findings of the project conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer which contradicted much of what he had said in November. Will he reconsider the effects of glyphosate in the food chain?

Deputy Simon Coveney: In truth, it is being looked at all the time.

Decisions on the authorisation of an active substance, such as glyphosate, are made at EU level following advice from the European Food Safety Authority, EFSA. Member states have competence to authorise products containing EU-approved active substances.

Glyphosate is a non-selective systemic herbicide that is applied directly to plant foliage. It was first commercialised in the mid-1970s and is registered worldwide. It is used in agriculture, forestry, industry, home and garden, and semi-aquatic areas. It is primarily used as a means of total weed control prior to the establishment of field crops or at the very end of the growing season to desiccate the crop to manipulate harvest date and improve crop quality.

Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 regulates the authorisation, marketing and use of plant protection products. Maximum residue levels, MRLs, are currently in place, including for glyphosate, facilitating all currently registered uses. The MRLs are currently under review by the European Food Safety Authority and the member states.

Glyphosate was previously reviewed in 2002, as part of the EU plant protection product review programme which has allowed its continued use. A scheduled re-review is currently under way, with Germany acting as the rapporteur and Slovakia acting as a co-rapporteur. The process of peer reviewing the German-Slovakian evaluation is coming to a conclusion and it is

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expected that this process will be completed within the next few months. As part of the process the European Food Safety Authority is co-ordinating a review by all member states of its evaluation.

The German evaluators will also perform a thorough review of the classification issued by the World Health Organization agency, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, IARC, once its full report, which is expected in August, becomes available. All uses of products containing glyphosate approved in Ireland are in line with approved uses in all other EU states. Uses are only granted if the appropriate risk assessment indicates that safe use is possible under normal conditions. To date, no EU or, indeed, OECD countries have taken a negative regulatory position on glyphosate and currently all EU member states have product authorisations in place.

Deputy Mick Wallace: A German NGO research group, called Testbiotech, strongly criticised the German report the Minister is talking about and stated that the report failed to evaluate several peer review studies which were omitted for unknown reasons. To frighten us a bit more, they told us that Germany's Federal Institute for Risk Assessment's pesticide committee has employees from pesticide giants that profit from glyphosate - two from BASF and one from Bayer - among its members.

Does it concern the Minister that the Dutch have changed tack on this? The Dutch are banning the use of glyphosate in public parks and any areas near people. Surely, there must be a reason for this. From November 2015, any product containing glyphosate will not be used by the Dutch.

The people are becoming afraid of it. We should be too. If cancer rates are growing in Ireland, there is something amiss. It is either something we eat or drink, and I am convinced that we have serious problems with our water table. I think we are being poisoned in the long term.

Deputy Simon Coveney: First, cancer rates are clearly linked to what we eat and drink, and what we smoke as well. There is a series of reasons for cancer and we need to be aware of that, and we need public health campaigns to try and address it. However, we also need to have faith in the European systems that have been put in place. I have faith in the European Food Safety Authority to ensure that reviews and, as they are called, re-reviews are done thoroughly. What is happening at present is that Germany and Slovakia, together, acting as rapporteurs to look at reviewing this substance, are doing that in a thorough way. It will then be fully peer reviewed before final conclusions are drawn towards the end of the summer. They are also tapping in to the World Health Organization to ensure that nothing is missed.

I take Deputy Wallace's point. Issues are raised by NGOs all the time. Sometimes there is something real behind those concerns. Sometimes they are raising questions that need to be answered or clarified. We need to look constantly at all of that. There is a comprehensive review under way. We will await the outcome of that with interest and we will act accordingly.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister referred to the World Health Organization but the body that I referred to, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, is a WHO body. The Minister will probably be familiar as well with the fact the Corporate Europe Observatory has shown that the current authorisation of glyphosate relies on old out-dated testing protocols and, almost exclusive, on industry studies. The agencies, that the Minister quotes and that he states he can rely on, are riddled with industry lobbyists who are only interested in security of the

chemical sector's profits.

Deputy Simon Coveney: That is nonsense.

Deputy Mick Wallace: It is outrageous that the Minister would argue that there are not persons lobbying on behalf of large corporate profits.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Of course, there are.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Look at what is going on with the TTIP. I refer to most of those trying to water down the regulations in Europe at present. The pressure is coming from lobbyists for big industry that has a profit motive and profits are being put before the health of the people. The Government should put the health of the Irish people before the profits of large chemical corporations making crazy money.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The Government always puts the health of Irish people before the profits of anybody.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Ban this substance then.

Deputy Simon Coveney: That is what the European Food Safety Authority is there for. Any organisation gets lobbied. Deputy Wallace gets lobbied.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister is ignoring the WHO.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Deputy Wallace should let me answer his question. I did not interrupt him.

Whether it is TTIP or any other policy consideration, there will be lobbyists from all sides, from NGOs, industry, health organisations and stakeholders, because many people, including the Deputy, have different vested interests in different decisions.

Deputy Mick Wallace: This is not safe.

Deputy Simon Coveney: That is the way it should be. We need to have institutions that can balance and prioritise within those considerations. I am saying human health comes first. That is why we have a food safety authority and a world health organisation. It is why we are having a re-review here on the back of a review. It is why it will be fully peer tested. It is why Ireland and other European countries will act on the back of the results coming from that review. Deputy Wallace is not even willing to wait until August to get the results of the review. He has already decided because of something an NGO has said.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I am bringing the results to the Minister.

Deputy Simon Coveney: That is the reality. Deputy Wallace is seeing a conspiracy around the corner before we even get a result.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister is prepared to ignore the WHO.

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Beef Data Programme

4. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of suckler cow farmers who have herds of ten cows or less; the percentage of these who have applied for the beef data and genomics scheme 2015; his views on the low uptake of this scheme by smaller herd owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26201/15]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Based on data that has already been provided to me, it would seem that a small percentage of owners of small herds have got involved in the genomics scheme. Could the Minister give some indication as to the percentage of herd owners who have less than ten suckler cows and what percentage of those have applied to join the beef data and genomics scheme?

Deputy Simon Coveney: According to the most up-to-date figures available from my Department's animal identification and movement system, the total number of herds that have ten or less beef-breed female cows on their holding is 38,171 and this represents 52% of all herds with female beef-breed cows. Of course, these figures refer to farmers with significantly varying demographic profiles and include thousands of farmers with enterprises on their farms other than suckler farming. In many cases, suckler farming will not be the main farm enterprise practised on the holding.

There is a cohort of farmers within these figures who, for various reasons, do not engage with schemes for the suckler herd where additional defined action is required on their part, such as was the case under the suckler cow welfare scheme and for the pilot beef genomics scheme last year. The reasons include the part-time nature of many of these farmers who keep less than ten cows, or the fact that suckler farming is not their main farm enterprise.

Therefore, when looking at the profile of applicants under the Beef Data and Genomics Programme, BDGP, or similar schemes, the relevant comparator is the profile of participants in previous schemes, such as the suckler cow welfare scheme and the 2014 beef genomics scheme. In that regard, I am satisfied that the profile of applicants under the new beef data and genomics scheme compares favourably with previous schemes for the suckler sector operated by my Department over the last decade or so.

Some 7,851 herds with ten suckler cows or less have applied for the beef data and genomics programme. This equates to 27% of the total number of applications received for the scheme, which is broadly proportionate to the level of participation in last year's suckler welfare scheme and the beef genomics scheme last year.

What we have examined is whether there is any change in patterns in the type of suckler farmer applying to participate in schemes and the answer is that there has not. Approximately one third of the applicants have ten cows or fewer. Another one third have between ten and 20, while the commercial suckler cow farmers have more breeding cows. It is more or less the same proportionate breakdown we would have had under the suckler cow welfare scheme which was launched by the previous Government and that we have had under the beef genomics scheme to date. There has been no real change.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The fact that there has been no real change does not mean that it is right. Based on data the Minister has given me - the figures he has given me now are marginally different from the ones he gave me previously - it is interesting to note that only 22% of

farmers - I think he said the figure was 24%, but I will not argue over 2% because he is arguing with himself over his own figures - have ten cows or fewer.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I am sorry; the figure is 27%.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The figure the Minister gave me previously was 22%.

Deputy Simon Coveney: That may have been the figure under the previous-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I can give the Deputy the figures.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: On 26 May the Minister said that in the range of nought to ten, there were 39,605 herds. I was also informed by him that 8,677 herdowners had made applications. That works out at a figure of 22%, but I will accept the figure of 27%.

Deputy Simon Coveney: There were late applications.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív has the floor.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I will give the Deputy the updated figures.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: That would be very useful, but we will accept the figure of 27%. On the same basis, in the case of farmers with 11 cows or more we are talking about, on average, 67% or 68% of those applying to participate in the scheme. It is obvious, therefore, that there is a massive difference in the percentage of farmers with ten cows or fewer who are applying.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will come back to the Deputy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Minister has given some reasons for this, but none of them stands up. It is a fantastic answer, but it is meaningless. Is the Minister concerned that the take-up of the schemes by smaller farmers is so low, particularly when the farm organisations kept telling small farmers that they would be looked after under Pillar 2?

Deputy Simon Coveney: Small farmers are being looked after under Pillar 2, but they have to apply to participate in the schemes. We deliberately designed this scheme in favour of small farmers. That is why for the first ten animals a farmer receives nearly €100 per head. The figure is €80 per head after this. We deliberately tilted the scheme in favour of small farmers for the very reasons about which the Deputy is talking, unlike his approach to the suckler cow welfare scheme which did not deliberately discriminate in favour of those with small holdings. To be exact, in per hectare terms, it results in a payment of €142.50 on the first 6.6 ha compared to €120 thereafter. We are deliberately saying to farmers with smaller herds that we want to give them more money for their first ten animals, after which everybody receives €80.

In terms of the breakdown, I want to put the record straight because the Deputy constantly tries to paint me as someone who only looks after the big guy. If he considers the facts in terms of what we have done, he knows that that is inaccurate.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will come back to the Minister.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The figure is 27% for farmers who have ten animals or fewer. The figure is 34% for farmers with between 11 and 20 animals; 19% for those with between

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21 and 30 animals; 10% for those with between 30 and 40 animals; 5% for those with between 40 and 50 animals; and less than 2.5% for those with between 50 and 60 animals. The biggest cohort, therefore, comprises those with between ten and 20 animals. The second biggest by far comprises those with fewer than ten. The biggest categories of applicant by far are those farmers who have 20 animals or fewer, but the Deputy does not want to accept the reality of the success of the scheme.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am sorry, but we are over time.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Minister is a genius with figures. Obviously, a large number of the farmers fall into the category with the smallest number of animals. Let me give the Minister an example. There are 39,605 farmers in the nought to ten suckler cow range. There are 1,978 farmers who have between 41 and 50 animals. If every one of them was to apply - some 72% have applied - they would still not outweigh the 39,605 farmers with small herds. The manipulation of the percentages by the Minister is shameful. The reality is that in the case of those with more than 20 cows the average application rate is 68% to 70%. For smaller herd-owners, the figure is 30%. For the Minister to say he is looking after small farmers is a blatant untruth. What does he intend to do to make the scheme attractive for small farmers? Will he confirm that the biggest of big farmers will receive the extra payment on the first ten cows just as the small farmer will?

Deputy Simon Coveney: As this is an area based payment, the same rules have to apply to everybody. On the first portion of a farm, 6.6 ha, a farmer receives the higher payment. That was deliberately changed by me to ensure we would favour small farmers.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The big guy gets it, too. If someone has 1,000 ha-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputy; the Minister has the floor.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The big guy does get it, but, on average, he receives less per animal the more animals he has.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: For the first ten he gets-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister has the floor.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The reason the Deputy is uncomfortable is the scheme is starting to work.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is not working for small farmers. Less than 30%-----

Deputy Simon Coveney: A significant proportion of applicants either have fewer than ten or 20 animals. That amounts to two thirds of applicants. The Deputy does not like the reality because, like others, he said farmers would not apply to participate in the scheme, but they have done so and in huge numbers. Some 30,000 have applied and we are writing to all of them. In time the scheme will work, as people will see.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Some 78% of herdowners have fewer than 20 cows.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have to call the next question.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The only way to compare it is by comparing percentages of applicants.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No.

Deputy Simon Coveney: This is a voluntary scheme and farmers choose to apply. It not mandatory.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am moving to the next question.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The reality is that two thirds of those who have decided to apply to participate in the scheme have fewer than 20 animals. That is a good result.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: They represent 80% of herdowners. It is farcical.

Bord na gCon

5. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Bord na gCon National Greyhound Laboratory in County Limerick has accreditation for testing for Stanozolol; if he will provide an up-to-date certificate of accreditation for Bord na gCon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26374/15]

Deputy Mick Wallace: In response to a parliamentary question in May the Minister outlined that Bord na gCon had never identified any greyhound with a positive Stanozolol test result, implying that we did not have a problem with the drug in Ireland. The truth is very different. The most up-to-date accreditation certificate for the National Greyhound Laboratory available on the Bord na gCon website does not include Stanozolol in the list of substances for which it has received accreditation to test. The document indicates that the laboratory has received accreditation for a list of additional tests. Is Stanozolol is on that list or any other updated list. Has the laboratory in Limerick been accredited to test for Stanozolol in all its forms?

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Tom Hayes): Bord na gCon is a commercial State body which was established in 1958 under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and improve and develop the greyhound industry.

The sampling of greyhounds for the detection of prohibited substances is a key element of integrity management at Bord na gCon. Anabolic steroids such as Stanozolol are not authorised for use within the greyhound industry; therefore, Stanozolol is a prohibited substance.

I understand from Bord na gCon that the National Greyhound Laboratory, NGL, has accreditation status from the Irish National Accreditation Board which accredits the NGL to undertake sampling in compliance with international standards. The National Greyhound Laboratory has flexible scope accreditation. This means that it is in a position to validate and add any prohibited substance to its scope of accreditation at any time. It is not the practice for a racing laboratory to list all substances for which it has been accredited.

The National Greyhound Laboratory, including through its relationship with other laboratory services, provides the capacity to detect the anabolic steroid Stanozolol in samples obtained at licensed greyhound racing stadia. Bord na gCon is confident that these laboratory services, complemented by the use of intelligence lead sampling, can detect the unauthorised administration of Stanozolol to greyhounds where this has occurred. Bord na gCon has advised that it is awaiting confirmatory analysis of four samples obtained at licensed stadia to test for the

prohibited substance Stanazolol.

I understand Bord na gCon has recently conducted a review of its integrity and regulatory systems under the guidance of Professor Tim Morris with particular emphasis on sampling and analysis for the presence of prohibited substances and medication control issues.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State. The rest of the reply will appear in the Official Report.

Deputy Tom Hayes: This is very important. To finish-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will come back to the Minister of State in a minute. He will have two more chances.

Deputy Tom Hayes: That is fine.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

This review is nearing completion and once it is finalised, I expect Bord na gCon to consider its recommendations with a view to identifying any amendments required to legislation, practices or policies to ensure the advancement of the board's commitment to greyhound welfare and to underpin the integrity of the greyhound industry.

The scope of the review encompasses the capacity of the National Greyhound Laboratory in Limerick, the general adequacy of the equipment used and the levels of testing for prohibited substances. The objective is to ensure Bord na gCon will conform with best international practice. I understand from Bord na gCon that in addition to testing samples at the National Greyhound Laboratory in Limerick, it also sends samples for analysis to an appropriate laboratory in the UK as required from time to time. I commissioned the Indecon report in recognition of the need to review and reform aspects of the greyhound sector, including matters relating to integrity services, and I view it as critically important that its recommendations are implemented with a view to ensuring the greyhound industry can reach its full potential and prosper into the future.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Am I to understand it has the capacity to test for Stanazolol? If it has, can the Minister of State explain to me why Irish dogs that have gone to Britain have tested positive for Stanazolol when they never test positive in Ireland? I do not understand that and neither do many people in the industry.

We all know there have been problems in the greyhound industry for a while. Turnover has halved since 2006 and is down something like 55%. There is a good reason for that. There is a lack of confidence in how the industry operates and there is a great deal left to be desired there. It is down to even simple things. Last month, the Minister of State told me there are more than 27,000 uncollected fines. Of the 140 fines handed out during the current Government's tenure, how many have been paid? There does not seem to be any discipline in how greyhound racing is working. According to the Department's own statistics, 10,000 people are directly or indirectly involved in the industry which has a turnover of approximately €500 million. This is very important for Ireland and it needs addressing.

Deputy Tom Hayes: I accept the point that this is a hugely important industry. There are 10,000 people involved, including small farmers and small-scale breeders throughout the country. That is why we put the Indecon report in place. Indecon reported back to us with an

open, transparent plan to deal with the many outstanding issues over the next number of years, particularly financial issues but also in regulation and drug testing. We put that in place and it is being implemented. The Deputy is 100% correct that there is worry and fear.

On the review that has been completed on sampling, I note for the record that this review is nearing completion and, once it is finalised, I expect Bord na gCon to consider its recommendations with a view to identifying any amendments required to legislation, practices or policies to ensure the advancement of Bord na gCon's commitment to greyhound welfare and to underpin the integrity of the Irish greyhound industry. I note for the interest of Deputy Wallace and the people he represents that we want at all times to have integrity as a high priority. Nothing will stop us on the road to achieving that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Tom Hayes: That is what we are on and we need the opportunity to do it. There are many people in the industry who-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will come back to the Minister of State in a moment. I call Deputy Wallace please. I am trying to make some progress. We are ten minutes over time.

Deputy Mick Wallace: It is not my fault. The Minister and Deputy "quare fellow" there went on so long.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will not revisit that, Deputy Wallace.

Deputy Simon Coveney: It is my fault again, is it?

Deputy Mick Wallace: No, I blame the other Deputy more.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputy Wallace.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Will the results of the review to which the Minister of State referred be made public? On Stanozolol, the winner of the William Hill Derby in the UK, an Irish dog, was disqualified for testing positive for Stanozolol only recently. A breeder in Wexford was on to me last week. He told me that he could only get €900 now for a dog for which he would have got €3,500 ten years ago because there is so little faith in the industry. Another area in which there are problems relates to the Artificial Insemination of Greyhounds Regulations 2005, which we have discussed before. While the regulations have been changed, there are dogs which broke it previously and which are outside its rules. Baldoyle Honey won the *Sporting Press* Irish Oaks at Shelbourne Park in June and received €25,000 but is actually an illegal dog. Tyrur Sugar Ray is also an illegal dog. These guys break the regulations, but no one is doing anything about it. The big problem is that, unfortunately, too many people do not have faith in how the greyhound board is functioning.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Since we took over, we have put new people on the board. The term of others is coming to an end and we will be looking at that. At all times, we are putting people with the skills to which Indecon referred on the board. We have appointed an accountant and a vet who is one of the top specialists in the country. I cannot express what an advantage that vet has been to the board. There is an ongoing process of improving the board and the people around it.

I acknowledge that there is worry, but it is a broad statement to say a dog was worth €3,000

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last year, but only €800 this week. That happens. It is real life. One could also have a dog that was bought this week for €100 that would be worth €3,000 in six months. That is the commercial life of dog breeding. Prices go up and down. If one has a good dog and he wins, one will make a fortune. If one has a poor dog, one will not make any money. That is real life in the greyhound industry. The truth of the matter is that the sales graphs show prices are increasing. Last week, 100 dogs were sold in Thurles and the graph shows the prices had gone up. It is not fair, therefore, to pick out one case in Wexford. If the Deputy meets people throughout the country, as I do, he will have a general view of what is happening in the broader industry and will not come to the House with individual cases. I ask the Deputy to do that. He should meet the people on the ground in Tipperary and throughout the country who are breeding dogs. They will tell him.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have to move on.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Wait now. I have to make a point. There is no doubt the industry was in crisis. The economic downturn affected it. Indecon, however, has addressed many of the issues that are there. Going forward, the industry needs help and support, which is why the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund was increased in the budget. I commend the Government on doing that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Tom Hayes: We want to keep the industry and build on it because it has potential for employment. We need to support it in the House as well as outside because of all the small farmers in Kerry, Tipperary and throughout the country.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister of State and I are talking to different people.

Other Questions

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy who tabled Question No. 6 is not present. I call Deputy Broughan on Question No. 7.

Question No. 6 replied to with Written Answers.

Bovine Disease Controls

7. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the recent bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, case; the investigative measures his Department is taking to ensure this was an isolated case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25843/15]

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The BSE case in County Louth is a very significant event in Irish agriculture. I have been looking quickly at the epidemiological investigation report on the Department's website and it appears to conclude that this is a classical BSE case and, it is hoped, a one-off event. However, the report seems very vague overall. Obviously, the feed from the era in question, 2009 to 2010, has been investigated thoroughly and does not seem to be the root of the problem. Given the impact on our food reputation internationally and what

the Minister has been trying to do over recent years, is it concerning that we have not identified the precise cause of this outbreak?

Deputy Simon Coveney: Before I reply to the question, I thank colleagues for taking a very responsible approach to a very sensitive issue last week. We were anxious to get very detailed results, which we did. This has provided a great deal of reassurance to the beef industry and farming and, most important, to people who buy Irish beef. They can be sure this is an industry that is properly regulated, safe and which has dealt with an outlier or single and individual case of BSE in a very transparent and competent manner.

Final test results have confirmed the recent suspect case of BSE to be an isolated case of classical BSE in a single animal. In line with normal protocols, my Department identified all animals potentially exposed to the BSE agent that caused this incident, those born and reared on the birth farm one year either side of the birth date of the positive animal and, indeed, her progeny. These have been slaughtered, excluded from the food and feed chains and tested. The epidemiological investigation has confirmed the following. All 63 cohort animals and four progeny slaughtered and disposed of have tested negative for BSE. The confirmed case is an isolated case in a single animal. Both the dam and grand dam of the infected animal tested negative for BSE at slaughter and, therefore, vertical transmission is not considered to be a factor in this case. While the grand dam of the positive animal was imported, this is not of any significance in epidemiological terms. No concerns arise regarding the integrity of the commercial feed supply chain or the effectiveness of the feed control systems. We looked at thousands of test results from the years when this animal was growing up and not a single one tested positive for meat and bonemeal, which was connected in the past to BSE. We have had a meat and bonemeal ban in animal feed since 2001. All of the indications, surveys and test results show the ban has been rigorously enforced and adhered to by the feed industry in Ireland. Last year there were ten isolated one-off single animal cases of BSE throughout the European Union. Unfortunately we have had one this year, but we have dealt with it in a very comprehensive way. We have shown the systems in Ireland deal with these isolated incidences if and when they happen. The industry itself continues to deal in a very comprehensive way with the historic problem of BSE.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Minister made the point very strongly about feedstuffs but could there have been cross-contamination in 2009 or 2010? Was this ruled out? The farm in question is reported to be an exemplary producer. The report makes clear this is the second time this farm was depopulated as it also occurred approximately a decade ago. Is this of concern to the Minister? He mentioned the grand dam was imported in this case. Is this a matter of concern? The European Union and the OIE must be informed. Will this lead to a downgrading of our status from negligible risk to controlled risk? Is this a significant event with regard to the efforts made on beef exports to the United States and China? What further controls is the Minister considering to ensure this does not reoccur?

Deputy Simon Coveney: The Deputy asked many questions so I will try to move through them as quickly as I can. The markets are very calm with regard to this incident. People, governments and veterinary departments which understand BSE and its history understand these isolated one-off cases can happen. The important thing is how they are dealt with, and a number of people outside of Ireland have complimented me and the Department. Catching this animal and dealing with it in a transparent and open way is proof the Irish system is working.

We have not received negative feedback from the countries with which we trade. Of course

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we have provided information and reassurance to all of them and it seems to be working very well. Beef prices have increased since the incident happened. They are not increasing because it happened but they certainly have not decreased and the demand for Irish beef has not reduced. This is an indication people trust our systems. I believe Irish beef is the safest in the world, and this is the case now as it was a month ago.

On the OIE question, of course we have shared all of our results with European Commission and the OIE. Unfortunately we may well get reclassified. Three weeks ago we were upgraded to negligible risk status, which means no issue at all with BSE, from controlled risk status, which means our controls make us safe. However, controls are necessary. We may well now have to revert back to controlled risk, but this is a matter for the OIE and we will have to wait to see what happens.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I also asked the Minister about the fact that farm was depopulated in the past and about cross-contamination.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The farm had a previous incident of BSE in 2002 and unfortunately we have had this one-off incident on the farm again. The honest answer is we cannot pinpoint exactly what caused this, because in all likelihood it was something the animal ingested six or perhaps five years ago. We are sharing our results with other countries in Europe which have had one-off cases in recent years to try to gain a better scientific understanding about how these one-off cases happen. There are different theories on it. With regard to all we could have practically done in testing, we tested current feed on the farm and our inspectors looked at the farm in great detail with regard to feed storage facilities looking for any clues or hints as to how this might have happened. With regard to how it is run, the farm's cleanliness and organisation is exemplary. It is a really well run farm so it is unfortunate this incident has happened. We will do what we can with other countries to draw further conclusions but the conclusions we have drawn on the basis of the testing we have done are very reassuring to date.

Harbours and Piers

8. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of future tendering processes for properties at Howth fishery harbour in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26075/15]

Deputy Terence Flanagan: This question is about the tendering process at Howth fishery harbour and the other five fishery harbours. Will the Minister also comment on the report produced recently by the Committee of Public Accounts on the underutilisation of assets at the fishery harbours?

Deputy Simon Coveney: The property portfolio in Howth, one of six fishery harbour centres managed and operated by the Department, encompasses a range of diverse properties reflecting its remit as a working fishery harbour and its unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an economic and social perspective. The Department's aim, working within the Government framework for the management of State property and relevant legal frameworks, is to ensure the sites within this diverse portfolio generate a competitive economic return while fostering a diverse range of maritime activities. In this context the Department reviews the portfolio of properties on an ongoing basis to maximise these returns to the Exchequer.

Some properties in Howth Fishery Harbour Centre may appear vacant. However they can be, and in many cases are, subject to tenancy arrangements. At present eight vacant properties in Howth are not subject to existing tenancy arrangements. Of these, two were made available by competitive public tender on 15 of June and details of the competitions can be viewed on the Department's website. A further two properties are subject to legal, operational or planning considerations and cannot be made available for tenancy until these issues are resolved. These issues are being progressed and, when appropriate, further tender competitions will be publicly advertised. The remaining four properties are not considered suitable for tender at present.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: I thank the Minister for his response. No doubt he is very familiar with Howth as he has visited it on many occasions. It is a source of frustration for Deputy Broughan and I as local Deputies that business owners come to us on a constant basis expressing interest in some of the vacant properties. In some of the properties materials are being stored by the Department so they are not being run on a commercial basis. If the Department is not able or capable of utilising and ensuring the taxpayers gets bang for their buck it needs to hand over the properties to a commercial auctioneer who will look after them and ensure they are properly put out to tender. There are major concerns. The Committee on Public Accounts has visited Howth. The Chairman, Deputy John McGuinness, in particular was hugely critical of the underutilisation of resources. Much more needs to be done to ensure they are used to full capacity. There is huge potential for job creation. Howth is at the end of the DART line and is one of the most scenic areas in the city. More needs to be done.

Deputy Simon Coveney: More is being done.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: It is not.

Deputy Simon Coveney: More than the Chairman of the Committee on Public Accounts has commented on this. The committee chose to visit Howth, which it is entitled to do, and was shown around by people who have an interest in these properties and are looking to get access to them. The Department had an opportunity on 20 May to respond the committee's draft report on the financial management of the fishery harbour centres. The approach of the committee changed after that response. The Deputy knows some of the people advocating for properties to be made available to them in Howth have a history with the Department in terms of complex tenancy arrangements. In some cases, rent has not been paid.

We have a responsibility to do a number of things. We have a responsibility to Howth to ensure a proper fisheries harbour is run there and the management of it is professional, well-run and in the interest of the local community. We also have an obligation to ensure we run our fisheries harbours in a commercial manner in order that we can pay for their upkeep and I can invest in places like Howth. We are being asked to invest there all the time and we have made considerable investment in recent years. This matter is not a simple one. There are reasons certain properties have not been made available. The ones that are ready for tenancy are being put out to competitive tender. We will look to get those tenancy arrangements in place in a fair, transparent and competitive way as soon as we can.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: There has been criticism of the Department for not keeping proper accounts and an up-to-date financial management system. There has been criticism as well that proper dispute resolution mechanisms are not in place. The people on the ground and business owners are saying they are not happy with the decision-making and the fact that much of it is being done in Clonakilty. There is a lack of face-to-face accountability in decision-

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making. There are also long delays in getting letters answered. The harbour users forum is considered a box-ticking exercise. Perhaps some of the criticism is invalid but that is what Deputy Broughan and I, as local Deputies, are hearing on the ground. We are here to articulate those criticisms to the Minister and to ask him to ensure any bureaucracy and red tape is put to bed and more jobs are created in Howth. That is the bottom line and that is what we are looking for.

Deputy Simon Coveney: We are looking for that too but we have to ensure the tenants will be people who will pay their rent and will have accessed the tenancy arrangements under a fair and transparent competitive process. We need to ensure we have businesses that are in the interests of the broader community, in terms of development and employment in Howth, which, of course, we need to do. That takes time. We are managing six fisheries harbours at the same time. There are problems in terms of tenancies in properties in some of those harbours - some more than others. We have spoken about this matter before and I am conscious there are valuable vacant properties in Howth. They should be busy places of commercial activity and we need to get to that point. We need to be careful about how we do that and we need to ensure the people who are the successful tenants in those facilities are people who will pay their rent. That is not an unreasonable ask.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: No, it is not.

Bovine Disease Controls

9. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the suspected case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, in County Louth and its probable consequences for the negligible risk status afforded to Ireland by the World Organisation for Animal Health. [26065/15]

Deputy Martin Ferris: The Minister answered most of this question when replying to Deputy Broughan's question but what are the consequences of a negligible risk status following the outbreak of BSE in County Louth? How will it affect our international exports, particularly with the opening of the markets in China?

Deputy Simon Coveney: I was relieved when we got the final results of our tests last week because it was confirmation of what we had suspected to be the case. This was a once-off, isolated case. Obviously we would rather it did not happen. Last year we had no cases. The year before we had one. The year before that there were three cases. These one-off cases seem to happen. They happen in other countries as well. When BSE is a historical problem that is being dealt with, there seem to be isolated cases every now and again which need to be caught by the system and dealt with in a transparent and comprehensive way. I hope and I think that is the way we dealt with this case. In doing that, markets and the industry have been pretty calm in their response. There has been no indication any damage will be done to Ireland's reputation or our capacity to trade. We are a big exporter and trader of beef. When something unexpected and unwelcome happens, my job is to ensure we are very open about it and deal with it in a full and comprehensive way by testing and proving there is no other problem apart from the one outlier. We did this with the testing systems we had in place.

It is unfortunate that this happened the week after the World Organisation for Animal Health, the OIE, essentially recognised that Ireland has done a really good job dealing with BSE as a historical problem by classifying the country as being in the negligible risk category. We were

delighted with that classification. It may now need to reassess the classification as a result of this case because its rules require it to do so and we will, potentially, go back to where we were a month ago. Let us not forget, however, that we opened up all these new markets, and we have been more successful than any other European country in doing so, with a controlled risk status. On the basis of that controlled risk status, which I think everyone recognises is very comprehensive, we can continue to expand and grow our beef trade into new markets such as China and the United States in a very exciting way. I am very confident we can do that.

Deputy Martin Ferris: It is very seldom any compliments are thrown around this House but let me say at the outset that the Minister and his Department have done a very good job in this instance and it is worth noting. Regarding the contamination and where it came from and so forth, my understanding is that the animal in question was the daughter of an import or an import itself from Germany.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Its grandmother was imported but tested negative for BSE.

Deputy Martin Ferris: Retrospective testing was done there as well. What about the calves from this cow? She was a six year old cow. I assume she had four calves. Were the calves male or female and did any of those calves find their way into the food chain?

Deputy Simon Coveney: I am glad to clear up this matter. The animal had four calves. All four progeny were alive. They have all been slaughtered and they have all tested negative. There is a very tenuous link, if a link at all, between a mother and a calf as regards the passing on of BSE. Some scientists suggest it is possible; others say it is very unlikely. We know, however, that it is a non-issue here. We know the mother of this animal did not have BSE because she was tested. The grandmother that had been imported was also tested when slaughtered and tested negative. The four progeny all tested negative as well. The 63 other animals born the year before, the year after, and the same year as this animal and all of which grew up on the same farm were all slaughtered and tested and they all tested negative. All the animals that could have been connected in any way, through progeny or through other cohorts which would have been feeding on the same feed as this animal, tested negative. It is important and reassuring to note that fact. Something happened here which was not systemic. It certainly was not a broad problem in terms of the import of feed because it was isolated to one animal.

TB Eradication Scheme

10. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the eradication of bovine tuberculosis, with particular emphasis on the number of animals testing positive in recent years; the number of blackspots in the country; the annual cost of the programme to the Exchequer; if he is satisfied with the manner in which the veterinary profession is carrying out the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26095/15]

Deputy Noel Coonan: The programme for the eradication of TB is hugely important in many senses of the word and from both animal health and human health points of view. It is also a very expensive and ongoing programme. What progress has been made on the expense associated with it? I am especially concerned, however, about how difficult it is to get information from the Minister, his Department and veterinary inspectors when something goes wrong. I am extremely concerned about investigations which take place with officials investigating

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themselves. I spoke to the Minister about a particular problem. He did not want to get involved in it and he silenced his colleague, the Minister of State sitting beside him, on it. The veterinary officers hide behind legal arguments. The public is hugely concerned that natural justice would not only be done but also be seen to be done.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I will answer both of the Deputy's questions but the first one relates to TB generally. The bovine TB eradication programme has delivered considerable success, particularly in recent years. The number of reactors has fallen from under 30,000 in 2008 to 16,000 in 2014. The decline in the number of reactors has continued in 2015 with the result that reactor numbers are likely to fall below 15,000 this year for the first time since the programme was introduced in the mid-1950s. Herd incidence of tuberculosis fell from 5.9% to 3.6% between 2008 and 2014 and has continued to decline further this year, with the possible exception of Wicklow, which has a specific issue.

The reduction in the incidence of the disease has already brought significant benefits to farmers. First, 2,700 fewer herds were restricted in 2014 compared to 2008. Second, the annual cost of the TB eradication programme has fallen from €55 million in 2008 to €35 million in 2014. Apart from the number of counties, the herd incidence of TB in most regional clusters is close to the average of 3.6% now. The counties where the incidence of TB is significantly above the national average include Wicklow, Westmeath and Wexford. My Department has undertaken a survey in recent months with regard to the situation in Wicklow to determine the incidence of TB in deer with a view to investigating the impact of TB in deer on the situation in the county. The results of the exercise are still under examination by my Department. The findings of the study will be considered by the non-statutory Irish deer management forum, which will make appropriate recommendations in respect of all aspects of deer management in Wicklow and nationally.

Deputy Coonan referred to a specific case. It is true that I did not want to get involved in it personally. I did not think it was appropriate for a Minister to get involved in individual cases. We have an appeals system when someone believes they have not been treated fairly by my Department or its inspectorate. We encourage people to use that appeals system. In respect of the case the Deputy is concerned about I encourage him to encourage that the appeals system, which is an independent system, should be used and I hope it will get a satisfactory result.

Deputy Noel Coonan: I thank the Minister for his reply, but it does not really deal with the issue. There have been cases like the Fleury case in Offaly, the Cavan case and other cases throughout the country where people, farmers in particular, have been dragged through the courts and where the Department and its inspectors make life difficult for them. People have been put out of business over this.

Under natural justice in this country a person is innocent until proven guilty, but my experience when dealing with the Department is that it is the other way around: a person is guilty until he can prove his innocence.

No farmer that I am aware of or any farmer in the country wants TB. All farmers want it out of their herd immediately and they will do everything to co-operate to get it out. I offer a case in point. The veterinary inspector who is now suspended identified 15 animals as TB reactors. The Department decided this was not the case and that there were only nine. Those responsible left the other six in the herd. Then, two months later when they tested the herd there were over 100 reactors in the herd. These cases are not being answered by the Minister or the

Department. We have to drag them screaming to get information from them. Will all ongoing investigations be published and made known at least to the people involved or preferably to the general public?

Deputy Simon Coveney: Deputy Coonan is aware of how the system works. We have a responsibility to ensure that the rules are kept. We have spent time on two or three questions talking about the BSE issue that we have had to deal with in recent weeks. We have programmes dealing with bovine viral diarrhoea, TB and Johne's disease. Obviously, we must ensure farmers farm in a way that is consistent with the cross-compliance rules and so on. Part of my Department's job is the unpopular and unpleasant work of ensuring that people keep the rules and that we have systems in place we can stand over and which guarantee integrity in the food chain. That is all my Department tries to do. If there is a problem with that and if people do not like how the Department is undertaking the job, then we have an independent appeal system to which people can apply. We also have a farmers' charter which has just been agreed in recent weeks with farming organisations. Essentially this covers the codes of conduct under which my Department interacts with farmers. We have agreed that for the coming years.

I am keen to be helpful of course, but I do not believe it is appropriate for the Minister to get involved in the detail of individual cases; otherwise I would spend all my time doing that. That would encourage a kind of political lobbying that would not be healthy in agriculture. Instead, my job is to ensure that we have systems in the Department which can deal with cases that need to be appealed - often there is good reason for appeal - and that provide for a fair appeals process that deals with appeals in a fair, open and transparent manner. That is what I try to do.

Deputy Noel Coonan: The people to investigate wrongdoing in this country are the members of the Garda Síochána. The Minister should call in the Garda Síochána to investigate this particular instance. The Department is believing deliberate untruths told by someone else in order to back up the case. Those responsible are investigating themselves and that is not good practice.

Every farmer wants to eradicate TB. I want to see natural justice carried out. My experience of this case is that it is not happening. If the Minister wants to be open then what is he afraid of? He should call in the proper authorities to investigate the situation and deal with it, rather than putting genuine farmers out of business and, in the case of genuine veterinary practitioners, destroying their livelihood and careers.

Deputy Simon Coveney: We are not putting any farmers out of business. We have to make decisions on the basis of the information that is available as a result of the inspections that take place. As I said, I have no wish to discuss the detail of any individual case. We work with An Garda Síochána in many instances and we send a file to An Garda Síochána when appropriate. We have done that in respect of the implementation of the agri-environment options scheme recently in a certain part of the country where we believe that An Garda Síochána should be involved in an investigation there. We have done that repeatedly in respect of horse welfare incidents. We are not afraid to work with An Garda Síochána when appropriate to do so, but we also have to make decisions as a Department on the basis of the evidence that is gathered as a result of individual cases that we have been involved in inspecting. As I said, there is an independent appeals process linked to my Department which should be used if people believe they are not being treated fairly, and they will get fair outcomes from that process.

Written Answers follow Adjournment.

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Message from Select Committee

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select sub-Committee on the Environment, Community and Local Government has completed its consideration of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Bill 2015 and has made amendments thereto.

Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014: Financial Resolution

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I move:

THAT provision be made in the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 to amend section 1 of, and the First Schedule to, the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952 to provide in secondary legislation for the physical characteristics, uses to which a vehicle may be put, and the supporting documentation required in determining eligibility for motor tax at a particular rate or an exemption from motor tax, and to amend the definition of a motor caravan to allow the physical characteristics required for eligibility to the motor caravan rate to be determined by secondary legislation.

I am putting forward this motion to allow a number of important amendments to the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 in the areas of local government finance, waste management, motor tax and water policy. These amendments have been well-flagged and have been provided in writing to the Deputies within the required timeframe, as provided in Standing Orders. The well-known water-related amendments referred to in this resolution were announced by my Department on 6 May last, all of nine weeks ago at this stage. Pursuant to Standing Order 177-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We are taking this motion without debate.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 63; Níl, 37.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Browne, John.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Terence.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>

<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Keaveney, Colm.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Hayes, Tom.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>	
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Neville, Dan.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Derek.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Mahony, John.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Joe.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
<i>Perry, John.</i>	
<i>Phelan, Ann.</i>	
<i>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	

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<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	
<i>White, Alex.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg; Níl, Deputies Brian Stanley and Éamon Ó Cuív.

Question declared carried.

11 o'clock

Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014: Instruction to Committee

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 177, Standing Order 131 is modified to permit an instruction to the Committee to which the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 may be recommitted in respect of certain amendments, for which it has power to make provision in the Bill in relation to:

(a) amendments to the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2014 to provide for a number of matters including:

(i) requirements for the owners of dwellings supplied with services by Irish Water;

(ii) provision for an approved housing body, responsible for the payment of water charges in respect of a tenant, to claim the water conservation grant on their behalf;

(iii) registration by approved housing bodies of certain dwellings in receipt of services from Irish Water;

(iv) the payment of water charges upon the sale of a dwelling; and

(v) the establishment of a database of water services to dwellings;

(b) provision for a number of changes to the Waste Management Act 1996 to strengthen the regulatory regime for household waste collection, introducing new provisions for the waste permitting process, and imposing new obligations on waste collectors and other facilities accepting household waste including separate collection and the mandatory application of pay by weight;

(c) amendments to motor tax legislation; to provide in secondary legislation, for the purpose of determining eligibility to a particular rate of motor tax or an exemption from motor tax, the physical characteristics required of a vehicle, the uses to which a vehicle

may be put and the supporting documentation that may be required; and to amend the definition of a motor caravan to allow the physical characteristics required for eligibility to the motor caravan rate of tax to be determined by secondary legislation; and

(d) provision for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to make the required payment from the Local Government Fund to the Exchequer in 2015, as envisaged in the 2015 Revised Estimates Volume;

and to change the long title of the Bill to take account of these provisions.

I am tabling this motion to permit a number of important amendments to the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 in the areas of local governance, finance, waste management, motor tax and water policy. These amendments have been well flagged and provided in writing to Deputies within the required time frame as provided in Standing Orders. Indeed, the water-related amendments mentioned here were announced by my Department on 6 May, all of nine weeks ago at this stage.

Before we get into discussion on the motion and the individual amendments in due course, I would like to take this opportunity to outline the importance and timeliness of these amendments. I am bringing forward very important changes to the Waste Management Act to comprehensively reform our system of household waste collection. Government waste policy is articulated in A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland. This sets out a number of commitments relating to reforming-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Is it possible to get a copy of the Minister's speech because it is the custom of the House that where a Minister reads from a script, it should be made available to all the Deputies in the House?

Deputy Alan Kelly: I will ask-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is not a question of just dismissing it.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I am not dismissing it. I have asked-----

Deputy Kevin Humphreys: It is being passed out at the moment.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): They are on their way.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That is the list of amendments.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I will arrange for the Deputy to-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We will arrange for it.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This came up the last time.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Can we suspend until we get it?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): No, we are not suspending. We will get the Deputy a copy and allow the Minister to continue.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We should suspend.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We are not suspending. We

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will allow the Minister to continue and we can circulate the speech.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: With no disrespect to the Chair, the democratic revolution should start now.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Deputy should resume his seat.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We should be given a copy of the speech. This Government seems to think that it can just walk on the people and the people's representatives.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Deputy Ó Cuív seems to think he can walk on the Cathaoirleach. He should resume his seat.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will not.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I am getting the Deputy a copy. I politely ask him to resume his seat. It will only take a moment and he will have his copy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: If the Minister agrees to-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): He has agreed to provide a copy of the speech.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: If he waits and starts his speech again-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The motion is on the Order Paper so, therefore, we are continuing with it.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is not a copy of the motion. It is a copy of the speech.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We are continuing with it and we will get the Deputy a copy of the speech.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: When we get the copy, we can-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Surely the Deputy can listen to the Minister when he is speaking and then we can get the Deputy a copy of the speech?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There is a lot of detail there.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There is a lot of detail. The Minister gave details of dates. We need to see the speech.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I will invite the Minister to continue and then the Deputy will get his copy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We need to be able to make notes as the Minister is speaking. Could we agree to suspend the House until we get the speech?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): No, we are not agreeing to suspend the sitting.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As a matter of procedure, the Minister should have ensured that copies were here before we started.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Deputy will get a copy of the speech, which will be available in a moment. I will agree to have this taken up with the Ceann Comhairle but in the meantime, I invite the Minister to continue with his speech. All of the Deputies will have a copy in a few moments.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I think we should wait until we get a copy of the speech. In fact, I think the Minister should leave the House and get us a copy.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The motion is before the House and we want to proceed with it. It was agreed yesterday-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: I have no problem with holding for five or ten minutes if that is-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): It will not take that long because it only takes a couple of minutes to get a copy.

Deputy Brian Stanley: On a point of information, we are here discussing the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014. The motion relates to this Bill. On a point of information, if I heard him correctly the Minister says he is changing the Title of the Bill. Could I have a copy of the new Bill? Could we at least have the Title of the new Bill we are discussing?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We are dealing with the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014, motion to instruct the committee. Presumably the information would have been available in the Deputy's pigeon hole the same as for everyone else.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Bill has a new Title.

Deputy Brian Stanley: Will the Acting Chairman or the Minister tell me or provide the Title of the Bill?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The information before me is the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014, motion to instruct the committee. That is what we are dealing with.

Deputy Brian Stanley: That is the old Bill.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We are dealing with the motion to instruct the committee.

Deputy Brian Stanley: That is the old Bill which included Killarney National Park, dog breeding, air pollution -----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Deputy Stanley, we are dealing with the motion to instruct the committee. It was agreed yesterday on the Order of Business.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I am very clear on what was agreed yesterday which was the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 but the Minister has now informed us-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Please resume your seat for a

moment and I will get clarification.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The question is very clear.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I am getting clarification.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Minister has informed us that the name of the Bill is changed. We do not have the new Bill but could we at least have the Title of the new Bill, please?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I understand your question, Deputy. Please resume your seat and I will get clarification. I will read the clarification contained in amendments Nos. 1 to 4 inclusive:

Bill entitled an Act to make provision for transfer of certain functions under the Bourn Vincent Memorial Park Act 1932 to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; to amend and extend the Air Pollution Act 1987, the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 and the Waste Management Act 1996; to amend other Acts and to provide for related matters.

These changes are provided for in amendments Nos. 1 to 4, inclusive, which are on the list provided to the Deputy. The Title of the Bill can only be changed when the amendments are approved.

Deputy Brian Stanley: This is a new way of doing business.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): No. It is an amendment.

Deputy Brian Stanley: It is a new way.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): It is not. It is provided for in Standing Orders.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: It is the normal way.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I ask the Acting Chairman to read out the proposed new Title for the benefit of the House.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is a totally different Bill.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): It is not a new Title.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Minister said the Title was being changed.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): It is not a totally new Bill. The Title is changing under amendments Nos. 1 to 4, inclusive, but it will only change when the amendments are adopted. That is not a new way of doing business; it is the way we always do business.

