



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 6 Aibreán 2016

Wednesday, 6 April 2016

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Business of Dáil

An Ceann Comhairle: The first item of business is the nomination of a Taoiseach. Before receiving nominations, I call the Government Chief Whip, Deputy Paul Kehoe, to propose arrangements for the rest of the day's sitting.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It is proposed to take No. 1, nomination of Taoiseach (resumed), and No. 4, statements on Dáil reform. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the arrangements for nomination of Taoiseach shall be as follows: the speech of each proposer and seconder shall not exceed five minutes in each case; the Chair shall allow contributions for a period not exceeding 30 minutes whereupon the Chair shall put the question on any motion made in the order in which such motions were received; on conclusion of the votes of nominations for Taoiseach, the Ceann Comhairle will call on all nominees for a five-minute statement in each case; and conclusion of statements by nominees, statements are to be made by the main spokespersons for Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, AAA-PBP, Independents 4 Change, the Social Democrats, the Green Party and a non-party Deputy or a Member nominated in their stead which shall not exceed five minutes in each case. Any such Members may share their time provided that a Member has not already spoken.

The proceedings on statements on Dáil reform shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 8.30 tonight and the following arrangements shall apply: the statement of each member and substitute member of the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform, who shall be called upon in alphabetical order, shall not exceed five minutes in each case; the statement of each other Member called upon shall not exceed five minutes in each case; and upon rising today, the Dáil shall adjourn until Thursday, 14 April 2016 at 2.30 p.m., there shall be no Order of Business within the meaning of Standing Order 28, and accordingly the only business to be transacted on that day shall be as follows: nomination of Taoiseach, resumed if not previously concluded, and statements on progress on Dáil reform.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can I take it that the proposal from the Government Chief Whip is agreed?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: My colleagues and I have submitted a motion proposing

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the establishment of a committee to deal with the homelessness and housing crisis. The motion mimics and echoes the motion which formed the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform. Given the political uncertainty, hiatus and delay and the fact that no credible proposition for Taoiseach, much less for a Government, has been established, it is not acceptable that Deputies are frustrated in their work. It brings this House and the Oireachtas into public disrepute when the impression is that Members are elected but are not carrying out their democratic functions. I do not think the issue of homelessness and the housing crisis is contested by anybody on these benches. We may have different ideas as to how to sort out the problem, but I am sure none of us is in denial about it. I have been in touch with the Office of the Ceann Comhairle today seeking an opportunity not just to speak about this motion but to move it and get the approval of this House for a representative group of Deputies from across all political parties and none to come together and start to get to grips with a catastrophe for families throughout the State. I do not accept the Order of Business as set out. It is critical that we are allowed the space and opportunity to get some work done. That is why we are here. I am asking that we be allowed to move this motion and I hope that the formation of such a committee would enjoy support from every Member of the Dáil.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: While the main parties of the political establishment in particular have been engaged in an elaborate political charade, an escalating social emergency exists in housing and homelessness that simply cannot wait to be dealt with. We have tabled a specific motion, although I acknowledge the wider points made by Deputy McDonald and others, on the need for urgent, comprehensive and radical action to deal with a crisis that is getting worse every day and that is inflicting appalling hardship on families and, worst of all, children. We simply cannot wait for the game that is being played by the main political parties to deal with this issue. We have specifically put down a motion asking for one practical measure that the Minister for Finance could take straight away, which is to instruct the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, to immediately stop any sales of land or property to vulture funds, real estate investment trusts, REITs, or private equity funds, and to change its mandate-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not think Deputy Boyd Barrett should get into the detail of the debate.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Can I have one more sentence?

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The remit of NAMA must be changed so that it can immediately bend all of its resources and energy towards the direct provision of council and affordable housing. This has to happen immediately and we must cease allowing NAMA to do things that are worsening that crisis. These issues have to be addressed as an absolute matter of urgency. They are of far more importance and interest to the public than the game-playing that is going on around the formation of a government.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. Nobody in the House disputes the absolute importance of the issues that he raises. I appreciate that Deputy McDonald was in touch with my office on this particular matter earlier. However, what is before us is a proposal to deal with the election of the Taoiseach. It is a constitutional imperative for this House to address that particular issue and we must deal with constitutional business before we can consider other matters.

When it falls to us to consider the other matters, I am afraid we are still in a situation in

which Standing Order 200(3) prevails. It is the direction under which this House must operate and therefore the motion the Deputy is attempting to move is not in order today. I think her party Whip will understand that and will be able to explain it to her.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Please, a Ceann Comhairle-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy may make a brief response.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I understand absolutely, as does everybody else, the constitutional imperative of electing a Taoiseach and forming a government. That is not a matter of dispute. Equally, however, it is true to say - we see it unfolding before us - there is a real crisis in the real world. There is a constitutional obligation on us to be permitted to carry out our tasks.

The motion very specifically follows the same pattern and design as that which established the committee on Dáil reform. Surely if we can work collectively on the matter of Dáil reform in this hiatus we can work collectively on the issue of housing and homelessness. I wish to record our deep dissatisfaction with that decision.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we at least be allowed to proceed at this juncture with the constitutional business that is before us? If later in the day the Deputy wants to raise that particular matter again, then by all means she can raise it and we will consider it. However, no matter how many times she raises it, the reality is that Standing Order 200 is the order under which the House must currently operate.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Later in the proceedings the Ceann Comhairle might advise me and other Members how, procedurally and in accordance with Standing Orders, we can get the chance to do the job that we are elected here to do.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There is nothing in Standing Orders that prevents the Dáil from meeting on other occasions, as we did for the second meeting of this Dáil, which discussed housing, Europe and other business. While it is important that a Taoiseach is found and elected, the Dáil should meet next week. We have to discuss the growing housing crisis. Evictions are increasing at an unbelievable pace. There are many burning social issues. When are we going to take some of the motions that parties have put on the Order Paper and that have been sitting there for a week, including motions in respect of housing, which everybody has mentioned, but also our motion on the urgent need to repeal the eighth amendment to the Constitution? Following the sentencing of a woman in Northern Ireland, it is critical that this issue is addressed. When will the Dáil meet to deal with those motions? There is nothing preventing it from doing that.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will ask the Chief Whip to respond.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I do not want to miss this opportunity. I did, on the last occasion we were here, raise the matter of accountability of Ministers in whatever capacity - outgoing, caretaker, describe them as one chooses. If we read the first publication of 2016 from the Oireachtas Library and Research Service, we see that it is all about parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's performance. Its executive summary states:

One of the main functions of the Houses of the Oireachtas is to provide oversight of government activities and hold the government to account ...

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Parliaments have a number of tools at their disposal for the scrutiny and oversight of government policy and performance. The main tool is monitoring and reporting requirements i.e. the government gives information on its performance to parliament which monitors it and can highlight areas of poor performance ...

To provide effective oversight parliament needs to have access to information on government performance.

That is simply not happening, a Ceann Comhairle. I note the Clerk of the Dáil speaking to you and in advance of putting forward my name to contest for the position of Ceann Comhairle, I had a series of meetings with officials here. In the lead-up to the election for Ceann Comhairle, I established definitively that it is within the power of this House to determine what measures it wishes to employ and what it wishes to address. That opportunity has not been afforded to us.

It is absolutely imperative that we be in a position, as Members of this House, to put Ministers under question here, not just by written parliamentary question but by oral parliamentary question whereby we can tease out the detail.

An Ceann Comhairle: Okay.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I will give one simple example. As best as I can understand, with a quarter of a year now passed, the €35 million that was ring-fenced for additional spending on mental health-----

Deputy John Deasy: A Ceann Comhairle, what are we doing here?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I did not interrupt.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Caoláin is entitled to speak.

Deputy John Deasy: There has to be a limit to this.

An Ceann Comhairle: One voice, please Deputy Deasy.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: -----has not yet been drawn down. This is hugely important with a quarter of the year already passed. I have no mechanism to ask the relevant Minister or Ministers about that-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has made his point.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: -----and about many other matters.