Deputy Brian Stanley: How will the new Title read?

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): One voice at a time, please. I have given the Deputy the answer. We are awaiting copies of the Minister's speech. I under-

stand copies have arrived. I invite the Minister to continue with his statement on the motion.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I am bringing forward important changes to the Waste Management Act to reform comprehensively our system of household waste collection. Government waste policy is articulated in A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland. This sets out a number of commitments in relation to reforming the regulation of household waste collection in Ireland, including requiring improved environmental and customer service standards to be adhered to by collectors and encouraging more responsible behaviour by households.

The new proposals to give legislative effect to these commitments in the policy have been subject to a consultation process which closed in early 2014. The consultation paper set out a clear proposal to move the household waste collection sector to a per kilogramme price per weight charging system, in line with the commitment in A Resource Opportunity.

The new framework for household waste collection system provided for in these amendments is intended to meet the following policy objectives. The framework will respect the waste hierarchy and the polluter-pays principle; it will provide clear incentives and obligations for households and collectors; it will give more teeth to regulatory bodies such as the national waste collection permit office to tackle poor performance and below cost selling by waste collectors; it will simplify pricing structures and enable customers to compare the cost of different household waste collection services more easily; and it will provide an effective means of enforcing those obligations. These changes will further drive improvements in standards of customer service and environmental protection in the household waste collection industry and serve as a precursor to future wider reform of waste collection generally as Ireland continues to meet its targets under EU legislation and positions itself to benefit from the new circular economy package, to be published later this year by the European Commission.

The amendments I am proposing today in relation to domestic water charges support statements that the Government has made over the past eight months about providing a domestic water charges system that is simple, certain, affordable and encourages conservation. The public deserve a reliable, secure supply of drinking water and satisfactory levels of waste water treatment. Central to this major reform programme is having a water charging system in which unpaid charges are pursued fairly and justly.

Last November, I announced changes that simplified the domestic tariff structure. I stated quite categorically that I would be insisting on making a distinction between those who are willing to pay but cannot pay, as opposed to those who just refuse to pay. Those who want to pay but are in financial difficulty will have the potential to avail of easy-pay options, instalment plans and to enter pay agreements, just like any other utility. Irish Water has put these measures in place and they are being availed of. Those who do not register and do not pay will not be able to avail of the water conservation grant and will be pursued by Irish Water. It would not be a fair situation where the compliant population pay water charges to fund water services for those who can pay but are not willing to pay. It would also place the burden of the cost of upgrading and improving a deficient water system onto the next generation.

Key among these measures was the introduction of capped charges that would see a single adult household face a maximum charge for water services of €160 per year from Irish Water. A household with two or more adults would face a maximum charge of €260 per annum. In tandem with these measures the Government also announced that measures would be introduced

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to address the non-payment of water charges. Irish Water customers who have unpaid arrears in respect of water charges of at least the annual capped charge and who have not entered into a payment plan would attract an automatic late payment penalty of €30 for a one-adult household or €60 for all other households for each year that the charges remain unpaid. Further measures were also announced to strengthen the payment of water charges by both owner-occupiers and tenants.

The Water Services Act 2014 was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas last December. The Act included all of the measures relating to the capped charges, the introduction of the conservation grant, the introduction of the late payment fees and several customer protection measures. However, additional consideration was required to address the measures announced by the Government to enforce the payment and collection of water charges and it was indicated that these measures would be introduced at a later stage.

The Government reiterated its commitment in May to legislate in these areas, principally, regarding liability for domestic water charges and the process of registering with Irish Water and in particular, clarifying the registration process in respect of landlord-tenant relationships. Today, I am fulfilling these commitments through the amendments proposed to water legislation. Measures announced in May to place a requirement on a landlord to retain a tenant deposit until the tenant provides evidence that he or she has paid their water charges, will be brought forward soon in a forthcoming Bill.

However, I take this occasion to warn people to be careful about propaganda they will be likely to hear from the Opposition which will undoubtedly be spinning mistruths with scare-mongering stories about evictions of tenants. I will respond by outlining two key facts. First, there will be absolutely no change to tenancy protections under these provisions. In fact, the Government will be strengthening these shortly. The measures outlined here will put water bills on the exact same legal footing as other utilities such as gas and electricity. Payment of utilities is already a standard part of letting agreements, something that the Opposition has elected to ignore because it did not fit in their narrow narrative of chaos, victimhood and feigned anger. Indeed, Syriza, the political heroes of the hard left in Ireland, seem intent on forcing the Greek people to pay for their consumption of water on a full-usage basis and at a higher cost than the people of Ireland. Let us not indulge in too much hypocrisy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There is a lot more water in Ireland than in Greece.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I ask the Opposition to spare a thought for the 11,300 people in County Roscommon who this week are no longer on boil-water notices, thanks to the work of Irish Water. Having safe drinking water is the least our citizens deserve. They certainly deserve it having been put in that place for decades.

In tandem with these amendments, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Fitzgerald, published the Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill yesterday. The Bill seeks to implement the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission's report on the enforcement of debt, principally around the streamlining of existing enforcement procedures. Under the Bill, creditors will be able to apply to the court for an order enabling either attachment of earnings or deductions from social welfare payments, as appropriate, for the purpose of enforcement of debt. This important change will be accompanied by a crucial safeguard: the abolition of imprisonment of debtors, except in the case of maintenance arising from family law proceedings. This, I believe, represents a balanced approach to the recovery of civil debt so that creditor rights are protected with

a range of legal mechanisms which compel payment by those debtors who will not pay, while removing the outdated threat of imprisonment in such cases. The legislation supports the distinction between the “can pay but won’t pay” debtors and those who are willing to pay but are in financial difficulty, a distinction that is crucial in implementing the underlying fairness aspect of domestic water charges.

The water conservation grant, the details of which I announced last November, will play an important role in helping households deal with the costs of water services and in adopting more sustainable approaches to water usage. Though many homes in rural areas have been paying for water for years, which is often forgotten, the introduction of domestic water charges across the country is a major change for the vast majority.

I fully understand the resentment to any new charge or tax. The people have had to deal with the financial difficulties presented by the recession and they have stepped up to the plate. As the country now begins to look around the corner to a recovering economy, an essential ingredient has to be a modern and sustainable public water system that can meet the demands of a growing and mature market economy and of which we all can be proud.

I am also introducing a technical amendment to clarify the wording of a provision in the Bill as published, as well as introducing technical but nevertheless, important amendments to allow payments from the Local Government Fund to proceed as envisioned in the Revised Estimates Volume and two changes to the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952, relating to motor tax matters. We will have an opportunity to go into more detail on these provisions as the individual amendments are discussed in the House.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Before I start, it is customary on Second Stage - this is a quasi-Second Stage - to explain the Bill’s proposals. This is effectively a new Bill. Will the Minister explain to us section-by-section now, on this quasi-Second Stage, the proposed amendments to the Bill, which are more substantial than the original Bill?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Deputy has 15 minutes to continue with his speech.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have not started; I am asking a question through the Chair.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Deputy has 15 minutes. I am sure the Minister will address his points later.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Once again, well established custom in the House is being ignored for a purpose. The purpose is to cut short the democratic process in this Dáil. The process of a proper Second Stage where the Minister would outline step-by-step each provision he is proposing, then on Committee Stage flaws in the proposals could be debated, with the Minister and Deputies coming back on Report Stage with amendments, is being cut short by the Minister.

In Parliament it is common to have three Stages in a Bill. I know the Minister is relatively new in the job but there are good reasons for this. The purpose is first, on Second Stage, to have a debate on the principles of the Bill, and have them outlined both in principle and then section-by-section by the Minister. Then we have the Committee Stage. Very rarely, both in my experience on the Minister’s side of the House and on this side of the House, have I seen proposals brought into the House and teased out properly on Committee that do not require amendment. We then have the Report Stage where both sides take time to reflect on what hap-

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pened since Second Stage. I suggest the Minister should consult his colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine, Deputy Coveney, on how he handled the Animal Health and Welfare Bill, with all the changes he made having listened to Deputies on Committee Stage. The Minister then comes back on Report Stage having reflected on what has been said, as did the Deputies concerned.

The Government seems to have made a clear decision that if it were to do that in this instance the process would be too drawn out, allowing that there is meant to be a fortnight gap between the various Stages and it would result in too much debate. In other words, the Minister could not stand the heat in the kitchen and he decided not to do this the proper way.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Exactly.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Minister stated: "... the water-related amendments mentioned here were announced by my Department on 6 May, all of nine weeks ago at this stage". First, it is eight weeks ago today, so the Minister should get his speech corrected. Second, Committee Stage of the Bill, that was and not as is, was held on 26 May 2015, 20 days after the Minister's so-called announcement. The Committee Stage lasted all of half an hour. Deputy Stanley was there that day and he had the only amendment tabled on that Bill.

During the Committee Stage, the Minister of State, who took the Bill on the Minister's behalf, said:

I want to point out to the committee that while the Government is not presenting any amendments to the Bill at this stage in the process, it intends to propose a number of amendments on Report Stage in the Dáil. This will require a motion to be tabled to amend the Long Title and scope of the Bill. These amendments will cover a range of issues, including further amendments to waste legislation and provisions relating to water services legislation. While I am not in a position to go into more detail about the amendments at this stage, they will be published in good time ahead of Report Stage so that Deputies will have time to consider them in advance of the debate on the floor of the House. I refer to the debate on the amendments on Report Stage.

Deputy Catherine Murphy, a lady we all have to credit with great sharpness and understanding of procedure, then said:

We have been told that this is a technical Bill. I am often watching for Bills to which I can table amendments ... I would like to ask about the amendments that are coming to us. I have to tell the Minister of State that I do not like stuff coming to us on Report Stage. I know it can happen when things are worked on late in the day. It is nice to see the totality of what we are doing on Second Stage [well said]. The Minister of State has said that a motion will come before us. What is the nature of that motion? Will it be debated in the Dáil? If so, will that debate precede the Report Stage debate? I am aware that a certain system applies if a quite substantial change is being made to legislation. I remember that a legal services Bill introduced by a former Minister, Michael McDowell, had increased in size by two thirds by the time it got to Report Stage. The Minister of State might tell us about the nature of the changes she is proposing in this regard, with specific reference to the nature of the motion that will come before the Dáil.

The Minister of State, Deputy Ann Phelan, replied:

The motion that is to be tabled will amend the Long Title and scope of the Bill. The amendments will be introduced thereafter. I am not in a position to give any details of the amendments at this stage [even though the Minister has said they were announced 20 days earlier], other than to say they will be made available at an early stage so that the Deputies will have plenty of time to look at them.

Deputy Catherine Murphy asked:

Are we looking at technical amendments to existing waste legislation? The legislation in question is pretty significant in its own right. Indeed, anything to do with water services legislation tends to be controversial.

The Minister of State replied:

This Bill is quite technical. There are some typographical issues. It will really be a question of dotting the i's and crossing the t's. The scope of the Bill does not allow for the Bill to be changed in any huge way. The Bill itself is very technical. We will be proposing amendments. The Deputies will have plenty of time to consider them.

Deputy Catherine Murphy asked: "Is the Minister of State telling us that these changes are essentially technical and that the Bill is not going to be amended significantly?" The Minister of State replied:

The Bill itself is a technical one. We intend to make further amendments to waste legislation and to include provisions relating to water services legislation.

That is in the Official Report of a committee of the Houses of the Oireachtas. Does the Minister think that reflects what is included in these amendments? Does he think committee members were properly informed that amendments that would be more substantial than the Bill were going to be made on Report Stage? He has given no reason for doing his business in this way. I have no doubt that he was advised by his public servants that it would be handy to put it through in this way, to get it done quickly, take a cold shower and get it over with. It would equally have been easy for him to take all of these amendments and publish a new 2015 Bill and bring it through the House in the normal way. There would have been no extra work involved beyond adding amendments. Had he done this the downside would have been that the proper Oireachtas scrutiny that should happen in this House would have taken place. There would have been debates on Second, Committee and Report Stage. Surely, that is what we are elected to do and that is the purpose of the Legislature. Surely every Bill should be scrutinised in that way unless there is an emergency need when we would all understand the Minister had to take a shortcut.

When the Government came to power, particularly when the Labour Party entered government, we were told there was going to be a democratic revolution, that the shortcuts of the past would not be taken and that power in the Dáil would not be misused to rush legislation through. Those of us with experience of being in government realise that when a Government rushes legislation through, in the long term it is the one who rushed, the proposer of the legislation, who finds that it has created a boomerang. The longer I was Minister the more I realised thorough scrutiny by the Oireachtas benefited the Government and the Opposition equally. Between now and 4 p.m. this evening the Minister should reflect on the very serious mistake he has made in trying to rush through changes that it would have been more appropriate to include in a totally separate Bill and in respect of which there is no need for the urgency he seems to think there is.

We are in the last three weeks of this Dáil term, if it is not extended beyond the proposed date. There will, of course, be late sittings, Bills that will be rushed and mistakes. I thought part of the changes that were going to be made and part of the Haddington Road and Croke Park agreements was that we would avoid what always seemed to happen – I know that it happened when we were in government and it annoyed me – that a Minister would suddenly be presented with all sorts of proposal coming up to the end of term and told they were very urgent. There is nothing urgent about this Bill. The Minister has an opportunity between now and 4 p.m. to reflect on what is a big mistake and not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor in rushing legislation through unnecessarily, to withdraw the amendments, to ask the Whip to postpone the debate on the parts of the Bill agreed to on Committee Stage, without amendment, and to recommit the Bill on Report Stage, with the parts included in the original Bill, and to publish a separate Bill to be brought before the House. The Minister will, however, be advised not to do this. He will be given all sorts of reason, none of which will fit any logic. There are times in life when the courageous and right thing to do is to say: “I should not have done this; I made a mistake. I was wrong. I tried to take a shortcut. I realise it was a bad decision. I realise I have to be my own man and make my own decisions as a politician. I have to answer for the political consequences.” The Minister has an opportunity between now and 4 p.m. to respect this House, the Oireachtas and all those of us elected equally to this House, irrespective of which side we are on and to enhance his record by facing up to the fact that he made a mistake. We will all recognise that it takes a big person to recognise he has made a mistake. The Minister should do that today rather than try to bulldoze through, with a compliant backbench population, amendments that would be better debated in a stand-alone Bill.

Deputy Brian Stanley: Will the Minister withdraw his statement on information that should have been given on this Bill? He has misled the House. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív has read from the Official Report of the Committee Stage debate which shows that is the case. The original Bill was 28 pages long. I tabled an amendment to it on Committee Stage. Without mine, the amendments fill 37 pages. The Minister remembers what happened when he rammed through the House the previous legislation on water services and the mistakes made. Here we go again, but this time it is even worse. In effect, the Minister has two new Bills. He said he was changing the Title of the Bill.

This is a total abuse of Dáil procedures. A raft of Government amendments seek to railroad through what should in reality be separate Bills. My party completely opposes this and will be opposing the Government’s amendments. They should be rejected and the Government should come back to the House with new Bills and proceed through the normal Stages through which legislation has to go in order to become law. I had tabled 27 amendments opposing the Bill in all of its sections. We were told by the Bills Office on Friday that they would be accepted, after a lengthy series of e-mails and a chain of correspondence regarding whether they would be accepted. I only found out at noon yesterday that the amendments had been ruled out of order but I was not informed through my correspondence or by e-mail to my office. The Bills Office said we did not have an opportunity to communicate or to put down replacement amendments. We spoke to the Ceann Comhairle’s office about this yesterday. Despite the Bills Office and the Ceann Comhairle accepting that there had been “miscommunication” - although I could use other language - regarding my original amendments, in that wrong information had been sent in correspondence, of which we have a copy, they could not accept my revised amendments. I have sent them to the Bills Office and I am insisting that they be taken. I will be reading them out on every Stage today. We are elected here, we have a right to do it and I will be doing it, make no mistake about it.

This is effectively the Committee Stage of the Bill as it is the only chance that Deputies have to discuss the substance of changes and what they mean. We will not get a chance to see the amended Bill, as would be normal practice before a Bill goes to Report Stage. What sort of carry-on is this? I know the Minister did not come through the local government system, which is fair enough. However, what sort of carry-on is it to bring this in when we cannot even see the Bill we are amending? Therefore, it goes to Report Stage without there having been the facility to submit amendments up to the point when the Bill is taken.

Of course, that does not change the substance of what I was attempting to do anyway, which is to oppose this shoddy attempt to force through punitive measures against people who have not paid or are unable to pay their water charges. It is a clear attempt to force through these measures before the summer recess and a panic reaction to the obvious fact that huge numbers have not paid the water tax yet. If proof of that is needed, we only have to consider the refusal of both Irish Water and the Minister to say how many people have paid their bills to date. They are normally good at coming out with statistics and informing us. Obviously, the facts do not fit this time in order for them to do that. The fact the civil debt Bill is also on the schedule this week is further indication of the desperation on the part of the Government to get this in place before the summer holidays and to have a clear run-in to the election.

Allowing companies like Irish Water to go to court and secure attachment orders for unpaid bills is clearly designed to frighten people into paying and have them quaking in their boots. The courts must be looking at the long lists they already have and wondering where they will fit all these people in the body of the court. Obviously, the hope is that the threat to attach bills to someone's house and basically to force the local authority and private tenants to pay the water charge is the stick that is being deployed now that the carrot has failed, in that the so-called conservation grant has not tempted enough people to sign up and to pay.

There is also the issue of Irish Water finances. The original level at which charges were to be levied, as approved by the energy regulator, would have set them at a far higher rate than the current flat charge. Of course, the concessions that have allowed a flat rate to be charged will end in 2018. I know the Minister spun around a good few times on this. We remember all of the U-turns he and the Government did in reducing and changing charges to make the bitter pill look and taste a little sweeter so people might swallow it. People can see what their bills are likely to be up to that date but, of course, beyond it, everything changes and the meters kick in. As I said at the time, the Government's climbdown in the face of mass opposition to the water charges was only postponing the much higher bills, which will very quickly be, on average, €500.

The Minister knows where this is going. Households will have the full cost of the water services passed on, as Irish Water will be obliged to do after 2018 under the EU directive. That is when the fun really starts. The Minister knows all this but what he is doing is playing a game to soften and sweeten things this side of the election. It is the same with the civil debt Bill. It is a delaying tactic to make sure there are no sharp edges and nothing disastrous happens such as court cases or people being imprisoned this side of the election.

In the meantime, however, Irish Water has to win approval for its current shambolic finances from EUROSTAT, and the Minister might update us on that position. The simple fact is that the amount Irish Water will take in commercial and domestic water charges this year, and in the next three years, if the legislation is not changed, is not sufficient to meet the costs of maintaining water services as they currently are, never mind carrying out the necessary rehabilitation

of the infrastructure. When the cost of the water conservation grants is taken away from what the Government will net on this, the Minister knows very little will be left. That will inevitably mean that if the water charges and Irish Water stay in place, the average bill will be €500, and well over that for some households, depending on their composition and water requirements. The Government is being totally dishonest about that but is happy to avoid the issue as it desperately attempts to win back sufficient electoral support to, hopefully, remain in government after the next general election.

Of course, we all recognise that water needs to be paid for, one way or the other, and that the current system is not fit for purpose. That is why we already pay for water, which requires investment and efficiency in delivery. Creating a corporate monster that is gobbling up money at a rate of millions of euro a day is not the way to do it. The way to do it is to put that money into mains rehabilitation, not pump more water into a system that is already leaking. We have been honest about that and we have set out in our budget proposals how we would pay for the service, if necessary through normal borrowing on the State balance sheet. Irish Water is now borrowing at a higher cost than the State. One way or another, the Government has put a raft of money back onto the State's balance sheet, including €500 million that was put back on the State's balance sheet before Christmas, and the Minister will remember that, in the Estimates, the Government provided Irish Water with €399 million for operational costs, also on the State's balance sheet. It then provided €222 million for capital costs, which was all on the State's balance sheet. Let us get away from this phoney debate about what is on the State's balance sheet and what is not, which was supposed to be the reason for setting up Irish Water in the first place. We will be setting out in greater detail our proposals in regard to a public body to be accountable to the Oireachtas through democratic oversight.

It is worth pointing out that the bulk of the amendments introduced by the Government concern waste management. This is, of course, a serious issue and one that requires legislation, as myself and others have pointed out. However, rather than introduce such legislation, the Government has attempted, as with the water charges elements, to introduce substantial new changes to the waste management sector without the normal publication of a Bill, and without Second Stage and Committee Stage debates, which give an opportunity for Members and, indeed, stakeholders and interested groups to consider the changes properly and propose amendments, where relevant. It is regrettable we have not had that opportunity. However, it is not possible now, given the manner in which this is being done. Deputies were only given short notice of this when it was sprung on us last Friday, which makes it impossible to debate and consider properly the issues involved. Yet, interestingly, from talking to people on local authorities, particularly at management level, I know that county and city managers were advised several months ago that such legislative changes were to come in this Bill. Of course, the Government did not see fit to let Members of the House know about it. The Minister has come in here this morning trying to bluff his way through this. He did not let us know through the normal procedures which would have allowed for proper consideration of the measures proposed, some of which will have extremely serious implications for waste management.

I reiterate my opposition to how the Government has gone about this, railroading it through the House. We have been put in a situation where we do not have a fair opportunity to debate it. If the Minister was on this side of the House, his party leader would be screaming at the government side over this. All we are asking for is a fair opportunity. Whether the Government side likes us or not, we on the Opposition benches have been elected. All we want is a fair opportunity to come in and put forward amendments. Procedures for dealing with issues

have been set out and the practices are well established here. I have only been here for four and a half years, but I have been observing the procedures carefully and try to use them and have proposed amendments on any Bill that has come forward under my brief. I put forward amendments on Committee Stage to this Bill and put forward amendments for Report Stage. We should be dealing with these issues on Second Stage now and I am flagging these amendments for Second Stage.

The Minister came into this House and told us he wanted to leave “a legacy”. Phil Hogan left this House with a legacy, and depending on where one stands, one would have a different view of that legacy. Big Phil Hogan was noted for being a cute hoor and for pulling strokes like this in the House. However, what this Minister has done and how he has gone about it here today would make Phil Hogan blush. What has happened and how he has treated the Opposition is disgraceful.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I ask the Deputy to withdraw the remark regarding Commissioner Hogan.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I withdraw it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The next speaker is Deputy Clare Daly, who is sharing time with Deputies Boyd Barrett, Paul Murphy, Mick Wallace and Catherine Murphy.

Deputy Clare Daly: It is a great privilege to be here taking part in this democratic revolution, except that it does not feel like one. The whole fiasco reminds me of the phrase, “Those who can do, and those who can’t bully.” That is exactly what we have here. This is a desperate measure, a de facto admission that the Minister has failed to win the hearts and minds of citizens as to the worthiness of his Irish Water proposal. It has been exposed that the amount of money he plans to collect is roughly equal to the amount it will cost to collect it. Rather than stand back and admit he has got it wrong and rather than listen to the will of the people and abandon this lunacy, the Minister has decided to plough on. I honestly believe that will be the rock he will perish on.

I was going to say that one could not make this up, but it could be and has been made up. It is very much the scene from “Yes Minister” where the Minister is being shown around the new hospital by the civil servants and they pass the gleaming canteen, the hundreds of typists, the car park, the communications department and so on, and they go to the big empty rooms down the back and the Minister asks: “Oh, what is this?” and the response is: “They are the wards, but we haven’t got the money to open them.” That is what Irish Water is. It is hundreds of millions of euro spent on meters, tens of millions of euro spent on consultants and hundreds of thousands spent on advertising and hundreds of workers in a call centre. It is money for nothing, when what the Government should have been doing was fixing the leaks and encouraging people to conserve water.

The people have seen through the Minister and that is why we are here today. The Government has lost the argument. People know we have paid for water. We have paid for it through taxation and public services and we are not going to pay for a big monstrosity of a quango that soaks up money. I put it to the Minister that this Bill is a monument to his failure. In being here today, he is admitting he has failed to convince the people with the carrot of the reduced bills, because they all know they will increase again, and the €100 giveaway. Now he must resort

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to the stick. Being honest, it is a pathetic stick and I do not believe anybody will tremble before it, because despite the Minister's allusions to it today, this is not legislation to take money from tenant's deposits, which would be completely unworkable. The landlords of Ireland are not going to operate as the Minister's debt collectors. He is not able to take the money from people's wages and has clearly not won them to paying it voluntarily. He is on a loser on this. The people have seen through him. They are off their knees. They are not going to be conned. They were not conned by the carrot, and they certainly not going to be conned by the Minister's pathetic stick.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Minister deserves a medal from the political school of cute hoorism when it comes to how he has tried to manipulate, in the most cynical way, the democratic process in order to ram through measures to do with water charges in a Bill that ostensibly had nothing whatsoever to do with them when it was introduced in the Dáil.

It is disappointing that much of the media have not shown any outrage at this cynical manipulation of the political process. It seems as if this sort of carry-on is just par for the course in this Chamber, because that is what Governments do. They manipulate, get around and circumvent proper democratic procedure and political oversight of important legislation that affect citizens. Perhaps there is a feeling in government and media circles that the people do not really care about these issues and do not care about democratic procedure, but they are wrong. People are very awake to this. They are aware that in this country and now across Europe, as we see in Greece, there is a war on democracy. Democracy is becoming the major casualty of the ruthless and relentless efforts of the European Union and governments like ours to inflict austerity and to do so using the most foul means, undermining the democratic process.

Europe is showing itself aghast at the prospect that the Greek people might be allowed to vote on the blackmail being deployed by the European Union in terms of further vicious austerity measures being imposed on a people who are utterly crushed. The idea that they should have a referendum is considered with shock. It is denounced and vilified by the European Union and by our Government, because the people might decide. In the same vein here, the Minister has done everything to make sure the people have no view or oversight of legislation to deal with an austerity measure that he is trying to coerce and enforce on people. This sort of cynicism is sickening.

People are waking up to the Minister however. He will see thousands of people outside the Dáil tonight expressing their disgust at what he has done and showing their solidarity with the people of Greece. He will see this again on the streets on Saturday. Of course, the reason the Minister has manipulated this process is that he is terrified of the protests, the popular rebellion and the growing resistance to austerity and the attack on democracy that he and his mate, Angela Merkel, are inflicting on people in this country and across Europe.

Debate adjourned.

Topical Issue Matters

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): 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 Seán Kyne - the need to implement the Oireachtas joint committee's report on policy options to support business growth and job cre-

ation and retention in town and village centres;

(2) Deputy Terence Flanagan - the measures to be taken to reduce the misuse of drugs;

(3) Deputy Sean Fleming - the proposal to review the boundary between County Laois and County Carlow;

(4) Deputy Brendan Smith - the need to engage with Liberty Insurance to ensure the best possible supports for employees of the company;

(5) Deputy David Stanton - the need for a co-ordinated cross-departmental approach to assist those who developed narcolepsy as a result of receiving the Pandemrix vaccine;

(6) Deputy Michelle Mulherin - the need for a funding mechanism to grant aid new group water schemes in disadvantaged rural areas impacted by the cessation of CLAR funding;

(7) Deputy Jim Daly - the need for the Central Bank of Ireland to clarify the number of distressed mortgages that were converted from tracker to variable rate as part of solutions offered to borrowers;

(8) Deputy Jerry Buttimer - the need to address delays in registering nurses with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland;

(9) Deputy Martin Heydon - the need for faster roll-out of the broadband plan for rural Ireland;

(10) Deputies Tom Fleming, Michael Healy-Rae, Martin Ferris and Billy Kelleher - the need to appoint staff to assist cystic fibrosis patients at the respiratory unit in Cork University Hospital;

(11) Deputy Dan Neville - the need to address issues raised in the report, Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020;

(12) Deputy Mick Wallace - plans in place to address serious malpractice among senior gardaí in An Garda Síochána;

(13) Deputy Clare Daly - the need to address issues raised in the protection of life during pregnancy report 2014;

(14) Deputy Niall Collins - the need to discuss the working group report on direct provision;

(15) Deputy Colm Keaveney - the need to provide the resources necessary for young people with intellectual disabilities transitioning to adult services;

(16) Deputy Helen McEntee - delays in certain applications for Leader funding in Meath;

(17) Deputy Timmy Dooley - the need to address the frequent lengthy queues to process immigration at airports, particularly in Dublin Airport; and

(18) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett - the financial crisis in Greece and possible consequences for the eurozone, the European Union and Ireland.

The matters raised by Deputies Tom Fleming, Michael Healy-Rae, Martin Ferris and Billy Kelleher, Jerry Buttimer and Deputy David Stanton have been selected for discussion.

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Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Today, 1 July, is the deadline for the banks to get back to the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, on the provision of reductions for variable rate mortgages. The Taoiseach must accept that the Minister's initiative has been somewhat of a flop because only two of the six lenders have made minor reductions to their standard variable rate mortgages and one of those was made before the meeting with the Minister.

There are more than 300,000 variable rate mortgage customers in this country paying an average 2% more than the average European customer. There are also 46,000 mortgage holders who are outside the banking system, who have mortgages with vulture funds who bought up their loans and who have absolutely no protection whatsoever. Those people are particularly vulnerable. This is a massive issue in households throughout the country. It is about money in people's pockets. What is happening at the moment can only be described as a massive rip-off. The rates that are being charged cannot be justified, based on evidence from the banks themselves to the Oireachtas committees. I put it to the Taoiseach that an existing customer with 20 years remaining on a €200,000 mortgage at a rate of 4.5% is paying €992 more than someone availing of a new mortgage, and €3,874 more than someone on a tracker rate. Those are extraordinary variations. They are huge sums of money that matter to thousands of families throughout the country.

Nothing has been done about it. By any yardstick, the Minister's initiative has been a flop. We have put forward legislative proposals, through Deputy Michael McGrath's Bill, that are reasonable and balanced and, if adopted, would give capacity to the Central Bank, first, to examine whether there is market failure and then to give directions to the Central Bank to intervene to ensure fairness, equity and, above all, a reduction in the rip-off that is taking place in the context of variable rate mortgages. Does the Taoiseach accept that the Minister's initiative has been a failure? Will he provide time for debate and accept the Bill that has been published and moved on Second Stage by Deputy Michael McGrath, which would bring a legislative response to this issue, one that the Government has neglected for a number of years?

The Taoiseach: I agree this is a serious matter for a great number of people. That is why the Government made the recent changes. I do not agree that the Minister's initiative has been a failure. Today is the first day he set for consideration by the banks. The Minister already notified the Central Bank that if it required legislation to intervene, he would do so to give it the authority. It did not seek that authority. He held a series of meetings with the six banks. They focused on the comparatively high standard variable rates currently being applied by the banks, as in the case to which Deputy Martin referred of a €200,000 loan over 20 years at 4.5%. The banks agreed to review their rates and their products and to have simple options to reduce monthly payments for standard variable rate customers. Some of the potential products include lower standard variable rates for existing and new customers, competitive fixed-rate products, and lower variable rates taking account of loan to value for new and existing customers.

Officials in the Department of Finance have been mandated to review progress in the coming weeks and to set up a number of follow-up meetings between the Minister and the banks in order that they follow through on what they said. Some institutions have announced reduced standard variable rates, which is welcome, while others have offered customers reduced fixed-rate options as a method of reducing monthly repayments. That is the customer's choice. In recent weeks we have also seen increased competition in the switcher market, which I welcome.

That was not available previously. Institutions are offering customers reduced rates and incentives to attract them, which is welcome. The increased range of products already announced by the banks have increased competition in the marketplace, which is also welcome. The Government has always been of the view that an increased level of competition is in the customer's interest. Officials are following up on what the banks said they would do. I expect there will be further meetings arising from that, and I do not accept that the initiative taken by the Minister, Deputy Noonan, has been a failure. I view it as a work in progress.

We have debated the legislation to which Deputy Martin referred and I do not see it as being pertinent just now. I have outlined the progress made by the Government. We have seen progress on the part of AIB, Bank of Ireland and KBC, all announcing new products for existing customers that will see mortgage rates reduced to less than 4% for customers, which is in the interests of customers.

Deputy Micheál Martin: There are times when I genuinely do not know what planet the Taoiseach is living on.

The Taoiseach: The same one as Deputy Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: To be frank, the banks have told the Government where to go, and they have told the Minister where to go. Only two banks have responded. AIB made a reduction of 0.25%, a very minor reduction. The reduction announced by KBC was very convoluted and even more minor again in terms of its impact. Bank of Ireland has not reduced the SV rate. It has left it untouched. Ulster Bank has not responded in any shape or form. The Taoiseach said today was the first day by which a response should be made but it was the final date for the banks to get back to the Minister with meaningful proposals and responses to the standard variable rate issue.

The Taoiseach said in response to a question from me in April that from any moral or ethical point of view, when banks are now restructured and on their way to making a profit again, it is just not acceptable that when they themselves can borrow at much cheaper rates, they continue to have higher rates applied to mortgage holders. That is exactly what is going on right now. We know from all the evidence to the Oireachtas committee that the cost of funds is far lower than what the banks are charging the standard variable rate mortgage customer. It is a shocking rip-off. What the Taoiseach has proposed today is more inertia, as has been the case for years. It is not a question of whether the Central Bank wants the legislation. It is the Oireachtas that must do something about the situation because the sums of money are enormous for the households that are affected. The situation is much more significant than the combined effect of property tax and water charges in terms of the sums of money that have been gouged out of hundreds of thousands of families by unacceptable behaviour by the banks. According to the Taoiseach's own words, the situation is unacceptable from an ethical and moral point of view. In April, the Tánaiste said gratitude would only get one so far with the banks, and that she had never known bankers to be an especially grateful sort of people.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could Deputy Martin ask a question please?

Deputy Micheál Martin: What will be done about the situation? We have endeavoured to be constructive. Deputy Michael McGrath has produced well-researched legislation. A legislative response is required. At a very minimum, the 46,000 households whose loans have been bought up by vulture funds are extraordinarily vulnerable to arbitrary hikes in rates. Does

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the Taoiseach accept that legislation is required? I do not know by what criteria the Taoiseach would judge the Minister's initiative as being a success or what timeframe he is now setting out. He said the officials would follow up on what the banks have undertaken to do. How long will the process last? Does the Taoiseach not accept that legislation is required to bring fairness between existing customers and new customers, for example? All the Taoiseach announced were marketing and promotional approaches by the banks. They do not deal with the core issue of how existing customers are being screwed and ripped off. This is the key point and it is unacceptable.

The Taoiseach: I live on the same planet as the Deputy and work in the same building as he worked in when he was a Minister in a Government that allowed the banks to do as they liked and wrecked our economy.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: A history lesson.

The Taoiseach: I do not accept from the Deputy, or anybody else, that the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, has not taken the problem by the scruff of the neck.

Deputy Robert Troy: Where are the results?

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Tell it to the young couples.

The Taoiseach: The changes that have been made in restructuring and recapitalising banks and making arrangements for the taxpayers to get back all their money is markedly different from the situation Fianna Fáil left when its Government ended.

Deputy Simon Harris: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I accept that 300,000 people paying variable mortgage rates that are above the rate at which banks are borrowing is not a morally justifiable situation.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What is the Taoiseach going to do about it?

The Taoiseach: This is why the Minister, Deputy Noonan, met each of the six banks and gave them a piece of his mind about what they should do.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: When the Taoiseach wanted to get rid of the Garda Commissioner, he left him in no doubt. Why does he not send in the Secretary General?

The Taoiseach: KBC, Bank of Ireland and AIB have introduced measures to reduce variable rates below 4%. The Minister's officials are monitoring the progress of what the banks said they would do to see the outcome of it. The October budget will be an opportunity for the Minister to deal with the banks if necessary.

Deputy Robert Troy: "If".

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin does not seem to understand that the Central Bank is an independent regulator.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Taoiseach does not understand.

Deputy Simon Harris: He has no respect.

The Taoiseach: He wants the Government to direct everybody in this democracy.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Taoiseach was not long moving the Garda Commissioner when it suited him. He should put half as much effort into dealing with the banks.

The Taoiseach: The Minister wrote to the Central Bank some time ago and said if it required the legislative authority to intervene he would provide it by way of legislation.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Are you not the Taoiseach?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: He got rid of the Minister for Health too.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach has the power to initiate legislation.

The Taoiseach: The Central Bank did not take up the offer. Time is moving on.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: It is, for the borrowers.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: Deputy Dooley's Government, which he supported, left them in some mess. He has some neck.

The Taoiseach: Every day, people come to me about variable mortgage interest rates and the pressure they are under. This is why the entire suite of measures put in place by the Government is designed to alleviate it. I expect the banks to reduce their variable mortgage interest rates, which are unfair on so many. The Minister has given them a warning, and I expect them to respond.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Does the Taoiseach accept that the debt crisis in Greece is about EU elites trying to force the Government of Greece into accepting an outcome that contravenes its electoral mandate? They want to Greek Government to do what Fine Gael and the Labour Party did. They tore up their mandate, reneged on their election promises and undermined the people's right to assert democratic control over decisions which affect our lives.

Deputy Arthur Spring: We saved the country €30 billion.

Deputy Gerry Adams: This is the major question facing all EU citizens, including Irish citizens. Do citizens have the right to assert democratic control over decisions that affect our lives? The Taoiseach clearly does not believe so. This is at the heart of the crisis in Greece and is also a major issue here. This is why it does not suit the Taoiseach to have a government in Greece that proposes alternatives to the austerity policies which have increased inequality in many EU states, including Ireland. The water charges, a Fianna Fáil idea, to give it credit, is part of this, as is forced emigration, inequality, child poverty, a low-wage economy, the lack of social housing and the run-down of public services.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Is Deputy Adams an expert in equality?

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Minister for Health, Deputy Varadkar, has admitted the health service needs another €1 billion just to meet existing demand. Will the Taoiseach supply this? Of course he will not. However, he will impose the repayment of €181 billion in debt created by his friends in the golden circle and the greed of the elites at the expense of Irish people for generations to come. The Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, admits that there are not enough hospital beds to cater for ill citizens, which we have always known.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I have been saying it for the past four years.

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Deputy Gerry Adams: Will the Taoiseach accept that this is the price he is forcing our people to pay, and expects the people of Greece to pay, because he kowtows to a right-wing ideology and is, shamefully, uncritical and subservient to Brussels?

Deputy Arthur Spring: Deputy Adams's great idea was to send them home, and their money with them.

The Taoiseach: I profoundly disagree with the Deputy's comments. The situation is as I outlined yesterday. The democratically elected Prime Minister of Greece has come to the European Council on a number of occasions during recent weeks and has outlined, both for the European Council and the leaders of the eurozone, his vision for his country, as he is entitled to do. He said, in respect of generating social consent in Greece, that he has to deal with corruption, structural changes, an infrastructure package, becoming competitive and implementing a taxation system that works. The party sent a member to Sinn Féin's conference in Derry, indicating where Sinn Féin is headed in respect of delivering for Ireland. I profoundly disagree with it. I would not expect the citizens of this country would have anything to do with a situation such as that which, unfortunately, obtains in Greece. We have great empathy with the people who are struggling outside closed banks.

Deputy Martin Ferris: The Taoiseach has no empathy.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: He would throw them under a bus.

The Taoiseach: The Greek Government is entitled to call a referendum and allow the people to decide on what the question might be. Unfortunately, the deal was not on the table to be part of the referendum.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is because the Taoiseach whipped it off the table.

The Taoiseach: Papers have been exchanged and there will be a further conference call with the Ministers for Finance of the eurozone at 4.30 p.m. and, perhaps, progress might be made. Politicians in Greece have commented that the referendum may not be held. If it is held, it must be a question of whether the citizens of Greece wish to remain part of the EU and eurozone.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is bullying.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: They want bread on the table.

The Taoiseach: Apparently, it is the case. Unfortunately, the negotiators at Saturday's eurozone meeting were called away abruptly without concluding the debates. Deputy Adams has experience of what it means to do that and also knows from experience that the place to settle such differences is at the table. I am glad there has been movement from the Greek Government and that there is a reciprocal acceptance of consideration of what they are taking about. The overriding issue is for the Greek Government to tell its citizens the referendum is to take place on Sunday. Who knows what may happen with the current discussions with the eurozone Ministers for Finance later this afternoon and, possibly, later this week. It is a state of considerable flux. The ordinary people of Greece are suffering great hardship due to the failure to negotiate politically.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: They have been suffering for seven years.

The Taoiseach: The institutions and leaders of the EU and the eurozone are more than willing to support, in whatever way possible, the citizens of Greece so they can realise their aspiration of being part of the eurozone, getting out of the recession and introducing the changes about which the Prime Minister spoke eloquently at the meeting in Brussels on Friday and on the previous Monday.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I asked whether citizens had the right to assert democratic control over decisions which affect our lives, and the Taoiseach dodged the question and gave us his usual Rambles in Éirinn type of non-answer. The Greek Government is negotiating, but how would the Taoiseach know? It is doing something he never did, namely, trying to negotiate on behalf of the people who gave it a mandate.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Hear, hear.

Deputy Simon Harris: It is going well, is it not?

Deputy Gerry Adams: I have, as the Taoiseach noted, some experience of negotiation.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: How are the negotiations going?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Let us try to get to the bottom of why the Taoiseach holds to his position. The decades of corruption and economic mismanagement of Greece are the disastrous legacy of successive Governments with which the Taoiseach's Government has been closely associated.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: Ideology will not solve it.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Government which the Greek people rejected was led by New Democracy, which is a sister party of Fine Gael in the European Parliament.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The economy was growing while it was in government.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The other component of that coalition Government was Pasok, the party which implemented the original Greek bailout and a sister party of the Irish Labour Party. The two governing parties in this State are inexplicably linked to the parties in power in Greece when the problems in its economy were created as a result of corruption and a lack of regulation. Does that not sound familiar?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Did Fine Gael or Labour Party Members ever speak to their Greek counterparts about the disastrous policies which crashed the Greek economy? If they have not done so, is it not the case that the Taoiseach's current posturing on the new Greek Government, which has already started to implement a programme of genuine and widespread reform of the Greek economy, amounts to rank hypocrisy? Will the Taoiseach answer the fundamental question at the root of the ongoing struggles, namely, whether people have the right to assert democratic control over decisions which affect their lives?

The Taoiseach: The answer to the Deputy's last question is "Yes". In this country the people made that decision and the Government they elected will be judged on whether we fulfilled our mandate to fix the public finances and put our country back to work. That is the essence of democracy. Citizens' votes elect and change Governments, and that is their absolute right.

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Deputy Gerry Adams: It is more than that.

The Taoiseach: In regard to the Deputy's comments on the negotiations, I was at the meetings on the Stormont House Agreement. Deputy Adams raised a racket, as he normally does, which is fine.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach certainly did not raise a racket.

Deputy Martin Ferris: He sat there like a lapdog.

The Taoiseach: Afterwards, his party's acceptance of the deal was advertised in its own literature during the election process and Deputy Adams stated that the agreement must be implemented in full. However, he subsequently decided that the agreement no longer suited him and he rejected it. I would call that rank hypocrisy.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I would call that untrue.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: He was found out.

Deputy Niall Collins: I see a coalition in the making.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The shape of the next Government is emerging.

The Taoiseach: That rank hypocrisy will be squared by the gentleman who spoke a moment ago given what he did with his friends.

Deputy Simon Harris: The alternative.

The Taoiseach: Prime Minister Samaras brought in a primary surplus, was approaching 1% growth for Greece and was able to get back to the international markets to borrow money. What has happened now? People said they would abolish all property charges, water charges and everything else, and would pay for nothing. Now it has gone back beyond where it was. The problem is that, unfortunately, the ordinary people are now outside the closed banks and cannot withdraw money. Pensioners were told they would be able to withdraw money but they are unable to do so. They cannot get back to the international markets and the good and honourable name of Greece that was built up over the years is being torn down by the failure to negotiate. I would say to the Prime Minister in Greece that it is time to follow through on the papers that are now the subject of a conference call this evening at 4.30 p.m. There is time and a way to deal with this rather than have the 11 million citizens of that historic country done down by politics.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Three million of them are in poverty thanks to the Taoiseach's friends.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: It is because of following Sinn Féin policies.

The Taoiseach: The answer to Deputy Adams's question is "Yes". People's votes decide who is elected and who is thrown out. That is the way it should be. In this case, the mandate is not achievable because of the failure of the Greek Government to sit at the table and work it out. I hope that can happen in the next few days.

Deputy Paul Murphy: In "The Godfather Part III", Don Lucchesi turns to Vincent Mancini and says:

Finance is a gun. Politics is knowing when to pull the trigger.

Deputy Simon Harris: It is movie night.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: This is real politics.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The gun of the European Central Bank is directly pointed at the Greek economy and society. It is being used to demand the ransom of a “Yes” vote on Sunday for more austerity. The Taoiseach was concerned about the queues at the ATMs but he did not care about the queues at the soup kitchens and food banks. Those queues are a result of the decision by the European Central Bank, which was called for by the Minister for Finance.

Deputy Simon Harris: That is not what happened.

Deputy Paul Murphy: They are a result of the decision not to provide further assistance to the Greek banking system. They are a part of the campaign of financial terror that the European establishment is pursuing against the Greek people. Two days ago, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, made an incredible speech which was full of lies about the deal on the table for the Greeks and which threatened the Greeks with being forced to exit the euro if they did not vote “Yes”. Mr. Juncker said something which I think will resonate with many people in Ireland who voted twice on past European referendums when he told the Greeks that they had to vote “Yes” whatever question was put to them. That is European democracy. We can have as many referendums and choices as we want but we can only say “Yes” to austerity. We cannot say “No” to it.

Deputy Noel Harrington: What is the question?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Yesterday the President of the European Parliament and Angela Merkel made the same intervention. The reason they are so scared of democracy is because austerity has failed to achieve its stated aims of restoring growth and reducing debt. It has shrunk the Greek economy by one quarter and ballooned its debt to 180% of GDP. The IMF admits that the deal put on the table on a take-it-or-leave-it basis would have resulted in unsustainable debt, even with economic growth of 4%. Austerity has no popular legitimacy because it has exposed what happened to the money that went to Greece. Less than 10% of the money went into the Greek economy, with the rest going to bail out the banking system, the German and French banks and the major bondholders. That is the real purpose of austerity. The hope is that the tyranny of the troika, the financial terrorism of the ECB and the bullying by Europe’s leaders will force people to vote “Yes”. The Irish Government’s role in this mob story is that of Fredo Corleone, meekly doing what it is told to do and enthusiastically allowing itself to be used as a stick to beat the Greek people. Does the Taoiseach agree that the bullying and the threats should stop and that the Greek people should be free to make their decision on Sunday about the austerity deal? Will he withdraw the threats he repeated today about kicking them out of the eurozone if they make the wrong decision?

Deputy Noel Harrington: Is the movie over?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Sadly it is not.

The Taoiseach: Perhaps the Deputy is rehearsing the speech he will be making in Athens on Friday. I wish him luck in his travels.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Perhaps the Taoiseach could go to Greece to show solidarity.

The Taoiseach: I am glad the Deputy is following through on his convictions. I listened very carefully to what Prime Minister Tsipras said at the European Union leaders' meeting. He said that his country does not want to leave the euro and it will pay its way rather than default. He said he has to deal with corruption, infrastructure deficiencies and changing structures to make his country work, and that he needed our help. Mr. Draghi has given €87 billion in emergency liquidity to the Greek banks. Other countries, through their taxpayers, have contributed significantly to Greece and, believe me, they want to see Greece work as a democracy in order that its citizens can live the life they should expect in the European community. However, that requires people to sit down and deal with the challenges they face. As the Greek Prime Minister said, he went to the OECD and met its personnel who were able to give him the best advice, technical and otherwise, to put in place the structures that he said were necessary for Greece to make its way forward. Believe me, there is a willingness not just to listen and respond with words but also to respond with assistance to put in place those structures to allow Greece to function as a democracy that can make its way forward, pay its way and deal over a longer period with these problems. That was accepted by the European leaders in hearing it directly from the Prime Minister, but that is not what came back from Athens later. I do not have the reasons the Greek negotiators were withdrawn, but I do know that papers are now being exchanged. The Greek Finance Minister, Mr. Varoufakis, has been talking, as have other members of the Greek Government, about whether the referendum will be held. I hope some progress can be made in the conference call which will take place today at 4.30 p.m. between the eurozone Ministers, as everybody wants to see this work. Nobody wants to have a situation where this will spiral downwards from what is beginning to happen in Greece. From our point of view, we will work with our Greek colleagues in any way we can to bring them back from the precipice. Greece is the first developed country to be in this position of arrears.

Deputy Paul Murphy: If the Taoiseach wants to respect and help his Greek colleagues and if his words of sympathy and solidarity with the Greek people mean anything, he should withdraw the threats. He should be the leader of a European country that says, "We do not believe that if the Greek people vote "No", they should be forced out of the eurozone, if that is not their wish." I believe all this talk about the Taoiseach and other European leaders being interested in negotiations is not in good faith. What happened at the negotiations? A deal was put on the table on a take-it-or-leave-it basis in the knowledge that Syriza as a whole would not be able to take it. Yesterday Mr. Paul Krugman wrote that it was, deliberately, an offer Syriza could not accept because at the same time it was negotiating with the leaders of New Democracy and Potami, The River. What the European leaders wanted was a silent coup in Greece to replace the government with something more acceptable. When a referendum was announced, however, all of a sudden they were in favour of entering negotiations again. They even raised the question of debt relief, which had been off the table. Mr. Tsipras wrote to the Taoiseach and others, saying, "Okay, let us postpone the ending of the second programme until after the referendum so that we can have negotiations." However, everyone said "No". Mr. Tsipras wrote yesterday and again today, saying he wanted a third programme. However, Chancellor Merkel replied, "No, we will not have negotiations until after the referendum." That is because they want Syriza to be defeated in the referendum to get rid of the problematic issue of democracy and replace it with a government that will do exactly what they want.

The role of the Irish Government in all of this has been absolutely shameful. It is being used as a stick with which to beat the people of Greece and Ireland and it does so consciously against the interests of people here. It is shameful that today the Ballyhea bondholder bailout protestors are in Brussels making a case for a debt write-down for the Irish people. Meanwhile,

the Taoiseach is saying nobody needs a debt write-down, that everyone should pay their debts, unless they are among the richest people in the country.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Shame on the Taoiseach. Where is the June 2012 agreement? It has been completely forgotten. The Greek people should not be bullied. The Irish Government does not speak for the people here.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Does the Deputy?

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The Deputy is arrogant.

Deputy Paul Murphy: We, too, say “Oxi” or “No” to the troika’s tyranny and austerity. We stand alongside the Greek people in a fight for a Europe that will work in the interests of millions, not millionaires.

The Taoiseach: I am interested in the Deputy’s analysis that there is a threat to drive Greece out of the eurozone.

Deputy Paul Murphy: That is what the Taoiseach said.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Taoiseach said it.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Paul Murphy understands there is no mechanism to exit the eurozone, that a country would have to request to leave. Therefore, his analysis that there is a threat from this country or anybody else is absolutely baseless. The position is that Greece is in arrears in meeting its debts to the IMF. There is, obviously, a serious problem that is affecting millions of people in that country. As the Deputy has often asked here, why have others tell us what to do? The Greek Prime Minister is saying, “I recognise that you have a problem. I recognise that we have to deal with corruption, restructuring the way we do business, having an incentive and an infrastructural platform to develop the country but we need help to do this.” He has pointed to how this can happen. The exposure of other taxpayers in other countries is enormous in some cases.

It is fine for Deputy Paul Murphy to say, “Withdraw your threat,” but there is no threat to force anybody out of the eurozone. The Deputy talks about democracy here, but it is the same for other European leaders who say, “I cannot get a motion through my parliament to extend the bailout programme. I will not get it through because I am being held in position by two or three parties.” That is democracy and that consent is required. In fact, some parliaments would have to ratify whatever agreement might be reached.

On Saturday the intention was that there would be a meeting of eurozone Ministers to negotiate for whatever length of time with their Greek counterparts, to agree a deal, have it put through the Greek Parliament and endorsed by the Finnish, Dutch and German Parliaments. They would then be able to proceed for the next six months with a finance programme to meet Greece’s needs, meet its repayments and allow the country to start the work the Prime Minister, Mr. Tsipras, himself said was required. I hope we can get back to that position during the conference call at 4.30 p.m. Nobody wants to see us spiralling backwards and downwards. There is a responsibility on everybody to make it work. From the institutional end and the point of view of political leaders in the eurozone, we are willing to work and engage with our Greek colleagues to make it happen. There is a way through this, but it requires two to be at the table.

1 July 2015

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 34, statements on European Council, Brussels, pursuant to Standing Order 102A(2)(b); No. 9, Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 – motion to instruct the Committee (resumed); and No. 33, Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 - Order for Report Stage and Report and Final Stages.

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 9 p.m. and adjourn at the conclusion of Private Members' business which shall be No. 192, motion re one-parent family payment scheme (resumed), which shall take place at 9 p.m. or, in the event of a division being in progress at that time, immediately thereafter, and which shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 90 minutes; and No. 34 shall be taken immediately following the Order of Business and that the proceedings thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 85 minutes and that the following arrangements shall apply: the statements shall be made by the Taoiseach and the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group who shall be called on in that order, may share their time and shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; a Minister or a Minister of State shall take questions for a period not exceeding 20 minutes; and a Minister or a Minister of State shall be called on to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes and be followed by the suspension of the sitting under Standing Order 23(1).

Tomorrow's business after Oral Questions shall be No. 33, Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 - Report Stage (resumed) and Final Stage; and No. 5a, Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill 2015 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are two proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with the late sitting agreed to?

Deputy Gerry Adams: No, it is not agreed to. I object to the rescheduling of Private Members' business which clearly is being done by the Government to facilitate the railroading through of contentious legislation before the Dáil goes into recess. The Private Members' motion is about cuts to lone parent payments, yet the Government is moving the debate to prioritise even more austerity measures for hard-pressed citizens. The punitive measures to cut allowances for lone parents will take effect tomorrow and affect 30,000 families, many of whom will be pushed further into poverty. I am sure the Taoiseach knows that the CSO's figures show that 63% of lone parent families live without basic necessities and are among the most vulnerable in society. In another broken promise, the Tánaiste said the cuts would not be implemented without affordable child care and afterschool care services being available, but these services are not in place. Rather than have a proper debate on these matters, the Government jiggles and jigs the clár to allow it to bring forward other measures to facilitate the passage of legislation that will penalise people in not paying water charges they cannot afford. It is a very bad way to deal with Dáil business and shows nothing but contempt both for Government backbenchers and Opposition Deputies.

The Taoiseach: The Sinn Féin Party is perfectly entitled to table its Private Members' motion on the one-parent family payment scheme. This is not the first time there have changes to the Order of Business. The important point is that Deputy Gerry Adams, as leader of his party, and the members of that party are perfectly entitled to make their case during Private Members' time. There will be an opportunity to vote on the issue, which is normal procedure during Private Members' time. It does not show contempt or anything else for Members.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Yes, it does.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's party is fully entitled to avail of Private Members' time. It chooses what to debate and its spokespersons have their opportunity to make their case. It is a rearrangement of business-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: To suit the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----but Sinn Féin's motion is an important part of it. I am quite sure the Deputy's voice will be heard during the debate.

Question put: "That the proposal for dealing with the late sitting be agreed to."The Dáil divided: Tá, 75; Níl, 43. TáNílBannon, James.

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 75; Níl, 43.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Creighton, Lucinda.</i>
<i>Conaghan, Michael.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Terence.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Keaveney, Colm.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</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>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Gilmore, Eamon.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>

<i>Hayes, Tom.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Lynch, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Lyons, John.</i>	<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>	
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
<i>Neville, Dan.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Derek.</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>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>	
<i>Spring, Arthur.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	

Walsh, Brian.	
White, Alex.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Martin Ferris and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 34, statements on the European Council in Brussels, pursuant to Standing Order 102A(2)(b), agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister for Health has been performing some extraordinary somersaults on Government health policy in recent times. This morning he was on “Morning Ireland” attempting to give the impression that the programme for Government was not as strong in terms of its commitment to universal health insurance as what was included in the Fine Gael manifesto in 2011. He also made comments to the effect that universal health insurance could not be introduced in one big bang. The programme for Government is emphatic and clear. It states, “[t]his Government will introduce Universal Health Insurance with equal access to care for all” and “[a] system of Universal Health Insurance (UHI) will be introduced by 2016, with the legislative and organisational groundwork for the system complete within this Government’s term of office”. On 9 March 2011, when introducing the Government’s programme, the Taoiseach said, “In the vital area of health, we will introduce universal health insurance....” In case people will suggest the Labour Party had not signed up, the then Tánaiste, Deputy Eamon Gilmore, said on 2 April 2014 at the launch of the White Paper that in 2001 the Labour Party had been the first political party in Ireland to propose universal health insurance based on multiple insurers. The Labour Party was in favour of universal health insurance before Fine Gael. The introduction of universal health insurance was an explicit commitment on the part of both Fine Gael and the Labour Party and it is extraordinary that the Government has essentially wasted four years on a flawed policy based on a flawed model which it presented to the people.

Deputy John Deasy: Is Fianna Fáil agreeing or disagreeing with Leo?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: We are agreeing with him.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It represents perhaps one of the biggest untruths before the general election.

Deputy Robert Troy: Leo does not know himself.

Deputy John Deasy: Why does Deputy Micheál Martin not just say that in the first place?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Deputy might allow me to speak. It is not a laughing matter when one considers that individual taxpayers could face a bill of up to €3,000 under the Government’s proposals.

The Economic and Social Research Institute has undertaken a major study on this and it was presented to the Minister on 21 May. However, the document is being held back.

Deputy John Deasy: Deputy Martin is agreeing with the Minister for Health, Deputy

Varadkar.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The document is not being published. Will the Taoiseach confirm, first of all, that the commitment in the programme for Government to legislation - it states that universal health insurance legislation will be introduced - has now been formally and officially abandoned? A year ago the Minister said the same thing. The Taoiseach had a cut off him, marked his cards, said he was wrong and that universal health insurance was still on the Government's agenda. Anyway, he was clear this morning. He is now using new language, calling it universal health care. It is a real slíbhín approach, as if we will disappear or eliminate it, like George Orwell. It is almost Orwellian as if he is saying we never actually promised universal health insurance. It is as if he wants to bury all the documents or get rid of them. That seems to be what is happening. People are not fools. I want the Taoiseach to confirm it. Is universal health insurance off the table? Will the Government publish the ESRI report, which went into the costings of universal health insurance? Will the Government also publish the KPMG report it commissioned in respect of this policy?

Four years on the Government has created havoc throughout the health service with waiting lists, waiting times and accident and emergency departments across the board. There have been extraordinary increases in waiting times. The Government issue is not resolved by any shape or means. The then Minister, Deputy James Reilly, was disastrous during his tenure as Minister for Health. The Minister, Deputy Varadkar, seems to be doing nothing more than to try to put a brave face on it and to get presentational issues right before the next general election. A big lie was told here on this health issue. A big, big lie was told before the last election to the people. It is time we got some truth, transparency and honesty from the Government in respect of this issue.

The Taoiseach: It is a common word that Deputy Martin uses these days. I assure Deputy Martin that the matter of universal health insurance is part of the Government's agenda.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is not on the agenda of the Minister for Health.

The Taoiseach: I confirm for Deputy Martin that it will not be introduced in the lifetime of this Government. I confirm for Deputy Martin that the steps that have to be taken to restructure the health system for any particular form of universal health insurance are taking longer than anyone expected.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister did not say that this morning.

The Taoiseach: Clearly we have gone a long way with the primary care teams, the building of the primary centres, the free GP care strategy for under sixes and over 70s and hospital groups that have been established.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: That has nothing to do universal health insurance.

The Taoiseach: We have moved to hospital trusts to define what is best in the different areas.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We do not have hospital trusts.

The Taoiseach: There is far more use of generic drugs. The issues of consultant pay and stabilisation of the private health insurance market have been addressed.

The answer to Deputy Martin's question is that it will not be introduced in the lifetime of this Government. It is still on the agenda. The Minister received the ESRI report. It is a first draft and does not take into account the cost reduction factors that are put in there.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is the Government going to publish it?

The Taoiseach: There are also issues about the unmet areas that have to be costed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Government publish it?

The Taoiseach: Obviously, the Minister will consider the report. It is not going to happen in the lifetime of this Government.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Government publish the ESRI report?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin can believe me. Having examined the scale of the change that is necessary to get the kind of health system that we all need, it is clear it will take some considerable time of the next Administration.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: We are further away from it now.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Gerry Adams is next.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is a simple matter.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are short of time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I asked about the publication. Will the Taoiseach commit to the publication of the ESRI report? Why the secrecy? Why the failure to publish something that should be shared with everyone in this House and with the public generally? What is the Government trying to hide from the public?

The Taoiseach: Nothing.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach make a commitment to publish the ESRI report? That is what I asked.

The Taoiseach: I know the Minister is considering the figures that are in the ESRI report. As I said to Deputy Martin, this is a first draft. There is a great deal of further work to be done here. I have seen reports of figures but I have not read the report myself yet. I will do so. Obviously, I will consider what the best option is arising from that report, whether to publish it or whether to require further necessary work.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach wants to rewrite the report.

The Taoiseach: No, there is no need to be so smart at all.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have called Deputy Adams, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The ESRI is an independent body. Will it be allowed to produce the report and publish it?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin was the Minister who famously said-----

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An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We only have a short period.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Just because the Taoiseach does not like the messages that come from the ESRI is no basis for him to go and prevent it from being published. The Taoiseach is a bit of a dictator. If he does not like what the report says, he rewrites it.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin was the Minister who famously said in the Department of Health that he had no responsibility for anything.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have called Deputy Adams, please.

The Taoiseach: He said he had no responsibility.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He does not have the courage to say he will publish it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sorry, Taoiseach and Deputy Martin. I have called Deputy Adams. We have only three minutes left.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Government publish it? What is the Government afraid of? Will it publish the ESRI report on universal health insurance?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have only three minutes. I am sorry.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is it because it exposes the Government's policy, which has been hopelessly flawed from day one? A big, big lie was told to the people and the Taoiseach knows it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This is the Order of Business. Deputy Martin, please. I call Deputy Adams. We only have two minutes left now.

The Taoiseach: I remind the Deputy that when he had responsibility he put 120 reports, at taxpayers' expense, on the shelf which were never published.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: It is the Taoiseach's responsibility now.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Gerry Adams is next. Can we have order, please?

(Interruptions).

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Fine Gael Deputies cannot even remember the five-point plan.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Deasy knows of the difficulties of Waterford University Hospital because of this Government's policies.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, we are finished that.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá ceist agam faoi the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill agus ceann eile faoi the Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill. I will deal with that ar dtús. The Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill is up for debate tomorrow. It will allow creditors, including Irish Water, to apply for a court order that enables the attachment of earnings or deductions from social welfare payments for the purpose of the enforcement of debt. The Government has brought this forward without adhering to normal Dáil pre-legislative procedures. It failed to publish the heads of the Bill and failed to allow it to go to the committee for consideration by stakeholders. It has failed to allow a minimum of two weeks for offices

to scrutinise the Bill upon publication. We only got sight of a draft of the Bill last Friday, and then that was changed on Monday. This is really an underhand method to force through the Dáil a Bill that will pick the pockets of low-paid workers and people on social welfare. It will force more people into poverty. I call on the Taoiseach to reconsider the position he has taken up and to allow normal procedures. The Taoiseach talked earlier about the need for democracy to prevail. Will the Government publish the heads of the Bill, allow it to go to the committee and allow proper scrutiny by the relevant offices?

The Government has said rightly that it cannot proceed with the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill because of a court case. It now appears that the case has to go before the Supreme Court and it could be a year before the first same-sex citizens are able to marry. I accept entirely the right of citizens to go to the courts, but it strikes me that the time involved is lengthy, particularly given that this was not only in legislation in the Dáil but a referendum by the people as well.

Deputy Pádraig MacLochlainn and I have given a draft Bill to the Bills Office to amend the Referendum Act 1994 to provide for a statutory timeframe for 90 days within which referendum petitions must be heard and decided by the courts. We intend to bring that forward next week. Will the Government consider supporting this Bill on sight of it?

If the Supreme Court upholds the referendum result, how soon does the Taoiseach expect the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill to be published after that?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Adams referred to the Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill. The Government is moving because of the body of work done by the Law Reform Commission. The commission set out a great deal of opportunity not to have people sent to jail for small debts and to expand that beyond one particular entity and have it for civil debt. This would apply across the board. I believe that is progressive. That has already been worked upon for a long time and the Government is simply building on that foundation in the form of the Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill before the House. That will proceed.

Deputy Adams also referred to the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill. We need to be careful here. Deputy Adams spoke earlier about the will of the people. The people expressed their will in a referendum on the question and gave a resounding “Yes” to the question. I am constrained here in what I say because there is clearly a separation of powers between the Oireachtas and the courts. If Deputy Mac Lochlainn’s Bill, which I am sure is well intended, were passed or if the Government decided to put its Bill through the House, it would be a direct affront to the independence of the Judiciary. We cannot go there. One could argue whether the people, having decided by vote in a referendum, have expressed their will. People take cases before the court. A case is due on 30 July. I cannot interfere in that process and I have no intention of doing so.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It is not seeking to interfere. It is a general Bill.

The Taoiseach: We are bound by the complete and utter independence of the Judiciary and the courts system. We will not interfere in any way.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It is not specific to a case.

The Taoiseach: One cannot give directions to the court.

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Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It concerns the people's decision being decided upon quickly one way or the other.

The Taoiseach: We might all have wished for the result to be left as it was when the referendum was passed by the people, but people have a right to take court cases. It is not for us, the Deputy or the House to direct the courts on what to do. The Deputy should not go there because there is a complete separation of powers. The Government is anxious to move ahead with its legislation as quickly as possible and have it enacted and applicable by the year's end for those who wish to give three months' notice and get married. I cannot predict the outcome of the court decision, nor will I speculate on it.

The Bill is ready to go from our point of view but my advice is that it would be very wrong for the Oireachtas to proceed with it in advance of the court making its decision. I am sorry I cannot be more specific.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I thank the Taoiseach for his answer but wish to reiterate the point that Teachta Mac Lochlainn was making. I said in my remarks that we respect absolutely and uphold the right of citizens to go to the courts. We are not seeking to interfere with the court system or interfere in any way with the separation of powers between the Judiciary and the Oireachtas but there seems to be an unfortunate and overly long period for dealing with this issue, although it might not be intentional. We simply want to bring forward for consideration a proposition that establishes timeframes for the process but does not interfere with it.

The Taoiseach: Obviously, if one tries to give a direction to a court stating such a decision must be decided by such a date, how does one know the arguments that are going to arise? How does one know the other objections or elements that might be raised? One just cannot do it. I refer to the utter separation of the Judiciary from the Oireachtas. Deputy Mac Lochlainn's Bill might be well intentioned but he cannot give directions to a court through the parliamentary system.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. I regret I cannot call the other Deputies who are offering to contribute. I hope they will be able to try again tomorrow. That concludes the Order of Business.

European Council Meeting: Statements

The Taoiseach: The meeting of the European Council that took place last Thursday and Friday was particularly challenging. We were faced with many difficult questions of fundamental importance for the Union. Discussions, which continued late into the night, were undoubtedly robust. However, it must also be recognised that important progress was made on a range of critical and sensitive issues.

On Thursday, we first discussed the situation in Greece. We then considered in some detail how the European Union can most effectively respond to the migration crisis, recognising the importance of solidarity with those member states at the front line. Prime Minister Cameron outlined UK proposals for European Union reform, marking the beginning of a process of exploration of these issues. On Friday, we moved on to consider security and defence challenges, in addition to efforts to boost jobs, growth and competitiveness, in particular the implementation of the digital single market strategy.

Let me say a few words about Greece. Although it was not formally on our agenda, the situation in Greece was discussed by the European Council for some considerable time, following a presentation by the President of the Eurogroup. At that time, there was considerable commonality between the proposals from the institutions and Greek authorities, giving a reasonable expectation that the remaining gap could be bridged to reach an agreement acceptable to all parties. I, together with other Heads of State and Government, urged Prime Minister Tsipras to make every effort to conclude an agreement and to put an end to the instability that is having a detrimental effect on the Greek economy and the Greek people in particular.

The Eurogroup was due to meet on Saturday to bring forward negotiations and, we had hoped, conclude an agreement. Unfortunately, however, before the Eurogroup meeting on Saturday, the Greek authorities announced that they were unilaterally withdrawing from negotiations. Prime Minister Tsipras indicated that a referendum would take place on Sunday, 5 July during which the Greek people would be asked to accept or reject the latest compromise proposals put forward by the institutions.

Meanwhile, against the background of last week's turmoil and uncertainty, deposit outflows accelerated from the Greek banking system. On Sunday, Prime Minister Tsipras called a bank holiday to last until at least 7 July and has imposed capital controls. As we all know, Greece did not meet its repayment of €1.5 billion due to the IMF last night, meaning that it is now in arrears to that organisation. Late yesterday, Prime Minister Tsipras wrote to the President of the Eurogroup proposing a new ESM programme, debt restructuring and an extension of the current programme. The Eurogroup reviewed the content of the letter, which was very brief. I understand that a second letter has now been received and the Eurogroup will have a further conference call this evening.

The situation facing Greece and its people is now extremely grave. Last week, we believed a solution was in sight. This week, we have entered uncharted waters. That said, I would underline that the door remains open to dialogue, in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility. Continuing volatility and uncertainty are not in the interest of the Greek people. Our objective remains a sustainable and mutually acceptable agreement which will return Greece to growth within the eurozone.

Following discussions on Greece, the European Council addressed the migration crisis facing the European Union. We know that insecurity and conflict in Africa and the Middle East has resulted in unprecedented numbers of migrants attempting to enter Europe. Prior to the recent reinforcement of search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, we were witnessing a tragic loss of life on a large scale. The *LE Eithne* alone has rescued at least 3,000 people since arriving in the Mediterranean on 23 May to support the Italian coastguard. The discussions at the European Council on migration were difficult and lengthy, but also constructive. Despite the anticipated differences of approach, it should be acknowledged that significant progress was made on what is a very complex and politically sensitive issue. All member states agreed on the importance of balancing solidarity with responsibility, and on the need for a comprehensive approach to the migration challenge.

The approach agreed by the European Council, and reflected in its conclusions, demonstrates a balanced and comprehensive response to the problem. The response focuses on three distinct pillars: relocation and resettlement; return and readmission; and co-operation with countries of origin and transit. This includes an agreement to help 60,000 vulnerable people, through a mixture of resettlement of refugees based outside the European Union, and relocation of those

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in need of international protection who are already within the European Union, currently in Italy and Greece. The relocation, which will be exceptional and temporary, will now be on the basis of a voluntary distribution plan to be agreed by consensus between member states by the end of this month, July.

We also agreed that new reception facilities should be established in front-line member states to improve the processing of refugee applications and to strengthen procedures for the return and readmission of irregular migrants or those who do not qualify for refugee status. EU assistance and policies will be used to create incentives for implementing existing readmission agreements and concluding new ones. Importantly, the conclusions we adopted also emphasised the need to reinforce our overall co-operation with countries of origin and transit to tackle the root causes of irregular migration and to combat the smuggling networks. In my intervention, I made it clear that Ireland believes an approach based on solidarity and responsibility is essential. We have already offered to resettle 520 refugees between this year and next as well as deploying the *LE Eithne* to assist in search and rescue operations. Ireland also provides extensive humanitarian assistance to regions affected by conflict. We will continue to examine the situation with a view to possible further assistance.

Under Protocol 21 to the Lisbon treaty, Ireland can choose whether to opt in to the relocation measure. At the European Council, I indicated that we are prepared to give the issue careful consideration as an emergency and one-off measure. We need to see how the proposal evolves before making a decision. Of course, participating in such a measure would also require Oireachtas approval. Realistically, any proposal for Ireland to opt in could only be properly considered after the measure has been agreed and adopted at EU level.

Staying with migration, I want to mention briefly the launch of the EUNAVFOR Med mission, which was raised in this House during our pre-European Council debate. The decision to launch this mission was taken by the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 June and subsequently noted by the European Council. The mission is one element of the comprehensive approach to addressing the migration crisis. It is important to be aware that the mission will be implemented in sequential phases, with the first phase focused on supporting the detection and monitoring of migration networks through information gathering and patrolling in accordance with international law. This phase will commence shortly. To move beyond this first phase and into a phase which might involve the targeting, seizure and destruction of the smugglers' vessels and assets, the Council will assess whether the conditions for transition have been met. This will require taking into account any applicable UN Security Council Resolution and the consent of the coastal states concerned. I would underline that consideration of participation by the Irish Defence Forces in the EUNAVFOR Med mission will only occur if there is a UN Security Council resolution and the applicable national statutory requirements are met.

The EU-UK relationship was considered briefly by the European Council. Prime Minister Cameron provided a short outline of his proposals for possible changes to EU policy and legislation. As expected, there was no substantive debate. Given Prime Minister Cameron's prior series of bilateral engagements with EU leaders, including our own meeting in Downing Street on 18 June, little of what he said in Brussels was unexpected. He has already outlined the areas in which he would like to see change. They include improving competitiveness, enhancing the role of national parliaments, making clear that the UK is not bound by the concept of "ever closer union", managing the relationship between member states within and outside the euro area and addressing the possible interplay between migratory flows and welfare entitlements. It was useful however for the European Council to hear collectively about Prime Minister Cam-

eron's commitment to a successful outcome and about the priority areas for the British Government and to mark the beginning of a fully inclusive process aimed at resolving the question of the UK's membership of the EU. It was agreed that the matter will return for consideration by the European Council in December. In the interim, it is expected that there will be a technical process of scoping out and clarifying possible measures and their implications before a move to negotiation as such begins later in the autumn.

The challenge is to find a consensual basis that will ensure the UK's continuing presence within the Union. That is the real challenge. As I have said previously, this process may not be easy and there are likely to be hurdles to overcome along the way. However, I am confident, especially following the positive start last week, that an acceptable solution for all parties can be reached. I repeat that given Ireland's very clear national interest in the UK's continued place in the Union, this will continue to be a very high priority for the Government. We will continue to adopt a positive and constructive approach while assessing specific issues on their merits.

On Friday morning, the European Council discussed security and defence issues. We initially had an exchange with the NATO Secretary General, which was useful in understanding the strategic challenges facing both organisations and where they might usefully co-operate. The conclusions underlined the importance of intensifying partnerships, namely, with the UN, NATO, the OSCE and the African Union. The European Council renewed our commitment to developing a more effective, visible and results-orientated common security and defence policy, CSDP, which involves the further development of both military and civilian capabilities, and strengthening the ability of EU industry, including SMEs, to deliver those capabilities. The CSDP has made an essential contribution to crisis management and conflict resolution globally, including with participation from the Irish Defence Forces, gardaí and civilian personnel. However, the EU must continue to work to ensure missions can be deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible. The European Council also recalled the need for member states to allocate a sufficient level of expenditure for defence and for the EU budget to provide appropriate funding for CSDP related research.

The conclusions also flagged the need to mobilise EU instruments to counter hybrid threats, an increasingly common feature of our security environment. In light of the changing international security environment, the European Council mandated High Representative Mogherini to prepare a new EU global strategy on foreign and security policy in close co-operation with member states. This is to be finalised by June 2016. Ireland looks forward to contributing to the preparation of the strategy in the months ahead.

At the time the second session of the European Council on Friday morning was beginning, word was just beginning to filter through of the barbaric slaughter of an individual near Lyon in France. I conveyed my condolences to President Hollande and through him to the French people as he returned early to Paris. That afternoon, we witnessed the horrendous attack in the Tunisian resort city of Sousse during which 38 tourists, including three Irish citizens, lost their lives. We also heard of the deadly attack on a mosque in Kuwait. Over the weekend, I asked that my condolences be conveyed via our embassies to those EU partners whose nationals were murdered in Tunisia. Yesterday, I spoke personally to Prime Minister Cameron in light of the particularly appalling scale of British casualties, which numbered 30.

Recognising the security challenges within the EU's borders, the European Council agreed that work would be taken forward on the renewed EU internal security strategy, which identifies the tackling of terrorism, organised crime, cybercrime and online radicalisation as key issues.

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This builds on priorities identified at the European Council meeting in February, which called for increased information sharing between police and intelligence services; addressing online radicalisation and the removal of illegal content; engagement with third states exploited by foreign fighters, notably Turkey; and the enforcement of greater controls over and the tracking of illegal firearms.

One issue which, for once, did not feature on our agenda was the situation in Ukraine and EU relations with Russia. This was because clear orientations had already been provided by the March European Council. The June meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council took the necessary formal decision to extend EU sanctions until 31 January 2016 due to Russia's role in destabilising eastern Ukraine. I expect the issue to feature prominently on the European Council agenda again before the end of the year.

Although much attention was understandably focused on the situation in Greece, the European Council also provided important orientations on broader economic issues. Economic prospects across Europe have clearly improved over recent months. However, we must continue to press ahead on the key initiatives that will reinforce this momentum and further strengthen the outlook for jobs, growth and competitiveness. In my intervention, I took the opportunity to highlight the crucial role of a fully functioning digital single market that is both open and competitive. The reality is that barriers to doing business digitally and across borders are barriers to growth and jobs. The House will recall that I wrote in these terms to President Tusk in advance of last week's meeting. The letter was co-signed by my counterparts in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, the UK, the Netherlands, Poland and the Czech Republic and many of the sentiments were shared by other member states. I am pleased that strong political endorsement for the new digital single market strategy is reflected in the conclusions of the European Council and I expect to see regular reporting on implementation progress. Given the transformative potential of digital technologies, there is no greater opportunity at our disposal to make a real difference for investment, growth and jobs in Europe.

The European Council also adopted conclusions generally endorsing the country-specific recommendations to member states, including Ireland, under the European Semester and noted the publication of a report by President Juncker and the heads of other institutions on completing the economic and monetary union. I have asked the Minister of State, Deputy Dara Murphy, to address these issues in his closing statement.

Adversity is not new to the EU. Indeed, it is an organisation born in response to challenges that are unimaginable today. In more recent years, we have come through an economic crisis that shook the Union to its core. At times there will be differences of perspective as this is inevitable in a Union of 28 member states. However, solidarity and responsibility must continue to guide our approach as we work together for a stable, prosperous and compassionate Union.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The succession of summit and Council meetings over the past few weeks has, unfortunately, produced nothing positive. Instead they have exposed yet again the failure of leaders to work together in a positive and ambitious way to tackle the enormous crisis engulfing the European Union. It is the inflexible extremes which have been allowed to dominate and have escalated problems to a stage where profound damage may be done to both the economy and the politics of Europe. Citizens are looking on in despair and frustration. In all of the back and forth, the emergency meetings, the name-calling, the posturing and the ultimatums, the one thing which has not been tried thus far is compromise. The people of Greece and Europe have been caught in the middle of a fight between a failed orthodoxy and a cynical

radicalism. In all of this, our Government has chosen the role of vacuous cheerleader for an unsustainable and damaging policy. The Taoiseach and the Minister, Deputy Noonan, have publicly tried to backtrack from their support for an inflexible approach but the record stands. It should be Ireland's policy to seek a true reform of the eurozone and a sustainable path to growth for member states, but nothing of the sort has happened.

Equally, others in this House have offered the empty posturing of demanding that the Greek Government be given whatever it wants without any requirements. In their view, money is no problem and there is no such thing as a tough and responsible choice. Whatever happens in Sunday's referendum, the only thing which is not in doubt is that the crisis will continue. The Greek Government has decided to hold a vote but it has not offered its people any clarity in what they are actually voting on. The Syriza Government bears a large amount of the blame for what is unfolding. It has failed consistently to enter negotiations in good faith. It has regularly abused and insulted people and countries at the same time as seeking their money. It has undertaken high-profile trips to different capital cities but never once published a credible plan for controlling the long-term deficits or tackling the tax administration failures which are at the root of Greece's problems. Every time it has produced a proposal this has fallen apart within hours. Gimmicks and made-up figures have defined a lot of the measures. As of yesterday there is no bailout programme to be continued and there is no deal to be voted on. Prime Minister Tsipras's letter of yesterday seeking €29 billion over the next two years was more about giving the impression he was doing something than actually trying to get a deal. There is no specific proposal on relief on old debt and no commitment to taking actions which would allow new debt to be repaid.

What is quite cynical about the letter is that it cites treaty articles as a basis for demanding solidarity without mentioning that the very same provisions require that support can only be given following the agreement of a memorandum of understanding setting out what the recipient government is going to do in return for it. This letter has allowed Syriza to claim to have a plan for what to do next while actually only having another demand rather than a plan.

Fundamentally, Syriza has refused to accept the basic idea that if one wants other people's money one does not get to act unilaterally. It has also refused to acknowledge that other governments have their own democratic mandates which are often far in excess of the 36% which Syriza won. The Greek Government was indeed elected on a platform of ending austerity and it is entitled to pursue this aim. However, it was also elected on a platform of promising to stay in the euro and to accept the responsibilities which come with that. What it offered the Greek people was a campaign of slogans and easy answers. It never set out exactly how it intended to achieve entirely contradictory objectives and in government it has regularly fallen back on election slogans when faced with the hard reality of delivering.

There are many parallels with what we have heard here in the last five years. During our referendum on the fiscal treaty it was the position of Sinn Féin and others that Europe should be told to get lost. When challenged in debates to say where they proposed getting the billions needed to fund public services if the bailout terms were ripped up as they demanded, all we heard was stuttering emptiness. In debates, both Deputies Pearse Doherty and McDonald insisted that there would be no problem raising the billions of euro and that there was no need to cut anything that mattered. This is cynical politics of the worst kind and it is something which we are seeing worked out before our eyes in Greece.

It is very striking that a round-up by the international media of political parties which have

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come out in favour of Greece voting “No” listed Sinn Féin, along with France’s National Front. So far, the principal uniting feature between parties calling for a “No” vote is that they are stridently anti-Europe. In terms of the claim that Greece is somehow being punished for electing a radical left government, this is more empty rhetoric. Lenders want a credible route to getting their money back. There is nothing unreasonable about that, particularly as the bulk of the lending is being done by countries, including Ireland, which have to borrow in order to lend to Greece. Some 80% of the debt is public debt. This fact is very often lost in this current debate.

If the Syriza Government had entered negotiations in good faith five months ago; if it had put aside the angry speeches and the staged photo opportunities with enemies of the European Union, the crisis would not have reached this stage. It is being said that a “No” vote will lead to Greece exiting the euro. Legally, this is not clear-cut. No euro member may be forced to leave other than by being excluded from membership of the Union as a whole. The relevant treaty provisions provide little basis for expelling Greece from the Union. Some form of a deal will be required whatever the result of Sunday’s vote. Let no one forget the fact that Greece needs debt restructuring if it is to have any realistic chance to return to growth. The refusal to contemplate it so far may have been reinforced by the aggression shown by Syriza towards lenders but this does not change the fact that it is required.

Debt restructuring is going to happen one way or the other, either by a chaotic default or by a structured agreement. This is simple economic reality and no amount of political wishful thinking is going to alter this. Ireland’s opposition to debt restructuring appears to be based solely on our Government’s determination to deny Greece something which Fine Gael and Labour once claimed was vital but ultimately failed to even ask for. Four years ago, Fine Gael and Labour said that relief from debt incurred to recapitalise the banks was an urgent necessity. They said that the Irish people should not have to carry the full burden of these debts. Three years ago they went further and announced that they had all but secured relief from this debt, with the Minister, Deputy Noonan announcing that he would not say how many billions of euro we would get because he might be able to wrangle more than his bottom line. As a series of freedom of information requests submitted by Fianna Fáil revealed, not only have we received no debt relief but our Government did not even ask for any. It is over two years since the Taoiseach even mentioned debt in a communication with a European leader.

I have noted a clear habit of the Taoiseach when he is caught out on something. He either denies he ever said it or he tries to twist his own words to mean something else entirely. Unfortunately, this has been on display again during the past week. When he claimed that Ireland had managed to get through the crisis without increasing taxes on income, VAT or other taxes, he was making a statement which was completely and undeniably false. Yesterday he could not even admit to that. The 45 tax increases imposed by his Government were not imagined by people; they happened and they have hurt. What is more cynical is that in his lecture about how Ireland got through the crisis he praised himself and his Government for taking decisive action which they had actually voted against. The majority of measures which consolidated our budget were in place before the Taoiseach came to office. The late Brian Lenihan introduced budgets which were fundamental in consolidating our fiscal position and the Taoiseach railed against them and voted against them at every opportunity. Those measures were fundamental to sorting out the fiscal issue and creating the foundations for the economic recovery.

Deputy Dara Murphy: All those measures had to be changed.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: He does not even understand.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I know this hurts the Minister of State but I did not interrupt the Taoiseach when he spoke. I ask the Minister of State to allow me the opportunity to make my points no matter how much they hurt him.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: He does not even understand it.

Deputy Dara Murphy: All Fianna Fáil's measures had to be changed and renegotiated.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Not only did the Taoiseach vote against those measures he campaigned actively against them. So to turn around now and demand credit for them takes a level of neck never seen before in Irish politics. While Syriza was irresponsible in the promises it made before the last Greek general election, let us not forget "Not a red cent" and "Frankfurt's way or Labour's way". They were also dishonest promises abandoned within days of the Fine Gael-Labour Government coming into power.

As was revealed last Sunday, Fine Gael is currently researching the idea of holding an early general election and offering different messages for that election. Given how debates in this House have developed, no doubt the core strategy will be to claim to be national saviours and to unleash a stream of negative attacks. What they continue to fail to understand is that the Irish people can see through this and remember exactly what was said and promised before the last general election.

The Government needs to join the middle ground of states who believe in finding a solution to the Greek debt crisis. The suggestion to increase the VAT rate on tourism would have been totally counterproductive as Greece is highly dependent on the tourism industry. The concession on this showed some common sense at least. We have to avoid a humanitarian crisis. It is not acceptable that pensioners were fainting in the queues at the ATMs. At least opening the banks to allow them to get their pension is a positive step. Youth unemployment is at 50% in Greece and this will lead to far more social problems that may last for years to come. If the ECB pulls support from the Greek financial system, worse will follow.

The EU Council of Finance Ministers is meeting today and I hope the Minister, Deputy Noonan, speaks up for a real reform of the eurozone instead of the flawed and timid proposals which were discussed last week. Such reforms are necessary and should be undertaken by the Government. The euro is the only currency union which has attempted to work in the long term without any serious form of fiscal union. If we want a eurozone which is secure and which can deliver rather than just talk about growth, then there must be a move towards increased transfers to regions in trouble.

The position of the Taoiseach has been to support the idea that all we need for growth is budget control and structural reform. There is no credible economic basis for this. It is the very approach that was at the heart of the failure of the period from 2008 to 2012 which did so much damage to Ireland and other countries. Over the past four years Ireland has received nothing from the European Union and IMF which was not negotiated by others and extended automatically. The Government has delivered nothing from its approach of simply parroting whatever the hard-line position from the CDU is.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Rubbish.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In this, it has contributed to a situation which has caused large and growing damage the European Union and the ideals upon which it was founded.

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The summit heard a presentation from the British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, about Britain's demand for the renegotiation of various terms of its membership of the Union. Although this demand was announced four years ago, the public is still in the dark about what is being sought. From reports it would appear that something short of an amending treaty is being discussed and that officials will hold negotiations which will culminate in a decision at December's Council. The position of the Government is completely unknown other than that it, rightly, wants Britain to stay in the Union. The debate has been allowed to proceed without Ireland making any statement about where it sees the future of Europe or proposing any reforms which might be discussed. Given the timetable for decisions this needs to end now and we need a credible discussion about what is our position for these negotiations. It is highly likely that we will have our general election during the process of proceeding from a political agreement on principles towards a final text for ratification.

If the Government refuses even to outline a position on the main issues then it is inviting trouble. Without seeking any consensus among parties which are constructive on Europe it is increasing the possibility that it will agree to measures which are unacceptable to others. As I have said before, Fianna Fáil's core position is that we will not support any attempt to roll back the core social functions of the Union. It is not simply a trading block and we must reject any attempt to reduce it to one. Equally, we will not support measures which reduce the ability of the eurozone to reform and develop.

We have a right to know what the implications are for Ireland of the proposals that are on the table. For example, if the proposal on claiming social security benefits were implemented, what would the implications be for Irish citizens in Britain? The Government should publish a discussion paper on the British proposals and adequate time should then be provided to debate the issues before December's summit. The Oireachtas committee has already finalised and published its paper.

The June summit did not mark a major improvement in response to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean. The work being done by the *LE Eithne* together with the navies of others countries is essential and we should be very proud of it. It is, however, not an answer. Ultimately, we need an ambitious and generous approach to supporting countries from which these refugees are fleeing. It is obviously welcome that lives are being saved, but we cannot support a system that is failing these refugees who are fleeing, one third of whom are from Syria with others from North Africa, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

In the past six months 137,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. They are fleeing from war persecution and areas with severe conflict. Data from Greece given to the UN recently stated that there has been an 83% increase in refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean. This will increase further over the summer months. Since the lives were lost two months ago an operational policy has been in place but more needs to be done to facilitate the refugees who are fleeing war-torn areas. The whole of Europe should share that burden. It is upon this humanitarian approach that Europe is built.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): I call Deputy Adams, who is sharing time with Deputy Colreavy.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I again express my sincere condolences, and those of Sinn Féin, to the families of Larry and Martina Hayes, and of Lorna Carty, the three Irish citizens brutally killed in an indiscriminate attack on tourists in Tunisia, which I utterly condemn. I extend

condolences to all those, from whatever part of the world they come, who were killed in these attacks, as well as the victims of the attacks in France and Kuwait.

During pre-European Council statements last week, I said that Greece and other highly indebted eurozone countries needed more reforms not more cutbacks. I also called on the Taoiseach to support Greek calls for a reduction in its unsustainable and unfair debt burden, and to support a debt conference. The Taoiseach concluded his remarks by saying that “solidarity and responsibility must continue to guide our approach as we work together for a stable, prosperous and compassionate Union”. I pick out of that “solidarity”, “responsibility”, “prosperous” and “compassionate”.

However, last week the Taoiseach stated the Government would not support any debt relief for Greece. He put party political interests ahead of the interests of the people of Greece, of this State and of Europe. It is completely illogical that the Government of a small, highly indebted State, such as this, with an unfair debt burden of its own would not support debt relief for another highly indebted European state with unfair and unsustainable debt. This is an EU crisis, not a Greek crisis. Debt relief benefits the people of Ireland as well as Greece. Economists from the left, right and everywhere in between all agree that Greece needs debt relief.

Last week the Taoiseach claimed that in tackling the economic crisis here the Government did not increase income tax, VAT or PRSI. That is untrue. It raised income and consumption taxes. It also introduced water charges and a property tax. It opted for forced emigration and now, 500,000 of our citizens are scattered across the globe. I do not think the Taoiseach understands the consequences and social difficulties for families and communities for a population of almost 5 million when 500,000 have left in eight years, mostly our young people. One third of our children are living in consistent poverty. The sick and the elderly end up on trolleys instead of hospital beds. These are the people who are paying the price for the Government’s austerity policies.

The Government’s stance on the Greek debt crisis is destructive of any concept of solidarity, prosperity, community or democracy or of the original ideals which are supposed to underpin the EU project. It is also a matter of deep shame that the Labour Party has descended to the point where its leader spends her time attacking a democratically mandated Government for refusing to accept brutal austerity measures after successive social democratic and right-wing governments in Greece crashed that country’s economy by accepting such measures. While the Tánaiste cuts lone parent’s benefit, she wishes to prevent any alternatives to relentless austerity being heard. She also claims that Greece needs to stop lecturing Europe. She has told the Greek Government to shut up and accept austerity and its devastating effects. Not to be outdone, the Fianna Fáil leader’s remarks today surpass his usual hyperbole as he attempts to make himself and his party relevant in this debate. Given how his party leaders bankrupted this State after decades of corrupt behaviour and then capitulated to the troika, it is little wonder he engages in abstractions and falsehoods.

The Greek economy has not been crippled by the citizens any more than the citizens in this country were responsible but by a regime of austerity which followed decades of corruption and a lack of regulation. Greece is stuck in a downward spiral of cutting growth and raising debt. The EU institutions are not interested in the slightest about the severe humanitarian crisis in that country. The Government of Greece has argued for growth-led measures that would support the rebuilding of the Greek economy and allow it to meet its credit obligations. However, the significant fiscal adjustments put forward by Greece were rejected by the EU institutions,

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including our Government. I welcome the decision of the Greek Government to put these issues to its people in a referendum.

I commend the actions of Greece in upholding the principles of democracy in the face of increasing pressure from EU institutions which are holding the citizens of that country to ransom. Neither this Fine Gael-led Government nor the previous Fianna Fáil-led Administration had a mandate to impose vicious cuts to social supports or unfair taxes on low and middle-income families but they did so, contrary to the mandate it received.

The Taoiseach: How would Deputy Adams have fixed it?