An Ceann Comhairle: Okay, would the Deputy-----

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am asking-----

Deputy Brendan Griffin: How many written questions has the Deputy tabled? Not one.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: -----the Ceann Comhairle, in his role as the protector of the right of Members of the House - the individual parliamentarians - to afford us the opportunity to perform the task we were elected to perform, and that is-----

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: To form a government.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: -----to hold the existing holders of Executive office to account in line with what was outlined in the first publication of the Library and Research Service for 2016. Will the Ceann Comhairle afford Members that opportunity this week or in the coming week? I have no doubt it is not beyond the gift of our officials to structure an opportunity to put Ministers under direct question in this Chamber.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has made his point and what he is saying is helpful. I call Deputy Adams.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the Ceann Comhairle respond?

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, I will.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I wish to make a suggestion regarding what can be done until we reach the point where we can change these Standing Orders. A way to set up the sub-committee on homelessness is for the Taoiseach and his Government to propose it. I appeal to him to do that. That would involve all our parties and Independents dealing with this emergency.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Healy, very briefly, and then I am moving on.

Deputy Seamus Healy: It is vital that this Dáil be able to hold the Government and its various Ministers to account. I want to address the suggestion that we adjourn until 14 April. It is absolutely urgent that the Dáil should reconvene tomorrow and again on Tuesday next because, as we speak, there is a crisis at South Tipperary General Hospital and at many other hospitals. Figures issued today show a 100% increase in the number of people on trolleys at South Tipperary General Hospital. In March, 552 people were on trolleys. This is an increase of 319 on the position which obtained last March.

An Ceann Comhairle: The principle of the Deputy's point is made.

Deputy Seamus Healy: There were 233-----

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot discuss individual cases.

Deputy Seamus Healy: The point I am making is that there is a very serious crisis in the health service and, in particular, in my constituency at South Tipperary General Hospital.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's point is made. Will he please resume his seat?

Deputy Seamus Healy: Surely this Dáil and the relevant Minister must address situations of this nature. We can hardly go home again today and not return for another ten days.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can you resume your seat, Deputy, so that we can explore a possible solution to that?

Deputy Seamus Healy: I propose an amendment, namely, that the Dáil sits tomorrow to deal with the very serious issue of health, particularly hospitals, as well as housing and homelessness.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: If the Deputy made up his mind who he wants for Taoiseach, it might help to move it on.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are several Members wishing to contribute. I call Deputy

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Halligan.

Deputy John Halligan: The general public is watching proceedings here today.

Deputy Niall Collins: Yes, we know that.

Deputy John Halligan: We are already locked into 20 minutes of procedural talk-----

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Of nonsense.

A Deputy: Of circus.

Deputy John Halligan: -----when we have, as admitted by everybody here, a crisis in health, housing and other issues. That can only be essentially responded to if a Government is elected.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Halligan: Our first job here is to elect a Government.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Yes.

Deputy John Halligan: If we cannot elect one, we must go back to the country.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Good man.

Deputy John Halligan: However, before we can do anything regarding housing or health, let us attempt to elect a Government. That is what we have come here for.

Both parties are essentially right. I believe the Dáil should sit again to discuss the serious issues of housing and so forth. The preferred option of the people of Ireland would be that a Government would be elected to deal with the problems the country is facing in health, education and so on. We cannot do that without electing a Government. If we cannot elect a Government, go back to the country and try again. However, that is what we should do first of all, namely, attempt to elect a Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: In light of the points made, will the Whips meet as a matter of urgency to come up with a proposal around how we will deal with the issues which have been raised on the floor of the House? Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Gerry Adams: When?

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy Adams.

Deputies: When?

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three items before the House. First, is it agreed that the House proceeds with the nominations for Taoiseach? Agreed.

Second, are the arrangements for speaking on the matter of Dáil reform agreed to? Agreed.

Is the proposal, as it stands, for the House to adjourn until 14 April agreed to?

Deputies: No.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 101; Níl, 56.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen S.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>

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<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>
<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>	<i>Smith, Brid.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	

<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Michael Moynihan; Níl, Deputies Gino Kenny and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Question declared carried.

Nomination of Taoiseach (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: I will now receive nominations for the position of Taoiseach. I call Deputy Rock.

Deputy Noel Rock: Tairgim:

Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Enda Kenny chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.

I move:

That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Enda Kenny for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.

I stand today to nominate An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, to continue in his role as Taoiseach of this country. Since I last stood to nominate An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, he, along with the Fine Gael negotiating team, has initiated discussions with 15 Independents. These discussions have not been undertaken lightly and in total have amounted to more than 50 hours of real, substantive discussions. This demonstrates our seriousness towards the work of forming a government that will work and will last. This process and these discussions will

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take time but any process that is to last will take time. The resilience and the determination shown by the Taoiseach in attempting to bring together a new partnership government have been admirable. His commitment to sitting down with Independents and our party to work on a process, together with an independent facilitator and an independent rapporteur, to put together a process of real substance has brought about a document of real substance.

The discussions, as one would expect, explored key policy areas such as housing, health, improving the lives of people with disabilities, climate change and providing family-friendly child care and a substantial document has been produced arising from these 50 hours of deliberations and discussions between Independent Deputies and Fine Gael Deputies. This document is simply a draft foundation document at this point in time. However, it points the direction for a solid foundation for further discussions and a solid foundation for a potential government.

No democracy can function without compromise and from the Twenty-sixth Dáil onwards we have seen compromise and coalition become a permanent fixture and reality of Irish governance. This is no bad thing, and the process that we see before us is no bad thing either. What we now need is patience and composure. While I acknowledge the people want a government - we all hear this on a daily basis and understand it - there is a need to ensure that any government which is formed can work cohesively in the best interests of the people. This process takes time and resilience.

Unfortunately, there are those who wish to take their seats in here while permanently committing themselves to hugging the Opposition benches tightly and pursuing their so-called ideological perfection instead of the reality of compromise and governance. Good for them. However, the reality is this country needs a government. As Robert F. Kennedy once rightly said, "one fifth of the people are against everything all the time". I think the public can rightly guess which fifth of the people in here that phrase might describe. Let us hope they stay at that level of just one fifth. Parliaments simply cannot afford too many passengers. We need decision-makers and people who are serious about forming a government.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Make decisions then.

Deputy Noel Rock: I know that Deputy Enda Kenny is serious about governing and forming a government, which is why I support him today. I stand here today to nominate someone who has shown the resilience, determination and fortitude needed as well as the ability to put country ahead of party and simple ideology. He has worked resolutely towards creating a new government that takes account of the fractured political environment and landscape that all of us Deputies can see before us here today. Let me be clear. While there is an element of repetition to this process, that is not a bad thing. I would prefer to nominate the right person for Taoiseach twice than even contemplate the wrong person once.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Deputy will have to do it three times.

Deputy Noel Rock: I am confident that An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, has both the experience of government and the commitment to forming a Government which are necessary. I am proud, therefore, to nominate Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: It is my honour and privilege once again to second the nomination of An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, as Taoiseach of the Thirty-second Dáil. I have worked with the Taoiseach both in opposition and in government over the past eight years and I always found him to be a man of honour, integrity and vision. He never fails to impress with his

enduring energy and enthusiasm in everything he does. His work both at home and abroad has displayed great leadership, and he is a respected statesman on the international stage. He has worked tirelessly to restore hope and opportunities for all the citizens of this country. I believe Deputy Enda Kenny's qualities are needed in these challenging times. Over the past number of weeks every effort has been made by the Taoiseach to create a climate for negotiations to form a stable Government and to continue to build on the work already started.

We, the elected Members of this Dáil, have been entrusted by the electorate to govern and each of us has a responsibility to do that. I believe that with Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach of the Government we can achieve the stability that is needed for the next five years. I therefore formally propose the election of Deputy Enda Kenny as the next Taoiseach of this country.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: I propose that Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Micheál Martin for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach. Deputy Martin is very well qualified to undertake the duties of the office of Taoiseach. Fianna Fáil is remaining firm in its commitment to implementing a change of Government by nominating Deputy Martin as Taoiseach.