Deputy Gerry Adams: By refusing to extend Greece's bailout, the EU is attempting to do the same thing to Greek citizens and to undermine a free and democratic decision of a proud people. The crisis in Greece is about power and democracy underpinned by the question of democratic values, of whether the values of solidarity and co-operation, claimed by the founders of the European movement actually underpin this modern European Union.

This Government has contributed to the current crisis. Last Monday, according to the *Financial Times*, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, along with the German Finance Minister, pressed for emergency financial support for Greek banks to be stopped unless capital controls were imposed. On Sunday they got their way when the ECB froze its funding line to Greek banks. Last week, the Taoiseach railed against the idea of debt write-down or debt relief for the Greek people. That is not a surprise because he never asked for a debt write-down for the Irish people.

We wish the people of Greece well. It is my strong view that the Taoiseach does not represent on this issue the popular will of the people of this State or island. Fine Gael and the Labour Party opposed debt relief for Greece because it would expose the failure of this Government to demand the same.

I again commend the crew of the *LE Eithne* which has rescued 3,000 people in the five weeks or so it has been in the Mediterranean. I am disappointed, though hardly surprised, that the EU summit did not deal with the humanitarian crisis of which this is a symptom.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: I am speaking on behalf of my colleague, Deputy Seán Crowe, who cannot be with us here today.

In stark contrast to the statements of the Taoiseach, the Minister for Finance and the leader of Fianna Fáil, I echo the words of my colleague, an Teachta Adams, commending the actions of Syriza in upholding the principles of democracy by holding a referendum on the so-called offer of the EU institutions. It is appropriate in the cradle of democracy that Syriza is standing up for democracy in the face of increasing pressure from EU institutions which are holding Greece and the people of Greece to ransom. Shamefully, the Irish Government, aided and abetted by Fianna Fáil, is supporting the twisted ideological position of the institutions which are working against the interests of the people of Greece, Ireland and Europe. We are witnessing the EU power brokers, money men and compliant or complicit political leaders beginning the process of shaping political representation to their preferred vision or form of democracy by diktat. While this European Council meeting was largely overshadowed by economic issues, it also focused on issues concerning migration and the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean.

I also pay tribute to crew of the *LE Eithne* who continue to save lives and rescue migrants

in serious trouble in the Mediterranean. Last weekend the *LE Eithne* and her crew rescued 593 migrants from six separate inflatable vessels off the coast of Libya, bringing the total number of people rescued by the crew of the *LE Eithne* to almost 3,000. The crew of the *LE Eithne* are a credit to their country and I state my, and Sinn Féin's, appreciation of their outstanding work. The number of migrants they have rescued puts into stark contrast the huge need for search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

The EU, however, refuses to tackle the issue with the solidarity and humanity it deserves. According to reports, the debate on creating a compulsory quota system to resettle migrants landing in Greece and Italy around the EU was incredibly fractious. Last Monday the EUNAVFOR Med military mission to crack down on migrants was launched to great fanfare and eloquent speeches from EU officials, yet by Thursday member states were fighting a bitter battle over a relatively modest scheme to share the intake of 60,000 migrants between them over two years. That tells us all we need to know about the current state of the European Union. Why is the EU so happy to treat a humanitarian crisis as a security issue? Why can it easily unite on military action but not respond when humanitarian assistance is so badly needed? It is galling that a humanitarian emergency involving the resettlement of a limited number of human beings fleeing war, poverty, oppression, and hunger has brought the whole Schengen Agreement into question.

When countries lined up to tell Italy they would take no part in a compulsory resettlement programme and that they would ignore the issue as their geographic locations allowed them to do so, the Italian Prime Minister reportedly stated: "If this is your idea of Europe, you can keep it." I hope the Taoiseach ensured Ireland fully supported the humanitarian option and argued in favour of fair resettlement. Did he do so?

While the programme is not compulsory, we should not be waiting for a compulsory programme to increase the number of refugees Ireland is accepting. We are in the midst of a huge variety of simultaneous humanitarian crises that have ensured 80 million people are currently displaced and hundreds of thousands are risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean.

It is the current so-called fortress Europe mentality that has made it virtually impossible for refugees to enter the EU by any other way than by paying their life savings to human traffickers and risking their lives on flimsy boats in the Mediterranean.

I note the Council meeting concluded that development aid will be used to stop migrants. Big walls and inflated military budgets is what we are talking about when what we really need is for European countries to improve their aid and trade policies. As Dóchas said:
2 o'clock "The EU should increase investment in inclusive development, decent work and social protection in countries of origin so that migration becomes an option - not a necessity." The Council meeting even finished with a discussion on defence. While EU leaders were uniting to kick the Greek Government and people for opposing austerity, and while the EU is raising inequality and deprivation due to austerity, it was agreed to develop the EU's military capabilities further and strengthen Europe's defence industry.

I find it surprising that no one pointed out the link between the EU's foreign affairs and defence policies and the conflicts and poverty forcing migrants to flee to Europe, or between NATO's role in Libya and the current migrant crisis, or between calling for cuts in social spending in Europe and increased military spending. Is it any wonder the EU is facing multiple crises? Equally, is it any wonder the people in Ireland, Greece and other EU states are asking

if this is an EU where the bankers, the money men and the military and political elites are too big to fail and the people are too small to matter? In stark contrast to the humanity of those on the *LE Eithne*, clearly, concepts such as humanity and democracy are alien in today's EU institutions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Deputies Stephen Donnelly, Ruth Coppinger, Mick Wallace and Clare Daly are sharing time. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: I would like to focus my comments on Greece. It is clear failures on both sides in this negotiation have led to the current situation where negotiations have been suspended. The Greek people are being faced with an impossible "take it or leave it" option on Sunday. Several years ago, in previous negotiations, one Greek MP reflected that the Greek people were given a choice between being killed and dying. It feels that, several years on, that is the choice they are faced with again.

The Greeks have not acted necessarily as well as they could in these negotiations but it is difficult to see what choice they have. The conditions that are being demanded of Greece are so detailed that, were they to start accepting them, in no meaningful way would they be running their own country. If one looks at the conditions, they stink of special interests. Why is the eurozone demanding that Greek restaurants change the rate of VAT they charge on their food or that Greek hotels change the rate of VAT charged on their rooms? That is no one's business but the Greek Government's.

We had to suffer a troika programme here and targets had to be met, but it was up to the Irish Government and the Irish Parliament to meet those targets. While it was humiliating enough to be in a troika programme, at least the troika emphasised repeatedly that it was up to us to decide how we met the various targets. The level of control being demanded by the eurozone of Greece is completely unacceptable. We would never have accepted it. For the Greeks, it is utterly humiliating, so what has happened? They have been backed, step by step, into a corner, and they are now doing the only thing that people backed into a corner can do - they are coming out fighting. They have been given no choice. They have been humiliated, they have been beaten down and now they are being accused of all sorts of things.

Ireland, as a troika programme country, could take a leading role in helping to resolve this crisis. The loans can and should be extended, not with microeconomic conditionality and the sort of nonsense that is being demanded but with institution building conditionality. For example, it seems to be the case that the Greek state has a problem collecting all the revenues due to the state. The Irish Revenue Commissioners is recognised as one of the most sophisticated revenue bodies on Earth so, rather than our Minister for Finance demanding capital controls on Greek banks, why do we not talk to the Greek Government about sending out 100 Revenue officials to undertake institution building? This capacity-building approach is what has been used with highly indebted countries all over the world over recent years. It is a different approach that works and that should be explored. It is an approach the Irish Government could bring to the table as a different way forward.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I want to correct a lot of misinformation and propaganda that is being perpetuated by the Government. There are no queues at ATMs in Greece - absolutely none. What is clear is that there is a concerted propaganda campaign by television, by media and by governments abroad to present a picture of chaos in Greece. I have spoken to people in Greece about the situation and there are no queues, no panic and no chaos.

There is, however, an understandable fear as to what is going to happen because funds have been withdrawn to manipulate a “Yes” vote in the referendum on Sunday and, ultimately, to try to bring about the fall of Syriza and bring in a right-wing government in Greece. That has been colluded in by our Government, more than any other government in Europe, in fact, through the statements it has been making. Last week, we had the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, calling for funding to be withdrawn from Greece to bring it to heel. This morning, on radio, the Tánaiste, Deputy Joan Burton, conjured up pictures from Africa of defaults and terrible chaos, and lectured the Greek Government and Greek people. This is a woman who is attacking the most vulnerable in our society with her social welfare cuts. This morning, the Taoiseach said that in the referendum, a question should be put that, if they do not accept this, they leave Europe. That is an absolutely outrageous intervention from the Taoiseach. Where is the solidarity we were told was part and parcel of this EU project? Instead, there is an ultimatum: it is the troika’s way, it is troika tyranny, or leave.

I do not accept that it is a case of walk away or bend to the will of the troika. What we are seeing laid bare is the real nature of the EU now, with no solidarity whatsoever. We are seeing shocking treatment of workers and unemployed people in Greece who have dared to elect a government on a platform of ending austerity and who have dared to challenge the austerity juggernaut they have endured. Let us be clear. The governments that got into this mess were not Syriza. They were parties, New Democracy and PASOK, which are similar to those in our Government, which ruled Greece in recent decades. They were the people who brought about the financial crisis in Greece, not Syriza. It was banks throughout Europe which lent that money to Greece.

The second point that needs to be made is that the Greek people have already undertaken every austerity programme they have been asked to undertake and it has not worked. It has brought about the highest suicide rate they have ever had, as well as homelessness and record levels of prostitution. That is the situation upon which the Irish Government wants to heap more structural reforms, as it calls them. Those are the parties which were in power and which toed the line to the EU, and the European Central Bank knew exactly what was going on.

With regard to the current situation, I do not know if there is going to be some kind of deal. I hope the referendum that is due to be held on Sunday goes ahead and I hope it is a “No” vote. I hope the bullying and the blackmail that is being heaped on the people of Greece does not work. Employers in Greece, I have been informed from Greek socialists, are pressuring their workers to vote “Yes”, making the same threats that were made to us on Lisbon and Nice, namely, that foreign direct investment would pull out. They are pressuring their workers to go on “Yes” demonstrations and making all sorts of apocalyptic threats about the situation if the “Yes” vote does not win. Obviously, the withdrawal of funds two days before the payment was due was designed to bring about fear of the abyss and fear of the unknown to persuade people to vote “Yes”.

I hope the left, the workers’ movement and the people of Greece reject this blackmail, that they vote “No” and that Syriza uses that mandate to say they will not pay any more of this odious debt. They need to nationalise the banks and run them in the people’s interests, not in the interests of the ECB. They need to implement credit controls to stop the attack from the markets and they need to redevelop their economy. Most importantly, they need to appeal for support from around Europe. Clearly, they have support in Ireland and there will be a demonstration at 6 p.m. today and another on Saturday at noon with the Greek solidarity committee. That is the kind of support that will force the ECB to lift the shackles from the Greek people.

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Deputy Mick Wallace: When the euro project was being formed, the German Minister for Finance at the time, Oskar Lafontaine, spoke of the “vision of a united Europe, to be reached through the gradual convergence of living standards, [and] a deepening of democracy...” In *The Guardian* last week Aditya Chakraborty wrote in the same context: “Instead of raising living standards across Europe, monetary union is pushing them downwards. Rather than deepening democracy, it is undermining it”. The Europe we were promised seems to have disappeared. Aside from the Greek episode, another example is the amount of squabbling in which members engaged about what they were going to do with the 40,000 migrants that nobody wanted. These migrants are in Italy and Greece. Members were, however, able to show more unity on how they were going to shaft Greece.

Earlier today the Taoiseach said the European Union was not trying to push Greece out of the European Union. I agree and do not believe it is. However, it does not want Greece to behave in a certain way. What it really wants is regime change in Greece and its movements in the past while have been seriously geared in that direction. Shortly after Syriza was elected on 22 January, the ECB introduced a ruling that curtailed the amount of money the Greek banks could give to local authorities. The previous government was not subject to that curtailment and I wonder why. Why did the ECB force the closure of the Greek banks last weekend? Would it have had anything to do with the fact that it was trying to influence the referendum result next Sunday? It is blatantly obvious that the manner in which Syriza is trying to govern Greece, the manner in which it has tried to put an end to austerity and the manner in which it has stood up to the neoliberal agenda of the European Union do not suit the European Union and that it would like somebody else to rule Greece. That is what it would really like to see.

When one mentions the word “neoliberalism” here, there is almost a feeling of “don’t say that word again.” People do not like to talk about neoliberalism and there is a good reason for it. Perhaps we might simplify the word more often because it is a simple philosophy which was brought forward by Milton Friedman and enshrined by Mrs. Thatcher and Ronald Reagan initially and many more since. It was about deregulating financial institutions, cutting the size of the state, cutting public services and privatising as much of the public service as was possible. It was about looking after the interests of big business first and whatever was left taking care of the people. This is a philosophy that is causing untold damage and which at this stage is creating a humanitarian crisis for many who are on the wrong side of the line. That is the sad truth of the matter.

Every person standing for election in the next general election should be made to commit one way or the other on whether he or she will be part of a neoliberal grouping after the election. Neoliberalism is hugely damaging and causes untold trouble for too many.

Deputy Clare Daly: It is important for us to indicate in our Parliament, in a way the people outside the gates are trying to do on the streets of the capital, that we stand in solidarity with the people of Greece, but what does this mean? For me, it simply refers to the right of the Greek people to elect a government of its choice and the right of that government to implement the policies it sees fit and on which it was elected. This may seem a textbook primary school answer to what democracy is - a free vote to choose one’s leaders. What we have seen in the European Union in the past while is a confirmation of the warnings issued previously that this was not to be a union to benefit the peoples of Europe, to deliver equality and better living standards for all, but, in fact, one for the elites.

The carry-on of the Irish political establishment and most sections of the media in regard

to the crisis in Greece is nothing short of scandalous. It represents a new low. The Taoiseach has basically said: "Take your medicine and you will get better," as if things are better for all people in this country. A hell of a lot of people would strongly disagree with this. The stance of the Tánaiste, Deputy Joan Burton, was probably worse, seeing in the Greek problems almost a political opportunity to say to the people here, "It could be worse if you start. We know that you are not going to vote for the Labour Party, but if you start to vote for these lefties, you could be worse off." Is this what the Labour Party has come to, that the only thing for which it now stands is the defence of the *status quo* and that it cannot challenge austerity? That is a pitiful journey.

The programme that was foisted on the people of Greece as a result of the troika's so-called remedy has already resulted in and is the official cause of the disaster there. There is an unemployment rate of 60% in Greece; its GDP has dropped by 25%; some families are living off the pension of a grandparent and its suicide rate has increased by 35%. Then Mr. John Bruton says to Syriza that it must accept its responsibility to provide for more austerity. It would be the height of irresponsibility - socially, economically and morally - if Greece was to travel further down this road. What it needs is a debt write-down and economic growth, but neither of these propositions were being delivered on the deal put before the Greek people.

It is important that we record that almost none of the enormous sums of money loaned to Greece has benefited the Greek people. The former chairman of the Bundesbank was honest about this in saying the Greek bailout was about protecting German and French banks in particular from debt write-downs. That is the name of the game.

Over the weekend, the waterboarding of Greece by the European Union and the troika that has been ongoing was stepped up a notch, as the eurogroup and the ECB reacted with horror to the idea that the Greek people might be given a choice and punished this so-called dangerous outbreak of democracy across European borders with a capping on Sunday night of the emergency liquidity assistance for Greece, helping to trigger the run on the banks for which they had obviously hoped. We do not have time to make the points we want to make. The real problem for the European Union is the fact that an alternative government might be bold enough to put forward an alternative in the interest of the people of Europe, rather than the elites, which might be a beacon for people in Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy. I salute the Greeks in their stance and wish them every success in the battle. What our political establishment has done has been disgusting beyond belief.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): We now have time for questions.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Is the Minister of State happy, notwithstanding the sham debate that sometimes takes place between the Government and Fianna Fáil, that Fianna Fáil in its comments today has joined the Government side in the vilification, bullying and misrepresentation of the position of the Greek Government as it resists the outrageous political bullying of and economic terrorism being inflicted on the Greek people? The comments have been made on the basis of a very curious notion of what is democracy. In criticising Alexis Tsipras of Syriza, Deputy Martin said words to the effect that the problem with him is that he kept falling back on election slogans. That is interesting. It is now considered irresponsible and a political crime to hold to one's election principles. Is that not what is at stake? Fianna Fáil does not believe in keeping political promises. The Government does not believe in keeping political promises. The troika is determined----

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Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Could Deputy Boyd Barrett just ask a question?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Yes, I will ask a question. The troika is determined to punish the Greek Government because it wants to keep its political promises. Does the Minister of State not think that is a shameful attack on the basic principles of democracy, that he, Fianna Fáil and the troika are supporting? They are affronted by the idea that a government might keep its election promises and they are equally affronted by the prospect that if there is a possibility the Greek Government might have to make concessions on those election promises they would put them to a referendum. That is something the Government was unwilling to do when it rolled over on its election promises. Does the Minister of State not think he should stand in solidarity with a government that wants to keep its election promises, and if it is going to break them, that it would put that to the people?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): I must allow the Minister of State time to respond to the Deputy's question.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Dara Murphy): I am not sure if a question was asked.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There were several questions and they were very clearly articulated.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Deputy Boyd Barrett started off by asking me to comment on the Fianna Fáil Party. I am sure Deputy Dooley is more than capable of putting the Fianna Fáil position.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There is common ground between Fianna Fáil and the Government.

Deputy Dara Murphy: With respect to the comments of Deputy Martin about the political reality of the negotiation process that is now ongoing, it is true to say that commentary we heard during the time of our fiscal stability referendum from many Independents and the Sinn Féin Party was along similar lines to the populist narrative we now hear from Syriza. The reality is that the previous government in Greece had managed to achieve some growth in the economy after some very difficult years. The future was improving for Greece. There is a responsibility-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The rates of suicide and infant mortality have increased.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Could I answer the question please? The point that was being made is a correct one. There is an obligation on politicians in this House who did form part of the debate during the fiscal stability referendum and who made claims and promises that there was an alternative route to the one we took as a people three or four years ago to recover our economy. The reality is that the position taken by the Syriza-like Sinn Féin Party and many Independents, including our own grouping, would have caused enormous difficulty and suffering for the Irish people if we had gone down that route. Having been in Brussels for most of last week, there is a very strong solidarity and compassion from all governments in Europe for the Greek people and the difficulties they are suffering but there must also be a political reality. That must be borne by the Greek Government, which must do what we did in this country, namely, to engage with the citizens of the European Union who are lending money from their own exchequers and re-

sources in solidarity and support, in order that where necessary the reprofiling measures would be put in place and would deliver on returning the Greek economy to growth.

That is what we did in this country and that is the fundamental difference from the point made by Deputy Donnelly, who was largely correct in his analysis that what Ireland did should be what Greece should seek to achieve. The difference is that the changes we made to our programme were done through negotiation. However, we also made the case to the institutions that the changes would be to the benefit of the economy in terms of creating jobs and growth. That argument has not been made in respect of Greece, largely through lack of engagement, but it is the belief of the institutions and the other members of the Eurogroup that the measures currently proposed by the Greek Government will run contrary to the ambition of achieving growth. It is fair and reasonable that the countries, economies and governments that are lending money should at a minimum believe there is some hope that the measures will in fact be in the best interests of the Greek people, whereas in reality the belief is that they will run contrary to that ambition.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Does the Minister of State accept that the comments of Deputy Boyd Barrett fail to accept the reality that exists in Greece and fails to accept the approach Syriza took in campaigning to seek office? Does he also accept that Syriza's campaigning slogans were about ending austerity, while at the same time campaigning on a platform of remaining within the eurozone and accepting the responsibilities that flow from that? Does he further accept that in recent months, Greece has failed to bring forward any concrete proposals that would find favour with those countries who have lent their taxpayers' money to support Greece in its efforts to rectify its situation?

In addition, does the Minister of State accept that the reason Greece finds itself in its current position is that during the course of the intervening period it continued to reflect on the campaign slogan, as my party leader indicated, of ending austerity while at the same time failing to live up to the responsibilities that are required to remain within the euro? When Deputy Martin said that the Greek Government continues to reflect on its campaign slogans, what he was saying is that it has not sought to put flesh on the bones of its requirement to remain within the euro and to live up to and accept the responsibilities to which it alluded in the course of its campaign. Far from suggesting that any political party should move away from its election commitments when it achieves office, but unfortunately-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): What is the Deputy's question?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The question is whether the Minister of State agrees with the points I made. I gave him an opportunity to address those points as he proceeds. Does the Minister of State accept that all member states must accept the agreements that have been entered into and the various treaties that are in place, and that it is not in the gift of any one group of countries to allow others to act unilaterally and outside the legal framework that underpins the Union?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Could the Minister of State manage to respond to those questions?

Deputy Dara Murphy: The reality is that every new government, when elected, must reflect on the mandate it has achieved but equally, Greece is not in a unilateral situation. The same was true of this country. That said, the reality is that the programme negotiated for us was particularly poorly negotiated by the previous Government. It required lengthening of the

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maturities of the European Financial Stability Facility, EFSF, debt and the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism, EFSM, debt. We had to further negotiate and reduce interest rates. The promissory note deal had to be restructured and there was also the early repayment of the IMF debt, which was particularly expensive at the time.

The broad thrust of what Deputy Dooley and his leader said is correct. The Greek Government has an obligation while within the eurozone and the European Union to operate within the structures that are in place through the treaties that have been agreed through what always is, in European terms, a protracted process that requires negotiation. The process also requires that Governments be willing to settle, where required, and give and take. This is the European way, and it has been very successful during the past 40 or 50 years in allowing the Continent to function in a peaceful manner. It is not without flaws, and there is an obligation on the Greek Government. At 4.30 p.m. there will be a Eurogroup conference call, and it is very much hoped that there is still an opportunity for new proposals to be found. At the beginning of last week, there was significant optimism that a deal would be concluded and there is still the potential for a deal.

We hear from the political classes here, particularly Sinn Féin, the populist line that promises can be made and economic realities do not exist. They frequently refer to “austerity”. In reality, every economy must put in place a plan to fund its public services, such as health, education and social protection, over the longer term. This is what is being suggested, and there is strong solidarity and a desire to support Greece in returning to a point which it had reached last year. It is possible for the Greek people to turn the situation around, as we, Portugal and other EU countries have done, and they will have the support of the institutions and Governments throughout the EU. However, they must come with a set of believable and realistic proposals. They will see very strong goodwill, especially from countries such as Ireland which have been through the process. We can give added value and support to the Greek people and Government. The measures must be, as in Ireland’s case, negotiated, defended and sustainable.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: In the Minister of State’s concluding remarks, could he take cognisance of the potential impact the Irish Government might have in assisting the Greek Government to conclude a deal, based on its experience? Is the Government not in a position to say it has been able to make minor changes to the memorandum of understanding on the basis of changed economic circumstances? Rather than trying to score political points at home by believing that while the initial deal was bad, it was the only one that could have been done at the time, could the Government say there is flexibility among the EU partners as economic circumstances change and as thinking evolves, as it did during the crisis, given that the EU had never experienced it before? Would the Government not feel it is in a position to be helpful to the Greek Government in suggesting that it is an evolving system that is subject to change, depending on circumstances?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: How can the Minister of State say he or the EU are interested in negotiation or flexibility with the Greek Government when he supported the EU’s stance of “take it or leave it”? The EU proposed a plan and told the Greek Government to accept it or else it would pull the plug. It is blackmail, not negotiation.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Both Deputies mentioned flexibility. Flexibility has always been shown. However, flexibility does not mean one set of proposals by Greece must be accepted. The Greek Government is not being flexible. I am very pleased, as always, with the debate, although it would be better if we had more time. I am pleased to be involved. Last week, I ac-

accompanied the Taoiseach to the meeting. I thank the Deputies for their contributions, much of which concerned Greece. The Taoiseach very clearly said the door remains open to dialogue, very much in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility. We want to reach a mutually acceptable agreement which will return Greece to growth, which is our objective, within the eurozone. We anxiously await the outcome of this evening's Eurogroup conference call and any proposals that come from it will require technical assessment by the institutions and governments.

I reject any assertion that our approach is not one of compassion and solidarity with the Greek people. We came through the challenge of a programme and understand better than most that sacrifices have real impacts on people's lives and livelihoods. The Greek people have already gone through significant sacrifice, which should not be in vain. In negotiations to date, there has been a real effort to find a way forward which takes account of the Greek situation. The priorities of the Greek Government must be to stimulate growth and there must be an understanding that certain existing parameters and commitments must be respected if a solution is to be found.

The European Council wrapped up this year's European Semester process, which is one of economic policy co-ordination and is being advanced on the basis of three main pillars, namely, boosting investment, implementing structural reform and pursuing fiscal responsibility. The European Council also generally endorsed the 2015 country-specific recommendations, CSRs. These CSRs were the product of the European Semester process and will be taken forward through the various national budgetary systems through the months ahead, culminating in our budget in October. The European Council also welcomed the agreement reached this month on the regulation underpinning the new European fund for strategic investments, EFSI, and called for its rapid implementation. We very much hope this fund, known more broadly as the Juncker investment package, achieves its objective of continuing to stimulate growth, which we are seeing across the EU.

Following a tasking by the October 2014 Euro summit, President Juncker, with the Presidents of the Euro summit, the ECB, Eurogroup and the European Parliament, presented an important report on completing economic and monetary union. The report was published last Monday, and given that a significant amount of time was allocated to discussing Greece, there was not a very detailed discussion of it. The conclusions note the report and ask for its rapid examination by the European Council. Ireland is analysing the implications of measures outlined in the report which proposes a range of actions over a two-year horizon followed by a phase of more far-reaching reforms. There is much we can support in it, including measures aimed at better addressing the overall fiscal and economic stance of the eurozone. We very much favour a pragmatic and gradual approach to EMU reform which focuses in the first instance on steps that can be taken more effectively to implement existing instruments. Ireland intends to participate fully in debate and reflection on the issue in relevant Council formations over the coming period and I hope there will be a good and broad debate in Ireland on the issue, which is important to our national interest and will present some challenging questions. I thank everyone for participating in the debate.

Sitting suspended at 2.40 p.m. and resumed at 3.40 p.m.

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Topical Issue Debate

Hospital Facilities

Deputy Martin Ferris: I am raising the issue of the respiratory unit for cystic fibrosis patients in Cork University Hospital for several reasons, not least of which is the current crisis. I knew personally several people who passed away as a consequence of that terrible illness, including Billy Burke who passed away a number of years ago, Mary Hand from Dingle and Kieran Treacy who was a great friend of mine. I am concerned that the proposed 20 bed adult respiratory ward in Cork University Hospital has not yet been activated. Mr. Joe Browne, a Kerryman whose 14 year old son Pádraig has cystic fibrosis, started a fantastic campaign, Build4Life, which raised €2.3 million to fund a ten bed ward at the hospital. Construction of the ward commenced in January 2014 and was completed by January this year, but I am told the ward has not been opened owing to staff shortages.

I am sure the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, has visited cystic fibrosis patients. I am a regular visitor to cystic fibrosis patients in the Mater hospital. Given their vulnerability to infection, the importance of a specialised ward cannot be overstated. When will sufficient staff be made available to open the unit? I hope the Minister of State can give this matter her immediate attention.

Deputy Tom Fleming: I am glad that the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, is responding to this issue because I do not think there is anyone better acquainted with the various obstacles and snags that affect health services. She has been very helpful at various stages in addressing the anomalies and issues that arise in dealing with this matter. There is an undue delay in opening the 20 bed adult respiratory ward 5B which includes ten designated single inpatient rooms for cystic fibrosis patients. Cork University Hospital was not in a position financially to provide a larger unit to replace the original ward 3A where for several years doctors and staff had been struggling to accommodate cystic fibrosis patients in 11 beds. Fortunately, Mr. Joe Browne and his fundraising group in County Kerry, Build4Life, stepped in to fund the unit. All members of the group were either adults with cystic fibrosis or parents of children with the illness which gave them first-hand experience of the inadequacies of the facilities at Cork University Hospital. Through its endeavours, the group raised more than €2.3 million as a catalyst to get the project off the ground. Following the initial discussions on the number of beds to be designated for cystic fibrosis patients, the Minister of State intervened to find a satisfactory solution. However, there has been a delay of four or five months since the unit was completed. It needs to be opened at the earliest opportunity because these patients need to be treated in isolation, given that exposure to infection can be fatal for them. It is shameful that the unit continues to lie idle. I am sure the Minister of State is willing to make one more strong endeavour to progress the matter. I also note that her senior colleague, the Minister for Health, has stepped in with national funding.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I welcome the opportunity to join my colleagues in raising this important matter. I have close personal friends who are cystic fibrosis sufferers and their families have lived with this problem for many years. I commend Mr. Joe Browne and the other individuals who started Build4Life for their massive fundraising efforts for many years. They stepped in when Governments, past and present, let cystic fibrosis patients down. It is a shame that the beds and this much-needed unit cannot be opened because of an insufficient number of

staff. What are we saying to Mr. Browne and those who work with him? Are we to tell them that not only must they provide the money to develop and build the unit but they will also have to fundraise to hire nurses privately to staff it? Is that what the Government wants?

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: This is not an occasion on which to be critical.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I am not criticising anyone; I am saying we want the unit to open. That is the bottom line. All we ask is that the unit receive the staff required to open it. That is what cystic fibrosis patients need and deserve. The facility was provided by people like Mr. Browne and those who supported the Build4Life charity. We will be forever in their debt for the work they have done for many years. I hope the Minister of State will have a positive response to our plea.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is extraordinary that we are still debating this issue six months after completion of the building project. Mr. Joe Browne and Build4Life went about organising a fundraising project. They lightened the obligation and burden on the State by developing an infrastructure that was required for cystic fibrosis patients. It is unacceptable that the HSE cannot bring itself to recruit the additional numbers required to staff the respiratory ward and ensure there would be complementary staff in the wards from which they would be taken. Is it beyond the wit of the HSE to do so? It knew for a number of years that this facility was going to be completed and opened at some stage. It is unacceptable, therefore, that it cannot provide a complement of staff to facilitate transition to the new ward. This is not the first time this has happened. The HSE seems to be incapable of anticipating staff requirements in the context of new builds and the completion of infrastructure. We have had the same issues across the country in many areas where emergency departments have been opened, yet the required staffing complements have not been put in place. In addition, there have been theatre and ward closures owing to the HSE's inability to manage staff. In this situation, members of the public came together in a fundraising exercise to negate the State's obligation to provide a service. All they asked for was a staffing complement, yet they now find six months after construction was completed that the requisite staff are not available. This fine facility has potential life-saving implications for cystic fibrosis patients. We all know the history of why Mr. Joe Browne and others became involved. It stemmed from the tragic outcomes for some people, including as a result of cross infections, because of which some died. We now find six months on that four Deputies have had to raise the matter. It is time for the HSE to get its act together and address the staffing issue immediately.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I thank the Deputies for raising this issue. Deputy Tom Fleming, in particular, has always had an interest in it and this is not the only forum in which we have discussed it.

Cystic fibrosis is the most common life-threatening inherited disease in Ireland. I am acutely aware of the challenges facing people with cystic fibrosis and their families in managing their condition. I fully acknowledge the need for dedicated accommodation for appropriate isolation and better infection control. Where inpatient treatment is required for people with cystic fibrosis, it should be in single *en suite* rooms, as these patients need to avoid possible sources of infection. At the same time, however, we must aim to minimise hospital admissions and instead treat patients on a day-care basis as close to home as possible.

There has been significant investment in treatment and services in the past few years. It includes the €29 million unit at St. Vincent's University Hospital, a new outpatient unit at Beau-

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mont hospital, a paediatric outpatient unit in Galway and a paediatric day unit in County Mayo. In addition, we have developed newborn screening services and provide the cystic fibrosis drug ivacaftor, Kalydeco.

The Government welcomes the completion of the new 20 bed cystic fibrosis and respiratory unit at Cork University Hospital. This unit, with single bedrooms and state-of-the-art infection controls, will be a great boost for cystic fibrosis patients and their families in the region. I commend Build4Life and Mr. Joe Browne for raising €2.3 million for the project. It is a tremendous achievement and I am pleased that the Department of Health was able to support it through the provision of national lottery funding of €300,000.

I also welcome the start of construction of new paediatric cystic fibrosis facilities at Cork University Hospital. I understand the current unit moved temporarily in June to allow work to begin. I am, of course, aware of concerns about delays in opening the new inpatient unit at the hospital. I am advised that while it has been completed and fitted out, there are difficulties in staffing the unit. Recruitment of nurses is an issue not just for Cork University Hospital but also nationally and internationally. I have been assured that Cork University Hospital is actively recruiting nursing staff and will open the unit as soon as it can be safely and effectively staffed. The National Recruitment Service has been asked to prioritise the issue. Unfortunately, it is not possible simply to move staff from other areas of the hospital. Cystic fibrosis units have a higher nursing requirement and require dedicated staff. Consequently, to open the new unit in Cork University Hospital would require staff reductions in other areas and this would necessitate bed closures. I am sure none of the Deputies would like this to happen, as it would affect patient flow and access and would have a serious impact on the emergency department.

I fully recognise the disappointment of Build4Life, as this is a personal and heartfelt project for it. The Government fully acknowledges the work it has put in and its frustration at the delay in opening the unit. Nobody wants the opening of this upgraded service to be delayed. However, the House must accept that patient safety cannot be compromised and, therefore, the unit cannot open until it is safe to do so. I have asked the CEO of the South/South-West Hospital Group to keep me informed of progress in the opening of the unit and have urged that the issue be resolved as a priority.

As Deputy Tom Fleming and others will know, I have taken a personal interest in this issue. When there was an impasse, we managed with cool heads and dedication to ensure the project would proceed. We managed to have the ward reconfigured. Its state-of-the-art status is incredible. I have been told that there are approximately 40 nursing vacancies in Cork University Hospital. If any nurse was to walk in the door of the hospital today, he or she would be offered a contract and a job. It is not an issue of financial resources but of an inability to recruit. The difficult is not ours alone; it is also an issue across a range of areas. I am hopeful, however, that the unit will be opened as soon as possible. It is a priority not just for me but also for those charged with recruiting nurses to ensure it this will happen.

Deputy Tom Fleming: There is no doubting the Minister of State's commitment to the project from the very start, but the HSE's *ad hoc* arrangements are unfortunate. It appears that a staff member within the hospital was seconded to oversee the issue of staffing levels. It is mindboggling that, at this late stage, they have fallen down disastrously in failing to put the necessary team together. I understand there have been some statements on the multi-disciplinary aspect, including the specialist consultant side. At this stage, however, it is not a reasonable or justifiable answer to come up with. Efforts should be redoubled immediately. Perhaps the

Minister of State might revert to hospital management to see if we can come to a resolution as quickly as possible.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister of State for her response. I take what she said as fact - that if a nurse was to walk into the hospital tomorrow morning, he or she would be given a job. However, she is saying nurses are not taking up the jobs available. Has she examined why our young nurses are going abroad and do not want to take up offers of employment here? We cherish and adore our young people and want them to stay in Ireland, if at all possible. If young, qualified nurses choose to go abroad rather than work in Ireland, is it because of the packages being offered? The Minister of State says money is not the issue; why, therefore, can we not recruit nurses?

I understand what the Minister of State is saying and accept her *bona fides*, but we have the same issue in places such as Kenmare Hospital where the upstairs section is not fully open. In Dingle Hospital the HSE located offices where there should be beds to cater for patients. It is simply not good enough.

The cystic fibrosis unit in Cork University Hospital did not suddenly fall out of the sky. Management and everybody else knew that it would have to be staffed and managed. I cannot get my head around the fact that we are in this situation so long after the building was completed.

I compliment the manager of Cork University Hospital and the staff working there, as well as the staff in Kerry General Hospital. We really appreciate the work they do in tough conditions, be they surgical, nursing, catering or cleaning staff. We thank them for their efforts in dealing with sick people every day.

Deputy Martin Ferris: The HSE has been aware of this issue since 2011 and Joe Browne himself said there was no other project on the ground. He said that, since 2011, they knew they had to plan for staffing requirements and staffing has been on the agenda of the project group's monthly meetings since January 2012. How can it be that the HSE was aware of it, the staffing project was aware of it and it was on the agenda since 2012 but they still have not started? It is either total incompetence or total neglect. Mr. Browne also says he may as well have had crayons and colouring books and that no staff numbers were even given. This is the man who was the driving force behind this project to save the State €2.3 million yet, from 2011 to 1 July 2015, the staff have not been available. The HSE has totally lost focus on what this is all about.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I reiterate everything previous Deputies have said. Catherine Shanahan's article in the *Irish Examiner*, her correspondence with Joe Browne and Build4Life and the correspondence of Mr. Browne, Catherine Shanahan and the HSE all go to show that the HSE is footdragging at the very least, and that is being polite. At worst it is incompetent. Since 2012 it knew this building would be completed and it knew the staff complements it would require. There were difficulties in bed allocations, which we accept, though one could argue the HSE even handled that badly. Since the resolution of the designation of the beds and the completion of the project in January 2015 the HSE, six months on, has still not had the wit or the ability to staff the unit. I accept that the Minister is trying to explain it from the HSE's point of view but the HSE is ultimately culpable here and is failing people who need the service.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: This Government has been in position for only four years but, for

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the first time ever in this country, we are now developing workforce planning to look at what our staff needs will be in the future and what skill-mix we will need. This should have been done a number of years ago because one cannot plan for the future without knowing exactly what one's requirements will be. I was centrally involved in the negotiations on the unit and it would have been impractical and unreasonable to say in 2012 that we were going to need a certain complement of staff for the unit but that it should be held in abeyance until the unit was opened. That would not have been a very good use of resources.

As Deputy Healy-Rae rightly pointed out, we have a difficulty in recruitment, not just in CUH but across a range of areas, and we are now targeting the very people about whom Deputy Healy-Rae spoke, namely, our young graduates who are ready to go. They will need a degree of supervision, as all new entrants to any profession do, but we are targeting the two groups coming out this year for recruitment. We sometimes forget, however, what it is like to be young. Young people like to travel and we cannot stop them doing that. They gain experience and worthwhile accreditation in other countries. They learn how to do things differently but they do come home and we are targeting that group. Not all of them will want to travel back but we are now targeting those who wish to work for us with a recruitment drive. We are now going to England to target our nurses and to try to bring them back home to work for us.

Deputies must remember that the economy did collapse in a crash. The cystic fibrosis unit we are now discussing should have been built when this country was experiencing a boom, something Deputy Fleming and I have discussed many times. It was not built then but it is there now with the help of Build4Life and we are determined that it will open. We are doing our very best to recruit staff and, on foot of this important debate, we hope that people will hear what we are saying. If they are available and wish to have a job as nurses, male or female, in our service we would love them to work for us. This is not something I dismiss. I have taken an active interest in developments and will continue to do so.

Registration of Nurses

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: As the Minister knows, there is an issue with recruitment and registration of nurses and this has to be changed quickly. The process should take just 90 days but it can, in some cases, now take up to a year. It is affecting all sectors of the health system, be it public or private, the voluntary sector, nursing homes or acute hospitals. As the Minister said earlier, there are vacancies waiting to be filled, particularly in the nursing home sector and in our acute hospitals. This is affecting the patients, their families and the delivery of services. I contend that it should not take beyond 90 days to complete the process of registering a nurse with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.

Senator Colm Burke and I have raised this in the Seanad and the Joint Committee on Health and Children, respectively, and we are bringing the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, NMBI, into the committee for the recess because this is a huge issue, especially in the nursing home sector. It is also having an impact on other acute services. I raised the issue with the HSE at the quarterly meeting of the committee, of which I am Chair, and it seems like little or no progress has been made since then. At the same time, I brought up the impact on the HSE of recruiting nurses from nursing homes and asked for interaction with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland to reduce the inordinate delays in registration. In response to my question the HSE said the main difficulty with expediting timely applications, as reported by the NMBI,

arose partly from a failure by the applicant and third parties to furnish the necessary documentation required to assess eligibility for registration and partly from the overall volume.

It is all too easy to blame the applicant but I do not believe for one moment that every applicant can take such time as to create the delays we are now witnessing. I have met people from private hospitals, nursing homes and nursing organisations and I cannot comprehend it. Is it a matter of administration? Does the NMBI have the proper resources to do the job? If it does not, let us make sure it does because it is supposed to facilitate health services, not impede them. It is in nobody's interest for the current situation to continue as delays in the registration of nurses are having a domino effect. As we discussed with the Minister, in Cork University Hospital there are jobs waiting to be filled and I am told they need to be filled quickly because of capacity and vacancies and the effect on the delivery of services. The current situation means nursing homes and hospitals will not be able to provide services; therefore it is imperative the NMBI progresses registrations as speedily as possible. Administrative procedures should be put in place so that capacity in our health care system is not reduced. We need active engagement to deliver a solution that will solve the problem.

The chief executive of the NMBI, Dr. Maura Pidgeon, has agreed to come before our committee to discuss the issue and I hope the Minister of State's reply will give us some further hope that we can expedite the resolution of an issue which is becoming problematic. I hate using the word "crisis" but it is becoming a real crisis when hospitals cannot get nurses because of a situation which we in this House have the power to address.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: I will be brief. It is fortunate this Topical Issue comes on the foot of the previous one because they are significantly linked. I will not read out the written reply because Deputy Buttimer has addressed most of the points in it, but there are answers in it which may be of interest. Deputy Buttimer knows the difficulty is that nurses who train outside of the country have to register here. I think everyone agrees this should be the case. Their qualifications must be scrutinised to ensure public safety. We are all agreed on that but there are difficulties.

The reply notes that each and every application will be assessed within a maximum of 90 days. Deputy Buttimer has pointed out that is not the case so I am not going to reiterate that fact. What is in the reply that might be of interest to Deputy Buttimer, however, is that there are two remaining HSE adaptation courses available in June and August of this year. These courses are for people who have registered and need to complete an adaptation course. They are six to 12 weeks in duration and facilitate the integration of nurses from elsewhere to nursing in an Irish context. It may be of interest to the Deputy to learn that since the nationally co-ordinated pilot adaptation programme commenced in June 2014, which is just one year ago, 151 candidates have completed the programme, 58 candidates are currently undergoing assessment and 126 candidates are due for assessment up to the final programme in August 2015.

Outside of the current provision for placements in 2015, there are 293 requests for placements by employers and many of them, as the Deputy rightly states, are in the nursing home sector and our own hospital. These numbers are not reflective of a national total as some hospital sites have also run independent adaptation programmes. As the Deputy can see, there are many people who wish to work in this country but simply have not completed the required adaptation course. I advise Deputy Buttimer that the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland has been allocated additional resources to address the issue and I note that having the chairman or the CEO come before the committee is a wise move by it.

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Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I thank the Minister of State for her reply. I am glad she did not read out the written reply; she was quite right not to. I commend her on her engagement with this issue and the previous one. I will stray for one second. The Minister of State, to be fair, intervened in the cystic fibrosis issue in Cork University Hospital and I commend her on that intervention. She did not have to intervene but she did and she got people together, and for that I praise her. I hope she does the same with this matter.

In her reply, the Minister of State speaks common sense. Notwithstanding issues in terms of completion of documentation, which I accept exist, it is becoming too commonplace for this to be trotted out as an excuse. I have met people from the private hospital, acute hospital and nursing home sectors. I have met nurses themselves. Today I met a ward sister in Cork University Hospital who told me of the issue she faced. People are losing out on promotions because of the registration process. We need to resolve this issue and much of it is in our own hands. We can easily solve some of the challenges in the health care sector and I contend this is one of them.

This is about ensuring people are compliant and registered properly. While I accept that, I have a concern about the adaptation courses, particularly in the nursing home sector. I hope we can expedite the application process and that it can be done in a more timely manner. I am acutely aware of the issues and the hurdles to be overcome but if we want to see groundhog day, we need only sit back and do nothing, which is why the committee is bringing in the chief executive. It is not to have an adversarial engagement but rather a meaningful one through which we can find a resolution. This is otherwise a good news story in the health system - we are recruiting people - but as a result of some type of bureaucracy and red tape, we cannot recruit them and get them into jobs. That is surely what we must be about. I hope we can bring a resolution to this issue. I thank the Minister of State for her common-sense reply and praise her for her involvement in the process.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: When agencies work for the common good, although I think we have lost that concept of the common good, and we have a great need on one side and people prepared to work on the other but there are barriers in their way, there must be a flexible approach in order that we can do things in a more timely and speedy manner while still maintaining public safety. To build up resources to meet demand, we must create that type of flexibility within our systems.

Vaccination Programme

Deputy David Stanton: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this Topical Issue matter, and I thank the Minister of State for being present. Millions of doses of the vaccine Pandemrix were administered across Europe in 2009 and 2010 as a result of the response to the global H1N1 swine flu pandemic at the time. Studies have since demonstrated that this vaccine causes narcolepsy at a rate of between 1:16,000 and 1:50,000 doses. The disorder is also known as hypnolepsy. It is a chronic neurological disorder involving the loss of the brain's ability to regulate sleep and wake cycles normally. Another common symptom of narcolepsy is cataplexy which is a sudden and transient episode of muscle weakness accompanied by full conscious awareness typically, though not necessarily, triggered by laughing or crying and emotions such as terror.

This is a serious, lifelong and incurable neurological condition. The resultant sleep deprivation triggers the desire for irresistible sleep during the day. The Minister of State might confirm

the figure but I understand approximately 70 people are believed to have been affected by the vaccine in Ireland. SOUND, a support group for sufferers of unique narcolepsy disorder, holds regular meetings. One of its concerns is the need for increased co-ordination between Government and State bodies when dealing with sufferers of the condition.

The reason I raise this matter is to ask the Minister of State to do some work on this area. A particular concern is the difficulty in accessing health and education supports. SOUND has suggested the establishment of a working group comprising representatives of relevant Departments, SOUND itself and possibly others who have experience of the condition. The working group would examine how supports and services could best be delivered to victims from early age into adulthood. The issue seems to be that the people who suffer from this disorder have to fight for everything. An expertise or understanding among many as to what goes on is required. It is a serious condition and one which has a huge impact on people's lives, many of whom are young. Will the Minister of State examine the possibility of drawing together the agencies? Supports are available in the HSE and these people are doing a lot of good work. There are four co-ordinators. However, as I understand it, they have no authority outside of the health system although such is required.

There is also a need for support for people over 18 years of age. People may have left secondary school and are going on to third level education. They also need continuous support. Getting the points to access third level is an issue as well. It is very difficult for people with this condition, who may have been grade A students prior to getting it, to study because they are chronically tired and always falling asleep. They need extra supports when studying and doing exams. Supports for travel are also required. The Minister of State mentioned young people wanting to travel.