Deputy Martin's political curriculum vitae, CV, speaks for itself. First elected in 1989 and re-elected in every election since then, he has served as a Minister with responsibility for education, health, enterprise and foreign affairs and has a long established involvement in Northern Ireland affairs. He has represented this country and its Government with distinction on both the national and international stages and is exceptionally well regarded in Irish politics. As Leader of the Opposition over the last five years he consistently opposed Government policies which were unfair and hit the vulnerable hardest. He has campaigned tirelessly for a fairer and more inclusive Ireland, one which values every citizen equally. He has continued with this focus throughout Government formation talks over the last number of weeks and has conducted his work in this regard diligently and responsibly.

Like the majority of Deputies in this Chamber, I campaigned for change. We campaigned for a change in Government. The people gave their verdict on the outgoing Government and its policies, and it is clear that they voted for change. On that basis, we must do the same in this Chamber today - we must vote for change. By voting for Deputy Martin as Taoiseach Members are honouring the commitment to implement change and to take our country on a fairer and more inclusive path.

In conclusion, I and my party colleagues believe Deputy Martin to be a uniquely well-qualified candidate to be Taoiseach and to lead this country towards the realisation of our shared objective, an Ireland for all.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Tá mise sásta seasamh anseo chun tacú le hainmniúchán an Teachta Micheál Martin mar Thaoiseach inniu. Ar an gcéad lá sa Dáil seo, leag mise agus mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Lisa Chambers, síos na fáthanna gurb é an Teachta Micheál Martin an rogha is fearr don oifig seo, an oifig bhunreachtúil is tábhachtaí. Táimid anseo arís inniu chun ár rogha a dhéanamh. Ná bíodh aon amhras faoi seo: tá dualgas orainn go léir rogha a dhéanamh. I ndáiríre, tá beirt in ár nDáil gur féidir leo Rialtas a chur le chéile. Má táimid ag iarraidh an bóthar ceart a thógáil, má táimid ag iarraidh éisteacht le guth an phobail, agus má táimid ag iarraidh an freagra ceart a thabhairt don phobal, measaim féin agus measann Fianna Fáil go gcaithfidimid tacú leis an Teachta Micheál Martin. Tá roinnt daoine ag impí orainn aon saghas Rialtas a chur le chéile. Ní aontaímid leis sin ar chor ar bith. Measaimid go bhfuil dualgas orainn go léir an Rialtas ceart a chur le chéile, leis na polasaithe cearta agus leis an gcean-

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naireacht cheart, ón Teachta Micheál Martin. Chuir an Teachta Micheál Martin a phlean faoi bhráid an phobail i rith an olltoghcháin. Táimidne sa pháirtí seo ag cloí leis an bplean sin agus ag lorg tacaíochta chun é a chur i bhfeidhm. Toghadh muid go léir chun cinneadh a dhéanamh. Munar nglacfaimis go léir páirt sa vóta seo, d'fhéadfadh toradh a bheith againn a thugann an freagra mícheart don phobal. Má tá tír níos cothroime ag teastáil ó na Teachtaí go léir, ní mór dúinn vótáil ar son an Teachta Martin.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I would like to nominate Deputy Ruth Coppinger for the position of Taoiseach. The process of Government formation since the general election has become a total farce. Coincidentally, it is now 40 days and 40 nights since the general election that this farce has continued. While Jesus Christ wandered in the wilderness for 40 days and nights, contemplating the sins of humanity and maybe the need to save it, the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties have left this country in a political wilderness. However, they are not contemplating how they can save humanity but rather how they can pursue the drug of power and political office, without any concern for the substantial issues that affect ordinary citizens in this country.

Most shamefully of all, the background to that political wilderness in which the people of this country have been left is one where we have an escalating social emergency in the area of housing and homelessness and in our public health system, a crisis which is inflicting unacceptable and terrible hardship on a vast number of our citizens. I heard the Fine Gael Deputy who nominated Deputy Kenny talking about resilience and how his party had resilience in the process of negotiation. That resilience is nothing like the resilience that is needed by people who are rotting for 17 and 18 years on a housing list or who are in completely unsuitable emergency homeless accommodation with their kids, desperately wondering whether they will ever have a secure and permanent roof over their head, or the resilience that is necessary when a person is queuing up in an ambulance outside Sligo Hospital, unable even to get in the doors of an overcrowded accident and emergency unit.

These are the issues the citizens of our country are concerned about and the things they want this House to address. They want the political charade being played out by the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties to end. I would love to be putting forward a nominee for Taoiseach who had a realistic prospect of being elected as part of the formation of a left Government but, much as I regret it, we simply do not have the numbers. Those who have the numbers should get on with the business of forming a Government so we can begin to address the issues that are affecting our citizens and causing such hardship and suffering for them.

As I said earlier, a particular measure which I am asking the acting Government and the acting Minister for Finance to take on, in order to begin to address the homelessness and housing crisis, is the following: please, as a matter of urgency, instruct NAMA to stop unloading land and property to vulture funds, real estate investment trusts and private equity funds, which only see that land and property as a means to make profit, and demand that NAMA now change its mandate entirely and throw all its energy and resources into using the land and property at its disposal to address the housing and homelessness crisis. That can and must be done immediately so we can begin to address what is the worst housing and homelessness crisis in the history of the State.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to conclude now.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I nominate Deputy Coppinger not because we are inter-

ested in personalities, the drug of power or political position, but because we want to use this opportunity to highlight the issues that matter to our citizens and that every single Deputy in this House has a responsibility to address urgently. The two biggest parties, which are in a position to form a Government, should stop messing around and get on with the business that will allow us to address those issues.

Deputy Mick Barry: The nomination of Deputy Ruth Coppinger marks the first time in the history of this State that a woman has been nominated for the position of Taoiseach. Women continue to be treated as second-class citizens in this State. Of those living in poverty, around 70% are women. Child care provision lags way behind the European norm. Meanwhile, many historic wrongs done to women remain to be righted. Only this week in Northern Ireland a 21-year-old woman was given a criminal record for terminating her pregnancy. The exact same fate can befall her sisters in this State. The last Dáil, to its shame, passed legislation allowing for 14-year jail sentences for women who terminate their pregnancies here. In the United States Donald Trump has said that women should be punished for accessing abortion services in states where abortion has been made illegal, but this already happens here. Is it not punishment that women are forced to go abroad in secrecy and shame to access services that should be legal here? The Thirty-second Dáil should end this dinosaur regime, stop defying public opinion, and act to remove the eighth amendment to the Constitution and legislate for abortion rights. Will there be a need for an active mass campaign to pressurise this House to do so? Yes, I believe so. I also believe that the nomination of Deputy Coppinger puts down a marker that these issues will be highlighted in a spirited fashion from these benches in this Dáil.

Nearly six weeks after the election, there is still no new Government. The largest party in this House is wounded, the two main parties of the elite are stalemated and the Dáil is in a state of semi-paralysis. The press warns of the dangers of this situation, including the danger of industrial unrest. Bus drivers, Luas drivers and DART drivers are pressing pay claims. The press warns that nurses, gardaí, teachers and others may follow suit. Let us hope they do so. Working people were nailed to the floor and fleeced, first by Fianna Fáil, then by Fine Gael and the Labour Party, during the crisis years with water charges, the property tax, the universal social charge, pay cuts and pension levies. Now, working people see the recovery being robbed from them.

The Panama papers shine a light on a global capitalist elite maximising incredible wealth at the expense of society, sometimes illegally. In this republic, most of the elite do not need offshore accounts: the policy of successive Governments has already made this a paradise isle for the super wealthy, made richer again by the austerity measures forced upon the population. If hard-pressed working people, trapped by inadequate incomes, haunted by a housing crisis and crippled by austerity charges, can use their industrial muscle to claim their fair share of the recovery while the Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil mating dance continues, they will have the full support of Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit. Meanwhile, it is reported that water charges can become a stumbling block to negotiations. We say to the people that they should place no faith whatever in any of the major parties to voluntarily abolish these charges but they, the people, can force those parties to do so. The weapon they have is the boycott. We are appealing to every household to boycott the next bill and make water such an issue that the parties will have no choice but to abolish the charges. A mass national demonstration called by the anti-water charges movement would also be a real pressure point at this time.

Deputies Kenny and Martin will meet tonight. An arrangement between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael would produce a government that might make the hairs stand up on the back of the

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necks of progressive people and those who seek real change in this society. Sooner or later such a government would draw a response from ordinary people in the communities, from those who are tired of water charges and austerity measures, in the workplace, from those who need a pay rise, and in society, from those who want to counter a right-wing alliance with a real left alternative. From all such struggles, a new left will emerge; a new mass party of working people. Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit will be an important part of it. In such a way, the ground can be prepared for a genuine left-wing government. The nomination of Deputy Ruth Coppinger is a declaration of intent on our part to prepare for such an eventuality.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three nominees. We now have 30 minutes in which to have further debate, with seven Members offering to speak. Although I am in your hands, I suggest that Members take two or three minutes so we can get everybody in.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I welcome the news that Deputy Enda Kenny, the leader of Fine Gael, and Deputy Micheál Martin, the Fianna Fáil leader, are to meet this evening to discuss forming a government. It is a matter of some wonder that it has taken them so long to face up to the fact that neither can be elected Taoiseach and will not today if one does not support the other. It is also a matter of grave concern that the business of the Dáil has been effectively suspended for 40 days and will be suspended again after this session. We meet here to have a vote that will be absolutely inconclusive. It is a waste of time and a continuation of the shambles of recent weeks. Sinn Féin will play no part in this charade.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: What is new?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Teachta Enda Kenny cannot be elected Taoiseach today; neither can Teachta Martin, Teachta Coppinger nor I. For that reason I did not allow my name to go forward. The other nominees should have done likewise.

There has been a host of worldwide events that will have an impact on our island, including the EU response to the refugee crisis, the impending Brexit referendum, the Panama papers revelations and US decisions in respect of tax inversion, and yet the Dáil is not dealing with them. We should also be discussing the issue of homelessness today. As the Ceann Comhairle knows, Sinn Féin has put forward a motion to appoint an Oireachtas committee, similar to the Dáil reform committee, to discuss this crisis as an urgent matter. We have been denied the right to move that motion and the Taoiseach, thus far, has declined my request to facilitate this necessary initiative. Ms Erica Fleming, a young homeless woman who has been living in emergency accommodation for nearly a year with her nine-year-old daughter, Emily, will give a briefing in committee room No. 4 today at 5 p.m. I encourage all Deputies, including acting Ministers, to attend and listen to her story. We should be dealing with this emergency, which sees 5,000 families made up of citizens like Erica and Emily without a home.

Today, there are 525 citizens languishing on hospital trolleys and we have heard disturbing reports of ambulances unable to place patients in hospital as they queue outside Sligo general hospital. Tomorrow it could be Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda or the accident and emergency departments in Cork, Galway or Beaumont. The worsening health crisis is a serious matter that must be addressed urgently but we have decided not to do that. These are the issues the Dáil could and should be dealing with instead of a vote that will decide nothing.

Let me be clear - Sinn Féin is opposed to Teachta Kenny or Teachta Martin leading a government. However, it is also clear that they can do so because they have the numbers. There is a

similarity in policy between them that should encourage them to do so. It is nonsense to suggest that Civil War politics is a barrier to these parties reaching any sort of agreement.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy please conclude, as I want to let other Deputies in?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Yes. I have just a little bit to do yet.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have order for Deputy Adams, please?

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Civil War is quickly set aside in local councils where these two parties divvy up positions between themselves to keep Sinn Féin out. They must get used to the fact that this is a different Dáil and those two parties cannot dominate politics here in future as they used to in the past.

What do we do when this vote is over? There is no talk now, post election, about keeping the recovery going, stability versus chaos or the emergency being over. In fact, Fine Gael has admitted that the figures it used during the election campaign were wrong. Deputy Noonan and the former Deputy James Reilly have said as much recently.

Deputy Michael Noonan: No. That is not true.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: The Deputy is a bit dodgy with his own figures.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Here we are, 40 days on from the general election and the Dáil has sat twice. The blame for this lies squarely with Teachta Martin and the acting Taoiseach, Teachta Kenny, because of their refusal, or inability, to accept the new political dispensation. I urge them both, therefore, to accept the new realities and that they are the only ones fit to form a Government.

For our part, Sinn Féin will seek to provide progressive opposition to the conservative majority that exists. I am firmly of the view that all the rest of us who share this ambition must work together in the time ahead.

An Ceann Comhairle: If further speakers are going to consume all this time, the spirit of allowing everybody an opportunity will be lost. I call the Tánaiste to address the House.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: That is Dáil reform.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have order for the Tánaiste, please?

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): When the Dáil last met to debate this issue, the Labour Party made very clear our position.

Deputy Seamus Healy: On a point of order-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, we are not taking points of order.

Deputy Joan Burton: We supported the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny.

Deputy Seamus Healy: A quick point of order, I am just wondering what other Deputies are listed.

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An Ceann Comhairle: We have 11 Deputies on the list, including yourself, Deputy.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Thank you.

Deputy Joan Burton: At times, this afternoon is beginning to resemble looking at a box set of old favourites, as the same speeches and interruptions are repeated.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have order, please?

Deputy Joan Burton: We supported the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach on 10 March to complete the proposal we made to the people in the general election, which was the return of the Labour Party and Fine Gael to government. We also made clear that we would take every subsequent vote on its merits in the best interests of the country.

Specifically ahead of today's vote, we made clear that we would listen to what the various candidates for Taoiseach had to say in terms of the package they put to the Dáil, the stability of any arrangement being put forward, and the programme for Government proposed. The Dáil is nowhere near being able to make that assessment because the parties with the two largest mandates following the election, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, have yet to speak to each other. Although we all attended the 1916 commemorations together, it is still like the Civil War is not yet over. It is over, however.

The Labour Party considers that it would be premature to vote for a candidate today. We will therefore abstain on the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny, and oppose the nomination of Deputy Micheál Martin and others. I will give a brief summary as to the reasons. It is fair to say that Fine Gael has made a much more concerted effort at forming a Government than Fianna Fáil. I welcome the fact that at least Fine Gael is taking its responsibilities seriously because the country cannot afford this impasse.

New figures show consumer sentiment has weakened, meaning people are becoming fearful about the ongoing political uncertainty. That is not without consequences, as practically every business in this country can testify. There is a range of immediate policy issues which demand urgent action, including housing, health and child care to name just three.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Nothing was done about them for the past five years.

Deputy Joan Burton: In addition, the vote on Brexit, with all its potential consequences for this country, looms large on all our agendas. The foundation document, which Fine Gael has circulated following its negotiations with Independents, has some welcome commitments but, in my view, is not progressive enough. I could not help but notice and welcome that its core theme, "a strong economy for a decent society", is borrowed wholesale from the Labour Party manifesto.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: One voice, please.

Deputy Joan Burton: I also welcome the commitment, though vague, to the removal of the PAYE tax credit for very high earners and other measures to ensure the tax system remains fair and progressive. The Labour Party put forward precisely such a detailed plan in the elec-

tion, built around the principles of ensuring more take-home pay for low-income workers while ensuring high-income earners continued to pay their fair share. In the context of the revelations from Panama about tax avoidance, tax evasion and what seems to be downright wholesale corruption, the issues of tax justice are even more important than ever.

None the less, while there are some welcome commitments in the foundation document, it does not go far enough on other issues such as the living wage, housing, health care, class sizes and important social issues such as the Eighth Amendment.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: One would think the Deputy was never in government. Was she?

Deputy Joan Burton: Hence, we are not in a position to support Deputy Enda Kenny's nomination today as Taoiseach, but we acknowledge that Fine Gael has put forward a basis for progress. Fianna Fáil, in my view, has prevaricated while its members try to figure out what is best for themselves. That is why we will oppose the nomination of Deputy Micheál Martin today. His party has presented nothing of substance for consideration, apart from a promise of legislation on Irish Water. In doing so, they have brought us back to the days of old Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: What happened to new Labour?