There is also the issue of medication. Certain drugs, called orphan drugs, are available but not necessarily in pharmacies. Work needs to be done in this area too. I am interested to hear what the Minister of State has to say on this matter. I am seeking that awareness would be raised as well as seeking more support and, most important of all, co-ordination of the agencies under the aegis of Departments in order that these people can live the best lives possible.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: I thank Deputy Stanton for raising this issue as it provides me with an opportunity to update the House on the matter. It is a serious issue. I acknowledge the impact on those diagnosed with narcolepsy who had previously received a pandemic influenza vaccine as well as the impact on their families. As Deputies are aware, immunisation is a simple and effective way of protecting children against certain diseases. It has saved more lives than any other public health intervention, apart from providing clean water. In spite of the obvious benefits that come from vaccination I acknowledge that there can be serious adverse outcomes for a small number of people arising out of vaccination.

More than 1 million doses of pandemic influenza vaccine were administered in Ireland during the pandemic. The Health Products Regulatory Authority is the statutory authority for licensing and safety of all medicines. As of 25 May the HPRA had received 74 reports confirming a diagnosis of narcolepsy in people who had previously received pandemic influenza vaccination. The priority of the Minister for Health and the HSE is that the individuals and families affected receive appropriate health care and supports. Therefore, the Department engaged with the HSE and the Department of Education and Skills along the lines suggested by the Deputy to ensure the provision of a range of services and supports on an *ex gratia* basis. The *ex gratia* health supports provided include clinical care pathways to ensure access to rapid

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diagnostic treatment and ongoing clinical review; multidisciplinary assessment led by clinical experts which allows for the appropriate individualised health and educational supports to be put in place; counselling services for the individuals and their families; discretionary medical cards to allow unlimited access to general practitioner care and any prescribed medication; and *ex gratia* reimbursement of vouched expenses incurred in the process of diagnosis and treatment, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and dental assessments.

The HSE's advocacy unit liaises with service and support providers and other Departments to facilitate access to required services. Staff from the unit are in regular contact with individuals affected and regularly meet representatives of Sufferers Of Unique Narcolepsy Disorder, SOUND.

Regional co-ordinators have been appointed to assist individuals by providing advice, information and access to local services. It is acknowledged that treatment and individual medical needs may have to be reassessed over time. Consequently, the services and supports provided are reassessed on an ongoing basis to take account of any changes in the individuals' conditions and circumstances. As Deputies may be aware, legal action has been initiated by 28 families alleging personal injury in which they are claiming the development of narcolepsy resulted from the administration of the pandemic vaccination. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on any of these cases. I acknowledge the impact on the lives of the people affected by narcolepsy and on their families and reiterate my commitment to the ongoing provision of appropriate services and support.

Deputy David Stanton: I thank the Minister of State for her response and for acknowledging the fact that this is a terrible condition brought on by the vaccine. I acknowledge the fact that vaccines are important and save many lives. This is an unintended side-effect of what happened.

A total of 74 people have been affected in Ireland. I understand a centre of excellence was supposed to be established in Temple Street. Can the Minister of State advise on the position and what progress, if any, has been made?

This was brought to my attention initially by parents of a student who has been affected and impacted by this particular condition. The student's life chances have been severely impacted in a negative way because of it. The student may not be able to attend university now because of the difficulty in studying and getting the points. Perhaps the Minister of State might have a discussion with her colleague in the Department of Education and Skills to review the matter and consider whether the students who are suffering from this condition through no fault of their own may be given some provision whereby they could attend university. Going to university was the dream of the student in question. This student wanted to attend university but is now concerned that this might not happen only because this condition was brought about by the vaccine administered at the time of the pandemic in the country.

It is a serious condition with a serious impact on people. Will the Minister of State comment on the need for more co-ordination - this is the main thrust of what I am raising - across Departments and agencies with respect to this condition as well as more information and access to international expertise? The number affected is small but the impact on these people, as the Minister of State has acknowledged, has been absolutely vast. Lives have been changed radically. Whole families have been impacted. Some people cannot be left on their own because of the condition. There is also the fear and concern of getting cataplexy and other conditions that

go with this. I look forward to the final response of the Minister of State.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: This condition has a wide-ranging impact in terms of the ability to drive, travel alone and live independently. It has a major impact which is unimaginable. Higher education access and supports are available. Students with narcolepsy can access the disability access route to education, a college and university scheme which allows enhanced access to third level education for pupils with disabilities. Further details are available and I will make these available to the Deputy. Examples of some of the supports at third level include priority registration. Students with disabilities can be allowed to register earlier than general registration in each academic year. They can access recordings of lectures on audiotapes and transcriptions of recorded audiotapes of lectures. A range of supports is available.

Deputy Stanton's point is well taken in terms of the co-ordination because this is a lifespan issue. Not alone is it a lifespan issue but it is across all the areas of society that we expect to access and live through.

I will set out the arrangements for reimbursement on an *ex gratia* basis, including those for vouched expenses incurred, because they are important. General practitioner visits are covered by the medical card. Consultant visits, hospital charges, prescription costs, opticians visits, dental costs, some costs associated with occupational therapy assessment and complementary therapies - in some instances these can be of help - travel costs to and from hospital and finally consultant appointments are included. Subsistence expenses have to be accompanied by receipts as do accommodation costs. A range of supports are in place to support people but only because it is such an overwhelming condition when it occurs unexpectedly, as it has in this instance. I will furnish the Deputy with the background briefing note. It may be of interest for those affected.

Message from Select Committee

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly): The Select Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has completed its consideration of the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Bill 2015 and has made no amendments thereto.

Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014: Instruction to Committee (resumed)

The following motion was moved by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, on Wednesday, 1 July 2015:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 177, Standing Order 131 is modified to permit an instruction to the Committee to which the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 may be recommitted in respect of certain amendments, for which it has power to make provision in the Bill in relation to:

(a) amendments to the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2014 to provide for a number of matters including:

(i) requirements for the owners of dwellings supplied with services by Irish Water;

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(ii) provision for an approved housing body, responsible for the payment of water charges in respect of a tenant, to claim the water conservation grant on their behalf;

(iii) registration by approved housing bodies of certain dwellings in receipt of services from Irish Water;

(iv) the payment of water charges upon the sale of a dwelling; and

(v) the establishment of a database of water services to dwellings;

(b) provision for a number of changes to the Waste Management Act 1996 to strengthen the regulatory regime for household waste collection, introducing new provisions for the waste permitting process, and imposing new obligations on waste collectors and other facilities accepting household waste including separate collection and the mandatory application of pay by weight;

(c) amendments to motor tax legislation; to provide in secondary legislation, for the purpose of determining eligibility to a particular rate of motor tax or an exemption from motor tax, the physical characteristics required of a vehicle, the uses to which a vehicle may be put and the supporting documentation that may be required; and to amend the definition of a motor caravan to allow the physical characteristics required for eligibility to the motor caravan rate of tax to be determined by secondary legislation; and

(d) provision for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to make the required payment from the Local Government Fund to the Exchequer in 2015, as envisaged in the 2015 Revised Estimates Volume;

and to change the long title of the Bill to take account of these provisions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe O'Reilly): Nine minutes are left in this slot. I understand Deputy Paul Murphy is sharing time with Deputy Catherine Murphy and Deputy Mick Wallace.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Yes. The Government approach to this Bill, which should have been a new water services Bill but instead has been introduced in the form of amendments to entirely unrelated and irrelevant legislation, makes a joke of basic procedures of parliamentary democracy. It makes a joke of the rules of this House in respect of how things are meant to be debated on Committee Stage and then on Report Stage. It makes a joke of basic democratic rules.

Should we be surprised that this has been the Government's approach? No, because we can point to its previous approach on this issue, which has been to guillotine the debate on the Bill first time out and refuse on six different occasions to give us the basic figures and information we need about how many people have paid the water charges. Moreover, it is in line with the disgusting abuse of the media to create the impression that some major scaremongering legislation was coming down the line which would enable Irish Water to take water charges directly off people. That was never the case and it has proved not to be the case now either. It is also in line with the approach of the Government's friends in the European Commission, European Central Bank and the German Government and the approach of its party allies across Europe. It is a line with what is happening in Greece. It is a pale echo of what is happening in Greece, which is an attempted regime change by the 1% in Europe. This is happening in contradiction to the results of elections recently held and in fear of a referendum due to happen on Sunday.

Why are these events happening? They are happening because the Government is scared. It is scared of people, democracy, these ideas and of a discussion on these ideas taking place. It is believed that if people see what is contained in this legislation, on foot of proper debate, it will expose the scare-mongering for what it is and give people confidence.

The legislation being amended had nothing to do with water charges. It relates to smoky fuel, some typing errors and a park in Kerry. In the debate on Committee Stage, the relevant Minister simply said there were a few small technical changes to be made. Therefore, it is an absolute abuse of the democratic process to make these amendments.

The Minister, Deputy Kelly, mentioned today on this motion the idea of deposits being taken from tenants if they do not pay their water charges. Let us be 100% clear: that is more bluster. It is not proposed in the legislation in front of us today in the form of amendments. It was threatened time and again but the provision does not exist. It is not in the legislation for a definite reason, and tenants should not be scared. Admittedly, there is an obligation on their landlord to hand over their names. If the legislation is passed — it should not be if there is anything right in this Parliament - it will be an implied part of the tenancy agreements in the future but there is no incentive for the landlord to enforce it. Therefore, people should stick to the boycott and should not be scared about any of the Minister's scare-mongering tactics or completely undemocratic procedures.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: This is the third Bill related to water services that has been through a very flawed process. The first, introduced in February 2013, was introduced on the same day as the promissory note deal, if one wants to call it a deal. It was so heavily guillotined that only one amendment was debated. With regard to the second Bill, introduced in December of that year, only three hours were allowed for Second, Committee and Report Stages. The debate was restricted to three hours. It was such an abuse of the process that the entire Opposition walked out. Here we are again taking more liberties with the process.

Up to now, the Bill was the miscellaneous provisions legislation. Among the items it dealt with were a park in Kerry, dog-breeding penalties and expanded monitoring by the EPA of air quality. Deputy Ó Cuív read into the record some of what was said to me at the committee. I will focus on one area. Minister of State Deputy Ann Phelan said the Bill is quite technical and that there are some typographical issues. She said it was really a question of dotting the i's and crossing the t's. She said the scope of the Bill is such that it does not allow for it to be changed in any huge way. She also said the Bill was very technical and stressed there would be plenty of time to consider the amendments. The amendments were available to us only at the deadline. Therefore, the concept of having plenty of time can be called into question.

This Dáil was misled, either by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government or the Minister of State because there is a paradox. Both sides cannot be right when two different things are being said. We are being told little is being changed, yet a large number of amendments on waste collection merit consideration in their own right. The Bill introduces mandatory registration for Irish Water for everyone. It establishes a lien on people's property so it cannot be sold without the water charges being paid. It establishes that approved housing bodies are to be regarded as occupiers of the dwellings for the purpose of the water charges. It establishes a new database of information on water services supplied to each dwelling in the State. It is not clear whether PPS numbers or other unique identifiers are being talked about. The Bill is so vague that we do not even know what the Minister is talking about.

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This House has become an inconvenience for the Government. What is occurring is an absolute show of contempt for this Parliament and the parliamentary process. I refer to the manner in which what is being done is being done. If the Minister is showing contempt for the Opposition, he is showing contempt for the people. Given that the House has been so misled on this, and that the Government is proceeding in such a flawed way, one must really question whether the Government has the authority to hold office. It just regards this House as an inconvenience. It is believed that the legislation can be got through quicker if it is done in a way that avoids the kinds of processes that are absolutely critical in a parliamentary democracy.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Government has made it very clear that the neoliberal imperative to maximise economic competitiveness guides all its policies, no matter what the cost to the people. Even any discussion of the minimum wage must be subordinate to meeting the needs of international market ideology, rather than the needs of the low paid in Ireland, as was established here last week.

This morning, the Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, stated his Department, in accordance with the polluter-pays principle, wants household waste to be charged for by the kilogram. He said this is part of a drive towards environmental protection and customer service. It is difficult to listen to the Minister utter the words “environmental protection” while keeping a straight face. This is the Minister whose Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill had no reference to the word “pollution”, let alone the polluter-pays principle. That legislation makes no reference to the principle of climate justice or to any national carbon emission reduction targets whatsoever. Therefore, we can take it for granted that when the Minister mentions the phrase “polluter pays”, he means that the majority, not the elite few, will pay. I would love to know what the Department is doing to ensure the biggest polluters in the country are being subjected to the polluter-pays principle.

The truth is that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government has continuously and consistently demonstrated that it could not care less about the environment, especially when caring might impose a short-term cost on the Exchequer, infringe on the profits of corporations or damage so-called Irish competitiveness.

What steps are being taken to challenge the packaging companies? What about the introduction of a universal beer bottle that could be recycled and reused by any brewery in the country? Why do we not ban the excessive use of plastics and cardboard in consumer packaging? We are paying to send rubbish to Norway to be burned. Why do we not go after those who produce excessive amounts of rubbish at source rather than calling the citizen the polluter and individualising the waste problem? Doing so would be in violation of the neoliberal doctrine of the Labour Party and Fine Gael. It would interfere with the long-standing and ongoing transfer of wealth from the poor to the wealthy that this Government is so intent on seeing to the bitter end. The really big businesses in Ireland barely have to pay any tax, let alone face any kind of social or environmental responsibility measures. The polluter-pays principle would have dictated that those who created the toxic debt during the boom would have taken responsibility for it rather than passing private losses on to the public.

I have asked a number of questions in the House on the water issue and no one ever answered them. Irish Water has taken over the supply of water and waste treatment. No one has ever told me who will look after pollution. Who will look after storm water? Who is looking after surface water in Dublin city? There is a combined pipe in the city and Irish Water is going to take control of it. Will it charge the State sector for the use of it? The State sector is

still responsible for storm water and surface water. Alternatively, will the State build a new, independent line that it will own? Given many of the workers who currently deal with water in the local authorities will be moved to Irish Water and that some will not be working in the sector anymore, all the people who once worked for the local authorities on storm water and pollution will not be in place. Who will do the work? What will happen is that we will privatise the system. Can the Minister of State, Deputy Paudie Coffey, check for me who will install the new surface water pipework in Dublin city? It will not be done for less than €2 billion. I would love to know who will pay for it. Irish Water will not be paying for it because it has washed its hands of it. Pollution and storm water are unpredictable. Therefore, Irish Water does not want responsibility for them.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 38.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Creighton, Lucinda.</i>	<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Terence.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Gilmore, Eamon.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>

<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>Lynch, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
<i>Neville, Dan.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Derek.</i>	
<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</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>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>	
<i>Spring, Arthur.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	

<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	
<i>White, Alex.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg; Níl, Deputies Paul Murphy and Mick Wallace.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: On a point of order, under Standing Order 134(1) I wish to move a motion to recommit the Bill in its entirety to Committee Stage. There was a procedural error on Committee Stage because we were not informed at the beginning of Committee Stage that there would be a substantial change to the Bill. It was only at the tail end of Committee Stage that we were informed. I believe there was a procedural flaw and for that reason to proceed would be on fairly shaky ground. Therefore, I seek a recommittal of the Bill to Committee Stage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am informed that this can be done only on Report Stage. We must first have agreement on taking Report Stage. The Deputy may move the motion after that.

Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014: Order for Report Stage

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I move: "That Report Stage be taken now."

Question put: The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 37. TáNílBannon, James.

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 37.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>

<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Terence.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>
<i>Gilmore, Eamon.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>	
<i>Lynch, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Maloney, Eamonn.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</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'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>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>	
<i>Spring, Arthur.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	
<i>White, Alex.</i>	

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

Question declared carried.

Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014: Report Stage

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I move:

That in accordance with Standing Order 134(1), the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014 be recommitted in its entirety.

On Committee Stage, we were told as a by-the-way at the end of Committee Stage rather than at the beginning that there would be changes to the Bill. We were not told there would be substantial changes. The process is technically very flawed and for that reason I am seeking to have the Bill recommitted to Committee Stage.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach committed to do that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Gov-

ernment (Deputy Paudie Coffey): It is not agreed.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I ask the Minister of State why it is not agreed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I just asked the Minister of State.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Can the Minister of State give an explanation for not agreeing to that?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I put it to the House. Is it agreed?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle-----

Deputy Paudie Coffey: It is not agreed.

Deputies: It is agreed.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: This morning I read into the record what was said on Committee Stage. It was clearly indicated on Committee Stage that all that was involved were technicalities. The least the House is owed is a detailed explanation of why, in view of the misleading information given on Committee Stage, the Bill is not being recommitted to Committee Stage. The Minister of State owes it to the House to explain that in detail.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We deserve an answer to this. In the response to the complaints made about the manner in which the Minister at the last minute put in these very substantial amendments the line the Government gave out was that all this was well flagged. That was the line repeated *ad nauseam* at the weekend by the media, that all these changes were well flagged. Can the Minister of State explain why, if they were “well flagged”, as some Ministers suggested since last year, they were not in the initial Bill or introduced on Committee Stage? If the Minister of State had them already why did he hold off with these substantial amendments and bring them in literally at the deadline of 11 a.m. on the morning after which no further amendments can be put in by the Opposition? Why would he do that-----

Deputy Finian McGrath: It was a political stunt.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: -----unless he was attempting to deliberately bypass the Second and Committee Stage debates where there would be proper scrutiny, oversight and debate on those issues? There can be no other explanation. If the Minister of State believes in the democratic process and a proper legislative procedure, this Bill has to go back to Committee Stage when we can properly scrutinise these amendments.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: It is clear from the Minister of State’s reaction that he wanted to brush off Deputy Catherine Murphy’s most reasonable request that, given the antics and manoeuvres of Government, the content of the amendments and the length of some of them, at the very least we should, and the public might, expect a full and thorough Committee Stage consideration of each amendment. The Minister of State is quite happy to brush off Deputy Murphy and to say he was not accepting that proposal. I do not think he had the first clue why he was saying that. I saw him furiously looking for guidance from his officials. It is not good enough for the Minister of State and his mob in government-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy James Reilly: That is rich coming from Sinn Féin.

Deputy Ray Butler: Yesterday it was arseholes, today it is mobs.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: Says the expert on mobs.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: If that is not parliamentary language, I put it to the Minister of State that this is not correct parliamentary procedure. What is going on here is not worthy of any assembly that would have even the pretence of going through proper democratic processes and oversight.

Deputy James Bannon: The armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is right Deputy Bannon.

Deputy Brian Stanley: It is time Deputy Bannon woke up.

A Deputy: A few votes, Deputy Bannon.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Deputy Catherine Murphy and the Opposition are quite right to insist that this matter go to Committee Stage. Can we have a full and detailed explanation from the Minister of State of why he and the Government have proceeded in this manner and why he feels we are not due, and the citizens and taxpayers in this jurisdiction cannot expect, a proper Committee Stage debate on this issue, because his mob does not like what needs to be said?

A Deputy: Why is the senior Minister hiding?

Deputy Paul Murphy: I support the motion and I will be interested in hearing a Government response, and a response from the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Kelly, who has driven this. I remind the Deputies of what the Minister of State, Deputy Phelan, said on Committee Stage. She stated, “This Bill is quite technical. There are some typographical issues. It will really be a question of dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s. The scope of the Bill does not allow for the Bill to be changed in any huge way. The Bill itself is very technical.” What we have here is not just a huge changing of the Bill but another Bill entirely, brought in under the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014. This is the water services (No.3) Bill that the Government promised us. It has now come by way of an amendment to a completely different Bill. The purpose of it is entirely transparent, it is to avoid any proper scrutiny here. It may result in any subsequent Act being open to a legal challenge and it is to avoid scrutiny by the public and the response of the public who are gathering for a protest at 6 p.m. outside this building. The Minister of State should answer and the Government should accept this proposal.

A Deputy: The water mob.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is a political stunt.

Deputy Micheál Martin: On Committee State, Deputy Phelan stated, “This Bill is quite technical. There are some typographical issues. It will really be a question of dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s. The scope of the Bill does not allow for the Bill to be changed in any huge way. The Bill is very technical-----

Deputy Ann Phelan: What is the Deputy saying about the motion?

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Deputy Micheál Martin: -----and we will be proposing amendments. The Deputies will have plenty of time to consider them.” The Minister of State said at that time that there would be no big change to the Bill but that it would be a matter of dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The Deputy should read all of the text.

Deputy Ann Phelan: The Deputy should read all of the text.

Deputy Micheál Martin: When we raised this operation yesterday, and the way the Government was proposing to deal with this legislation, the Taoiseach said it was open to the Opposition to propose to recommit it to Committee Stage.

Deputy Ann Phelan: Yes but the Deputy should read all of the text.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The implication was that it would be recommitted. He did not definitively say it but he gave that as his way out of the leaders’ questions on this yesterday.

Deputy Ann Phelan: Where does the text say anything about being promoted?

Deputy Micheál Martin: He strongly implied that it could be recommitted because this is very sharp practice. Deputy Phelan said what she said. Deputy Coffey is here and the Minister is notable by his silence. The whole point was to smuggle through this legislation pertaining to Irish Water, hopefully without anybody noticing, and with the Minister well in the background.

Deputy James Reilly: In the best Fianna Fáil tradition.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This issue has been badly handled from day one over two years ago when it first came into the House and was rammed through. The Minister of State should give an adequate response saying why he will not allow it to be recommitted given that the amendments are new, very substantive and have been visited upon us for the first time on Report Stage.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I am happy to clarify for the Deputies opposite that these amendments have been well flagged.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There it is again - “well flagged”.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: A white flag.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: They were flagged and provided in writing to the Deputies opposite within the required timeframe under Standing Orders but also on 26 May on Committee Stage. I see that the Deputies opposite are choosing the text they wish to choose. I will quote the Minister of State, Deputy Phelan, from that committee meeting when she said-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: At the end of the meeting. I heard it.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: She said:

I want to point out to the committee that while the Government is not presenting any amendments to the Bill at this stage in the process, it intends to propose a number of amendments on Report Stage in the Dáil. This will require a motion to be tabled to amend the Long Title and scope of the Bill. These amendments will cover a range of issues, including further amendments to waste legislation and provisions . . . We intend to make further amendments

to waste legislation and to include provisions relating to water services legislation.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is unprecedented.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It was in response to that Deputy Catherine Murphy asked about the scope and the Minister of State said the changes were technical. Deputy Coffey, should read the full report. I read it into the Official Report this morning. When she was asked to clarify her initial statement she was told-----

Deputy Ray Butler: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle should put the question.

Question put.

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: As a Teller, under Standing Order 69 I propose that the vote be taken by other than electronic means, because of the critical nature of bypassing a whole section of the process.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As Deputy Murphy is entitled to call a vote through the lobby, we will take that vote now.

Question again put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 39; Níl, 73.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Bannon, James.</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Butler, Ray.</i>
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>
<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
<i>Daly, Clare.</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>Flanagan, Terence.</i>	<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>
<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>	<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	<i>Costello, Joe.</i>
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>

<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Gilmore, Eamon.</i>
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>
<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>
<i>Timmins, Billy.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
	<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>
	<i>Lynch, Kathleen.</i>
	<i>Lyons, John.</i>
	<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
	<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>
	<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>
	<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>
	<i>Mulherin, Michelle.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Nash, Gerald.</i>
	<i>Neville, Dan.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Derek.</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>Quinn, Ruairí.</i>
	<i>Reilly, James.</i>

	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Shatter, Alan.</i>
	<i>Spring, Arthur.</i>
	<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>
	<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>
	<i>White, Alex.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Catherine Murphy and Éamon Ó Cuív; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared lost.

Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2014: Report Stage

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Before we commence Report Stage I wish to advise that there are typographical errors in the numbered list of amendments circulated on 30 June. Amendments to amendments which appear in the name of Deputy Paul Murphy should also be in the names of Deputies Joe Higgins and Ruth Coppinger.

Amendment No. 1 is consequential on amendment No. 6, so amendments Nos. 1 and 6 may be discussed together. Recommitment is necessary in respect of amendment No. 1 and the related amendment, in accordance with Standing Order 136, as they relate to the instruction to committee motion.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: So it is possible to recommit them.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendments Nos. 1 and 2.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I move amendment No. 1:

In page 5, line 7, after “extend” to insert “the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952,”.

Amendment No. 1 is a technical amendment which provides for amendments to the Long Title of the Bill to allow for amendment No. 6. Amendment No. 6 consists of two changes to the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952 relating to motor tax matters. The first amendment is to section 1 of the Act. From time to time clarification is required in relation to the requirements set out in primary legislation for eligibility for taxing in a particular motor tax class or in relation to an exemption from motor tax. Currently, such matters are dealt with by way of circular instruction to motor tax offices. The amendment provides that clarification in relation to the construction and use requirements for eligibility to any motor tax class, and the supporting documentation that may be required with a tax application, will henceforth be pro-

vided for in secondary legislation rather than by way of circular, giving a clear legislative basis underpinning instructions to motor tax offices.

The second change is an amendment of the definition of a motor caravan. The definition for motor tax purposes was most recently amended in the Motor Vehicles (Duties and Licences) Act 2013 to align with the definition that has been introduced for vehicle registration tax purposes in 2010 which had no minimum interior height requirement. Before 2010, both VRT and motor tax codes contained the same interior height requirements of 1.8 m. After the height requirement had been removed from VRT legislation while remaining for motor tax, it led to vehicles being classified as motor caravans for VRT purposes but then being refused motor tax at the motor caravan rate. The alignment of the definitions in 2012 was intended to remove the discrepancies.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 2 and 3 are consequential on amendment No. 20. Amendments Nos. 2, 3 and 20 and amendments Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, to amendment No. 20 are related and all may be discussed together, by agreement.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 5, line 8, to delete “and the” and substitute “, the”.

Amendments Nos. 2 and 3 are technical amendments which amend the Long Title of the Bill to allow for amendment No. 20. Amendment No. 20 enables the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to make the required payment from the local government fund to the Exchequer, as envisaged in the Revised Estimates volume in 2015. Amendment No. 20 updates subsection (2C) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and changes the provisions in section 6 of the Local Government Act 1998, which provides powers to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to make payments from the local government fund. In this respect, it is necessary to provide specifically for the legislative underpinning of the required transfer of funding to the Exchequer. The transfer to the Exchequer is in respect of 2015 only and will be for a maximum amount of €540 million. In 2014, the legislation provided that up to €600 million of local government fund income could be transferred from the fund to the Exchequer. Some €520 million was transferred last year and in 2013, €100 million was transferred. Subsection (2C) continues to provide that in determining the payment to the Exchequer regard must be had to the balance in the fund when all commitments have been made. The projected income to the local government fund for 2015 is in excess of €1.84 billion. The amendment ensures an appropriate contribution is being made to the Exchequer in recognition of the State finances generally.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Can the Minister of State explain why he is taking more than half a billion euro from the local government fund, money that people paid in property tax, to give to Irish Water? During the property tax fanfare, brochures were distributed showing children smiling in parks and reading books. Libraries were going to open and grass was going to be cut to the finest blade in every corner of every housing estate. Does the Minister of State remember? He bullied and intimidated people into paying it and passed it over to the Revenue when people would not pay the household charge. People have found that not only have their council services not improved, they have been cut back, for example library opening hours have been

cut in my council area. There have been many other cuts and there is never any money when councillors seek anything. The Minister of State proposes to take money from the fund and give it to Irish Water, a company that is meant to be independent and garner its own finances.

Can the Minister of State explain why he is doing it? I would like an answer, and the Minister of State owes it to people. Why does Irish Water need a transfusion of funds from the taxpayer, which is what we are discussing? We are swimming in amendments, from dog licences to waste and the size of cars, and it is inexcusable that the Minister of State is ramming through something as significant as this provision for a transfer from one fund to another. Will our masters in the troika and the EU agree with it? The people of Greece can do nothing to control their autonomy to make decisions. Although three leading Government Members have condemned the Greek Government for measures such as the introduction of a wealth tax, the Government is able to dip into taxpayers' funds and give money to a huge quango that virtually nobody wants or sees a need for. What will happen to the smiling children and the libraries they are supposed to be enjoying when the Minister does it?

Deputy Michael McNamara: I have a question on the proposed amendment of section 16 of the Finance (Excise Duties)(Vehicles) Act 1952. Although there is no mention of documentation in the Act, there is a proposal in section 17(3)(a)(d) regarding "any documentation required to support a claim for a particular rate of duty". While I appreciate that this is technically part of the previous section that was discussed, the way the Bill is being brought through the House is slightly unorthodox, to be kind about it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: This is from one of the Government's own.

Deputy Michael McNamara: Given that there will be no Committee Stage, the Minister of State would agree we need to get as much information as possible. The Minister of State read out what the Minister of State, Deputy Ann Phelan read out on Committee Stage. She said her amendments would be brought through on Report Stage, and this is one of them. This is our only opportunity to discuss it. Given that there is no mention of documentation in the Finance (Excise Duties)(Vehicles) Act 1952, what type of documentation is envisaged? Is the documentation envisaged to register for the first time in a particular vehicle class, given that we have different vehicle classes, or is it on an annual basis? It is important we find out what is envisaged, given that the amendment would enable the Minister to bring in secondary legislation to do it, and the Dáil has no control whatsoever over secondary legislation.

While I support many, although not all, of the objectives of the Bill, I have many reservations about how it is done. Unlike my colleagues opposite, I have no problem with the principle of paying for water or with the fact that those who pay have to be differentiated from those who do not pay, when it is a choice as opposed to an inability. I am not joining my colleagues opposite in opposing the principle of paying for potable water. This has nothing to do with water. It is an amendment to an excise Bill which was not flagged in any way.

What documentation is envisaged? It is important, for the integrity of the House if nothing else, that when an amendment is introduced we at least know what we are doing, even if the amendments are being brought forward in the most unorthodox way possible. We took a vote not to remit the Bill to Committee Stage, and while it was a democratic decision of the House, democracy is not the tyranny of the majority. We must, at least, account for ourselves. This is why we have an Opposition and a debating Chamber in which we are free to ask questions and get answers. My only question on amendment No. 6 is what documentation is envisaged and if

it is envisaged that it will be produced when one first registers or on an annual basis.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I have tabled amendment No. 3 to amendment No. 20, and it is very similar to some of the other ones. Amendment No. 20 would allow the Minister for Finance to take up to €540 million from the local government fund and transfer it to Irish Water. The provision changes section 6 of the Local Government Act 1998, which established the local government fund. It achieves this by altering section 79 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which the then Minister, Phil Hogan, brought before the Dáil and which allowed up to €600 million to be transferred from the local government fund to Irish Water.

However, approximately €470 million was taken out. This section of the Act is entitled, “The local government fund and Irish Water”. This provision simply changes the date by which deductions can be made from the end of 2014 to the end of 2015 and decreases the amount from €600 million to €540 million. The Minister of State, Deputy Paudie Coffey, described this is a one-off measure. That is exactly what we were told last year and the previous year. It is a one-off event that happens every year. The Government may need to introduce legislation on it every year, but, in effect, it is merely changing the date and the amount. I called a vote on section 79 when we were debating it. The section provides that the Minister may make payments out of the local government fund to Irish Water in respect of water services functions transferred from local authorities to Irish Water. This came about as a consequence of the resistance to water charges in the early 1980s which were related to major anti-tax marches and proposals to broaden the tax base. The Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1983 introduced water and refuse charges which were called service charges at the time. These were resisted for a number of years and in 1997 it was agreed by the rainbow coalition Government that motor tax revenue would be ring fenced in the local government fund to provide certainty. This revenue was additional to commercial rates and other income.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy’s time has expired.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There is no time limit.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I apologise; I received incorrect information.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: During the years I had concerns about the way in which the money was distributed, but at least it offered certainty. Subsequently, however, the household charge was introduced, with promises that it would pay for grass cutting or libraries. It was mis-sold on the basis that it would cover a range of additional services to which people were not accustomed. The household charge was succeeded by the property tax as a replacement for the local government fund. When that fund was at its height in 2007, it amounted to almost €1 billion, but it has since been whittled down to almost nothing. People are not receiving additional services in paying the property tax. I do not understand why the Government is trying to con people. Why does it not simply acknowledge what is happening? People are offended when they are told something is other than what it is. If the Government replaces one tax with another, it should be honest enough to say so. We have all been through difficult times, but this dishonesty has undermined the credibility of politics.

People are paying the property tax to replace the local government fund, as well as motor tax, to pay for Irish Water. It is no surprise that they are up in arms when that kind of thing happens. There has been a fundamentally dishonest approach to this issue. At the last general election Fine Gael gave a commitment that it would not increase income tax. By taking water

services off the books to fund them separately, it avoided touching income tax, but it still meant the introduction of a new tax. People on low incomes who would not be caught in the tax net are now paying taxes by a different name. These measures have nothing to do with conservation. The previous Government also proposed water charges, but its model would have included a free allowance for everyone and charges would only have applied where water was wasted.

The Government is claiming that the figure of €540 million, a significant sum, represents a contribution to the Exchequer, but the 2014 Act clearly states the local government fund is inextricably linked with Irish Water. Part of the reason the fund is needed by Irish Water is the resistance to charges from people who have been pushed too far. They do not have anything left to give.

Deputy Alan Shatter: May I briefly raise a point of order?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Yes.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It concerns a matter of great importance to all Members of the House. Members have a constitutional right to access, enter and leave Leinster House. Equally, citizens of the State have a right to demonstrate outside it if they see fit, but they do not have a right to prevent elected Members of the House from gaining access to or leaving it. There is an anti-democratic fascist mob outside Leinster House which is obstructing Deputies from gaining access to it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy's point of order should be raised in the context of the Bill.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Sadly, the policing by An Garda Síochána in this context is grossly inadequate.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Can we speak about matters unrelated to the Bill?

Deputy Alan Shatter: I ask that the matter be drawn to the attention of the Ceann Comhairle.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I ask the Deputy to take his seat.

Deputy Alan Shatter: I ask the Garda Commissioner to take the necessary action to protect the constitutional rights of Deputies. The anti-democratic dangers posed by events taking place outside Leinster House need to be considered, understood and addressed. What is happening today should not set a precedent for similar events.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: On a point of order, may I take up something the Deputy said?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): No. Will the Deputy, please, take her seat?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Acting Chairman has just allowed somebody-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Please do not speak over me.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: ----- to accuse people outside Leinster House of being fascists.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): In the context of the discussion we are having the Deputy may not raise a point of order.

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Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There was no need to allow Deputy Alan Shatter to speak in the debate.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Will the Deputy, please, take her seat?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Acting Chairman allowed Deputy Alan Shatter to describe people outside Leinster House as fascists. Will the Acting Chairman ask the Deputy to withdraw that remark?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): As it was not directed at anybody in the House, he does not have to withdraw it. I ask the Deputy to take her seat.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I am taking part in the debate.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): If the Deputy is ignoring the Chair, I will ask her to leave.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Deputy Alan Shatter was allowed to say whatever he liked.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Will the Deputy, please, take her seat?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Will the Acting Chairman allow the debate to be conducted properly?

Deputy Paul Murphy: A bumper sticker which reads “my motor tax pays my water charges” has become popular in the anti-water charges movement and it is about to become even more popular as a result of this provision. According to the website of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the local government fund is:

a special central fund which was established in 1999 under the Local Government Act, 1998. It is financed by the full proceeds of motor tax and an Exchequer contribution. The Fund provides local authorities with the finance for general discretionary funding of their day-to-day activities and for non-national roads, and funding for certain local government initiatives.

Perhaps the website is somewhat out of date because the main purpose of the fund is to pay for Irish Water.

Can the Minister of State clarify how many different sources of funding Irish Water now has? It is getting the property tax instead of libraries, playgrounds and parks, and is also getting motor tax. In addition, it is getting a Department of Social Protection payment via the so-called conservation grant, which it has stolen from lone parents and handed over to those whom the Minister, Deputy Kelly, refers to as the “compliant”. It is getting commercial water charges from businesses. It is also trying to get water charges from domestic customers, albeit not very successfully.

Is Irish Water going to suck in the entire revenue of this State in every possible way that money can be obtained? Will it all eventually end up going into Irish Water? Will this be the super-quango of super-quangos?

Why is this extra money needed? Is it a sign that perhaps people are not paying their water charges? That would be indicated by the fact that after six different attempts to get the figures for water charges, we still do not have them. The Taoiseach resorted to telling me to toddle

along, while Irish Water said it would not be helpful to give the figures. Under a freedom of information request, it said that it was commercially sensitive information, even though the company is a monopoly. After an appeal, it said the same thing.

During Leaders' Questions, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, refused to answer the question. He gave us an advertisement for Irish Water that we could hear many times on the radio any day of the week. Then a question to the Minister, Deputy Kelly, was ruled out of order. Is this a reflection of the failure of the Government's strategy to scare people into paying the water charges? That is what all this is really about. The reality is that the Government is failing on it.

Surely EUROSTAT has some interest in the fact that this money is coming from the Government's central funds, potentially to Irish Water and provision is made for that through this amendment. Does EUROSTAT have nothing to say about that? Could the Minister of State inform us how EUROSTAT will do the test?

At the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform recently, there was an incredible statement by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. Its representatives said they had heard from the Department of Finance that the EUROSTAT test would be done only on the amount of money that has come from the bills. Therefore, it will examine the money that has come from the bills, and ask whether more than 50% of that comes from people who are paying them. Clearly, the answer will always be 100%, meaning that they have managed to dupe the test itself so that they can always win. That is relevant here, otherwise why is money being transferred?

What is the reason that lies behind it? It is also the reason for the amendments tabled by the anti-austerity alliance which provides that first, there should not be more than one payment from the fund. How many payments does the Government intend to make from the fund to Irish Water? Second, such a payment should be subject to approval by both Houses of the Oireachtas. It should not be solely up to the Minister to hand over the money. Most importantly, the reference to €540 million should be deleted and replaced with €1. The whole amendment should go but we are arguing that a maximum allowable transfer should be €1 even if the legislation gets through.

We need to have an in-depth debate on this amendment and cannot allow it to go by without sufficient discussion. The Minister should come in and respond at length to the various questions that have been raised. We should continue the debate through the course of the evening, if necessary, in order to get to the bottom of exactly why this provision is being inserted and why this money is potentially being transferred.

Deputy Brian Stanley: As regards this Government amendment, I must compliment the Minister of State and his departmental officials for performing the gymnastics required to get to this point. The reason for establishing Irish Water, as outlined by the Minister of State, the Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, and his predecessor Phil Hogan, was to keep water services off balance sheet. It was said that it would be a stand-alone commercial entity. The record of the Dáil will show that this was rehearsed and repeated over and over like a broken record. This amendment is being tabled, however, with the clear intention of doing what the Minister of State said he would not do, that is, raiding the local government fund to prop up Irish Water. He did it in 2014 and said that it was a one-off.

I recently paid my car tax which is for roads, and an ESB bill which is for electricity. I

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accept the fact that under the terms of the 1998 Act car tax is going into the local government fund because at least it is going to local government services. As a former member of a local authority, I know that we had some idea every year where that fund was going. Now, however, the Minister of State is leaving it wide open to continue raiding the local government fund for no less than €540 million. On what basis is it morally correct to raid the fund?

The local property tax - or family home tax, which is a more apt name for it - was supposed to be for parks, libraries, footpaths and lighting. That is what the Government repeatedly told us but we now see that it will be used to feed the corporate monster called Irish Water, which is not fixing leaks. I could show the Minister of State a leak that would have been fixed had the county council been left to its own devices and which had half the money at its disposal that is being pumped into the corporate monster called Irish Water.

The amendment is about financing Irish Water and keeping it off balance sheet. Before Christmas 2014, the Government transferred €500 million of a water loan back onto the State's balance sheet through one line of this Bill. Using the coalition's grand majority, they rammed it through and then rushed off on their Christmas holidays. Yesterday at the committee, the Minister of State said that local authorities pay rates to themselves and all commercial activity is rateable. Here we have, in the Minister of State's words, a stand-alone semi-State commercial company that does not pay rates. Imagine if Bord na Móna, the ESB, Bord Gáis or Coillte could do that, yet none of them can. This outfit, Irish Water, can because that measure was pushed through. That amounts to €559 million. In this year's budget, Irish Water was given a €399-million subvention from taxpayers' money for operational costs. Not content with that, the Government decided to give Irish Water another €222 million for capital funding, telling the company it could borrow on the market at three times the rate the Government can borrow for the State's balance sheet. Can the Minister of State explain that logic?

The Government then robbed €130 million from social welfare to be paid out in a water conservation grant, including for the millionaires of this country. They can thus empty their swimming pools every morning and refill them if they wish, while leaving sprinklers on for their extensive lawns and gardens. There is no problem because they do not need to conserve one drop of water. I want to see water being conserved, as I have said for the past four and a half years in this Chamber. Sinn Féin wants to conserve water. It is a valuable resource and it costs money to treat and to get into people's homes but this does not conserve one drop of water. The grand total on the State's balance sheet because of the actions of the Government in the past six months alone is €1.31 billion. Does the Minister realise that is €1,310 million? The Minister should try to spin his way out of that one.

That is what the Government has put on the State's balance sheet. Not content with that, the Minister comes into this House to secure a clause in the legislation to take €540 million. That is a fact which is on the record here and no spin from officials can get the Minister out of it. It completely negates everything he has said in this Chamber. The Minister of State has stood logic on its head in respect of all the arguments and all the cases put forward by him, by the previous Minister, Phil Hogan, and the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly. It is being done to prop up Irish Water and then go to EUROSTAT to get approval for it all. I am sure EUROSTAT will do that because it is the billed amount that matters. The billed amount and what is actually received are not the same thing, however, and we will wait to see what has been received by the end of the year. Let us see what the Government has brought in by way of water charges by Christmas, then deduct the €130 million it robbed from social welfare and the State's balance sheet and then we will see what we are left

with. The Government will then go into next year saying it has to do it, but it knows all this.

All this is a gliding exercise to glide the Government smoothly towards the elections. That is why it rowed back and reduced the charges, putting in the laughable water conservation grant that even people who are not connected to Irish Water can claim. People with their own wells can claim it. That is how crazy it is. It is a nutcase of a job. It has been done in the hope that people buy into the system. If the Government only nets a fiver after deducting €130 million, it will say it has the system up and running. It is about getting the door open and the sums are there. The sums are not mine but the Government's own and they were given in writing and verbally in the Dáil.

I will be opposing this amendment because it is illogical and wrong and the Minister of State knows that. The Government is pulling a fast one, using its majority, as it did with the previous two water Bills, to stand logic on its head and to ram the Bill through this House. It has totally disrespected the Opposition and the electorate in the way it has done this.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: This is a bit like Lanigan's Ball. Phelan steps in and steps out, Kelly steps in and steps out, Coffey steps in and steps out. I never saw a Bill that involved so many Ministers.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: What has that got to do with the amendment?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It has a lot to do with the amendment. Normally the same Minister takes a Bill through from beginning to end for continuity's sake, unless there is some very grave and serious reason, which does not appear to be the case today because I saw the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, in the House. Only in extreme situations would one ask another Minister to take either Committee Stage or Report Stage on one's behalf. It was the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Ann Phelan, who took the farcical Committee Stage of this Bill. I have sympathy for her because she was sent in with no Government amendments and an announcement that we would skip Committee Stage and go straight on to Report Stage with amendments. That was sharp practice and it was unfair that she was asked to do that. It was shameful.

If the Government knew amendments were coming, why did it not tell the committee it had amendments coming in and ask to defer the date for Committee Stage, as the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Simon Coveney, did on the Animal Health and Welfare Act because he rightly wanted to bring in his amendments on Committee Stage? We agreed to do that and I have no doubt that Deputy Stanley would have agreed to deferring the Committee Stage of this Bill until this week in order that he would have the full suite of amendments.

Deputy Brian Stanley: Absolutely.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What is going on here is absolutely shameful. The nature of Report Stage means we can make a long first contribution but we are limited in not being able to make a third or fourth contribution and so cannot tease things out in the way we should as parliamentarians.

The Minister's amendments, and the proposed amendments to the amendments, are quite interesting. I have listened to the debate from different sides. I have listened to the Minister of State's initial contribution explaining what he is doing and I have listened to Opposition Depu-

ties explain why they oppose it and why they have proposed amendments. The Minister might clarify something in his response. The local authority fund is made up of motor tax and Exchequer funding. When the Government introduced the local property tax, LPT, it dramatically reduced the Exchequer funding going into the local government fund. The LPT does not actually go into the local government fund as 80% is retained by the local authorities and the rest is recirculated, but it was introduced to reduce the Exchequer contribution to local authorities which was in turn done to reduce the current borrowing of the Government and the Exchequer deficit. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that that is, in fact, what happened. It would mean the statement by the Government when it introduced the local property tax was, to put it mildly, dishonest. Instead of telling people it was trying to reduce the Exchequer deficit, because the country cannot go on forever borrowing in the current account, and that it was raising new taxes with a property tax rather than taking it out of income tax, it tried to distract the public by giving the illusion that the local property tax meant more money for local authorities. Many people, believing the Government, fell for that one, which was quite shameful.

Irish Water is really Irish water and sewerage because it is water in and water out. This is a big change that has come in since this Government came to power as it was the first time paying for sewerage services had ever come up. The previous Minister, Phil Hogan, denied that would happen when we discussed the septic tank legislation. He utterly denied that people would be paying for water out and said clearly on Committee Stage that they would only pay for the water in. The Minister of State should check the record as he will find out I am right.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I do not recall that. I recall Deputy Ó Cuív saying it would cost €20,000 to remediate a septic tank and that it would cost €500 to register.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Is the Minister of State allowed to intervene all the time?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I like it when he intervenes as it adds a bit of spice.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: He might answer the question.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is obvious that when he intervenes, he knows he is losing. Irish Water is a water and sewerage facility. Is that correct, Minister? The amendment creates a facility every year to transfer up to €540 million from the local government fund to Irish Water. The Deputies rightly say this particular utility will not pay for itself and that it needs an Exchequer subsidy of €540 million, plus another €130 million, as well as the no rates subsidy. As has been pointed out time and again, the net income that will be earned from water charges will be very small.

This is the rub: amendment No. 3, tabled by Deputies Paul Murphy and Catherine Murphy, would, in practice, be put into force over a small number of years. When that happened and the Government decided that the amount of the transfer was €1 or less - perhaps nothing - Irish Water would tell us that, as a result, water and sewage treatment charges would have to increase by €540 million. There would be a temptation and advice from public servants. The Minister would be told he would be able to square his Department's budget for the year by reducing the payment to Irish Water and that it would be painless. When Irish Water, as part of a chain reaction, would then put up water charges and a question was asked about it in the House, the Minister would say it was a commercial decision for Irish Water. That is what is going on.