Deputy Joan Burton: Irresponsible game playing on Irish Water is the closest thing I have seen to an act of national vandalism since old Fianna Fáil abolished rates in the late 1970s without developing any alternative model.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Tánaiste to give way to other speakers at this point.

Deputy Joan Burton: We know how that set the country back both economically and in terms of developing the infrastructure Ireland needed. I am sorry to say, however, that now Fianna Fáil is at it again. Fianna Fáil should be sitting down with Fine Gael to see if a responsible, rather than a reckless, set of policy agreements can form the basis for a Government.

In 2011, the Labour Party did not hesitate when our country was at risk. We entered coalition in the full knowledge of how difficult things would be, because Ireland was in a perilous state and stable Government was essential. Five years later, Fianna Fáil members are serving their own best interests rather than the people's best interests.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Tánaiste going to conclude and give other Members an opportunity to contribute?

Deputy Joan Burton: I will conclude on this. As regards today's vote, I ask Members not to waste the Dáil's time.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have order, please?

Deputy Joan Burton: The next time the Dáil votes, it should be for the election of a Taoiseach. Many of the contributions today have been about play-acting and shadow-boxing. However, we do, and will eventually, need a government that can govern on behalf of all the people of this country.

Deputy Mary Butler: As this is my first opportunity to speak in the Dáil since the general

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election, I would like to thank all those who voted for me in Waterford. It is a privilege and an honour to have their support and to represent them in this House. Contrary to what one previous speaker said, as a woman I do not class myself as a second-class citizen. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Ceann Comhairle on his election.

I support the nomination of my party leader, Deputy Micheál Martin, for the position of Taoiseach. Deputy Martin is deeply committed to public service, and a Government led by him would deliver key reforms to build a fairer and more equal society. Our country has endured turbulent years. Our economy is still recovering and many communities have not yet seen the benefits of increased jobs and opportunities. Our health service is one area that needs serious reform and attention. Cardiac care services are still time-sensitive in Waterford. Cardiac coverage at University Hospital Waterford is limited to between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday to Friday. We cannot put time restrictions on the emergency heart issues that people in Waterford might have. I do not believe that we are best serving people by telling them they face being put in an ambulance to Cork or Dublin if their emergency falls outside these times. In short, it is time for 24-7 cardiac cover in Waterford. It was a firm commitment of mine to the people of Waterford and it will be delivered by Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Micheál Martin is a person committed to reforming our health service. Those in this House who served in the previous Dáil will be familiar with the focus Fianna Fáil, Deputy Micheál Martin and our health spokesperson, Deputy Billy Kelleher, brought to health issues. We need to ensure safety and dignity for patients in our hospitals and to deliver real change for our nurses and doctors working on the front line taking on impossible challenges in often intolerable conditions. Our health demographics and budget pressures represent serious challenges to the country. Deputy Micheál Martin as Taoiseach will lead a Government committed to meeting these challenges, and I support his nomination today by my colleagues.

An Ceann Comhairle: I congratulate Deputy Mary Butler on her maiden address. I point out to Members that it is a long-standing and honourable tradition not to interrupt a Member making their maiden contribution. I call Deputy Mattie McGrath.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is interesting that some of these people have been looking for my vote all week and they will be looking for it tomorrow as well. I thank the people of Tipperary for giving me a mandate. I, along with my five rural colleagues, Deputies Michael and Danny Healy-Rae and other Independents, are interested in forming a Government in response to the electorate who gave us a mandate to come in here. I am very disappointed because while we have been discussing, debating and teasing out all the issues, including policy documents, disagreeing, agreeing and doing our best with Fine Gael, Government officials and indeed Fianna Fáil, others chose to sit on the fence. I do not know why they went out in all weathers asking for votes and for people to elect them when they sit on their hands.

It is very important that we form a stable government because we are running out of time. It has been said here that 40 days and 40 nights have elapsed since the election. Of course, they have. The banks are still enforcing repossessions and people are homeless. There are 35 people on trolleys in a hospital in Clonmel today and the emergency department has nearly closed because it cannot cope. There is a significant crisis in many areas and the electorate is waiting anxiously and becoming tired. We listened to a lecture from the Tánaiste. I ask her and her ministerial colleagues, some of whom were not re-elected, to hand back their wages and take

the normal salary of a Deputy and not to lecture us on what we should do and rehash the general election. I ask people to be responsible and, in respect of the vote they got from the people, to act positively to try to form a stable Government. To that end, I will continue my efforts for another week and no more. I will abstain today on the vote for An Taoiseach.

Deputy Denis Naughten: There needs to be an acknowledgement by all constructive Deputies in this House that the election gave no political party a mandate to govern but instead the electorate decided that we all need to work together. My four colleagues - Deputies Michael Collins, Noel Grealish, Michael Harty and Mattie McGrath - and I have accepted that responsibility. Over the past two weeks, we have presented the two main parties, Independents and smaller parties with a number of working papers to try to overcome the current political stalemate.

I am hugely disappointed that some Members of Dáil Éireann have turned their backs on the responsibility and the mandate that has been given to them by the people who elected them. We need a five-year government, not one that will last five weeks or five months. We need to work towards that, which is why at a very early stage in this process, we as five Independents set out a proposal for a political partnership agreement which would have representatives of all the constructive Deputies in Dáil Éireann sitting around the one table to agree a clear work programme, a list of priorities for a new government and a format for building consensus in Dáil Éireann around these priority issues.

Over the past two weeks, we have reiterated that the two big parties must sit down with each other to facilitate the development of a political partnership agreement. We welcome the fact that due to our intervention, the parties have now acceded to our request and these talks are to commence later today. However, we cannot ignore the fact that we are extremely frustrated by the failure of the two main players over the past 40 days to sit down together and ensure that whatever government is formed has an effective working majority on the floor of Dáil Éireann to implement an agreed work programme.

From our perspective, in abstaining from the vote today, we are affording the leaders of both parties the last opportunity to do the right thing and we expect to see real and meaningful progress over the next week. This is very much a last chance. It is time for them to stand up and do the job they were elected to do - to put the people and the country before party politics. Those two parties have a responsibility to show leadership and to show that they can provide this country with a Government that can carry out work and deliver for the people of this State.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I add my voice to those in support of the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny as Taoiseach of the Thirty-second Dáil and leader of this country. I believe he is the man for the job. I have known him for more than 20 years and I believe his personal characteristics and qualities, which he has shown as leader of Fine Gael and the Thirty-first Dáil, are still to the fore. I believe the work he has done with the Labour Party, where they worked together in a collaborative and inclusive fashion, will be brought to the fore in any future negotiations as part of the next Government. It is with great pleasure that I add my voice to those of Deputies Noel Rock and Catherine Byrne in supporting his nomination. I believe Deputy Kenny is a democrat to his core and will abide by the rules of this Chamber and the rules laid down for the governance of this country.

It amuses me to listen to people in Sinn Féin, the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit and all the others who have declined to become engaged with this. There is an expres-

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sion for them in Offaly and north Tipperary. They are called “the hurlers on the ditch”. They are experts on every game but they have not pucked a ball in their lives nor do they want to. Deputy Enda Kenny is prepared to be Taoiseach of this country and is actively attempting to negotiate with people to bring this about. I believe he is the right person for the job. I know there are people who are impatient with the process. There are large numbers of people who are still discussing and taking this seriously and they need time. Forming a Government is a very serious business. When that Government is formed, we will be in a position to deal with all the matters that are outstanding, the very important issues of which we are all aware. However, we will not be able to do this unless we have a good solid Government led by Deputy Enda Kenny.

Deputy Seamus Healy: As I said earlier, there is a crisis at South Tipperary General Hospital as we speak. Trolley figures have increased by over 100% and figures released show that the March 2016 figure is 552, up 319 on the figure for March 2015. Hospital attendance has also increased substantially and occupancy of medical beds is running at 150%. When we last voted for Taoiseach here on 10 March 2016, there were 44 patients on trolleys in South Tipperary General Hospital. This was the highest number in the country. Those numbers have been consistently high since. Today’s figure is 38. Patients in these circumstances have no dignity or privacy and have limited access to washing and bathroom facilities. Over the terms of the previous two Governments, the hospital has been starved of resources and approximately 25% or roughly €15 million of its budget has been reduced.