The Government's amendment is written in such a way that there is no commitment to transfer €540 million in the future. As I have said, it is perfectly set up to reduce that sum over

time until it reaches zero. At that stage it will have to be made up in water and sewage treatment charges. It is for that reason that I have to say amendment No. 2 to amendment No. 20, tabled by Deputy Paul Murphy, is ultimately reasonable. What he is saying is that the Government should not be able to do this in the dark of the night. He is saying any decision on the amount of money involved should have to be brought before the two Houses of the Oireachtas to be debated and the Government would have to own up to what it was doing and the knock-on effect of reducing the sum of €540 million. In a very unfair and opaque way, it is trying to create a situation in which it can wean away the grant and allow water and sewage treatment charges go up. I hope the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, will clarify whether my reading of what is legally possible, based on the Minister's amendment, is correct.

I take issue with Deputy Brian Stanley and what he said about paying water conservation grants to people who have wells and septic tanks. There is as much, if not more, cost associated with maintaining a septic tank and a well as there is with being part of the public system which up until now was free. As someone who now has access to the public supply but who had a well for many years, I can state absolutely that even with the charge to be applied, it will be much cheaper than it was to maintain the well, replace washing machines, dishwashers and all other equipment in the house because of particle matter in the water from the well. Wells are variable and difficult to maintain. One of the interesting divisions in society concerns those who had wells for many years and then received a public water supply. Most of them would say they would pay an annual fee for a public water supply because of the ability to simply turn on the tap and be sure of getting quality water from it.

There is much talk about having paid for the water and sewage treatment services through general taxation. We did and we did not. We did when there was a Government surplus; we did not when there was a Government deficit. It is a very simple mathematical equation. When the Government was running a big surplus during the noughties, not only did we pay for everything through taxation, we also had money to put away in the bank. Once the Exchequer went into deficit, taxes were not paying for all of the services provided. It is debatable whether they were paying for social welfare, education, water or health services, but the simple fact is that, at one stage, what we were paying in taxes did not pay for €20 billion worth of services being provided. One thing was certain. When the money was coming from general taxation, those who provided their own water and sewerage systems were paying the same in taxation as everyone else, but they were not getting the same services from the State. Let us remember that 550,000 house owners - somewhere between one quarter and one third of all houses in the State - provide and maintain their own wastewater systems. There is, therefore, a certain equity in what is happening because at least a person will not be billed for a service he or she is not receiving. Unlike Deputy Brian Stanley, I think it is right that if a sum of €100 is to be given to those with publicly supplied water and sewerage services, it is perfectly logical and fair that the same sum be given to those who provide these services for themselves. Anything else would perpetuate an inequity that has lasted way too long.

I have said this before about the Water Services Bill. It will not happen in the short term, but when it does happen and the same standards are applied to built septic tanks on inspection as are applied to new septic tanks or wastewater systems as they are more properly called, it will cost up to €20,000 to remediate them to the proper standard. If one checks the memorandum circulated by the Minister of State's Department, it specifically states that it could cost up to €14,000. It was not me who said this but the Minister of State's Department. I am sure the Deputies in the House from rural areas will confirm that people ring us in our offices to say they have a

totally deficient wastewater system and that they are polluting the ground around them. They want to upgrade their systems because they do not like to pollute. They want to receive the very small grant provided to upgrade their wastewater systems because they are not in compliance with the law. What are they told? They are told they cannot get the grant unless an inspector actually picks their house. Now we have a great situation - only this Government could do it - where someone is breaking the law, although they wish to comply with it. The person has no wish to pollute but believes that, like the person who is inspected, he should get the grant too. He is told he cannot get the grant because the inspector has not found out he is breaking the law, even though the person is telling the inspector he is breaking the law. Does the Government know how much that grant is costing it? For 550,000 wastewater systems, it costs the Government €99,000. I hear talk about private wastewater systems polluting. It is the best bargain the State ever got. How many millions and billions do we spend on public wastewater systems?

The Government could not even say to the people of rural Ireland that if they come forward indicating they have a non-functioning wastewater system, it will give them a grant to upgrade it to a suitable standard. Is that equity or fairness? Is that good environmental policy? Is that ensuring we keep the pristine environment in which many of us have the great advantage of living? Is that protecting our rivers and lakes in some of the most high nature value areas of the country?

I will be opposing this section and I will be supporting amendment No. 2 from Deputy Paul Murphy which relates to openness and transparency. I hope the Minister of State will answer the questions I have put to him and that he will explain to us exactly the financial arrangements the Government is putting in place. I hope the Minister of State will either confirm or deny whether I am correct in saying this is designed in such a way that the Government can reduce the subsidy, increase the water and sewerage charges and then claim it was all done by Irish Water.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The sort of skulduggery at the back of this amendment and the various other amendments brought forward at the last minute to circumvent the normal process of legislative scrutiny and oversight is precisely what has brought people to the streets this evening and precisely what has brought unprecedented numbers onto the streets in fury and anger during the past year. They are there because of the unfairness and economic hardship of austerity, which is unbearable for vast numbers of people. It has plunged people into poverty, greater levels of deprivation and homelessness and needless suffering. That is one aspect of the anger and fury that has led people onto the streets, for the information of Deputy Shatter.

The other aspect is the utter contempt for democracy and the playing fast and loose with the entire democratic process, inadequate as it is in the first place. We have an election every five years but the people we elect can then shred all the promises they made. They are completely unaccountable and there is nothing the people who voted for them can do about it. If that is not bad enough, the Government wants to subvert even the utterly limited form of democracy we have. This amendment highlights what the Government is at.

In fact, this amendment is bigger news than the points we initially highlighted when we cottoned on the day before the Government submitted these amendments last week. At that stage the Government was pulling a fast one. It started to get the word out to the media and the public that it was up to no good and that it intended to smuggle through what is essentially a new Bill on water charges in a Bill which, when it was initiated in this House, had nothing to do with water charges.

In the short time we had to scan the Bill and work out precisely what is in it, we spotted some of the measures the Government knew would be controversial. The Government started to get the message out over the weekend. I admit I did not spot this amendment. Only more recently did I spot it. This is actually the worst of them and the most controversial. Of course, that is why the Government did it. The Government knew this would be controversial and it sought to hide these measures and smuggle them in under another Bill.

This extends the situation that has absolutely infuriated people. The property tax was unfair, regressive and unjust. People resisted it. As if all that was not bad enough, it is now going to finance Irish Water, as will the motor tax that people have paid. These are precisely the issues that have driven people onto the streets in unprecedented numbers. These taxes are being used to finance Irish Water. People are paying through the neck with a regressive tax to finance a new utility that is going to make the same people pay through the neck with another regressive tax. It was supposed to be for one year. Now, the Government is extending it for a second year in breach of a previous commitment. Most people do not know that. Fully €500 million is at issue here. This is big money.

When Deputy Stanley and Deputy Murphy listed the various sources of finance for Irish Water, including motor tax, local property tax, raiding or stealing money from lone parents in the social protection budget and squeezing and trying to terrorise householders, they missed out another source of finance which is costing all of us. That is the fact that this is all on balance sheet, that is, the State is borrowing extra money and paying interest to do this, a point confirmed to me by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. The representative from the body to whom I spoke pointed out that our deficit is increased by the costs of Irish Water. The Government, which has savaged people in the name of reducing the deficit because of the demands of the troika, does not mind increasing the deficit or increasing borrowing and the interest we have to pay to set up Irish Water. This really exposes what those in government are up to. They claim it is all about meeting the targets, deficit reduction and reducing the debt when it comes to justifying the assault on working people. However, when it comes to setting up Irish Water to squeeze people and enrich contractors like Denis O'Brien, it is no problem. In that scenario the Government can inflate the deficit and pay interest on it.

The representative of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council made clear, if there be any doubt at all, that the Government will be required to ratchet up the charges to two, three or four times the current level. This was confirmed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, which is not a left-wing think tank by any means. It is an oversight body of economists set up by the troika and established in law by the Government. The representative confirmed that to reduce the deficit, Irish Water will have to generate more money itself. This means ratcheting up the charges as soon as the Government can get over the line - if it can get over the line - of the next general election. That is what the Government is up to with these amendments. That is what the Government has been up to with its entire strategy of dealing with the fury, anger and protest against these unjust charges. It is altogether misleading. I am not allowed to say it is a lie so I will say it is deliberately, cynically misleading. With this strategy the Government is hiding, denying and covering up its real intent. It is heading towards a charge of €600 or €700 per year, which will be required as part of the deficit-reduction plan to which the Government is committed. In fact, the Government will be under pressure from the troika to meet this objective. This year we will be borrowing more and spending more to finance the monster that is Irish Water in order to put the squeeze on ordinary people.

Deputy Stanley is absolutely correct that when people are paying their utility bills, they do

not expect that their money will be going towards financing a quango. I will add a footnote to that: we actually do finance quangos when we pay our electricity bills because we do so through the public service obligation charge, much of which is going into the hands of private companies in the so-called wind energy business. The money is not actually going towards the production of energy for us but it is to make a profit for the private sector. In that sense, the approach to Irish Water is completely consistent with what the Government is doing, namely, setting up various utilities or trying to funnel money into the pockets of private companies or entities it hopes will be soon private.

Let me respond to the Minister of State's attempt to justify all this, the manner in which he has brought in this legislation and his denial that he has been playing fast and loose with the democratic process. He quoted the words of the Minister of State, Deputy Ann Phelan, on these amendments on Committee Stage. He omitted to mention the fact that she made her point at the end of Committee Stage when it was over. There was no chance to discuss the matter. Second, the Minister of State, Deputy Ann Phelan, said the amendments would be published in good time. They were not published in good time. As soon as it became clear to me and my office that apparently technical amendments concerning water were going to be brought forward, I started to ring the Bills Office to ask for them, but there was no sign of them. I am sure it was the same for other Deputies. I kept ringing and, in the approach to the final deadline for submitting Report Stage amendments, I asked where were the Government amendments. At 11 a.m., the deadline by which we had to have our amendments submitted, we could not see the Government amendments. We did not see them until mid-afternoon after the deadline had passed for us.

The Minister of State, Deputy Paudie Coffey, said these issues were "well flagged". I congratulate his spin doctors on that phrase. He managed to get every single correspondent to repeat it, on RTE, in *The Irish Times* and in all the other media. The expression "well flagged" was straight from the Minister of State's press release to the national media. If the issues were so well flagged, why was the proposal not contained in the original Bill? The Government obviously had the legislation and knew exactly what it was going to do. Is the Minister of State saying the Government did not bother to draft the legislation until, say, last Thursday, although the issues were so well flagged since the end of last year? When was it actually drafted? Perhaps we should submit a freedom of information request on that. Could the Minister of State answer the question? The legislation, or the majority of it, had to have been drafted some considerable time before the deadline of 11 a.m. last Thursday. It was a fast one. The Minister of State knows it was a fast one and that is why he is smiling. It is why the Chief Whip, Deputy Paul Kehoe, stated last week when this was pointed out to him that one would want to get up in the morning early to fool us. He had a big smile on his face. It was all a bit of a laugh to him that the Government was playing a trick on the Dáil and the public. Perhaps that is the way business has been done in here for years. I am here for only the past four years.

Deputy Michael McNamara: Is the Deputy having fun?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am not having fun when I see this stuff. It is not fun scrambling around trying to figure out what is in legislation only to discover that we are extending one of the most controversial aspects of what the Government has done over the past year. I refer to the fact that property taxes and motor taxes are going into Irish Water. That is not funny. If one asks the demonstrators to identify the issues that have really infuriated them, they will refer to this one most often. If they do not, it certainly will be very near the top of the list. We now discover that the Government is to do this again this year, although it said it would not.

Some €500 million is involved. That is news, in my opinion. Was it well flagged? When did the Minister of State know about that? When did he decide on it and why could we not see the legislation relating to it before last Thursday afternoon, after the final deadline had passed? It is because the Government was pulling a fast one. There is no other explanation.

People take these matters seriously. Perhaps in years gone by, people just dismissed the Dáil generally. However, in recent years, as we can see from what is happening in Greece and the numbers on the streets, ordinary people are actually beginning to become very interested in the details of what goes on in here. The more they look, the worse it gets. There are games, followed by games and further games. It is all regarded as a big laugh but we are actually playing with important stuff. It is very important and affects the lives of human beings, the macro-economy and all the big issues that are now being debated, including debts and deficits, the very phenomena that are leading to the big crisis in Greece. Does Ms Angela Merkel know? Perhaps she will threaten to cut off the finance to our banks if she discovers we are inflating the deficit to line the pockets of Denis O'Brien and the other contractors who are making money out of Irish Water. This is just another example, but a big one, of what the Government has been up to in trying to subvert the democratic process. It is a disgrace. Is the Minister of State honestly saying these matters do not need to be debated forensically on Committee Stage? We will not get the chance to do so.

Committee Stage should allow for a proper back-and-forward debate in which one can ask the Minister questions and double check the answers with a view to contributing again on Report Stage. That is the whole point of Committee Stage. The Government has circumvented that deliberately. If anybody suggested, in terms of legislation generally, that we should just get rid of Second Stage or Committee Stage and instead have just one stage of debate in the Dáil, would we not be up in arms? Would anybody who believes in democracy and the purpose of this Chamber not say it was utterly unacceptable? However, the Government has done so with this Bill, deliberately. It has done so with the IBRC legislation also.

I will conclude although I feel like going on forever just to annoy the Government because it played so fast and loose with the whole process. That is why people are out on the streets.

7 o'clock The Government is fundamentally undermining people's belief in the democratic process. Deputy Shatter stood up and gave out about the protests and referred disgracefully to fascists, using unbelievable language. It is really outrageous language that he should have been forced to withdraw. If he wants to understand why people get angry and lose faith in the democratic system, he should realise it is because of that kind of carry-on. The Government is digging the grave of the very democracy or type of democracy it purports to care so much about. It is playing with fire. The Minister of State, Deputy Paudie Coffey, should think about this although he seems to be so inured to the cynicism in the House that it is probably pointless even making these points.

Deputy Brian Stanley: On a point of clarification-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy can make his point. He is entitled to come back in and can ask the question then.

Deputy Brian Stanley: It is not a question. I wanted to clarify something for the record of the Dáil and clarify a misrepresentation. I said many times on the record of the House that we fully support grants for wells and a subvention for rural group water schemes.

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Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy has made his point.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I will be brief. The point I am making in respect of the so-called water conservation grant is that it should not be there for anyone, rural or urban, because there should be no domestic water charges.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I ask the Deputy to resume his seat.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I again say that we fully support the scheme of grants for private wells and the subvention for rural group water schemes. This should continue for people in rural areas, many of whom I represent.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I ask the Deputy to resume his seat.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I am glad that Deputy Stanley has clarified that because it is not what I heard earlier, which is on the record of the House. The Deputy and Sinn Féin said they did not agree with the water conservation grant being given to rural dwellers who, as Deputy Ó Cuív quite rightly noted, have installed, maintained, paid for and pumped those wells and septic tanks for many years. Deputy Stanley's words are on the record of the House. He said clearly that he was opposed to that conservation grant. I was very surprised to hear him say it given the fact that he is a rural Deputy but that is what he said.

In respect of Deputy McNamara's earlier comments, I think they referred to a previous amendment that was already agreed but I am happy to clarify that the documentation he referred to is currently specified by means of circulars that were given that we are now underpinning in legislation through the amendment in question. I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy. We can get further clarification for him if he seeks it.

I want to make it clear that 100% of the local property tax is being given to the local government system in 2015 and is funding essential local services delivered by local authorities. All of the property tax paid into the local government fund will be paid directly to local authorities and will not go to Irish Water, as some have implied here. All of the figures associated with my earlier contribution are published and are part of the Estimates process, which is approved by the House. For years, motor tax, which has been referred to by many Deputies, went to local authorities to fund water services so there is nothing new in that sense. I want to make it clear that none of the local property tax has been paid to Irish Water to subvent it in any way in 2015.

I also wish to clarify matters relating to Irish Water and the local government fund. Historically, the local government fund provided local authorities with finance to fund some of their day-to-day activities, including elements of the costs of water services, through general purpose grant allocations. The total operational costs of providing water services, which is estimated at just under €730 million, were removed from the local government sector in 2014. As a result of the introduction of the local property tax in 2013 and the establishment of Irish Water, the local government funding model has changed considerably. I am addressing some of the points that Deputy Ó Cuív raised. The funding provided to local authorities for the provision of water services from 2014 is governed by service-level agreements between Irish Water and individual authorities. Therefore, the local authorities are no longer in receipt of funding for water services costs directly from the local government fund. Instead, the fund provided a subvention to Irish Water in 2014 of €439 million and it is expected that it will provide up to €399 million in 2015.

The level of State subvention to Irish Water from the fund in 2014 reflected the fact that the costs of operating water services were being met by Irish Water and that there was no revenue at that stage from domestic water charges in 2014 as the first bills would not issue until 2015. Irish Water financed other costs from non-domestic water charge revenues of some €190 million and from borrowing, which was the subject of appropriate ministerial consent. I repeat that 100% of the local property tax revenue is being provided to the local government system in 2015 and is funding essential local services delivered by local authorities in their respective communities. All local property tax paid into the local government fund in 2015 will be paid directly to local authorities and other payments from the fund will met from a combination of motor tax and Exchequer funding. Some €459 million will be paid to local authorities in 2015 in the form of the local property tax allocations. No general purpose grants will be paid in 2015 as this funding line has been replaced by the local property tax allocations. Local property tax allocations for 2016 will be decided by the Government in the context of the Estimates process, which we will debate and which will be approved by the House.

I have addressed many of the questions and clarified some of the issues raised by Deputies. I am happy to respond in my next contribution.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Could we get a copy of that speech because there was a lot of information about this financial transfer and it would have been helpful if it had been handed out in advance?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: This is the problem about doing this on Report Stage. If it happened on Committee Stage, we could keep coming over and back and drill down to what is happening. The Minister of State confirmed what I thought was happening. The Government introduced the local property tax, which does not provide for any extra service. It is just matched by a reduction in Exchequer funding to local authorities. That part has been clear except the Government sold the property tax on the basis that there would be a range of extra services. I asked the Minister of State a specific question that is quite simple. As the Bill is written, am I correct in thinking that the €540 million is an upper ceiling and that without ever coming back into this House, the Government can reduce the subsidy to Irish Water over the next five, six or seven years if it is still in power? The consequence of this will be rapidly increasing water and sewage charges for citizens because of Irish Water's huge overheads. In respect of the Government withdrawing the €540 million, has it been given an estimate by Irish Water of the water and sewage charge it would require per house to fund its business?

I have asked the Minister of State specific questions and I expect he will give me specific answers. The real lacuna in this legislation is not the fact that the Government is giving €540 million because that is keeping the water charge down. This is temporarily keeping at least some of the money that is coming in within general taxation going to water and sewerage services. The real trick in the loop is the fact that it allows the Government to reduce this over time and the fact that if our friend, the Minister for Social Protection, also returns to power, she will be able to abolish her €100 grant to every household. The legislation is structured in such a way that the Government can do this without having to come back to this House.

Deputy Michael McNamara: I thank the Minister of State for the clarification. I would welcome further clarification but I appreciate that I cannot get it today. The Minister of State provided a lot of information. Am I correct in believing that a maximum of €540 million to be provided will be provided from the motor tax fund? If this is correct, is it in addition to €399 million which the Minister of State mentioned which is the subvention in 2015 from the local

property tax pool or fund? That amounts to almost €1 billion. Am I correct or incorrect? That is my only question.

Deputy Brian Stanley: With regard to the figures I read out earlier, the Minister has not confirmed whether he has changed his mind on them or whether he is now rowing back on them. I ask the Minister of State to confirm that over the past six and a half months he has put that €500 million of a loan onto the State's balance sheet, that effectively the €59 million write-off in rates, that no other commercial semi-State company enjoys, is a hit on the taxpayer and that the other figures I read out relating to the subvention for operational and capital funding of €399 million and €222 million, amounting to a total of €750 million when it is added to the so-called water conservation grant, gives a figure of over €1.3 billion.

It is worth noting that before this was introduced, rural group water schemes received a subvention out of general taxation and the local government fund. People did not object to that subvention nor should they. People in rural areas who wanted to drill a well or to improve a well always received the appropriate grant to do that. However, the Minister of State is not doing anything to improve or add to it. The chances are that the Minister will take from it down the line if the opportunity arises. That grant should continue.

The Minister of State said he is not taking money out of the local government fund for Irish Water but this is a smoke and mirrors job on his part. The Minister of State is taking the motor tax money. The hauliers in particular will love this Government for this. Does the Minister of State know how hard-pressed they are? Some of them are paying four times the motor tax and four times the road tax that hauliers pay in the North. They are paying €3,600 and €3,800 for an articulated tractor unit. The Minister of State is using their money to pump it into the leaking pipes in order to sustain the unsustainable corporate monster that is Irish Water. Then he robs the money from the social protection fund - €130 million - in a laughable water conservation grant that should not be there because the domestic water charges should not be there. Members of this House can claim it. Does that not show the Minister of State how ridiculous it is? Millionaires can claim it. It is ridiculous.

People in rural areas should continue to get what they used to get from the local government fund and general taxation, the well grants and the subvention for rural group water schemes. Can the Minister of State not see that these proposals are crazy? I know he does and I know the Minister, Deputy Kelly, does too. They want to keep everything smooth. The reason this legislation is being rammed through the House is that if it had to be done in two separate Bills, they know they might not get it through in the next two weeks and a series of sittings of this House before the summer recess. By stitching it onto a Bill about dog breeding and the park below in Killarney, they will get it through the House. It is like what they did before the last two Christmas breaks with the local property tax Bill. Does the Minister of State remember what he and the Minister did last year with the water Bill on the eve of Christmas before they went on their Christmas holidays? They did the very same as they are doing now. They do not want any humps or bumps in the autumn. They do not want any outcry about any of this in the autumn in the run-in to an election. They have it all planned. They have foreseen everything. They have bought one half and intimidated the other half. That is what they think they have done and they are hoping to get by. They are hoping that the half they have bought will support them in the election. All should be fair in politics and the Ministers should be up-front with the public and with us. They should stop twisting what the Opposition Deputies are saying and they should be honest with us.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: It is on the record of the House.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Minister of State should not talk nonsense. The record is clear. The Minister of State has spun that many times that he is dizzy and he is sweating from spinning. That is what is wrong with him. He has forgotten what he said originally-----

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The Deputy did not want the rural dwellers to get the grant.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I have been talking to rural dwellers, including people who supported the Minister of State's party in the past and they now have a water meter outside their door courtesy of Irish Water when the rural group water scheme was taken over and a one inch pipe was connected to it. Now they are customers of the corporate monster called Irish Water. In Derryguile, between Portlaoise and Mountmellick, the people are all on the supply line for Irish Water. All that is needed is a half-inch pipe. What was previously a rural group water scheme is now connected to the supply owned by the corporate monster called Irish Water. This is thanks to the Minister of State and his Government. Those rural dwellers will not forgive him for what he is doing because they are now in the very same boat as their urban neighbours, their sons and daughters and other relations living in the towns. That is what they have been telling me in recent weeks and months. Wait until the Minister of State faces them on the doorsteps in Waterford just as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan, will have to face them in Laois.

The Minister of State should not try to play urban dwellers off rural dwellers. The Ministers have stuck the boot into the whole lot. The septic tank legislation which they pushed through the House is crazy. People cannot get an upgrade no matter how badly their tank is leaking. They have not protected people in rural areas. They have stuck the boot into them in the very same way as they did to people in the towns. People on low and middle incomes will suffer.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I was outside at the protest and I spoke at it. I can inform the House, which may have been misinformed, that there was no sign of any fascists. In fact, there were Greek flags, Irish flags, banners and placards against the water charges and placards declaring *Okhi* which means "No" in Greece. It was a protest of the anti-water charges movement, protesting against the despicable manner in which this legislation is being processed, the way a new Bill has been rammed into an old Bill in the form of amendments in order to avoid any sort of basic democratic parliamentary process. They are protesting against the same but much larger process which is happening Greece, whereby attempted regime change is taking place with the instruments of financial terror, of bullying, of tyranny, of the troika. That is what is happening outside. I would strongly urge the Members of this House to go outside to meet some of the people who are outside, to make their own judgment as to whether they are fascists or perhaps ISIS or whatever particular scare-mongering word one wishes to choose, and to investigate the situation. I urge them to talk to the people and establish what are their grievances. I think they would indicate to the Government that the Government has made a grave error by avoiding the democratic process of debate in the way it is doing with this farce of a procedure, which is effectively avoiding Committee Stage.

The Government has made a big mistake. It is angering people more than they would have been if it had just gone through the normal process. People would have grimaced and bore the reality that in this parliamentary democracy people are elected with whom one may not agree and even though they are in a minority, they must at some stage listen to them, allow their amendments to be heard in committee, to be discussed and then they can be voted down. If the

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Government was not in such haste to get this Bill through, if it was not in such haste to avoid a public discussion, to avoid a discussion in this House, then it could have gone about it in another way and it would not have paid the price that it will pay for this.

In his response the Minister of State said something very revealing, which gets to the heart of this amendment and this issue. He said that motor tax always paid for water. Forgive me if I am wrong, but I thought the Government's argument was that we have not paid for water. Those of us on this side of the House who are opposed to water charges have always said we already pay for water. What is the position? Has motor tax always paid for water? Is it possibly the case that we have already paid for water through our general taxation and through our motor tax? If that is so, surely the Government's case for water charges has just collapsed in this debate this evening because its key argument has been that people have to pay their water charges. That is what Government Members say repeatedly in this Chamber, on the radio and on television. However, the Minister of State has said this evening that motor tax always paid for water services. So it was not free and we already paid for it.

That begs the question as to what will happen to the motor tax when we have the water charges. Will the motor tax be reduced because now we are going to pay for it again? Is the Government seriously suggesting that we will pay for water twice? That is what we argued but the Government claimed it was not a question of double taxation. It said we had to pay for our water. However, the Minister of State's response illustrates that we already paid for water. There is no proposal to reduce motor tax or any other general taxation and then we will have water charges on top of that. This is an admission by the Government that it wants people to pay for water twice.

Why does it want people to pay for water twice? There are two key reasons. First, it is revenue raising but not now, this year, next year or the year after because it will be revenue losing for those years, but it is establishing another revenue stream for Irish Water, which therefore the Government does not have to spend whenever the full charges become effective in 2019, of €200 per adult per year on average based on usage of 148 litres per person per day. That is the first reason.

The Government can deny it and it can create non-binding requirements on itself to have referendums before doing it all it likes, but the other agenda is privatisation. There is no other explanation for why it has invested so much political capital and why the Labour Party has been willing to face such losses over this issue but to continue all the way like a soldier directed by a general to run towards the enemy trenches. The only explanation is that the medium to long-term agenda is privatisation of our water services, facilitated by the amendment and the potential handing over of money to Irish Water. That can be done in many different ways. It is already happening now from below in the water services, in Irish Water, with design, build and operate contracts on a for-profit basis going to major water multinationals such as Veolia, Suez and Thames.

It will also happen very quickly if the Government, in spite of this amendment, were to pass the EUROSTAT test and have this off-balance sheet funding, which means going to the international markets and borrowing at a higher rate than the rate at which the State is capable of borrowing. It means borrowing from bondholders, who are the people who lend money on these international markets. It means effectively therefore privatising the revenue stream from the water charges to these people.

People in Ireland who have followed this debate may be aware of Detroit Water, which disconnected approximately 30,000 people. We all said that was because of the privatisation of Detroit Water, which is accurate. However, it is also accurate that Detroit Water was under the ownership of the city council and it had the same model of fund-raising that Irish Water has. It was officially publicly owned but then raised money through the bond markets through the effective privatisation of the revenue streams. Then the bondholders say, “We’re not getting enough money. We’re not getting our money back. You have to be harder. You have to disconnect people. You have to incentivise people to pay their water charges so that we can get our money back”. The same process could happen here.

In the medium to long-term I believe we will see full privatisation of Irish Water and full privatisation of our water services. The dark forces that are circling, as mentioned by a former Minister, want access to this. It is part of an agenda that comes from the troika. We can look to Greece in terms of the ruthless pursuit of agendas that takes place. The troika agreement with Ireland contained water charges, arguably a precursor to water privatisation. The Government was delighted to discover that water charges already existed in Greece and Portugal.

Water privatisation was included in the troika agreements where it could be. Where it could not, the process started with charges which lead inexorably towards privatisation. It wants privatisation. The big multinationals want privatisation. I would be fairly sure that people such as Mr. Denis O’Brien would like privatisation. That is where this fundamentally leads. Through this amendment and other means, the Government is interested in fattening up Irish Water for privatisation at some stage down the road and people will suffer the consequences. The present Government parties may not be in power; it could be a different Government.

The problem the Government has, as reflected in this debate, is that people are watching these things. In the past the Government or Fianna Fáil might have got away with this kind of stroke politics in how it treats the Dáil and shows basic respect for parliamentary democracy. However, people have been turned on to politics and are even watching the Dáil in a way that did not happen previously. Therefore, people know what is going on and when the Government does things like this, people mobilise and come out to protest, as they are at the moment. People will continue to do so and they will see through the falsehoods and scaremongering promulgated by the Government, and they will understand that if they stand firm together, the water charges can be defeated. While we will do our best in these debates, ultimately the Government has a majority in here, but out there the majority is more important if people are mobilised. I think people are mobilised and therefore this measure can be defeated even if it is passed by the House this evening.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Normally after a Bill is published, on Second Stage we get an explanatory memorandum. It would have been very interesting to see the explanatory memorandum for these amendments. It is not just the water-related amendments, but also the other amendments relating to waste, some of which are quite good. Perhaps others could have been added and there may have been a number of missed opportunities. Essentially, the absence of such an explanatory memorandum is part of a deliberate circumventing of the process and is fundamentally dishonest.

Many things have been dishonest in recent years. People were told that the core rates of social welfare were not cut. However, for example, there were cuts through changing the length of time one could qualify for some of the additional things in the household benefits package. We were told the money collected for the household charge was about something additional and

then discovered that it was a replacement for part of the local government fund that was withdrawn. The same applied with the property tax. It is a replacement tax. A fund that was ring-fenced for water has been transferred essentially to central funds to be transferred to Irish Water.

The common thread in all this is dishonesty and presuming that people are fools. People do not like being taken for fools and they will not be taken for fools. Deputy Paul Murphy is right. There is an engagement in the detail of politics that I have never seen and I was on a local authority for 20 years before becoming a Member of this House. There is an attention to detail in politics that is different now because people feel they have to pay attention as many of the things that happen will impact on them personally.

I am not sure what genius thought this was going to be a good idea to circumvent the process but it is not a good idea. The Minister of State may have read out part of what Deputy Phelan said but the last part of what she said when I pressed her for the detail was that it was only a matter of “dotting i’s and crossing t’s” and it is not. The transfer of €540 million from the motor taxation fund to the Exchequer and then to Irish Water is no minor deal and people know it. People also know it is being transferred because there is insufficient funding coming from the source the Government hoped would be there, the water charges. There is no doubt that there is significant resistance. We know that in part because the Government will not tell us the payment rates. Every week we were told how many people were signing up. That was used almost as a marketing initiative. People can read into that and know exactly what it means when the Government does not provide the information. They know the amount being demanded now will significantly alter if the full cost recovery model the Government envisages is put in place. There are many people who, with the best will in the world, do not have anything more to give. I do not know how many times that has been said in this House. I have knocked on the doors of households which might be regarded as doing alright but the people have said they may seem to be alright because they have a nice house but look in the fridge. There is nothing in reserve. That is one of the messages coming very strongly from this.

The Minister of State is right, motor tax, which is the main source of local government funding, did pay for water and wastewater. The rainbow coalition in the 1990s resolved the deficit in local government funding by ringfencing the motor tax fund. That is why people feel they have already paid and what is being demanded is that they pay a second time. I have no doubt there is a need to build a decent water infrastructure, that we have to change our habits in respect of water and water conservation but there is a lot of nonsense being spoken about the entire system being defunct. For example, the best we can hope for in the leakage rate is that anything below 20% is unlikely to be achieved even in the best situations. In my own local authority the rate of leakage is 25%. It does not take a genius to figure out that the leaks are in the old Victorian pipes. Most of the money spent so far has been spent on getting the institutional arrangement in place, setting up a database, a call centre and putting in metres. Going after the areas where there are the most leaking pipes has not been the primary concern. People cannot understand that. Taking the €540 million out of the local government fund for this is another item on the list of things that are dishonest. That is what is undermining democracy.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: We are going back to the debate about the fundamental need for Irish Water. Most Deputies, if they are honest with themselves, agree about the status of the water networks that we were pumping over €1 billion into, and that up to 50% of the treated water was leaking into the ground, and that there were sub-standard water treatment systems all over the country polluting river courses, streams and beaches. Serious intervention is and was required and should have been made many years ago. It was correct to establish a national

utility that would manage our water networks, water treatment systems and pumping stations as assets. We are not reinventing the wheel. The other semi-State utility company, the ESB, has been doing this for years. It has undertaken huge refurbishment programmes across its networks over the past 15 to 20 years because it needed to do so to service the future needs of society, people and businesses. It is no different for water except that it is a more critical resource. It is a shame we have neglected to intervene and invest in our water services, as was required. For the first time a strategic approach is being adopted by Government to ensure that this investment can be secured to guarantee quality water for people, farms and businesses. None of us here, on whatever side of the House, will be thanked if we do not intervene now and address the problems we have been storing up for many years. They are very obvious all around us, pollution, sub-standard water, capacity issues and leakage.

People are trying to imply that funding is being paid directly to Irish Water from the local property tax. I absolutely refute that. The operational subvention to Irish Water in 2015 will be up to €399 million. The amendment we are speaking to does not change this in any way. It relates to a payment to the Exchequer, not to Irish Water.

The Government indicated in November 2014 what the subvention to Irish Water would be in 2015 and 2016. That has not changed. I emphasise this amendment is not related to the funding of Irish Water. While funding was provided in the past it was not enough to deliver the level of investment we required. I have already outlined to the House why that is the case. This amendment is necessary to enable the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to make the required payment from the local government fund to the Exchequer as envisaged in the Revised Estimates Volume in 2015. The amendment ensures an appropriate contribution is being made to the Exchequer in recognition of the State's finances generally. I confirm for Deputy Ó Cuív that the transfer to the Exchequer is in respect of 2015 only and will be for a maximum amount of €540 million.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: The Government said that last year and the year before.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: In 2014 the legislation provided that up to €600 million of local government fund income could be transferred from the fund to the Exchequer. In fact €520 million was transferred last year and in 2013 €100 million was transferred. Subsection (2C) continues to provide that in determining the payment to the Exchequer regard must be had to the balance in the fund when all commitments have been made. It should be noted that the projected income to the local government fund for 2015 is in excess of €1.84 billion.

Deputy Murphy asked whether motor tax has gone into water services in the past, and, yes, it has done so for many years. We would not have been able to fund them if we did not have that investment. However, it was never enough so we had to bring forward new proposals, as outlined, for a national water utility that is modern, fit for purpose and which we can stand over as a modern, developed economy. I have heard a lot of anger and a lot of ranting but I have heard no solutions - not one solution - in terms of how we can deliver quality water for the people of this country, which is what they are entitled to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As many Members want to speak I do not want repetition.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We just want to get to the bottom of this.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will uphold the rights of all Members but I do not want repetition. I have heard things repeated that I heard two hours ago when I was in the Chair last,

so I do not want that again.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I know how you feel.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Until we get to the bottom of this and until the Minister of State gives us clear answers, we will just have to repeat and repeat. As the Minister of State knows, I am not the spokesperson on this subject and, therefore, I am not up to date with the labyrinthine financial arrangements as well as I would be if I were. Do I understand correctly that €540 million is being taken out of the local government fund and given to the Exchequer, and the amendment states this is going to happen for one year only? I understand further that the Exchequer is then making a payment of €399 million to Irish Water this year. These are the 2015 transactions, if one likes. Given there is no legislative provision for it, is it proposed to transfer money from the local government fund in 2016 to the Exchequer or anywhere else? If it is not, does that mean there is suddenly going to be a big wad of money - €540 million - extra in the local government fund? If that is the way it is, can I take it that €540 million is going to be available for local authorities in a bonanza? Furthermore, if the Government is not going to make any transfer to the Exchequer in 2016, because there is no provision in the proposed legislation to do that, will a subsidy be paid from the Exchequer in 2016 to Irish Water?

I accept the Minister of State is technically correct that this money is going to the Exchequer but it is just as if it was passed to Deputy Stanley and he passed it on to the Minister of State rather than me having me pass it directly to him.

Deputy Brian Stanley: Smoke and mirrors.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: However, it does make this a little more complex and more opaque. Can the Minister of State explain the financial transactions that take place in a simple way that we can all understand? It is always said that we should follow the money trail. Will the Minister of State explain to us the money trail?

My colleagues have been lamenting, as I did yesterday, the fact that on Second Stage of a Bill, the Minister will normally explain the purpose of the Bill and will then go through each section of the Bill and give the reasoning behind it. An explanatory memorandum on the amendments was circulated, I will grant that. However, it does not really explain the financial trickery that is going on here and does not really say much more than what the amendments say. In particular, it does not explain the circular transfers of the money. Maybe my Opposition colleagues fully understand all of this manipulation of the money, particularly what happens in 2016 - the Minister of State will have to forgive me if they all know what is happening and I do not. However, as I said, I am very curious as to what is happening to the money and I would like the Minister of State to clarify the money trail for me.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I am sorry if I missed some of the Minister of State's contribution so I may be repeating myself, but it has been a very long day. I would like the Minister of State to dwell on one point. I asked why the Government was taking this money. Unfortunately, we still do not have the Minister of State's speech so it is very difficult to deal with some of the issues when we do not have that speech in front of us in black and white. Nonetheless, one of the points he made which has brought clarity to the protesters outside, and to others, is that car tax has always been put into paying for water services in local authorities. I was on a local council for 11 years before I came here, so I would be very familiar with the funding of local councils. The Minister of State is right that this is the case and it is also the case that money

from the local government fund would have been used for all services, including water services. For many years, those of us on this side of the House who oppose the new water charges have been saying that we have always paid for water and that our taxes have always funded water services. However, the Minister of State said we have been getting it for free. We have not been getting it for free because anyone who pays car tax is paying for water, and, by the way, car tax was increased in the last couple of budgets and my own car tax doubled. People have had to pay more because of the bailout and we now find it is going to Irish Water.

The reason this matters is that Irish Water is going to cost and has cost a lot more than if the water services had been left in the hands of the local councils. We will keep needing bucketfuls and bucketfuls of money to keep this monster well fed because it is like a hungry beast that needs constant food. When local authorities were doing this, it was done in a much more slimmed-down fashion. There were no big bonuses for executives. While I accept that county managers and chief executive officers were very well paid, this was not the case for the ordinary water service worker or engineer, and there was no extra bureaucracy created, such as call centres to answer people's queries. The point is that we are going to keep needing to dip further into the taxes that people pay in order to keep Irish Water going.

The people outside are not happy. The car sticker was mentioned, and I have one here. The phrase on it is, "My car tax pays for my water". This has just been confirmed by what the Minister of State said. People have been paying for water through different taxes for many years whereas the Government has been making out that a tooth fairy was paying for it.

How much more of this are we going to need? The Government will find out that people are not paying the water charges, and I assume they are not because this is 1 July and, at this stage, surely the Government would be shouting it from the rooftops if the payment figures were good. What it is hoping for is that, through this legislation, people will not listen to the fine detail and they will not realise that the civil debt Bill which is coming up, and which we will speak on, is toothless and is designed for the likes of a television licence defaulter rather than a water charge boycott by hundreds and thousands of people. It hopes people will not realise they cannot be prosecuted for anything less than €500, so court cases are many years down the road, or that the Government cannot actually dip into their pockets and take this money directly. Later we will deal with a disgraceful proposal to terrify renters who are very vulnerable.

What the Government is trying to do with this legislation is increase the payment figures as much as it possibly can and hold on to the information about it as long as it possibly can. However, it is 1 July and the billing cycle is now finished for everybody. Sooner or later, the information is going to be demanded and we will discover that the Government is going to need to take more funds from taxpayers and other sources to keep the beast of Irish Water going. This is because it will not be able to do it from the four sources that were pointed out by my colleague, the first of which is the Department of Social Protection taking it from those like lone parents and giving it back to people in €100 bribes to get them to register.

The second source is car tax. The Minister of State may say also that it is not coming from the property tax but it is, because the Government is cutting the local government funding to local councils and keeping that money. Therefore, it is coming from property taxes and we will probably discover it is coming from other taxes also in the years ahead. On top of this, there is the car tax. There seems to be no end to the funding Irish Water will need in order for the Government to save political face. That is disgraceful.

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Deputy Brian Stanley: The Minister of State's explanations in regard to the amendments leave much to be desired. These amendments were supposedly well flagged, but they were well covered up and we are just beginning to see the game plan now. The Minister is giving permission to himself and the Government to take €540 million from motor tax into the Exchequer and by way of a fine technicality, they are trying to hide what they are doing. With the other hand, the Government is removing a similar amount of money from the Exchequer and handing it to Irish Water. It should not try to pretend otherwise. The fact is jumping out at us here that this is exactly what it is at.

Along with the €1.31 billion that the Government has put on the State's balance sheet so far, between what it did in December and what it has done to date this year, in other words in the past six and a half months, there is also off the balance sheet some €300 million borrowed by Irish Water from the private markets at three times the interest rate at which the State can borrow. Can the Minister not see when this is all added up that this is the worst and most expensive way to try to fund water services? Can he not see it gives the worst return and the worst results? Does the Government realise what has not been included in these figures? What is not included is the €539 million that the Government took, or borrowed, from the National Pensions Reserve Fund - a fund we should maintain - to install meters outside houses. That has not been mentioned. If that is included, we are running towards a figure of €2 billion.

Let us deal with the figures we have. If the meter installation programme had not happened, the Government would be saving that money, that is €539 million. That is a loan that will have to be repaid to the National Pensions Reserve Fund. We then have the €1.3 billion on the State's balance sheet, added in the past six and a half months, and then the €300 million plus borrowed by Irish Water on the private markets. All of this money will have to be repaid. Local authorities were providing water services for approximately €0.9 billion, between €860 million and €890 million per year in capital and operational funding. Now, just six months into the year we are already looking at a cost of €1.3 billion added to the State's balance sheet.

If the Government had left things as they were and tried to reform them, the operational funds could, being generous, have been covered by €500 million, with capital investment being approximately the same. This would have worked out at €1 billion per year and we would have seen €500 million going into fixing leaking pipes. It would have been cheaper to do that than do what is being provided for here. The Government has added cost upon cost because of the meters, which are the cash registers on the footpaths. That is what they are about. Will the Minister of State confirm that what this amendment does is to take €540 million from the local government fund, from the motor vehicle taxes, to put into the Exchequer, to make up for what is being taken out of the Exchequer with the other hand and put into Irish Water? Not alone that, there is no limit to how often this can be done. It can be done in subsequent years, in 2016, 2017, 2018 and so on. And if the Government wants to increase the amount taken, the Minister can come back to the House, if he is still here, and ask for that figure of €540 million to be increased. That is what is happening.

If the money was paid directly to Irish Water, if the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, wrote a cheque and handed it straight to John Tierney in Irish Water, the optics would not be good. Instead, the Government is bringing the funding by the circular route. It is bringing it into the Government coffers through the motor tax and then the cheque is handed out to Irish Water, on top of all of the other cheques. I pointed out to the Minister many times when Irish Water was being established that he was going to hand a blank cheque to Irish Water, all in order to get the system of charging up and running so as to get a revenue stream in place. Of course,

the full cost of that to taxpayers and householders will not be revealed until after the election and that is the problem here.

What is being done here is all economic gymnastics. An example is the way money is being moved around and the writing off of rates for local authorities. This is totally unheard of. We also had the €500 million placed back on the State's balance sheet by way of a single line in a Bill before Christmas and all of the other changes made. All of the economic gymnastics being performed here are all being done to get this system up and running. Will the Minister of State confirm that the €540 million mentioned in the amendment is really about the transfer of the money to the Exchequer to provide for a similar amount to be taken out on the other side as a subvention for Irish Water?

The Minister of State has not answered the question about the amount being put on the State's balance sheet now, which is far in excess of anything put on the balance sheet prior to the establishment of Irish Water. That is being put there to fund water services. I ask the Minister of State to check that and also to check the figures on what was going into capital investment in water services during previous years. There is more money going towards water services now and a greater weight is being put on the State's balance sheet, contrary to the reason behind the setting up of Irish Water initially. We have finished in a position that is the worst possible. There are holes in the State's finances as a result, with more money on the balance sheet and more money demanded. Today, we are stitching in an amendment to try to get this money included under the radar to try to pull off another stroke. That is what this is about.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Deputy Ó Cuív raised an important point in regard to how much money will go to Irish Water in 2016. We need a clear answer from the Minister of State on this. The point was also well made that the Government is just hiding behind smoke and mirrors in saying this provision has nothing to do with Irish Water, because it is a two-stage process. First, the money will be handed from the local government fund to the Exchequer and then the Exchequer subsequently hands over the money to Irish Water. To all intents and purposes, the money comes from the local government fund, including from car tax and other sources, and it goes to the beast that is Irish Water. Who the middleman is and how it is transferred, whether via PayPal, NETELLER, cheque, credit card or cash, does not matter. The essence of the matter is that the money starts somewhere and ends up somewhere else. From our point of view and from that of the public what is important is the transfer that is taking place.

The point about the figures being paid is extremely relevant. The only reason this transfer of money is needed is because Irish Water is not getting money from elsewhere.

That should cause a problem in terms of the EUROSTAT test, if it was applied objectively and fairly. It may not, but regardless of that it causes a problem in terms of Irish Water just having the money to operate as the beast that it is, and so that is the reason we have a further injection of cash which comes from the Exchequer, which comes from the local government fund, which comes from people who pay their taxes. Let us look at the payment figures because it is shocking that everyone by now has received their bill and should have paid their water charges. It was reported that the Cabinet was due to discuss the levels of payment yesterday. We do not know if that happened. We know that Irish Water has the figures but they are not being given out. That is quite incredible at a time when we are having another parliamentary and public debate about water charges. The amendment is directly related to the number of people who have paid yet the Government will not tell us. As a result, it is part and parcel of a process of debate and a method of debate that is fundamentally

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opaque, non-transparent and undemocratic because the Government has the figures and that can inform its debate and lines of argument, whereas we do not have the figures and the people do not have them.