4 o’clock

We need additional beds and staff urgently. The chaos in our emergency departments and the lack of beds generally in hospitals are causing several hundred unnecessary deaths each year according to eminent hospital consultants. This has everything to do with today’s debate and the vote for Taoiseach because the last two Governments, the Fianna Fáil-Green Government and the current Fine Gael-Labour Party Government agreed to pay €7 billion in debt interest repayments every year to the EU institutions and banks. The Taoiseach told us two and a half years ago that there would be a game change on this debt. I wonder if he even raised the issue at the most recent EU Council meeting because that never happened.

The fiscal treaty, which followed the Lisbon treaty, has created a new colonialism within Europe. That treaty flies in the face of the 1916 Proclamation. It is not a sovereignty-sharing treaty. It effectively sets aside Irish sovereignty and hands it over to the big EU powers. It must be renegotiated.

Little Ireland has shouldered 47% of the cost of the EU bank bailouts. Ireland should demand a debt conference and seek support from other indebted countries for that. The fiscal treaty requirement for Ireland is essentially a continuation of austerity over the next 20 years. Water charges are part of the fiscal treaty and are heaping repayments on ordinary citizens.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy could conclude it would be helpful.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I will conclude by saying over the past two Governments there has been huge and gross inequality. Recent CSO figures show that the top 20% wealthiest people in this country own 73% of the wealth, while the bottom 20% own 0.2% of the wealth. The Government must renegotiate the fiscal treaty and tackle the inequality in our society. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael support the fiscal treaty, austerity and inequality and I will oppose both their nominees. I will support Deputy Coppinger on the basis that she is opposed to the fiscal treaty

and to domestic water charges. Finally, will the Taoiseach instruct the Minister for Social Protection to tell her Department to stop pressurising social welfare recipients, forcing them to get their payments through banks? It is undermining the local post offices in every part of this country.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Since our last session here in the Chamber, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae and I have worked tirelessly, together with up to 15 of the other Independent Deputies and the two Members of the Green Party, with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael over many hours. We have made little progress. We did as well as we could and worked as hard as we could. I am glad that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are officially going to talk to each other this evening, even though I am reliably informed that high level talks have been going on for ten or 12 days gone by.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Deputy can tell me later about them.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am sure Deputy Martin knows well because my rumour is very well substantiated. It is very urgent that we get to grips with the matter and that they talk to each other because they have the numbers and we Independents do not. We have done our best and we will continue to do our best to make ourselves available to all sides. There are other Members here who have chosen not to talk to anybody. I am disappointed about that because they were elected by their people to come here and represent them as well.

A lot of time has elapsed and there are many serious issues that I wish to raise in this Chamber. I wish to hold the Minister for Health and Ministers for all sectors to account. I know a man in east Kerry who is totally blind. His home help has been cut down to five days. He does not have home help on bank holidays or Christmas Day. He is putting his clothes on inside out and upside down. He is spilling hot water on himself. We need to get that issue addressed because if people need home help for five days they need it for seven days. If old people are confined to wheelchairs and need help to get out of bed they will not be well enough at the weekend to go dancing or to go to rambling houses or whatever. They do need attention.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy gives way I can let Deputy Ross in.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: The Deputy should keep going.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: He should keep going.

Deputy Shane Ross: Who said that?

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Our talks were not helped by the antics of senior Ministers saying they had posters neatly stacked and were ready to go. Our posters may not be neatly stacked but we will find them and we are as well able to go as the Ministers if they are putting us under that kind of threat. Nobody wants another election. The people know it will cost €40 million to hold another one. I am appealing to the parties to have meaningful talks and get together. They should not waste the hours or cut the day short. There are 24 hours in every day. They should make as much use as they can of them.

An Ceann Comhairle: As the time has now lapsed in accordance with the order of the Dáil I shall now put the question on the motions received-----

Deputy Shane Ross: On a point of order-----

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An Ceann Comhairle: There is no point of order.

Deputy Shane Ross: Can the time be extended with limits-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The matter has been decided.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Where is the Dáil reform?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not going to be amended. That has been decided.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am proposing that it be amended-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ross cannot do that.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----to allow remaining speakers to make their speeches.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid the Deputy does not have that entitlement. It is not possible. The order has been arranged and we are going to proceed as per the order. In accordance with the order-----

Deputy John Halligan: Members of other groups-----

Deputy Shane Ross: Members of other groups should be allowed to make their contributions.

Deputy Barry Cowen: It is the Whip system.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Ross resume his seat? There is going to be a second round of contributions after this and we will call on him on that occasion.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: After what?

An Ceann Comhairle: After the nominations. If the Deputy reads the order paper-----

Deputy Sean Fleming: There is five minutes for each group.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are further contributions to be made and Deputy Ross can be called first at that point.

Cuireadh an cheist: “Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Enda Kenny chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.”

Question put: “That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Enda Kenny for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 51; Níl, 81.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>

<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>

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<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Joe Carey and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Michael Moynihan and Niamh Smyth.

Question declared lost.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis diúltú don cheist.

Cuireadh an cheist: “Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Micheál Martin chun a

cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.”

Question put: “That Dáil Éireann nominate Deputy Micheál Martin for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 43; Níl, 95.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Daly, Clare.</i>
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>D’Arcy, Michael.</i>
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
<i>Murphy O’Mahony, Margaret.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
<i>O’Brien, Darragh.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
<i>O’Callaghan, Jim.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>
<i>O’Dea, Willie.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>O’Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>
<i>O’Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>

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<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>
	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>
	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
	<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>
	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>
	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>
	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>

Dáil Éireann

	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>
	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Michael Moynihan and Fiona O'Loughlin; Níl, Deputies Joe Carey and Paul Kehoe.

Question declared lost.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis diúltú don cheist.

Cuireadh an cheist: "Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Ruth Coppinger chun a ceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Taoiseach."

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

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 10; Níl, 108.</i>	
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>
	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>
	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>
	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>
	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>

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	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>
	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>
	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>
	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>
	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>
	<i>Curran, John.</i>
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>
	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>
	<i>English, Damien.</i>
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>
	<i>Fitzgerald, Frances.</i>
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>
	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>
	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>
	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>

	<i>Kelleher, Billy.</i>
	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>
	<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>
	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>

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	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mick Barry and Richard Boyd Barrett; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Michael Moynihan.

Question declared lost.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis diúltú don cheist.

5 o'clock

An Ceann Comhairle: We now move on to statements by the three Deputies who were nominated. I will call on them to address the House for five minutes, after which, in accordance with the Order of the House, we will proceed to ask the spokespersons from the other parties and groups. The Taoiseach has the floor.

The Taoiseach: The Dáil has failed to agree on the nomination of a Taoiseach. As I informed the House on 10 March last and in accordance with the Constitution, the Government and I will continue to carry out our duties and will do so until a new Government has been appointed.

I might note that since the last sitting of the House, many of the important events to commemorate the Easter Rising of 1916 have taken place. I hope I can speak for everyone in the House when I state these events have been a great success and the promised inclusive, comprehensive and respectful approach clearly has been evident throughout all of the centenary commemorative occasions. If I may, I will take this opportunity to thank all those who were involved in planning and organising the centenary programme, including the Ireland 2016 team, consisting of public servants from a range of Departments and Government agencies, the Defence Forces personnel, the gardaí and those from the other emergency services, as well as all the civilians who gave of their time voluntarily to make this an outstanding success and will do so for the rest of the year. I also thank the many hundreds of thousands of people who have turned out to take part in the events to date and to pay tribute to the men and women who took the first steps towards Irish freedom 100 years ago this month. I make the point that a great deal of understanding and respect for the national flag has been engendered by the presentation by Defence Forces personnel of a Tricolour to each of the 3,200 schools nationwide.

At the last sitting of the House on 22 March, I undertook to work towards establishing a stable and lasting Government. I invited those parties, alliances and Independent Deputies who were willing to accept the responsibility and mandate they received from the electorate and to work towards that objective to enter into structured discussions with the Fine Gael Party.

Initially, Deputies Eamon Ryan and Catherine Martin of the Green Party and 15 Independent Deputies agreed to take part in that process, which began on Thursday, 24 March. Subsequently, the Green Party decided to withdraw from the meetings, and explained the reasons for so doing, but the 15 Independent Deputies from small parties and alliances have remained engaged throughout. This process has involved more than 50 hours of constructive and worthwhile discussion. I thank all those who participated, who approached these discussions with great commitment and energy and demonstrated their willingness to accept responsibility in moving the country forward. As for many of the positive ideas and proposals that have been put forward during the process, the first draft of a foundation document has been put in place. Separately, I have agreed to invite Deputy Micheál Martin to have a conversation this evening - and I expect Deputy Martin will oblige in that regard - as to how we might have an initial discussion on how to put in place a stable, effective and lasting Government.

Nearly six weeks have passed since the general election and I note that I deliberately took the view that, in the case of those Independent Deputies who stated they had accepted their responsibility to move the country forward, it was important to identify their priorities, concerns and anxieties. I make no apology for having spent considerable time in engaging with, talking to and listening to them and in putting together what we consider to be the main issues that are of importance to them. Everyone is aware that we face a range of important challenges, not just here at home, including housing and homelessness, disability and mental health, health issues, education, justice and so on. Everyone understands this and, in many ways, I have learned the importance of areas within these issues that are highly sensitive. In addition, however, we also face external issues such as the possibility of a Brexit, migration, international currency fluctuations, events in the Middle East and Far Eastern countries and so on. These are all important challenges facing the country, and I make the point to Deputy Micheál Martin, whom I have known for many years, that I wish to be as flexible and generous when negotiating as is possible in this regard.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Steady now. The Taoiseach would want to put a muzzle on a few of his boys.

An Ceann Comhairle: One voice, please.

The Taoiseach: It is not simply about numbers; it is also about stability and building a relationship of trust. This is a centenary year, which obviously is an important symbolic year, and in the quite complex decision that the people have given, it is right and proper that the cards they have dealt and the spectrum of responsibility and politics for which they have voted be reflected in genuine attempts to put together a Government that will set about dealing with the many challenges we now face. This is the reason it is incumbent upon all Members present, who have the privilege of being elected to serve in the Thirty-second Dáil, to understand this responsibility, and I will work diligently on behalf of my party to ensure this happens.

Consequently, as Taoiseach and as leader of the largest party in the House, I remain fully committed to working to ensure the people get a Government that will work diligently and hard on their behalf and that will last the term. They did give a very different answer in their votes. It is our responsibility to deliver an answer to that by putting together a Government, and for that reason, the House will adjourn this evening until 14 April. Moreover, for my part, I pledge that if I can reach an understanding with Deputy Micheál Martin in respect of a process, a structure and a strategy by which this might be followed through, it can be followed through, and the next week should have an important element of that. While I cannot state at present that this

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will result in a conclusion, with a Government at the end of a week or ten days, for my part and that of my party, we will work diligently in this regard. I hope the discussions I hope to initiate this evening with Deputy Martin will lead us very much in that direction and to a conclusion.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I pay tribute to all those involved in organising the 1916 centenary celebrations, in particular the celebrations over the Easter weekend. The presentation of the various aspects of the celebrations was splendid. I pay particular tribute to RTE on its coverage of the centenary concert. The presentation was stunning and reflected well on the nation and our maturity and capacity to tolerate diverse views on the Rising. It did it with some style. I also pay tribute to our armed forces, Óglaigh na hÉireann, for the role they played in the Easter parade.

Following the votes, I will now outline Fianna Fáil's approach to both the formation of a Government and the fundamental challenge of reforming our politics. One of the greatest failings of Irish politics is that the need for change gets quickly diverted and we end up carrying on as before. This must not be allowed to happen again. The deep loss of trust in the ability of our politics to deliver progress on the issues of most concern to people will not be reversed by slogans and partisan posturing. We can achieve nothing if all we do is change the form rather than the substance of how our Government and Parliament work. Given the scale of public disillusionment and the mounting crises facing our country, the worst thing we could do would be to keep repeating the practice of the past where the sole focus is on a rapid change of Government Members with everything else carrying on regardless. The priority has been power rather than policy.

From the first day of the count, when the scale of the rejection of the outgoing Government became clear, our position has been entirely consistent. It is also the same position we outlined before the election and which formed the basis of a mandate we won with the support of more than 500,000 people. Our core position remains consistent with our promise. We want a change of Government, a change of priorities and a change in how politics is carried out. Irrespective of the ongoing clamour of self-appointed spokespeople on behalf of the national interest, we insist on our right and obligation to work to implement our commitments to the people.

Since the election, we have sought and carried out discussions with a range of Deputies elected as Independents and as members of smaller parties. At the very start of these discussions, we tabled a detailed proposal for the policies which we believe should shape the next Government. Within this, and to avoid the vague generalities too often found in these documents, we identified specific actions which could be taken within six months and 12 months. Our priorities are focused on six specific areas for action. These include making the recovery fairer and ensuring that secure, well-paid jobs are created in all communities as well as urgent action on the housing emergency across all sectors, from home ownership and social housing to private rental. Our proposal for a Minister for housing has now gained broad acceptance across the House, as has our proposal on appointing a Minister for rural affairs. We have been the one party which consistently looked for a Minister for rural affairs. We had one in previous Governments but the outgoing Government got rid of the Ministry. We have consistently pushed for it in our manifesto and it is now gaining widespread acceptance.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Policy is beginning to triumph over the naked pursuit of power for its own sake. The six specific areas for action also include introducing a progressive ap-

proach to cutting costs for families and providing aid for communities under pressure, including a guarantee of key services and strengthening of community policing. While this includes substantial action for rural communities, it also addresses the urgent needs of urban communities, especially those facing a growing drugs menace and an undermining of basic supports. The six areas include support for reforming and investing in essential public services and a genuine reform of both Government and politics and how, for example, in terms of justice, we should transparently appoint judges.

We have come forward with very concrete proposals, in particular in our discussions with the Independents, who have generally responded positively to the content and substance of what we have put forward. I refer that to the Minister, Deputy Joan Burton, who, unfortunately, in her presentation reverted to hostility and an aggressive rehearsing of perhaps a traditional animosity between her and the Fianna Fáil Party. I do not think that did her or the situation we are in any justice today.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Very disappointing.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Wait for round two.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We welcome the constructive discussions we have had and acknowledge the assistance provided by departmental officials. As our proposals were independently reviewed and costed, we have not had to revise their costings. However, we must put on the record our concern that important fiscal information was not reflected in data published by the outgoing Government before the election.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The underfunded budgets were not acknowledged by Ministers before the election. This is a matter which should be taken up by a reformed budget oversight committee when it is established through the Dáil reform process. This applies in particular to the Department of Health. We were informed by officials that the underlying overrun by the end of February was already €60 million. We pointed this out before the election and we were not told the truth about it during the election campaign. There is also the wider issue of the fiscal treaty and its implications for how that is going to be dealt with in 2016. If any one thing is coming across as being of great seriousness, it is the crisis that is facing the health situation over the next 12 months - not over the next two years but over the next 12 months - in terms of the adequacy of funding that is being made available and earmarked for it.

Our approach to the negotiations has been to demonstrate our good faith. There has been no constant briefing, leaks or spin. There have been no manoeuvrings or attempts to deny the right of others to act in accordance with their mandates. The negotiations have been constructive but not conclusive so far. However, I believe we are close to a point where Deputies will be in a position to state what government option they will assist and support.

The primary focus is on the option of what would be a minority Government. It is important to address some of the comments which have been made about how a minority Government might work. The past approach to Government formation in Ireland is by no stretch the dominant model in successful democracies. In fact, the insistence that we hear from some that a Government can only be successful if it is assured that it can win every vote and get its way

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on every issue is nonsense. The casual and repetitive demand of commentators, many of whom completely failed to understand the mood of the public before the election campaign, that the only good Government is a majority Government simply does not stand up to scrutiny. We have just had five years of a Government which had the strongest majority in our history and only became unstable when it came to arguing over delaying the election by a few months.