Let us go back and look at all the different ways we attempted to obtain the figures. The matter was first raised in the Dáil on Leaders' Questions. If I recall correctly, the response of the Taoiseach was that he was not there to spoon-feed me information but I could toddle along to Irish Water which would answer any question I had. Subsequent to that, he made the point about answering any questions on Leaders' Questions as fully and completely as possible. Then, later that day, Deputy Ruth Coppinger and I duly toddled along to Irish Water and we asked for the figures. First, we asked how many bills had gone out, how many bills had been paid and if it had the figures. Irish Water confirmed to us that it has the figures for levels of payment, how many bills had gone out, which it told us. Irish Water told us how many bills were due to have been paid at that stage but it refused to tell us how many people have paid on the grounds that it would be unhelpful to do so. That begs the question of unhelpful to whom? It is clearly unhelpful to Irish Water, as opposed to those of us who are campaigning against water charges.

The third attempt to get the information was a freedom of information request which was denied by Irish Water on two grounds, first, that the information is commercially sensitive, which is a joke considering the fact that Irish Water has a monopoly and that it is happy to give out the registration figures and that they are not in any sense considered to be commercially sensitive, and second, because to give those figures would result in an undue disturbance of the ordinary course of business. That perhaps is slightly closer to the truth of why Irish Water did not wish to give the figures.

The fourth attempt was a freedom of information appeal, which goes to the office next door to the guy who answered the first question, and the other Irish Water employee also said Irish Water would not give the figures. An appeal is ongoing to the Information Commissioner.

The fifth attempt was with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, standing in for the Taoiseach. He just refused to answer the question in any way at all and then said that we should direct the question to the relevant Minister. He did not know that we already had directed the question in the form of a written parliamentary question for the following day to the relevant Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly. The question did not even ask how many people had paid. The question was whether the Department had discussed the levels of payment with Irish Water. It was ruled out of order on the grounds that it is not the responsibility of the Department. How on earth is who the Minister meets not the responsibility of his Department? It goes to show the extraordinary lengths to which the Government has gone to hide the figures of payment and non-payment.

It is a massive saga that we have gone through that has been going on for seven weeks. It is seven weeks today that I first attempted to get the figures from the Taoiseach. The information is crucial to the debate. We cannot debate the amendment in a fully informed way without having the figures. The Government evidently has something to hide, which is perhaps indicated by the levels of registration, which for some reason it is happy to give out although they are an embarrassment from the point of view of Irish Water and the Government. They claim to have a maximum of 70% registration, which means 30% of people have not registered; almost 100% of them will not have paid, and many of the 70% who have registered have also not paid. Nobody, or very few of those who have not registered will have paid, but many who have registered will also refuse to pay.

The figures also indicate a slow rate of sign-up for registration because the figure being used by Irish Water at the moment is 1.32 million sign-ups, but it was using the figure of 1.23 million about a month and a half ago, and approximately three months ago we had the same figure of 1.23 million. That gives a rate of approximately 30,000 people a month signing up after much advertising. How much is Irish Water spending per person on advertising to get people to sign up, never mind the €100 promised to so-called compliant people? That speaks to a low take-up of registration and a low rate of payment, which results in a situation whereby the Minister has suggested we hand over more money to Irish Water.

Finally, I wish to deal with the quite incredible assertion by the Minister that he has never heard any positive proposals or alternatives to how the system could be run. Let us start very simply. Water charges will not raise any extra money this year, next year or the year after to invest in water services. That is a fact. If everybody pays, Irish Water will raise somewhat less than €100 million but then it will spend that in giving the money back in the conservation grant. No extra money is being raised that will be invested in water infrastructure. The alternative right now is to abolish the water charges.

The Government says it has a great off-balance sheet model – it does not talk about privatisation – and that it can get money for free. Given that the borrowings are off-balance sheet, it is free money and we will be able to invest and we will be able to deal with Ballymore Eustace and all the other problems the Government likes to talk about that it has discovered in the past couple of months. The money, of course, is not free. The money is borrowed at a higher rate of interest than that at which the State is capable of borrowing money directly, and the money will have to be paid for by people. If Irish Water continues, it will be paid for by those people who pay their water charges. It will be more expensive than if the State were to borrow directly.

A very simple alternative is to abolish water charges, abolish Irish Water and bring the responsibility for water back to the councils with an appropriate level of national co-ordination and then have investment, because investment is the answer to all the water problems the Government has discovered. The Government can call it Irish Water and do whatever it wants with it but it does not solve the problem if the Government does not invest money in fixing the pipes and the infrastructure. That is what needs to happen. The Government is not raising any extra money to do that at the moment. That is a fact. It will borrow money through Irish Water at a higher rate. One thing the Government could do, if it were to abolish water charges and abolish Irish Water, would be to borrow money on-balance sheet at a cheaper rate and stay within the Maastricht criteria and the fiscal treaty criteria and invest.

Alternatively, if we grant that the Government would get €100 million a year, which it does not – it gets zero after all the costs are deducted - it might even end up with a negative amount, but if for the sake of argument one were to say the Government would get €100 million the question must be asked whether there are other ways the €100 million could be raised? There are many. One could ask what defines the water charge and what is its main feature. It is a regressive tax which means those who are less well-off pay more as a percentage of their income while the well-off pay less. The bottom 10% in terms of income will pay approximately 2% of their incomes in water charges while the top 10% will pay less than 0.2%.

Is there another, fairer way of raising €100 million that does not punish ordinary, low-paid people? There are many ways, for example, a financial transaction tax, of which the European Commission is a fan, the same European Commission that is bullying the Greek people unmercifully. Even it recommends a very small financial transaction tax of 0.1% on share transactions

and 0.01% on derivative transactions. The Government estimates it would raise €500 million, five times the most optimistic estimates of the outturn from the water charges. This option could raise five years' worth of water charges. We could increase the rate of effective corporation tax. Our headline rate of 12.5% is very generous to corporations, which pay approximately 8.5%. Increasing the effective corporation tax rate by 1% would raise slightly more than €500 million, again five times more than the most optimistic estimates of the outturn from the water charges.

We could impose a wealth tax on net assets in excess of €1 million, calculated by adding all an individual's assets, subtracting his or her debts and taxing the portion that exceeds €1 million at 1%. It would raise €600 million, six times the most optimistic estimate of the outturn of the water charges. We could increase by 1% the effective income tax rate paid by those who earn more than €100,000, which would raise €250 million, two and a half times the most generous estimate of what the water charges would raise. We have many alternative ways of funding it, which would provide much more money than water charges. The Government is losing money on the project. The long-term gain will be further regressive taxation and privatisation.

The Government has dropped the talk of conservation. For a while, it was the main issue, until the Government discovered Ballymore Eustace and the state of our water infrastructure, which it had ignored for so long. The Government then discovered the off balance sheet model, and it became the thing. We on the left are serious about water conservation. My colleague, Deputy Joe Higgins, upon first being elected, in the aftermath of a battle that defeated the last water charges proposal, raised and argued for building regulations that would have made grey water harvesting, rain water harvesting and dual flush toilets mandatory in new builds. This was before approximately a quarter of the State's housing stock had been built. If it had happened then, at a tiny cost to the developers, how much more water would have been saved than any amount the Government can achieve by way of water charges?

Even now, the Government is not serious about water conservation, because the small investment would come from the builders, developers and big construction companies, which would lose a tiny percentage of their total profits. The beneficiaries would be the environment and water services. However, this debate is not about conservation, but the further crucifixion of working people through further regressive taxation, the imposition of yet more austerity measures and the preparation for privatisation. The amendment is a crucial part of achieving it, both making up for the non-payment opposition and fattening up Irish Water for the future.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I will focus on the €540 million. I have a copy of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. Part 13, which is entitled, "Local Government Fund and Irish Water", amends section 6 of Local Government Act 1998 by substituting a number of sections, and by inserting the following subsection:

(2CA) The Minister may make payments out of the Fund to Irish Water in respect of water services functions transferred from local authorities to Irish Water.

This is to be the third consecutive year in which money has been taken from the motor tax fund and given to the Exchequer for the purpose, in the main, of funding Irish Water. On each occasion we were told it was a one-off measure. It is not a one-off measure, but a feature. The first year was not a full year. In the second year, €600 million was taken, the bulk of which went to Irish Water. Amendment No. 20 provides that up to €540 million is to be taken out of the fund and contributed to the Exchequer. How much of it will go to Irish Water? Will it go

to the Exchequer and will other money go to Irish Water, or will it go directly to Irish Water? If not, why does the legislation tie the two things together?

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I thank the Deputies for their various views and contributions. I disagree with a number of them. I am surprised that, with the exception of Deputy Ó Cuív, who like me has concern for rural Ireland, no Deputy expressed concern for more than 550,000 rural dwellers who already pay for water through their group water schemes, private wells or septic tanks in which they have had to invest over many years.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That is because it has nothing to do with the amendments.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: They have had to install, maintain and treat them over many years. Neither the parties of the left nor Sinn Féin has expressed concern for any of these people.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Minister of State was not listening. It should not go to anybody. He should abolish water charges.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: Sinn Féin gave the view that it opposed the conservation grant that will assist these rural dwellers. The Sinn Féin Members were, as always, speaking out of both sides of their mouths, telling people what they want to hear on one side and on the other side coming here and making different statements.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The Minister of State should tell the truth.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: It was the same with the metering. Deputy Brian Stanley criticised the metering programme. In the North of Ireland, more than 30,000 meters have been installed, and they are continuously being installed, in preparation for water charges, which Sinn Féin chooses to deny, speaking out of the other sides of their mouths here in the South.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I will answer it for the Minister of State.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: It is a fact. I find it hard to listen to the hypocrisy I hear in the Chamber. Borrowing for metering will be repaid, just as when local authorities borrow. Where meters have been installed, we have found large volumes of water leakage. It is very obvious for people to see and when Irish Water publishes its annual reports, with the oversight of ComReg, we will see the very real benefits of Irish Water and how it is managing the asset. I have listened carefully to some Deputies. Although I did not time Deputy Paul Murphy, for many minutes he gave an ideological lecture on a model that has failed throughout the world. That model essentially involves spending lots of money as long it is somebody else's money. I have asked for solutions and alternative proposals. The difference between Opposition and Government is that Opposition Members are entitled to express opposition, which I respect, and they can also express anger and complain, which I also respect. I expected to see alternative proposals but all we are getting is anger without any solutions for delivering a modern and fit-for-purpose water system which will serve the needs of this country for generations to come. That is important because the Irish Water model has already brought benefits in the short few months it has been in existence. It is allowing water leaks to be fixed, thereby reducing wastage of treated water. Treatment facilities are being upgraded more efficiently and our ground water and water sources are being protected. In County Roscommon, the boil water notices affecting more than 11,000 people were lifted yesterday.

Deputies have suggested that Irish Water will not be able to raise money but the forecast

billing revenue of €271 million will allow it to draw down additional investment. Between 2014 and 2015 more than €1.2 billion, excluding metering and establishment, will be invested in our public water systems. The Deputies opposite are public representatives who listen to their constituents just as I do. If a constituent has a boil water notice or a coastline or river is being polluted, they will try to hold the public agencies to account. Those public agencies cannot respond to complaints unless they can invest in their utilities. The subvention was criticised by a number of Deputies. It is ironic that the very same subvention allows the Government to cap the charges to make them more affordable for our citizens. It provides for children's water allowances and the capped charges. I do not understand why they are criticising it given that it reduces the cost burden on the very people they claim to represent.

Deputies Eamon Ó Cuív and Catherine Murphy raised issues in regard to the Estimates. The transfer of funds from the Exchequer was agreed as part of the Estimates process. The revenue and the Revised Estimates were published on 18 December 2014 and the matter was debated in the Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on 3 March 2015 and subsequently moved by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in the Dáil on 5 March 2015. The Estimates process allowed the question of the transfer of funds to be dealt with transparently. In 2016 the moneys to be transferred from the Exchequer will be decided as part of the same Estimates process and Members will have an opportunity to engage in that debate. The Revised Estimates for 2015 for the local government fund include a statement that income to and expenditure by the fund was €1.84 billion, of which €459 million was from local property taxes and paid directly to local authorities for the delivery of essential services, €364 million went to roads programmes, €399 million went into water investment programmes and €484 million went to the Exchequer. Nothing has been hidden in these figures. We are being open in proposing a model which will ensure investment in essential water networks. We can stand over that model. There was huge opposition to the ESB when it was first established in the 1920s. In time people will look back these debates and wonder why this new utility was ever opposed. Nobody likes to introduce taxes but in government we have responsibilities. I want a water infrastructure that will serve this generation and the generations to come.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is a red herring to suggest that we do not care about rural dwellers and the money they pay into group water schemes. Our position is that people have a human right to water. That includes rural dwellers and people in group water schemes. They should not have to pay for water other than through central taxation. The infrastructure for rural areas should be provided through progressive central taxation.

It is also nonsense to suggest that, in arguing against water charges, we are not interested in vital investments in water infrastructure and conservation. Every time we debate this issue, the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, speaks about the need to invest in water infrastructure. Can we short circuit that fake debate? We agree 100% on the need for investment. In fact, we agree 150% in comparison to what the Government is doing because we think Irish Water's investment programme of €1.2 billion is not sufficient. Our investment programme would be bigger because we think several billion euro needs to be invested.

That is why we are furious that the Government has wasted so much money on matters that are unrelated to fixing the water infrastructure. Had that money been invested in infrastructure, we would have rehabilitated it more quickly. Money was wasted on advertising. Every time we listen to an advertisement by Irish Water, it is money down the drain. Money is wasted on advertising agencies, consultants, billing systems we do not need and contractors. Every cent that is spent in these areas is a cent that is not spent on fixing leaky pipes. The money will continue

to be wasted through profit taking by consultants and contractors. These are not insignificant amounts. The administration cost of billing nearly 2 million people four times every year is a lot of money wasted and is unnecessary. It would be cheaper, more efficient and fairer to take the money out of central taxation, either through income tax, corporate tax, a financial transaction tax or other measures that do not involve regressive taxation hitting the least well off.

Deputy Paul Murphy gave four examples of how the Government could get more money than from Irish Water, on a more progressive and fairer basis. The Minister of State, however, pretended not to hear it. That is what is happening with Greece as well. The Government is on the same page as the bullies in the European Union. When the Greek Government went to the EU with detailed proposals about alternative ways to pay off their debts, they were rejected with a straight face.

I do not think he should do so, but Mr. Varoufakis said that they are determined to service their external debt. However, the troika does not like the proposals because it considers them to be unrealistic. Or the troika pretends not to hear them, just as the Minister of State pretended he did not hear Deputy Paul Murphy. Nonetheless, the Minister of State has heard alternative proposals from many Opposition Deputies for financing the necessary investment in our water infrastructure.

The issue is not whether we need massive investment in water infrastructure; it is how one pays for it and whether it is fair. In so far as one must pay for it, the method by which one garners that revenue must be efficient. On all counts, however, Irish Water fails, which begs the question as to why the Government wants it. We all know the answer to that question. It is about privatisation. The Minister of State knows it, and so do we and the public. I can guarantee the Minister of State that if he gets away with this, although I hope he will not, Irish Water will be privatised in less than ten years. He knows that is what will happen, just as Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Labour knew when bin charges were being introduced that the bin collection service would be privatised. Privately they all said it, but publicly they maintained that paying bin charges would stop privatisation. That was because they wanted to undermine the campaign of opposition against bin charges. In fact, however, it was the other way around. The Minister of State knew it then and knows it now, so he is just being dishonest with the people. Everybody knows that this is the stepping stone to privatisation, so why does the Minister of State not come clean about the real reasons for it?

It is difficult to know where to go from this. I feel we should keep this debate going just to annoy the Government.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I like listening to the Deputy as much as he likes listening to himself.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I can tell the Minister of State that I am tired of standing here and I would much rather be somewhere else. I honestly feel, however, that the more we keep this discussion going the more the people out there will have an opportunity to look at the details of what the Government is doing. What has been done in circumventing Second and Committee Stages was a deliberate attempt to hoodwink the people. I have just tried to explain that to those gathered outside Leinster House this evening. It is the anger over those tactics and that kind of skulduggery that have so many angry people on the streets. They are furious because they are being treated with contempt. The only protest we can put up against this is to drag out the debate so that people get a chance to examine the details of what the Government

is doing. In that way, they may be able to apply some political pressure, not that I think it will make much difference to the Government at this stage.

I take solace from the fact that the reason the Government sought to bypass Second and Committee Stages was because Ministers knew there were going to be protests. They tried to condense down to an absolute minimum the period in which this Dáil will be debating water-related issues. The Government knows that its support in the opinion polls plummeted when the protests were at their height at the end of last year. There was a direct correlation because support for the Government parties collapsed when the protests were at their height. The Government could never admit this because that would be giving away the big secret that the people have the power to defeat it. The Government will not admit or acknowledge it but it is well aware of it when plotting the sort of skulduggery it has engaged in on this legislation.

The Government asked itself how it could prevent this matter from becoming a major public focus. It decided to smuggle it in an apparently innocent and innocuous Bill, thus minimising the possibilities for the Opposition to make any noise about it or create any potential focus or protest outside. That is what the Government is doing.

The issue is about undermining, subverting and defeating opposition to the austerity agenda. It is less dramatic and severe than what the troika is doing to the Greeks but the tactics are from the same hymn book. The Government is fearful, just as the troika is fearful of the example that the Syriza Government, and the sentiment that elected them, represent to the neo-liberal agenda in Europe. They are scared and that is why they are deploying such foul tactics against the Greek people.

It certainly has nothing to do with the payment of debts, as I pointed out to people outside Leinster House this evening. It has nothing to do with the necessity to pay off debts or deal with deficits. The Government has no problem in writing down debts for people. Hundreds of millions were written down in IBRC to the benefit of some of the richest people in the country. The Government can do that without any problem. It can write down those debts but it is different when it comes to ordinary people who cannot bear the burden of having to pay off these odious debts any longer, because infant mortality, poverty and deprivation have gone through the roof, while incomes and pensions have been slashed. In addition, people are committing suicide at a dramatically increased rate. When ordinary people say they cannot pay, however, the Government says “No, sorry lads, you’ll have to pay off the debts. We know it hurts and we know it’s painful, but that’s just the way it is. Debts have to be paid off”.

The Taoiseach’s famous phrase was that he did not want to have the words “I didn’t pay my debts” written on his forehead. There is no problem for some of the richest people in the country, however. If they want a debt write-down, they can have it at any time because we have to incentivise the entrepreneurs. Then the same entrepreneurs get the contracts for Irish Water. Honestly, one could not make it up. The Italian Mafia would be very proud of it. They could not dream up a scam like the one the Government has engineered around Irish Water. The company that is putting in the meters has benefited from this massive write-down for one of the richest people in the country, who also became one of the richest people in the country because he got the second mobile telephone licence under murky circumstances, to put it mildly. That is not my opinion but that of the Moriarty tribunal yet still nothing is done about it. It sickens people that nothing was done about that and the very same people reappear to make an absolute fortune. How much profit will Sierra and Siteserv make out of the contract to install these meters? A lot of money. The increase in Mr. O’Brien’s wealth since 2006 is unbelievable.

The rest of the country has become much poorer and has seen incomes cut by 20% or 30%, deprivation has risen, poverty has risen and yet his wealth has gone from approximately €2.6 billion to over €6 billion in the same number of years. We could pay for the entire investment programme for the next four years by just using a wealth tax to cancel out the extra billions he, just one individual, has got over the past six years. If we just took it back he would still be left with the €2 billion he had back in 2006. If we did the same with the extra wealth a few other multimillionaires and multibillionaires have accumulated in the past five years, while the rest of us have been impoverished, it would pay for the necessary rehabilitation programme for water. That is the scandal the Government has presided over while it continues with a load of bogus arguments about being interested in fixing the water infrastructure.

Some terms and conditions for customers of Irish Water are extraordinary. A person on one of the protests pointed me to the agreement to which one signs up when one registers with Irish Water, one provision of which is that anyone who harvests rainwater from their roof, their paving, their windows or anywhere on their property has to get written permission from Irish Water to do so. That gives the lie to the claim that water charges are about encouraging conservation, which the Minister claims to support. Why would that be? I bet the Minister of State has not even read the agreement but why would Irish Water have a stipulation that the householder would require written permission to harvest water? There is a very obvious reason but the Government has not mentioned it and most people who have registered are blissfully unaware of it. If people start to conserve more water to reduce their water charges bill by, for example, not flushing their toilets so much, Irish Water will increase the water out charge when the metering comes up. That is a standard feature of what has happened elsewhere, such as in Detroit and everywhere else in the world where there is a similar model in which there is a charge for water in and water out. At the moment the ratio is 50:50 but the water companies tend to vary this over time. In Detroit one now pays much more for water out than water in because people conserve more as the charges rise, but the water has to go out into the system so the companies increase their charges for water out to deny people the benefit of conserving it. This removes the incentive to conserve water at all.

In Bolivia, when Bechtel, the nasty, profiteering gang which set up the infrastructure for the US army in Iraq, was in control of the water system, it sent inspectors to the poorest shanty towns to tell people who had water collection receptacles on their roofs to pay for them. The people eventually chucked them out after two years of sustained protests but that provision is in the customer agreement which a person signs up to when he or she registers with Irish Water. So much for conservation. It is all about money and profit. It is about setting up a utility, which will be privatised, to make money out of what is a basic human need.

We beg to differ with the Government on how to vindicate the basic human right for water and believe it should be paid for through fair and progressive taxation. We think it would be fairer and more efficient and would yield more revenue to tax the people who do not pay their fair share at the moment, whether they are the corporate profiteers, the super-rich with their accumulated wealth, the very high earners or the financial speculators, instead of this regressive unfair austerity charge.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Since a transfer of money to the Exchequer from the local government fund is only provided for this year, will there be a transfer next year and, if there is, will it require specific legislation to facilitate it? We have to know what is going on with the money because all the legislation provides for is a one-year transfer of money from the local government fund to the Exchequer, a proportion of which goes on to Uisce Éireann.

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I do not go along with the theory that the 32 local authorities were doing a highly efficient job and I had many a battle, both as Minister and local councillor, with the local authorities on this. We have to be honest about having a national network of water because if there had been a water supply to every house 120 years ago, no one would have set up 32 separate utilities. As with the electricity supply there would have been one national network connected in a comprehensive way, not stopping at county borders but giving a seamless system of water. We need a national plan in order that we move away from the stand-alone system county councils had in the past, because the problem was that if anything went wrong with them, one had no water. On the other hand, if there were a lot of interconnecting systems with larger and fewer treatment plants, it would give the advantage that if one supply got into difficulty, as happens with electricity, a backfeed of water would keep the supply going. The one-off, stand-alone local authority systems that did not connect have been a feature of rural life, but if anything went wrong, the whole system was down. When there was an outbreak of cryptosporidium in Galway, the fact that Galway city and county were not properly connected led to a lot of problems in the city because the new treatment plant in Luimnagh was not joined to the city system. To say, therefore, that the *status quo* is working correctly is wrong. To say it was sensible to have pipes stopping at county boundaries just because there was a county boundary is wrong. To say that everything was right with the system is also wrong, given my many dealings with it. The games that used to go on between local authorities and the Department of the Environment, which used to totally frustrate me, was wrong. A lot of money was spent on consultants preparing grandiose plans and sending them off to the Departments. The Departments would then say they were too big and the plans would to and fro for years. More money was spent on plans than was spent on putting pipes into the ground and upgrading the system.

I believe in the concept of a national network of water so that from one end of the country to the other each system would connect into the next. As a problem might arise, as it inevitably would, be it a purely natural phenomenon or otherwise, there would always be a back-up supply connected to it. At times, the debate has been a little unreal on that aspect.

I am still fascinated as to what is going on with the money trail. As I said, since the provision we are debating is for one year only, will new legislation or an amendment be needed next year? Will there be a transfer from the local government fund next year to the Exchequer? We are due an explanation on that matter in this House tonight. If this Bill had been legislated in the proper way, we would have got that explanation on Second Stage or Committee Stage and we could have come back to it on Report Stage.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I wish to take up a point the Minister of State made when he attacked the Opposition for not mentioning or dealing with the issue of rural dwellers.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The Deputy is very sensitive.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It does not pertain to any of the amendments tabled this evening. Since the Minister of State has opened up the debate, I will take up the issue. Dividing rural and urban dwellers is the Minister of State's stock in trade.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: No, it is not.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil rely on it sometimes, as does the Labour Party when it suits it. We have always called for the idea that anyone who can be should be linked into a public water network. Attempts should be made to do that in rural areas. People

should be brought into the public system as much as possible. Where it is not possible, people should be given grants for payments towards their group water or individual scheme. This was raised in the last water charges battle. I know the Minister of State is very young-----

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The Deputy would be surprised.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----but this position was put forward 20 years ago because we did not want a rural-urban divide then. If Irish Water is let loose and takes legs in the way the Minister of State would like it to, it will not be long before it takes control of rural group water schemes. Everyone will have to pay something towards Irish Water. In case the Minister of State thinks that is unlikely, it is happening already in the United States. There is very strict regulation in the United States, including, as was noted earlier, regulation of water harvesting. Anyone who harvests water has to pay the water utility for the privilege.

People in rural areas know this is an austerity measure. If one wanted to divide rural and urban dwellers, people in urban areas could argue they pay more property tax, but we are all in the one struggle. Most people in this country have not benefited and have lost out during the past seven years of austerity.

The Minister of State used the Water Services Bill tonight in a broadside on the left, saying that it never has any alternatives. My colleague, Deputy Paul Murphy, spoke for 15 minutes during which he outlined four alternatives, yet the Minister of State continued to insist he did not put forward any alternative. It is incredible that people on the Minister of State's side of the House perpetuate the myth that there is not a brass farthing in the country to be taxed. There is enormous wealth in this country and the people at the top have increased their wealth. They did not lose out during the recession. According to figures from TASC in April, the top 10% now own 34% of all wealth and the figure is growing. It was 27% in the 1980s. In the past couple of decades, some people have enriched themselves.

The former Minister, Deputy Alan Shatter, came into this House and was allowed by a different Acting Chairman to speak randomly on his experience outside this Chamber tonight. He said a bunch of fascists and thugs had prevented him from gaining access to the building and that this was disgraceful. It is called peaceful protest and it is the likes of the water charges which have ignited the protests. For seven years people stayed dormant, in acceptance and with their heads down in the hope that things would improve. The water charges have become the lightning rod for the anti-austerity movement. It is amazing that politicians who spent the past week bullying the Greek people are now finding a protest outside the gates of Leinster House a bit inconvenient.

At the outset of the debate the Minister, Deputy Kelly, made a very arrogant speech, which he delivered at breakneck speed. Believe it or not, many people listen to the goings-on in this House. Quite a few people listen to the Oireachtas goings-on live. More people than ever before are well aware of what is going on because of social media and the Internet. There is no way anyone listening could have followed a word the Minister said. It was very arrogant of him. However, he slowed down for effect when he wanted to mention certain things. He again delivered a broadside about Greece and how they have water charges there. The arrogance of the Government knows no bounds. Today it has come in with a sleight of hand. Cute hoorism, as it was called earlier on today, is a good description. The Government is sneaking in a whole new Bill in the guise of amendments to avoid discussion and debate.

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Deputy Paudie Coffey: We have been discussing it all night.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The members of Government then whinge that we are boring them and keeping them in the House. I have a nine year old at home who wants to see me-----

Deputy Paudie Coffey: So do I, but we cannot get out because of the Deputy's people.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----but thanks to the Mniister of State we will be here until 11 p.m. every night in the summer.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Government ordered the business of the Dáil; not us.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): The speaker to continue, without interruption.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I assume this will continue for the next few weeks as the Government rams through other measures which it could have got through the Dáil on the many occasions debate on other legislation finished early. Then the Government wonders why-----

Deputy Paudie Coffey: The Deputies would only be causing disruption.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----there are no women in the Dáil to be howled down and shouted at by very loud men. The Minister of State should expect a lot more. The Government is going to be challenged at every inch and on every line of these amendments to the Bill because of its manoeuvring and the way it thought it could act in the belief that we would simply give up. People have asked why we do not walk out of the Dáil. However, four or five Deputies spent the night here getting some interesting information out of the Minister of State and getting him to admit that motor and other taxes have been paying for our water services. We knew this, but it was nice to hear it from the horse's mouth. The Government has been saying we have been getting it for free and now we must pay for it but we were paying for it all along. Now the Government wants us to pay a second time and on top of those taxes which were already paid.

It is ironic that after this debate - it should be mentioned although it may have been mentioned earlier - the debate on the disgraceful cut to the lone parent payment is being shoved in at 9 p.m. until 10.30 p.m. tonight. There are women about whom I am reading today who are being told they have no money-----

Deputy Anthony Lawlor: This is not part of the debate.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----and that they have to go to their community welfare officer-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: She is absolutely right.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This is totally related because it is related to the way the Government has conducted this debate. Deputy Lawlor may have only just come into this House but some of us have been here for a few hours listening to the Minister of State meandering about Greece and all sorts of places.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I never mentioned Greece.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: If the Deputies do not mind, I am going to stick-----

Deputy Anthony Lawlor: The Deputy is meandering now.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Deputy Ruth Coppinger to continue, without interruption. I ask the Deputy to move the adjournment of the debate.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I never mentioned Greece once.

Deputy Anthony Lawlor: In fairness, the Chair never interrupts Deputy Ruth Coppinger when she starts talking about something that is not an issue.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: My point is that a very serious debate affecting thousands of women-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): The Chair is being fair.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----is being shoved to conclude at 10.30 p.m. because of the Government's carry on.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: I never mentioned Greece. The Deputy should correct the record.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is a disgrace.

Debate adjourned.

9 o'clock

One-Parent Family Payment Scheme: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh on Tuesday, 30 June 2015:

That Dáil Éireann:

— condemns the choices made by the current Government and its predecessor to force lone parent households to disproportionately shoulder the burden of cuts in the wake of an economic crash that was not of their, or their children's, making;

— recognises that the entirely foreseeable consequences of the series of social welfare cuts targeting lone parent has been a rise in the number of lone parents households experiencing enforced deprivation to its current staggering rate of 63%;

— rejects the claims made by the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, and others in government, that the purpose of the latest impending cut to the one-parent family payment scheme is to encourage lone parents to take up work and noting that it is only those lone parents who are actually in work whose weekly income will suffer a significant hit from this Thursday, 2nd July when the cut off age is lowered to just seven years;

— recalls the Government's commitment not to proceed with the cut in the absence of adequate child care provision; and

— calls on the Government, given the absence of such child care provision, not to proceed with the lowering of the cut-off age to seven years and to instead raise it to twelve years, and to this end commit to sit late to facilitate the passage of the necessary emergency legislation.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 2:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“acknowledges that despite significant levels of investment, including an estimated €607 million in 2015, the one-parent family payment scheme has not been successful in preventing lone parents from being significantly more at risk of consistent poverty than the population as a whole;

recognises that:

— in 2004, during the height of the economic boom lone parents were more than four and-a-half times more at risk of consistent poverty than the population as a whole - survey on income and living conditions, SILC, data;

— during the economic boom Ireland’s rate of lone parent employment was substantially below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, average of over 70%; and

— Ireland’s supports for lone parents need to be updated in order to provide for greater levels of opportunity for lone parents and for their children;

acknowledges that the very long duration, potentially 18-22 years, can engender long term social welfare dependency and associated poverty and social exclusion amongst lone parents and their families;

welcomes the Government’s decision to retain the one-parent family payment income at €90 per week;

recognises the difficulties experienced by persons renting or seeking to rent in the current market fundamentally due to the reduced availability of affordable private rented accommodation;

recognises the Government’s commitment to:

— maintain core social welfare weekly rates of payment;

— tackle long term social welfare dependency by ending the expectation that lone parents will remain outside of the labour force indefinitely;

— enhance lone parents’ access to the range of education, training and employment supports and services in order to develop their skills set with the aim of securing employment and financial independence;

— support lone parents to make the transition from the one-parent family payment onto another social welfare payment; and

— deliver significantly increased supply of social and affordable housing through the Construction 2020 strategy and the social housing strategy;

recognises that the Department of Social Protection has implemented preventative measures to provide for flexibility in assessing customers’ accommodation needs under the rent supplement scheme through the National Tenancy Sustainment Framework. Under this

approach, the circumstances of tenants are considered on a case-by-case basis and rents are being increased above prescribed limits. The Department works with Threshold's tenancy sustainment service in Dublin city and Cork city. This flexible approach has already assisted over 2,100 rent supplement households nationwide through increased rent payments;

welcomes the steps the Government has taken to ease the transition of affected lone parents from the one-parent family payment, including;

- the introduction of the jobseeker's transitional payment which allows lone parents whose youngest child is aged seven to thirteen years to balance their caring responsibilities by exempting them from having to be available for and genuinely seeking full time employment;

- creating for the first time the opportunity for lone parents to have access to a case officer on a one to one basis in order to agree their own personal development plan;

- the extension to the jobseeker's transitional payment, to now allow all lone parents, who have a child aged seven to thirteen years, to access the special arrangements of the transitional arrangement and not just former recipients of the one parent family payment;

- the automatic reviews and increases of the family income supplement, FIS, for affected lone parents, following their transition from the one-parent family payment;

- the introduction of the back to work family dividend for all lone parents who transition off the one-parent family payment into employment, which allows them to retain their child proportion of their social welfare payment;

- the Government's annual investment of €260 million in high quality, accessible and affordable child care for parents, benefiting over 100,000 children. This is delivered through a range of child care programmes for children, including the free pre-school year provided under the early childhood care and education scheme, ECCE, programme and as a range of supports provided to low income parents, that is, community childcare subvention programme, child care education and training support programme, afterschool childcare programme and community employment childcare, CEC, programme;

- the establishment of an interdepartmental group to carry out an economic and cost benefit analysis of policies and future options for increasing the supply, accessibility and affordability of quality child care;

- the decision to allow lone parents in receipt of half-rate carer's allowance to retain their one-parent family payment until their youngest child is 16 years of age;

- allowing lone parents who are currently undertaking an education course and are in receipt of a Student Universal Support Ireland, SUSI, maintenance grant to maintain both their one-parent family payment and the SUSI maintenance grant until they have completed their course of study; and

- the research the Department of Social Protection is sponsoring into an active inclusion approach to lone parents, which is examining best practice and innovative approaches to assisting lone parents improve their well-being; and recognises that after the reform lone parents with children who are aged seven years or older and in employment will continue to receive substantial support from the Department of Social Protection, such as:

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— a lone parent with one child who has no work will receive on a jobseeker's payment almost €218 per week;

— if they work 19 hours at the national minimum wage they will receive on top of their wages €235 per week between FIS and the back to work family dividend – a total family income of €400 per week;

— a lone parent with two children on a jobseeker's payment with no work receives almost €248 per week from the Department of Social Protection;

— if they work 19 hours at the national minimum wage they will receive on top of their wages €323 per week between FIS and the back to work family dividend – a total family income of €488 per week;

— a lone parent with three children and no work on a jobseeker's payment will receive almost €278 per week from the Department of Social Protection; and

— if they work 19 hours at the national minimum wage they will receive on top of their wages €413 per week between FIS and the back to work family dividend – a total family income of €578 per week.”

-(Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection)

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Deputies Paul Murphy, Tom Fleming, Catherine Murphy, Stephen S. Donnelly and Richard Boyd Barrett have ten minutes between them. I presume they will take two minutes apiece.

Deputy Paul Murphy: That is correct. I wish to read out a report on the National One-Parent Family Network Facebook page. It states:

The transition to other payments has been disgracefully handled. Some people have had their increases in FIS, others nothing. Some people have nothing to live on for the week! They've been told to go to the CWO for emergency payments (but have you tried getting to see the CWO during the school holidays with your children??).

Shocking disregard to lone parents and their needs...I witnessed women crying, begging and stressed out near breakdowns in my local Intreo office today. Horrible, horrible, cruel treatment by Joan Burton and her cronies. It's a sad day in Ireland when parents can't even buy food for their children because of the ineptitude of the system.

This cut and the role of the Labour Party in this cut will go down as the most horrific anti-woman, anti-working people, anti-people and regressive measure introduced by this Government. What makes it even more disgusting is the Thatcherite rhetoric surrounding it. There is this notion that it is a pro-work measure. It is not a pro-work measure; it is a pro-poverty measure. It is pro driving people into low-paid jobs.

The way the debate has been conducted by the Labour Party and the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, above all, has been a disgrace. Instead of engaging with the reality that over 10,000 one-parent families will lose at least €87, that reality has simply been ignored. The talk is about getting people back to work and incentivising people. Those people are already at work. In cutting their payments, the Government is making it impossible for them to afford child care, pushing them further away from work. The Minister,

Deputy Joan Burton, promised that we would not have anything like this until we had a credible and bankable guarantee of Scandinavian-style child care.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Deputy Tom Fleming is up next, but if someone wants to go before him it would give him time to catch his breath.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I want to tell the Minister of State what a real person wrote to me and many other Deputies. This person says she is a lone parent. The cuts that come into force this week will seriously affect her financially. She has worked part-time since her son was born nine years ago. These cuts will mean that from this week she will be down €62. She has a mortgage of over €600 on a house, whose value has also suffered in the economic crash. She is in negative equity. However, she did not give up and she has worked hard to keep her home and her job.

Unfortunately she does not qualify for the family income supplement because over two weeks she works 36.5 hours, nor is she entitled to the family dividend as she already has a job. Even if she could work more hours, child care is not available and if she were to pay out for child care for the extra day, she would be working solely to pay for that child care. She maintains it makes no sense to have someone else raise her child for that day when there is no financial gain to be had. She asks how these cuts are to benefit already-working lone parents. They have a job and, therefore, they are already in the workforce. The only thing the Government is doing is forcing them to give up their jobs and become unemployed. In her case, she is looking at losing her home. A sum of €62 per week may not seem a great deal to some people but it is all the difference for her. She says it amounts to her entire shopping bill in a given week.

This is the testimony of a real person. This is the real impact this measure will have on this group. One group in Irish society most at risk of poverty comprises households headed by lone parents. I cannot understand why the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, who is a Labour Party person, would do this. Lone parents will feel this keenly, but society in general will see it as a vulnerable group being picked off. They do not see it as being fair.

Deputy Tom Fleming: Our spend on early childhood education is 0.2% of GDP whereas the European average is 0.7% of GDP. This puts it in a nutshell. We are straggling behind almost all developed countries in our investment in this vital sector.

The cuts to lone parents without a proper structure of supports will cause devastation and bedlam for the vast majority. The child care to enable many of these parents to work more hours is unaffordable. The fact that they are faced with a reduction of approximately €80 per week will force low-income lone parent families to choose between poverty, that is to say, living on welfare alone or working in poverty by doing low-wage part-time work, which is both anti-care and anti-family.

Recent research and studies have shown that the levels of poverty and deprivation have increased significantly for some in the recession. The survey of income and living conditions 2013 report shows that 23% of one-parent families with dependent children are in constant poverty, over three times as many as in the general population. Instead of encouraging and incentivising parents into the workforce, the Government has drastically reduced the amount these people can earn before these heavy welfare supports are factored in. Rather than getting away from the politics of recession we are renewing a further episode of these policies, even when the Government is optimistic for the future. That makes it all the more difficult to comprehend.

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Thus, 1,500 parents have one-parent family allowances when their children reach seven years of age. Next month another 40,000 parents are to be reclassified as jobseekers. They will lose out on the income disregard and move into other traditional family supports.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: Tomorrow the Government is introducing changes to the one-parent payment which will have two effects. It will reduce the minimum age of eligibility to seven years for children and it will reduce the income disregard for those transitioning by 30%. This means that lone parents will have up to €140 less per week because of the measures the Government is bringing in tomorrow. This policy was conceived in an era of full and flexible employment. Neither of those conditions applies today.

The Tánaiste gave an absolute guarantee that this would not be done until a Scandinavian level of child care was in Ireland. It is not. The Government maintains that these measures are being brought in to empower these parents, 98% of whom are women. They will not. What they will do is force these parents out of work, force more parents and their children into poverty and lock them into poverty traps. That is what is happening tomorrow morning.

The Government estimates that these measures will save approximately €12 million this year. They will not. The social and economic ramifications of what this Government is doing tomorrow morning will cost this State a fortune in human suffering and money. I offer a real example. It relates to a lady called Sandra, who is a lone parent in Wicklow. She works part-time. She is in college and is obviously a parent. She receives the family income supplement, the one-parent payment and wages. After rent, she has €326 per week for her household. Tomorrow morning that €326 is going to fall by almost 30%. This is what will happen to her. She will have to drop out of college, out of work and she will have to stay at home. That is what is actually happening. It is the very worst and most stupid, mean, vindictive, regressive social policy that I have seen from the Government. It is incumbent on Labour Party Deputies, at least, to talk to their Ministers this evening and ask whether this can be stopped.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I ask in all honesty what does the Government have against lone parents. What it has done to them to date and is now proposing to do to working lone parents can only indicate a vindictive desire to attack lone parents and their children. The facts speak for themselves. No matter what way one tries to spin it, since the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, started to make cuts affecting lone parents, through cutting the income disregard, the concurrent payments and now the one-parent family payment, she has driven significant numbers of lone parents further into poverty and deprivation. We have seen a spectacular spike in the number of children living in poverty. There has been an increase of 137,000 since the Minister began her cuts in 2012, overwhelmingly because of the attacks on parents. The number of lone parents working has dropped from over 60% in 2012 to just over 30%. Therefore, how can the Government possibly claim this has anything to do with labour activation? It is, in fact, the Labour Party capitulating to the Fine Gael vendetta against lone parents and the visceral prejudice Fine Gael has against those it regards as social welfare-dependent lone parents. The belief is a myth, prejudice and total nonsense because the majority of lone parents were working and want to work. These measures will drive them out of work and more lone parents and their children into poverty. The Minister of State, Deputy Gerald Nash, should be ashamed of himself.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Some 18,000 people have already transitioned under the changes. I wonder whether Members of the Opposition know that. The bulk transitioned last year when the cut-off age was reduced to 16 years in the case of the children of some lone parents, ten in

the case of others and seven in the case of some. There was not a whimper about this last year. Last July-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Come on; we have been protesting since 2012. We spent hours here with the Minister, Deputy Joan Burton.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: There was not one word about the people who transitioned last July and I would like the Deputy to prove otherwise. Where was the request for a Dáil debate about it then?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We spent hours here with the Minister.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): To be fair, the Deputy should be allowed to speak without interruption.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Deputy is Chairman of a committee.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: The motion-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Deputy is living on a different planet.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): To be fair, she should be allowed to speak without interruption.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: The Deputy abstained in a vote when the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill was being discussed a couple of months ago. When Deputy Joan Collins put the matter to a vote, the Deputy abstained. Fianna Fáil voted in favour of it. I was wondering what the Deputy was doing at the time. He is jumping on the bandwagon.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Am I jumping on the bandwagon? The Deputy has absolutely no idea about my record on the issue.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: The Deputy is not sincere. These changes are brave and progressive.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Deputy is deluded, God love her.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): The Deputy will speak later and have his opportunity.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett should note that the Labour Party has taken ownership of this issue. This is our initiative. It is about helping lone parents. It would be a lot easier to do nothing. The genesis of the proposals dates from 2006 when there was a report on supporting lone parents. It was recommended that the one-parent family payment be time limited and that there be measures to facilitate lone parents moving to training, education and employment. That is where it comes from. A move towards these proposals was first announced in 2010. There was an OECD report in 2007 that stated the current system was a disincentive to lone parents working.

With regard to some of the comments made, it is quite clear that many people such as Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly probably do not know the detail of the changes. When the Deputy talked about an example in his constituency, he never mentioned the person's entitlement to the back-to-work dividend. I wonder whether he has advised his constituent about this entitlement.

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In many cases for people on family income supplement, the back-to-work dividend compensates in full for the 40% loss in the one-parent family payment. Sometimes, there is even a gain.

The risk of poverty is 40% for lone parents who are not working. Their income will not change after these changes. Some of the people who will be affected are in receipt of family income supplement. They are at the least risk of poverty, at a rate of 10%. Family income supplement and the back-to-work dividend are very much based on the number of children one has. The more children one has, the more support one receives. The two payments are child focused. The minimum net income a lone parent with three children will have after the changes will be just under €580 per week. If one compares this to the average wage, one will find that the latter, after tax, payment of the universal social charge and so on, is the equivalent.

With regard to a lone parent with one child on family income supplement and in receipt of the back-to-work dividend, the net income of €400 which starts from an income of €165, the minimum wage, is equivalent to €35 at the ICTU and SIPTU supported living wage. These are the supports that are available.

We should all be advising and supporting those who are working fewer than 19 hours. It is not desirable that people should be cleaning in a school for ten hours per week for the rest of their lives. Such people will be assisted by the Department under these changes to be given more hours or a better job and to receive any education and training they need.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is absolute rubbish.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: The *status quo* is trapping them in property.

Deputy Catherine Murphy talked about child care places for people who had to increase their hours. It is just a nonsense. If somebody already working works 15 hours and has to increase the number of hours by four-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Would they not increase it now?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): The Deputy will be wrapping up. He will have his opportunity then.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: The figures show that some in that position end up better off to the tune of €200 or more per week when the payment is combined with family income supplement, the back-to-work dividend and extra wages.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The cleaner working ten hours per week is not being given the additional four hours.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: That is €800 per month which would easily cover the cost of four hours extra child care, if needed. One should not forget that one does not have to work under the changes until the child is 14 years.

It is disingenuous to oppose the changes. Ultimately, the Government, including the Labour Party, will have done something to improve the lot of lone parents while the Opposition stood by.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): I remind the House to show due courtesy and respect to the person who is in the Chair.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: We are asking questions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): It is not a question and answer session. The Deputy will have ten minutes to wrap up at the end and I ensure him he will be afforded that courtesy.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I thank the Acting Chairman.

Deputy Arthur Spring: The sentiment of this debate is such that one would say there was abject property among lone parent families. I do not believe there is anybody in this House who would want to see children subject to abject poverty where we could do anything about it. We are coming to the end of a period of austerity and moving towards an era of prosperity, to which we all aspire. Two things with which I must confess to being obsessed as a politician are the creation of jobs and child care. As a society, Ireland is a complete outlier. As one of the few Members in this House who has lived in and experienced Scandinavia, I am a complete supporter of Scandinavian society and its system of government. I know the Tánaiste, Deputy Joan Burton, well. It would not be appropriate to suggest she has anything other than the highest respect and goodwill towards people who are struggling in society. She has made it quite clear to the people in the party and the Government who have asked about this issue that she is trying to tackle the fact we are outliers in terms of the numbers of people who receive one-parent family payment but have less income as a result of their inability to find work. She is trying to ensure people will be able to go back to work if they can find work and will be able to get child care. The question concerns whether we are achieving both at the same time.

I want to put the following information from EUROSTAT, the European Commission and the OECD on the record. The main issue in social policy is the problem of low work intensity households. They have been cited as a factor that can lead to serious social exclusion, something we all want to get rid of. The figure of 23.9% is the highest in the EU and more than double the EU average of 10.85%. Some would say this has its roots in austerity but the rate was higher than the EU average before the crisis and surged from 14.3% in 2007 to 24.2% in 2011 before falling to 23.4% in 2012. In 2013, the number of children living in jobless households was also the highest in Europe at 17.7%. We need to tackle two things, one of which is the opportunity to find a job. We have decreased the number of people who are unemployed from over 15% to around 9%. We also need to provide people with child care. Based on what I have read regarding international best practice, there is a safeguard. Children under the age of seven will be considered differently from those older than that. The child must be five years of age under the UK system. Once again, the best system leans towards Sweden and Scandinavian models where child care costs no more than €140 per month for the first child and decreases thereafter.

I heard the Tánaiste speak about her aspirations to improve the situation in this country. I will impress upon her this evening and over the coming months that this budget should tackle child care and jobs in regions. What is happening in Dublin is a far cry from what is happening in other places. It is not as easy to get 15 hours of work or, if one has 15 hours, to increase them to 20 hours in areas outside Dublin as it is in the city. Some sense has been spoken on all sides of the House. The overall sentiment is something I appreciate and I know what Sinn Féin is trying to achieve in this motion. It goes back to the fact that people in low work intensity households have the highest chance of serious social exclusion. This affects the children more than it affects the parent. Any incentive that can be given to remove a disincentive is a help but there are other social factors, which is why it is not always about taxation and the simple pay-

ment of money. There are structures and societal issues that need to be addressed for people to be better off. Lone parents need to be catered for and there is much that society can do outside of funding. The person also needs to be given the opportunity to work.

Deputy Seán Kyne: I welcome this debate on an important topic. I have said on numerous occasions in the House that social welfare is a safety net that many, if not the majority of, people will benefit from and utilise at some stage in their lives. Deputy Arthur Spring touched on the issue of politicians. I do not know any politician who wants to see people in poverty or who does not want to see people lifted out of poverty. Every politician would support and aspire to that. There are different philosophies regarding how one might achieve that. One could argue that it was not achieved in times of plenty. In more difficult and constrained economic times, it is obviously more difficult. Some people would espouse the belief that social welfare should increase to keep pace with inflation, while others would state we should encourage people to enter the workplace and support their progression there via family income supplement or the new back-to-work family dividend that was created by the Government in the previous budget. That is what this is about. It is not about saving money. It is about incentivising and lifting people out of poverty.

At the height of the boom in 2004 when money was not an issue, if one believes a former Minister for Finance who appeared before the banking inquiry, lone parents were four and a half times more likely to be in poverty. At that time, participation in the workforce was way below the OECD average so there was something wrong. Other countries have moved in terms of how they deal with lone parents. We all accept that lone parents face specific challenges, child care in particular, but this is about trying to lift them of the situation they are in by incentivising and encouraging.

I am a member of the Oireachtas Committee on European Union Affairs, which is currently dealing with the country-specific recommendations as put forward by the European Commission. Every country in Europe has signed up to Europe 2020 targets under the European Semester process. Those country-specific recommendations in 2014 and 2015 tie into this area. Recommendation No. 3 of this year involves taking steps to increase the work intensity of households and addressing the poverty risk of children by tapering the withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments upon return to employment and through better access to affordable, full-time child care. That is what the Department has been moving towards and that is what the European Commission has been advising countries to do via the European Semester process. The Commission is advising and encouraging this move. Other countries like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and New Zealand have progressed to a different model in recent years and we have not done so.

I seek clarification in respect of SUSI. It is stated that a student in receipt of one-parent family payment who comes off it and who can transfer to the back-to-education allowance will continue to maintain their SUSI maintenance grant. In response to one query, I was informed it had identified that the person in question will be receiving the back-to-education allowance. It said that from the information provided, it would appear they were not eligible for a maintenance grant but that they may still be entitled to a fee grant or a postgraduate fee contribution should one of those apply to their chosen course and subject to meeting all the eligibility criteria. I ask for clarification regarding whether they are eligible in all cases.

The impact of these changes must be monitored to ensure no one is left worse off and there is no greater hardship because we have encouraged more people to avail of family income

supplement and the back-to-work family dividend. That is the basis of it. As others have stated, I believe the Minister is genuine in her belief that this is the right thing to do and that it will encourage and lift people out of poverty, but I ask that the process and changes be monitored to ensure that if there are specific hardship cases for whatever reason, they can be alleviated through whatever means are possible.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: It is typical of the Opposition to have a debate about an issue for which it has no solution. It can wax lyrical but it has no solution. As always, it never ceases to amaze me the way the Opposition can grandstand and spout about what we in Government are doing wrong, yet it has nothing to offer. Sinn Féin wants to abolish water and property charges and introduce a wealth tax. The list is endless. If we actually did anything it suggested, how would the State have any money at all to pay for crucial things like welfare allowances and services? The reform of the one-parent family payment is a move that will be positive in the long run. We cannot continue to condemn one-parent families to a poverty trap. I ask if Sinn Féin wants help one-parent families and to see them leave social welfare. Research has clearly proven that the strongest protection against poverty is sustained employment, to have a job, rather than having one-parent families condemned to economic dependency.

The one-parent family scheme has consistently failed to prevent lone parents from being at risk to poverty. In 2015, lone parents are still two and a half times more at risk of consistent poverty compared to the rest of the population. This is unacceptable. Research shows that being at work reduces the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents by three quarters, compared to those who do not. The numbers speak for themselves and as a mother I cannot stand by and neither can this Government stand by and not do anything to help address this serious failure to protect and help one-parent families. We need to provide opportunities for all, not a welfare dependency trap for all.

As the Tánaiste said last night, Sinn Féin is using this motion simply as a cheap populist tactic. I find this motion hypocritical when in Northern Ireland and in many other countries, the equivalent supports stop at the age of five years compared to the proposed age of seven here in the Republic of Ireland. I do not hear Sinn Féin members mentioning that fact.

The purpose of the single parent payment is to help the parent to build financial independence over time. The single parents I meet and work with around the constituency of Dún Laoghaire want to work. I know them because I have taught many of them in my work as a school principal. They want to be financially independent and, most important, they want to give their children the best opportunities in life. This Government knows what it is doing. We rebuilt this economy, with the help of the people, from the worst recession this country has ever witnessed. Unemployment has fallen by more than one third since its peak. Throwing money at the problem is not the answer. This Government has introduced and reformed back to work schemes and education and training programmes to help assist single parents and others to get back into the workforce and be financially independent. I recognise that child care needs to be greatly improved in this country for all families. We are quite a bit off from the leading examples of Norway and Sweden but we are making progressive steps in the right direction.

I have proposed an after school child care model whereby schools provide on-site after school care services. Along with the board of management of the school in which I was principal, I launched this child care alternative in 2009. I believe the success of my initiative in one school can provide a blueprint for wider action. Most important, it will help support the very parents who are on the single parent payment to take up a job and thereby increase their likeli-

hood of employment.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I thank Sinn Féin members for tabling this Private Members' motion. It is never easy to introduce reform or to change a system that has been in place for a long time. However, from the outset, the Government and the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, have been committed to reforming the social welfare system. The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, introduced phased reforms to the one-parent family payment scheme in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012, in order to reduce long-term social welfare dependency. To give credit where credit is due, she is probably one of the few Ministers to have the guts to implement some of the reforms. This is about breaking a cycle of dependency on welfare and giving people opportunities to move into employment or further training and education.

Despite significant levels of investment, including an estimated €607 million in 2015 for almost 70,000 recipients, the one-parent family payment scheme has not been successful in preventing lone parents from being significantly more at risk of consistent poverty than the population as a whole. After many years of pouring billions of euro into a system, we still see that children who are in families where nobody works are at highest risk of consistent poverty. A 2008 survey showed that one of the main barriers to employment for lone parents was that a job would not be financially worth their while. The latest CSO figures indicate that two thirds of lone parents live in poverty. The Government is working hard to make work pay and I firmly believe that the best route out of poverty and social exclusion is through paid employment. Research shows that being at work reduces the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents by 75%, compared to those who do not work. Providing people with the skills to find employment can help them to improve their family situation and also the situation of their extended family. Some people have expressed concerns about the availability of jobs. I agree with them that there are still many people who need to be back at work.

Since taking office, this Government has helped to create 100,000 jobs across the board. There are also opportunities available on community employment schemes through SOLAS. Last week, 800 vacancies were available around the country as well as more than 98,000 places on training schemes and courses in our local colleges.

Returning to education and training can provide parents with new opportunities to re-train and gain the necessary skills to enter the workforce, which may not have been possible in the past when they were rearing young children. In my experience, returning to education brings renewed self-esteem, opens up doors and can offer a new beginning to many young people. The primary aim is to support lone parents who wish to take up these opportunities. That is why the Department is allowing lone parents who are already on an education course and in receipt of the SUSI grant, to keep their one-parent family payment and the SUSI maintenance grant until they finish their course. We need to keep these courses going and to support maintenance grants for lone parents. Since the reform of the one-parent family payment began, approximately 11,000 recipients have moved to alternative income support payments including the jobseeker's transition payment, the back to work family dividend and family income supplement.

The jobseeker's transition payment supports lone parents with children over the age of seven and until their 14th birthday. Under this scheme they do not have to be available and genuinely seeking work but they do have to engage with their local Intreo office and avail of the support of a case officer. No lone parent with a child under the age of 14 years is required to take up employment in order to receive income support from the State.

The back to work family dividend allows lone parents to retain the child proportion of their social welfare payment. From this week, 30,000 lone parents will move onto these new schemes and 20,000 of those will see no change in their income or they will gain from between €10 and €150 per week. From the remaining 10,000, approximately 6,000 will have an immediate incentive to increase their number of hours worked to 19 in order to claim family income supplement and the back to work family dividend. These people will be financially better off. Even after the reform, a lone parent whose youngest child is aged seven or over, working 19 hours at the national minimum wage, receives more support from the Department of Social Protection than an equivalent lone parent who is not working. They receive €235 per week free from the Department in the form of FIS and the back to work family dividend, in addition to their wages of €165, thus bringing their total income to almost €400 per week. This compares to an equivalent lone parent with no work who receives €218 per week from the Department. It is very important that we continue to encourage people - lone parents in particular - to return to the workforce.

Many people have raised with me the question of supports, maintenance and fathers. I ask the Minister of State if we can find a way of dealing with maintenance payments by fathers to lone parents. Many young women are rearing children with no maintenance being provided by the fathers of their children.

Deputy Joe Costello: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. I compliment Sinn Féin on tabling it, although I disagree profoundly with its analysis. It is very strong on outrage and very weak on ideas. I listened to many of the contributions last night. I would like to see more time spent addressing how we go about dealing with a system that is not functioning and effectively condemning lone parents to pretty much a lifetime of dependency on welfare and a lifetime of poverty. These are very harsh statistics. Even at the height of the Celtic tiger the situation was even worse than it is at present in terms of the percentage of lone parents who are vulnerable and prone to poverty.

All the figures clearly indicate that we should reform the system; we must reform the system. The Government made a commitment to reform the system of one-parent family payments. I would love to have a debate here with a clear analysis of what is wrong with the existing system and clear proposals on how to move forward in a coherent and meaningful fashion. There is no intention in any part of what is being done here to reduce the amount of money available to lone parents.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Is that what the Government is doing?

Deputy Joe Costello: The entire purpose of this is to ensure a system is put in place to enable lone parents to move out of poverty and get back into the workforce at a time when they can get back into the workforce. It is outrageous that someone with one child could be 22 years out of the workforce under the present scheme. It effectively condemns them to dependency on welfare during their prime working life.

We must acknowledge the absolute importance of the family. It is in the Constitution and in the 1916 Proclamation to cherish all the children of the nation equally. We must at the same time ensure we address the huge challenges facing lone parents in the present system.

It is right to provide the supports we are providing and it is right to improve child care enormously. It is right to ensure benefits are adequate for parents who need them. However, it

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is also right to liberate women from dependency on child care. A large cohort of people in my and Deputy Mary Lou McDonald's constituency are condemned to a lifetime of welfare dependency largely because they are mothers.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They will have plenty to say to the Deputy when they meet him afterwards.

Deputy Joe Costello: What steps are needed? What supports are needed?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Liberate them from their children.

Deputy Joe Costello: What mechanisms are needed to ensure they are not impoverished and do not spend a lifetime depending on social welfare? That is the challenge we have. Let us be positive about it.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: This will not do it.

Deputy Joe Costello: Let us not just engage in outrage that there should be any change in the system. Let us look at a system that has clearly failed from any analysis that has been done to date. Let us look to Northern Ireland if Sinn Féin has some difficulties with the present system here. Why is Sinn Féin quite happy to see a further reduction in the age in Northern Ireland? We are talking about seven here, but it is five in Northern Ireland.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: We are not happy.

Deputy Joe Costello: Then Deputy may not be happy with it. I do not hear any great words of outrage so far.

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Deputy Joe Costello to continue, without interruption.

Deputy Joe Costello: I have not heard any criticism from Sinn Féin of the system that operates in Northern Ireland.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Deputy should get the Tánaiste to raise it with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Get the Tánaiste to raise it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Deputy Joe Costello to continue, without interruption, please.

Deputy Joe Costello: Why should-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: He is speaking directly to us, not through the Chair.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): Through the Chair, Deputy.

Deputy Joe Costello: Why should Sinn Féin sit in government, presiding over a system with which it disagrees? There is no good in blaming the Brits forever. It is time for Sinn Féin to stand up and make its voice heard.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: The Deputy should tell that to his party leader.

Deputy Joe Costello: They should come into this House - they are here now - and say what they will do to improve the system in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. We want two systems that will cherish the children of the nation equally throughout.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: We actually process them.

Deputy Joe Costello: We want parents who will be protected and sustained. We need to ensure they are not being impoverished in any way.

Many people have outlined what these proposals would mean. Clearly, two thirds of the people who would be affected, estimated at 29,400, will be at least as well off and many cases better off. There are the incentives to get back to work, the €1,550 back-to-work family dividend for the first year per child and half that again for the second year. Of course, there is also the family income supplement.

I have no doubt there will be difficulties. I believe there will be difficulties with the 19-hour cut-off point for the family income supplement. However, we need to monitor constantly the difficulties that arise. There will be difficulties with child care. The difficulties that arise must be monitored, fed into the system and addressed in the upcoming budget. Let us look at the positive proposals-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Deputy should go around to the north inner city and Cabra, tell lone parents that story and see how he gets on.

Deputy Joe Costello: -----and the opportunities we have proposed that are in line with international best practice.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am sure they have written to the Deputy, as they have written to me.

Deputy Joe Costello: Where difficulties arise, let us address them.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Robert Troy): I call Deputy Peadar Tóibín who is sharing time with Deputies Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, Martin Ferris and Jonathan O'Brien.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Is iad tuismitheoirí aonair ceann de na grúpaí is leochailí sa tír seo. Tá rátaí díothachta níos airde ina measc ná i measc grúpaí eile. In 2008 bhí 14% de theaghlaigh aonair sa Stát ag fulaingt díothachta. In 2013 bhí 31% de theaghlach le tuismitheoir aonair ag fulaingt. Faoi chúram an Rialtais seo tá an chomhréir sin tar éis dúbailt agus tá cuma ar an scéal go bhfuil an chomhréir fós ag dul in airde i mbliana.

Nuair a labhraímid faoi dhíothacht tá muid ag déanamh tagairt ar theaghlach nach bhfuil in ann níos mó ná dhá rud as an liosta seo a dhéanamh: dhá phéire bróga a cheannach, cóta mór te a bheith acu le haghaidh an gheimhridh, feoil nó iasc a ithe lá i ndiaidh lae, nó an teas a chur ar siúl ar laethanta fuara i rith an gheimhridh. Is léir go bhfuil Páirtí an Lucht Oibre ag iarraidh níos mó airgid a bhaint ó na clanna seo. Táimid ag caint faoi laghdú de chuid €140 sa tseachtain le haghaidh teaghlaigh áirithe sa Stát seo. Táimid ag caint faoi dhaoine atá ag fulaingt cheana féin agus nach bhfuil in ann na gnáthrudáí a cheannach dóibh féin. Is é an freagra atá ag an Rialtas ar an bhfadhb sin ná níos mó airgid a bhaint díobh.

Cuir san áireamh freisin gur laghdaigh an Rialtas an cháin le haghaidh an uasaicme an bhliain seo caite agus go bhfuil sé chun an rud céanna a dhéanamh sa cháinaisnéis i mbliana freisin. Tá codarsnacht mhór ann idir an chaoi atá sé ag caitheamh leis na daoine san uasaicme agus an chaoi atá sé ag caitheamh leis na daoine seo. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil Fine Gael ag iarraidh ionadaíocht a dhéanamh ar son na huasaicme ach de ghnáth deir Páirtí an Lucht Oibre go bhfuil sé ag iarraidh ionadaíocht a dhéanamh ar son na hisealaicme agus na meánaicme. Séard atá ag tarlú ná go bhfuil an t-airgead ag dul go dtí an aicme atá thuas agus tá siad lánsásta é a choimeád dóibh féin.

Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil sé deacair é seo a chreidiúint, fiú leis an méid dochair atá déanta ag an Rialtas go dtí seo. Ní féidir leis an locht a chuir ar an troika nó ar Fhianna Fáil anois agus, mar a dúirt mé cheana, ní féidir a rá nach bhfuil airgead le fáil. Tá airgead ag an Rialtas agus tá rogha aige rud eile a dhéanamh. Tá an cháin seo ag déanamh ionsaí ar dhaoine. Ní staitisticí atá i gceist. Is ar ghnáthmháithreacha agus ar ghnáthpháistí a thitfidh an t-ualach trom. Le níos mó ná coicíos anuas tá mná ag teacht isteach i m'óifig Dháilcheantair le scéalta deacra. Tá siad buartha, imníoch agus trína chéile. Tá na deora ag sileadh leis an bhfaitíos atá orthu. Seo iad na rudaí atá siad ag rá.

Orla from Navan stated:

It costs me €90 a week (€30 a day) to have my children minded while I work 15 hrs. I've been told that because I only work 15 hrs a week I'm not entitled to FIS and my income will be down €83 a week. That means I have to give up work, I can't afford it anymore.

Aoife from Longwood stated, "I feel like I'm being punished for leaving a man who was abusing me". Martina from Navan stated, "I have to send my son to live with his dad, I can't afford to be his ma right now between rent increases and now this I just feel like giving up".

Áine from Athboy stated being a mother was a punishable crime in Ireland, especially if you had to do it alone. Helene from Trim stated, "I'm down €90 a week, does she realise how far I make that money go? Does she know what it's like to have to shout at her kids for taking an extra slice of bread or bowl of cereal out of fear we won't have enough for the week?" Aisling said, "I never felt so worthless in my life". Laura wants to know is it legal to leave a 12 year old at home by herself minding her seven year old brother after school.

Nuair a luaigh an tAire an cuspóir seo ar dtús cúpla bliain ó shin, dúirt sí nach dtiocfadh sé isteach do dtí go raibh córas cúram páistí inacmhainne ar fáil. Mar is eol do chách, go háirithe gach duine i m'aoisghrúpa, níl cúram páistí inacmhainne nó a leithéid le fáil sa tír seo. Tá an tAire tar éis sochar linbh a íslíú arís agus arís eile agus níl an cumas ag tuismitheoirí íoc as na táillí daora atá ann.

Bíonn a lán rudaí á plé agam féin agus ag Teachtaí Dála Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre sa Teach seo agus de ghnáth bíonn easaontas ann. Ach, de ghnáth, creidim go mbíonn siad ionraic sa mhéid atá á rá acu. Creideann siad an méid a bhíonn le rá acu. Ach tá mé lán cinnte ag an bpointe seo nach bhfuil na Teachtaí Dála i bPáirtí an Lucht Oibre lánsásta leis an bpraiseach atá á dhéanamh ag an Aire Coimirce Sóisialaí. Deir an Rialtas gur féidir leis na mná seo tuilleadh obair a fháil. Má tá 15 uair acu sa tseachtain, deir an Rialtas gur cheart dóibh 20 uair nó 30 uair a fháil. Chun an fhirinne a rá, níl an obair sin le fáil sa tír seo fós. Tá na céadta míle duine fós gan fostaíocht sa tír seo. Níl sé éasca ar chor ar bith an méid uaireanta oibre atá ag duine a ardú go tapa, go háirithe má tá dualgais ar an duine sin ó thaobh cúram leanaí.

Tá sé déanach san oíche anois agus táimid anseo go déanach mar gheall ar an polasaí uafásach seo. Ach tá seans ag an Rialtas fós é seo a athrú agus tá seans ag Teachtaí Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre an fód a sheasamh. Impím orthu gan géilleadh d'Fhine Gael arís agus arís eile. Impím ar na Teachtaí san an rud uafásach seo a athrú. Is féidir leo é sin a dhéanamh.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This motion condemns the Government for the decisions that have led to lone parent families carrying a disproportionate load arising from the economic crash. The fact that the number of lone parent households experiencing enforced deprivation is 63% is a shocking but telling indictment of this Government's legacy. This is particularly so given that it has occurred on the so-called Labour Party's watch. While it might be easy for many members of this Government to forget who these parents are, we know that there are approximately 215,000 lone parent families in this State, more than 18% of all family units. The most recent survey on income and living conditions revealed some disturbing statistics. In families with one adult and children under 18 years the rate of those at risk of poverty was 31.7% and the consistent poverty rate was 23%.

We all believe, or at least we should, that children should be given an equal chance. In 2008 18% of children in Ireland suffered poverty. This has since increased, with the persistent poverty rate having doubled. This Government has failed to ensure that all children are given an equal chance starting out in life.

The one-parent family payment is to be cut, from next month, for single parents whose youngest child is older than seven years. Parents are also to be moved to jobseeker's transitional allowance. This is similar to the one-parent family payment but it has a significant difference, one that all in the Government parties have been downplaying. The income disregard for the jobseeker's transitional payment is just €60 per week compared to €90 per week for the one-parent family payment.

As many as 30,000 families will be hit by this cut and it will most affect those who are in part-time employment. These families could lose out by up to €140 per week. All the while the Tánaiste knows that child care provision, as overseen by her Government, is wholly inadequate. She knows this but pushes ahead with these callous cuts. Such disregard suggests the very antithesis of a social conscience.

The main barriers to employment for these parents are jobs that leave families and individuals worse off financially, when the parent has accepted a position, and lacking access to quality child care. The Government has failed utterly to address the provision of adequate child care and has now increased the financial barrier. This goes totally against its stated aim.

In my constituency, in 2007, the Cavan Lone Parents Initiative conducted research on lone parents and labour market barriers, the study being undertaken by lone parents. The study profiled lone parents in the county in an effort to assess the various barriers to education and employment. The majority of respondents were women, 10% were newcomer families. A majority were working and were in receipt of the one-parent family payment. A significant number had left school without completing the leaving certificate. Overall, the study shows how diverse a group it is: parents with very different educational backgrounds, some in paid and others in unpaid work, and with children of various ages and widely different needs. Most have children of school-going age and education courses that are flexible are seen as most accessible. What the report shows us overall is that these many challenges need to be addressed in order that we can support, encourage and free parents to take a more active role in the workforce.

This will not happen by raising the barriers that stop this happening.

Even now, after having to deal with years of Government enforced hardship, the parents in these lone family units will have to deal with this further blow. Labour has recently tried to spin everything it does in a positive light. The election is in clear sight. It is still cutting back. It is still acting totally contrary to the memory of Connolly and it is still the wolf in sheep's clothing for many of the poorest and most challenged in our communities.

I understand the Tánaiste is looking to increase child benefit by €5 in next year's budget. She tied this nicely some would say, to coincide with this cut in the one-parent family payment. I imagine that this will be too little too late for those in need and for the Labour Party. It has shown its true colours and whatever they are, they are certainly not red. This and talk of changes to the universal social charge, USC, are long overdue and clearly represent an effort to curry favour in the run-up to an election and to deflect some of the very negative coverage of the cutbacks we are discussing. The USC changes must focus on those on low incomes as a priority. I urge that on the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Simon Harris, and his colleague here present.

The Government should be helping, not further punishing, lone parents already struggling to deal with the cuts to the back to school allowance. The reclassification of parents as job seekers without adequate supports is a cruel trick. The aim of education and work is a sound one but the Government has done nothing to reassure these families that suitable supports will be put in place.

Táim an-bhuartha faoina bhfuil i ndán do thuismitheoirí aonair faoin Rialtas seo. In ainneoin a bheith ag maíomh as a bhfuil déanta ag an Rialtas ar son na cosmhuintire, tá sé fós ag cur polasaithe diana i bhfeidhm. Is náire atá ann do Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre atá tar éis an lucht oibre féin a thréigint. Is náire atá ann don Tánaiste atá ag brú an polasaí seo chun cinn agus is náire atá ann dóibh siúd atá tar éis cinntiú gur beagán difir atá ann idir Fhine Gael agus Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre. Iarraim ar an Teach tacú leis an rún atá os ár gcomhair anocht chun gur féidir linn tuismitheoirí aonair na tíre seo a chothú go cothrom.

Deputy Martin Ferris: The way we truly measure a caring government or society is how it treats its young, the elderly, people with disabilities and those most discriminated against by the economic system within a state. If we apply this as a benchmark to past Governments and particularly the Government, I can assure the House that they have failed miserably.

10 o'clock

The Government's latest intention has been to take income from lone parents. It is taking money from their pockets that they would use to try to have a decent diet for their families, keep a roof over their heads and ensure they have some life. In doing this, it is condemning more and more people to poverty and putting those already in the poverty trap further into it. It is further punishing the most vulnerable in society. In doing this it shows its true mettle and what it really stands for. It does not stand for fairness or equality of treatment for citizens and the people, nor does it not cherish the children of the nation equally. In fact, what it is doing copperfastens an unequal society where children, if they happen to be part of a lone-parent family, are the victims of its failed economic policies and failure to look after those most in need. It is shameful.

I look across the floor of the House at those who consider themselves to be Labour Party Deputies. They say they carry the mantle of James Connolly, a person who took to the streets to defend the poor and the working class, a person who gave his life in pursuit of justice and

equality and freedom for his people. They have defaced everything that man stood for. They have signed up with the right-wing regime of which they are now part and part and which is to again attack lone-parent families.

In effect, on 2 July the Government will put 11,000 people further into property and cut a figure of up to 30,000 in a few weeks time. These figures are an awful indictment of the Government. They are a particular indictment of those who consider themselves to be members of the Labour Party. If we look at the statistics already available, we can see that between 2008 and 2013 the number living in consistent poverty increased from 6% to 12%. Some 135,000 children, or one in eight, are experiencing material deprivation on a daily basis, while 63% of lone-parent families are living without basic necessities. The Government talks about getting people back to work. It would be nice if it first created jobs. Child care is unaffordable for most low-income families and deprivation rates for the population soared from 14% in 2008 to 31% in 2013.

The best way to escape from poverty is not just through paid work but through a living wage, by creating a living wage to ensure people will not be condemned to poverty indefinitely, which is what the Government has done. I listened to some of the commentary from Fine Gael Deputies, in particular, although Deputy Joe Costello was not much better. I heard the condescending way in which they said this was for the betterment of lone parents. We are effectively talking about taking money out of their pockets and putting them further into poverty. How can this be for the betterment of lone-parent families and their children? These are the questions Government Deputies need to ask. They need to examine their consciences in that respect.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: I have listened to most of the debate last night and tonight. To be honest, I have found some of the contributions from the Government benches bizarre. I have heard words such as “incentives”, “encourage” and “immediate incentives to find extra work”. This is the rationale for the policy changes the Government is bringing forward. I looked at the Government’s amendment to our motion. It highlights a number of examples, such as:

— a lone parent with one child who has no work will receive on a jobseeker’s payment almost €218 per week;

— if they work 19 hours at the national minimum wage they will receive on top of their wages €235 per week between FIS and the back to work family dividend – a total family income of €400 per week.

The amendment goes through all of the different categories up to persons with four children. However, it does not give examples of people who are working less than 19 hours a week and one has to wonder why that is. The reality is that if a person is working less than 19 hours and not in receipt of family income supplement, he or she will be financially worse off under this policy. There are no ifs or buts about this - it is a fact.

A young woman visited my office on Monday who was transitioning to the new payment. She will be down €84 per week, despite the fact that she is working. She was listening to Leaders’ Questions last week and heard the Taoiseach say there was now an incentive to get back to work. In her case, as she is already working part-time but not for 19 hours a week, there is said to be an incentive for this young mother with one child to increase her hours. She does not need an incentive to work more hours or an incentive such as this to get out of poverty. She has all of the incentives she will ever need without the Government bringing in a policy such as this.

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She has bills coming in through her door every day; she needs to keep a roof over her head and to put food on her table. These are the only incentives this mother and many other lone-parent families need.

Deputy Catherine Byrne went through the figures. She said X number of people were going to be better off under this scheme and that 6,000 would have an immediate incentive to increase their hours. What she should have said was that 6,000 people would see an immediate reduction in their income because that is what is happening. It is all spin. It is like the Government's amendment in that it does not give us the example of people who are working less than 19 hours a week, who do not qualify for family income supplement and who will be €80 to €100 per week worse off. The woman who came into my office on Monday in tears will be down €84 per week. As her landlord recently put up her rent, she cannot afford to keep a roof over her head because of a Government policy which has been introduced by a Labour Party Minister. She is effectively going to become homeless. She cannot be given a council house by the local authority because in Cork city there are over 8,000 families awaiting council housing and we are allocating just 30 to 50 houses a month. That young lady will be homeless in a couple of weeks. She cannot afford to keep a roof over her head, because the Government has done nothing to control rents. To make matters worse, it is now introducing a policy that will penalise her because she can only get from ten to 12 hours work per week. It is not that she wants to work only ten to 12 hours a week. She would gladly work far more than that but she cannot get the hours. There is a complete failure on the part of Government to acknowledge that. Deputies Seán Kyne and Catherine Byrne mentioned this situation.

Deputy Joe Costello made a bizarre statement about "liberating mothers from their children", but I do not know what that means. If wanting to liberate mothers from their children is the type of thinking going on within the Labour Party, is it any wonder we are getting hare-brained policies such as this? We do not want to liberate women from their children. We want to liberate women from poverty. The Minister's policy does not do this.

The figures indicate that at any time from half to two thirds of homeless families living in emergency accommodation are one-parent families. Over 1,000 children in emergency accommodation in Dublin are in one-parent families and I guarantee that this number will increase as a result of this policy. I just gave an example of a woman who was in my office on Monday who will be homeless. She is down €84 per week. She cannot get more hours, though she has begged for extra hours. Her landlord has raised her rent. He is not going to drop her rent because she is down €84 per week. When she moves out because she cannot afford to pay him he will have somebody else who will come and pay what he is looking for, because the Government has failed to do anything in regard to rents also.

Much has been said about child care and I listened to contributions from the Government benches on this issue. The main support necessary to enable lone parents to return to education and full-time work is access to a quality, affordable child care system. We do not have such a system in this State. I remember Deputy Joan Burton standing up in this Chamber and giving a solemn promise that she would not proceed with these changes until adequate child care facilities and provisions were in place. However, like every other promise the Labour Party has made in regard to lone parents, carers and students this promise has been broken.

I do not know Deputy Joe Costello very well, but I would like to go canvassing in his area with him for the general election to see what answer he gets. If a Labour Party person tells me this measure is a good one that will liberate mothers from their children and that this is doing

them a favour, I dread to think what answer he will be given on the doorsteps. There was some mention of the situation in the Six Counties and of this being applied to children of five years of age. However, people fail to recognise that this is not acceptable to us either as a party.

When the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, visited the North recently she was not concerned about children living in poverty within the Six Counties. She sat on her hands and kept her mouth shut and did not try to negotiate a deal which would have enriched the lives of citizens of this island. She went up and sat and said nothing. I do not know if the Minister of State was there, but he knows that is a fact. What the Joan Burton fails to recognise is -----

An Ceann Comhairle: It is normal to use the word Deputy or Minister when naming a Member.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: I am sorry, Deputy Joan Burton is the Minister.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is normal practice. I was in the North recently and the same happens in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I think we should follow the practice we have always followed here.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: No bother. The Minister, Deputy Joan Burton, was in the Six Counties recently while negotiations were going on and she sat on her hands and said nothing. Then we get members of the Labour Party coming in here and criticising Sinn Féin, saying we stand over the cut-off of five years of age within the Six Counties. It is wrong that people who have never even crossed the Border come in here and criticise our record. That is laughable.

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I support the Government amendment. It is important to remember that in 2011, Ireland was in the midst of an economic recession unprecedented in our history. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien made an offer to Deputy Joe Costello, who has left the House, but I would take him up on his offer if he wants to come canvassing with me in the next general election. I would be happy to explain to people that our mandate was to restore our economic independence, which we have done. I would explain that we exited the troika bailout programme in late 2013 and that by taking painful decisions, we have kept our core welfare payments. I would be happy to stand over that and the Deputy is more than welcome to come door to door with me in Dublin Bay South when I explain this.

Last year the Irish economy was the fastest growing economy in the European Union and we are now seeing real benefits from this growth rate, with an increase of over 80,000 in employment in the past two years. The Deputy can be with me when I explain that also. Unemployment has fallen, from a peak of 15% in early 2012 to under 10% and the live register has fallen by over 100,000 since it peaked in late 2011.

Despite the high levels of investment in the one-parent family payment scheme, it has failed to prevent a cycle of poverty for one-parent families. I strongly agree with the Tánaiste that the single best protection against poverty is decent, secure and fairly paid work. It is imperative that the reforms to the one-parent family payment scheme take place in order to achieve this. The Opposition endorses a view that we should continue to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to one-parent families, but this is not acceptable. To do nothing puts one-parent family recipients and their families at risk of long term welfare dependency. In my constituency, I have seen intergenerational welfare dependency due to poorly designed schemes.

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Last night, a number of Opposition Deputies quoted the most recent survey on income and living conditions which stated that 23% of lone parents are at risk of consistent poverty. However, what they failed to say was that if a lone parent is in work, this risk falls to 10% and that if a lone parent is not at work, it rises to 40%. The Government introduced the jobseeker's transitional payment in 2013 to ensure that lone parents whose youngest child is aged between seven and 13 are exempt from the requirements that they must be genuinely seeking and available for full-time work in order to claim a jobseeker's payment.

While a person who is in receipt of the jobseeker's transitional payment does not have to satisfy this condition, they do have to engage with their local Intreo office. This is vital to develop their skills-set, with the aim of securing employment and financial independence. Individuals who were already on family income supplement will, from Thursday, receive an increased payment when they transition from the one-parent family payment. All these individuals will also be able to claim the back to work family dividend and will be better off than they are now. The dividend is worth €1,550 per child in the first year and €775 per child in the second year.

To date, we have 1,250 lone parents claiming FIS for the first time. These individuals will also all qualify for the new back to work family dividend. Without exception, these individuals will be financially better off than had they just remained on the one-parent family payment. After the reforms, a lone parent with one child working 19 hours at minimum wage will receive €235 per week from the Department. When added to their wages from employment, their weekly income is almost €400. That is a substantially higher income than a single person receives for working more than twice as long, for 39 hours per week, on the minimum wage. I hope the Low Pay Commission will address that issue for people who are working 39 hours for a relatively low income.

It is important to remember that the 19 hours for FIS can be with more than one employer. A case was mentioned yesterday of a person who was working 20 hours a week at €10 an hour. It was stated that the person would lose €86 a week and could not claim the back-to-work family dividend. That is not correct. I presume the person is already claiming family income supplement, but I must stress that he or she is also eligible for the back-to-work family dividend payment. To qualify for the back-to-work family dividend, a lone parent must transition off the one-parent family payment, and provided he or she does not claim another social welfare payment, excluding family income supplement, he or she will also be eligible for the dividend.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister of State is over time.

Deputy Kevin Humphreys: I will finish now. To qualify for the dividend a person does not have to increase his or her hours nor does he or she have to take up a new job.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, but I have to cut the Minister of State short.

Deputy Kevin Humphreys: In cases where customers lose financially and are having difficulty increasing their hours, my Department will work with them to offer every possible assistance.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Ionsaí uafásach ar na daoine is laige sa tsochaí seo againne iad na ciorruithe atá beartaithe don íocaíocht teaghlaigh aontuismitheora.

Why has the Minister for Social Protection decided to pick on lone parents? Why has the Government decided to pick on lone parents? Why not pick on the bankers, rack-renting land-

lords or employers who rip off workers? Most of the legislation coming through the House is an attack on the rights, social entitlements and social protection of ordinary citizens and in defence of the elites.

Most lone parents are women and the record of the Government in defence of women and the rights of women has been pitiable. After four years in power the Government has still not produced the much promised consolidated legislation on domestic violence, nor has it signed the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Under the Government's watch the number of children living at risk of poverty and in consistent poverty has doubled. That means at least 135,000 children are experiencing material deprivation on a daily basis. According to Tom Healy of the Nevin Economic Research Institute:

Deprivation is measured by the incidence of households who lack two or more of a list of basic needs such as two pairs of shoes, a strong overcoat, meat or fish meal every second day, going without heating. In the case of lone parents deprivation rates increased from 50% in 2012 to 63% in 2013.

That happened under the Government's watch.

In addition, the number of homeless children in Dublin has now surpassed 1,000. When the cut we are discussing is introduced tomorrow, all those difficulties will be exasperated for lone-parent families. That is not the troika's fault. Neither is it the fault of lone parents. It is solely the responsibility of the Tánaiste, Deputy Burton, and those who will vote against the Private Members' motion. That is the decision which Government party Deputies will take. It is as if the Government considers lone parents are somehow to blame for their circumstances and that they need to be forced into work or education, and away from what Labour calls "welfare dependency", a phrase straight out of Margaret Thatcher's handbook. It is a very insulting view of lone parents.

There are an estimated 12,000 families, including many in my own constituency of Louth, who now face significant cuts of up to €86 per week. Many will be deeply affected by the cut to the allowance. Such a Thatcherite view of the world ignores the valuable social and economic role lone parents make in raising their children. The Government made a firm commitment that it would not introduce the measure unless affordable child care and after-school care was available. That has not happened. The Minister promised not to proceed unless a Scandinavian model of child care was in place. One could ask where it is. Even on that basis, the Government should not proceed. It is another broken promise.

I listened with bemusement and sometimes irritation to Government party Deputies drawing on untruthful examples from the North to vindicate their shameful policies in this State. That is partitionism of the worst kind. It is also generally a misrepresentation of Sinn Féin's role in the governance of the North. We stand as firmly against austerity there as we do here. Both the Minister of State, Deputy Kevin Humphreys, and Deputy Joanna Tuffy are old enough to remember that Sinn Féin has a proud record of standing up for people's rights in the North against British militarism and Unionist misrule without any support whatsoever from the establishment parties in this State. The system is not perfect for lone parents in the North. I do not want to see a system that is perpetuated North and South. I want to see a united Ireland and a real republic.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

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Deputy Gerry Adams: Críochnóidh mé anois. Lone parents there will not suffer any loss. Members should remember that. The Tories in London wanted to stop lone-parent allowance at one year old and Sinn Féin prevented that. The allowances will not be reduced unless the parents have child care. In other words, we kept the promises we made.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Gabhaim buíochas leis na Teachtaí go léir a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht seo. Measaim gur díospóireacht bhríomhar a bhí ann. In ainneoin nach n-aontaím go hiomlán le gach rud a deir siad, tá sé ceart buíochas a ghabháil leo agus mo leithscéal a ghabháil leo siúd ar chuir mé as dóibh mar measaim féin go bhfuil an cheist seo chomh tábhachtach sin gur chóir go mbeadh sí firinneach agus gur chóir go mbeadh sé bríomhar chomh maith.

I reject the repeated claims made by the Tánaiste that lone parents are being protected by a safety net. This is the same safety net that she has continually cut during her tenure as Minister for Social Protection and now also as Tánaiste. It is clear that she and many who contributed to the debate are not living in the real world and continue to ignore the pleas of the thousands of lone parents who now face harsh cuts.

The Tánaiste said yesterday that the aim of this measure was to lock down poverty and joblessness. She went on to say the cuts to lone parents would actually help them to get back on their feet, build financial independence and build better lives for themselves and their families. She quoted the SILC statistics without making the link that it was her actions that helped contribute to the worsening situation as outlined in SILC through previous cuts to the one-parent family payment, the lack of investment in social housing and the JobBridge scheme which replaced many of the entry level and part-time jobs which would have been available to lone parents in the past.

In relation to the North, as Deputy Gerry Adams said, citizens there have only been protected due to the continued opposition to the Tory cuts by Sinn Féin representatives. Meanwhile the Tánaiste herself has never raised any voice in opposition to Tory cuts in the North or to cuts to the block grant. In this Chamber, Labour Party and Fine Gael Deputies make cheap political points at the expense of citizens in the North, but when the Tánaiste had an opportunity to stand up for lone parents in the North, and others who are dependent on social welfare, she did absolutely nothing.

She did not even open her gob during the very little time she spent at the entire Stormont House Agreement negotiations. She did not open her gob to protect them, to demand extra money or the reversal of the Tory cuts that had already been introduced, yet she has accused me of making cheap political points about child care provision for people participating in community employment schemes. I have done no such thing. Members of this Chamber know my record on the issue of seeking to enhance the community employment scheme, not only for lone parents but also for others in receipt of social welfare payments. It is one of the major schemes that should have been protected, not cut, as she has done. We need to enhance rather than cut these schemes.

The Tánaiste has tried her best to make the reductions she has introduced. Given that the changes will take effect in an hour and a half, there is still an opportunity for the Government to row back. However, I am not holding my breath. The Tánaiste has tried to portray these measures as positive. There is nothing positive for the thousands of people who have already been or will be negatively affected by the cuts to the one-parent family payment. There is noth-

ing positive about reneging on commitments to provide a Scandinavian model of child care. Labour Party Deputies did not mention the promise their leader had made in the Chamber when introducing these changes, that she would not proceed with them unless there was a bankable commitment. There is not even a mention of a bankable commitment, never mind anything else, on the promise she made.

The Tánaiste failed to say what would happen to those who were unable to find the 19 hours of work per week required to reach the FIS payment threshold. Everybody who knows someone who work few hours knows that it is very difficult to increase these hours and that, in some cases, those who ask for more hours lose their jobs. Many lone parents work in schools and the Government would have them seek more hours of work from the schools the payments of which it has cut. It does not work like that. The people in question work three hours a day, not including the summer months, which is less than 15 hours per week when calculated across an entire year.

I repeat my question and I am not scoffing at the Tánaiste. If the Government believes child benefit is a very valuable part of our child support structure, why was it cut? There is no answer. If the Government believes the one-parent family payment is part of a safety net, why is it cutting it specifically in this instance for many who are already in work? Those in work will be most acutely affected by it, which gives the lie to the argument that this measure is aimed at those who have been languishing in receipt of social welfare payments for four, seven, eight or 20 years, or whatever figure the Minister of State dreamed up when he came into the Chamber. The €5 per month increase in child benefit announced last year and the possibility of another €5 increase which the Tánaiste seemed to be touting yesterday will all be gobbled up by the water tax which the Government is introducing. The water charges will be taken from the pockets of the same people who will be affected if the Government gets its way tomorrow and Friday. At least the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, admitted that up to 10,000 claimants and, in particular, their children would be negatively affected.

All the lone parents I know have asked for increased hours or would love a job, but they have not been able to secure them. As one parent stated in a recent e-mail to me: "There are so many parents like me who are terrified and at our wits end because we simply feel that we and our children are not being heard." Another parent wrote:

Give "single parents an incentive to return to work"? An incentive is a thing that motivates or encourages someone to do something. I can see how this legislation will be a fabulous incentive for struggling families as starvation is definitely a motivating factor for any mother bear. I'm delighted to see that Joan and I share a passion for wildlife documentaries and that the law of the jungle plays such an integral part in the formation of Irish legislation.

Táim ag impí ar an Rialtas machnamh a dhéanamh ar seo. Tá níos lú ná uair go leith ann go dtí an t-am cinniúna nuair a thiocfaidh an réimeas nua i gcumhacht agus nuair a bheidh ar thuismitheoirí teacht ar bhreis airgid nach bhfuil ann dóibh. Tá an Rialtas ag déanamh iarracht bualadh síos orthu siúd atá ag obair ar feadh níos lú ná 19 uair a chloig sa tseachtain suas go dtí €60 nó €70 sa tseachtain. Is é sin atá i gceist. Beidh ar go leor de na daoine sin casadh athuair ar bheith ag brath go huile is go hiomlán ar an gcóras leasa shóisialaigh seachas a bheith ag obair. Molaim an rún seo agus impím ar dhaoine tacú leis.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Maith thú.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 36.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S..</i>
<i>Collins, Áine.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Conlan, Seán.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Conaghan, Michael</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Connaughton, Paul J..</i>	<i>Fleming, Tom.</i>
<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Kirk, Seamus.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Gilmore, Eamon.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	

<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>	
<i>Lynch, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Lynch, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Lyons, John.</i>	
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Olivia.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</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 Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Mahony, John.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
<i>Perry, John.</i>	
<i>Phelan, Ann.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	
<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
<i>Spring, Arthur.</i>	
<i>Stagg, Emmet.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	
<i>White, Alex.</i>	

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

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.

Amendment declared carried.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 3 not moved.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: As a Teller in the last vote and given that some Members forgot to vote and that we are only an hour from the introduction of the new regime for children and lone parents, it is appropriate that we ensure the vote is recorded properly and by other than electronic means.

Question again put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 78; Níl, 35.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bannon, James.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Butler, Ray.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Colreavy, Michael.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Coffey, Paudie.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Collins, Áine.</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, Tom.</i>
<i>Conway, Ciara.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Coonan, Noel.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Costello, Joe.</i>	<i>Kirk, Seamus.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Deenihan, Jimmy.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Dowds, Robert.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>

<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Feighan, Frank.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>
<i>Gilmore, Eamon.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Harrington, Noel.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Kevin.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Seán.</i>	
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, Anthony.</i>	
<i>Lynch, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Lynch, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Lyons, John.</i>	
<i>McCarthy, Michael.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>McFadden, Gabrielle.</i>	
<i>McGinley, Dinny.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</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 Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Mahony, John.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
<i>Perry, John.</i>	
<i>Phelan, Ann.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Pat.</i>	

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<i>Reilly, James.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
<i>Spring, Arthur.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Tuffy, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
<i>Walsh, Brian.</i>	
<i>White, Alex.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies John Lyons and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.

Question declared carried.

Message from Seanad

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Communications Regulation (Postal Services) (Amendment) Bill 2015 without amendment.

The Dáil adjourned at 11.10 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 2 July 2015.