Independent studies show that up to a third of governments in Europe since 1945 have had minority support in parliament. They have also shown that these governments have shown more respect for consultation in policy formation, worked with real parliamentary oversight of all stages of the budget process and can encourage more fiscally responsible policies than many majority governments. Some countries with the highest standards of governance in the world have regularly had minority governments which were enabled to be formed by opposition parties. The key to this is that their parliaments assume a more professional and accountable role.

Everything does not rise or fall on whether there is an all-powerful Executive. It is my intention to avoid the type of partisan comments which defined many of the contributions when we last discussed this matter.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Good.

Deputy Micheál Martin: No purpose is served by aggressive point-scoring. What does have to be said is that we now have the position where some are busy lecturing others about what they are and are not entitled to seek to do with their mandate. We have the bizarre situation where some parties are demanding that others form a Government in order that they can get on with denouncing it.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Never before have so many spent so much time calling for a Government they will vote against.

Deputy Niall Collins: Correct.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The process being followed at the moment by parties who want to lead Government is new for Ireland but common internationally. After today, it will move forward. Our parliamentary party will meet to discuss the issue tomorrow. It is our intention to continue the ongoing discussions which are under way. It is important to say that one of the things which was rejected by the people in the election is an approach to politics driven by constant hype and spin. The never-ending stream of unattributed comments designed to influence perception rather than fairly reflect reality has only served to damage the public perception of politics. There can be no trust or real change if this approach to politics continues. With regard to meeting, I have no difficulty at all meeting with the Taoiseach, but I should not have to read at 7 a.m. that apparently I am meeting him at 7 p.m. when, of course, there has been no contact. We can do without that type of endless spinning and manoeuvring.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should conclude.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I have no difficulty with meeting anybody in the House.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will conclude. I met with Deputy Burton last week and we had a very cordial exchange-----

Deputy Charles Flanagan: It did not take long for the Deputy to revert to type.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----which was much different from the presentation given. I respectfully suggest, and I address my remarks to the Taoiseach and to colleagues-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: No point scoring.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am not. This is a very constructive point, and it is important for the conduct of discussions into the future. The Taoiseach must stop the briefings and the manipulation of opinions if there is to be any reasonable prospect of moving things forward. As a bottom line, parity of esteem and respect is important for everybody in the House. That means that if people are saying to Fianna Fáil that they expect the party to support a minority Government if a majority of Independents will support Fine Gael, the same applies to the Fine Gael Party. The Fine Gael Party should equally be in a position to say that whoever emerges in a majority position to lead a Government should also be in a position to enjoy that support.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Martin, your time has elapsed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: However, ruling this and that out is not conducive to constructive engagement. That point must be put on the record.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time has elapsed, Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I thank you, a Cheann Comhairle, for your indulgence on an important occasion such as this. We are working to implement the mandate we received. We seek to rebuild trust based on a new Government, new parties and reformed politics. It is not just a challenge for us, but a challenge for every Member of this House.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before Deputy Coppinger begins, I have given extra time beyond the five minutes allowed to both the Taoiseach and Deputy Martin. Obviously, the same facility is now available to you, Deputy Coppinger.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That is marvellous. Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is very inclusive.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is inclusive. I will not avail of the extra time.

I will first explain the context for the nominations today, although I should probably give the Members time to clear out.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: They are going out to see Erica Fleming.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Members leaving the Chamber please show respect to the Member on her feet?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I thank the Independents who supported the nomination of the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit. I will explain the context of taking part in the debate on the nominations.

The two nominees we have heard from already should be reminded that it is clear from the

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election that people voted for change. The only two nominees put forward today, apart from our nomination, are from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and do not represent change. They represent more of the same and have dominated political life in Ireland for decades. While I commend Deputy Martin on doing his best to convince us that there is a huge difference, it is Mouseland politics. In reality, they are identical twins.

It is amazing that key issues have not been mentioned by either of the nominees. Apparently, it is unimportant and not worth mentioning that this week the Panama papers revealed a massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny elite globally. The papers also implicated Ireland in participating in creating tax havens for key companies around the world. The 1% are hoarding and hiding their wealth from governments and avoiding tax while in the so-called Third World people are starving and looking for water and while in the developed world, workers have had their incomes slashed and public services decimated in the past seven years to bail out this elite. Both of the candidates support this system. They have nothing to say in criticism of it. They think that this type of inequality is absolutely fine. In fact, they base their economic policy on encouraging low corporation tax rates and opposing some of these companies even paying back taxes to this country, such as Apple which owes €19 billion. These are key issues for the electorate who made a decision to elect a Government. The Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit believes that we must take this wealth and use it to invest in housing, health and education.

Amazingly as well, neither nominee mentioned the water charges. They talk about them on the radio, but they have not explained their position today. Are they going to get rid of the water charges or suspend them? The two parties are doing their best to minimise this issue and bat it out of the way. The Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit encourages people to maintain and accelerate the boycott of those charges. Clearly, we cannot rely on those two parties, and particularly Fianna Fáil based on its neglecting to mention the issue, to get rid of them. We will have to refuse to pay to put the parties under pressure to abolish them.

This is the first time a woman has been nominated for the position of Taoiseach in the almost 100 years of the Dáil's existence. That says a hell of a lot about the position of women in Irish public life over the last century. The Fianna Fáil Deputy mentioned that she is not a second class citizen. She is not, but in 31 Dáils no woman was ever nominated for Taoiseach and in the last Dáil there were no women Members of the Deputy's party in the House, despite the party having 20 Members. Our point is that women have been sidelined in Ireland. In fact, key issues relating to women should be addressed. Quite rightly, 1916 has been mentioned. The women who fought in 1916 were quickly brushed out of the picture and erased from history. They were told to go back into the kitchens and stay out of public life. That is the reality. The political ancestors of the two other nominees did that, and it should be mentioned. Subsequently, they allowed the Catholic Church to dictate a huge part of people's lives by giving it a special place in education and health and huge control over people. People rejected that type of society in the marriage equality referendum and have made their position clear. They want social progress and equality. A separation of church and State is inevitable, but I am not confident it will be done by either of the two parties that nominated Members for Taoiseach today.

Amnesty International staged a protest outside both the Dáil and the Taoiseach's office today, which it will continue for 12 days, on the ongoing scandal of the eighth amendment to the Constitution, which was introduced by the political ancestors of the two parties and maintained for 33 years. That shame can no longer continue. A total of 80% of people favour a referendum and repeal of the eighth amendment. Again, the nominees did not bother to mention it, but

what about their negotiations and discussions? We do not want a commission to examine it. People want a referendum and there is a democratic right to have one and for those parties not to suppress it as an issue any longer. We will shortly discuss Dáil reform. It should not be the privilege of a Government to prevent the general populace having a referendum on a key issue of civil liberties, which it clearly wants.

Finally, I wish to mention housing. Many Deputies have left the Chamber to hear Erica Fleming speak about her situation. I commend Erica on campaigning for months in a very difficult situation. I took part in an occupation of a house with Erica to highlight the ongoing housing crisis. It is scandalous that she is still in the current situation. There must be an end to the privatisation of housing. Taking that issue into public control is the only way to end the housing crisis.

With regard to the talks process, I do not welcome a Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael coalition or partnership, unlike what Deputy Martin said. However, if the two traditional parties and the so-called Independents, who have been having chats for the last while and who are not really independent because obviously they are willing to horse trade with the two traditional parties and prop them up if necessary-----

Deputy Alan Farrell: You mean democratic.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: If the two parties think they can continue to rule in the old way, they can forget it. We have seen the Luas workers and the reaction from nurses and teachers to having a two-tier system which was foisted on them by these two parties. The Tesco workers will not accept having to suffer low pay and a continuation of austerity and rule by the rich against the interests of working people, so be warned about those things.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The second vote by this House addressing the issue of Government formation has now concluded. As has been said by many speakers, 40 days have elapsed since the people cast their ballots and gave us this new Dáil and each of us our mandates. It is a very diverse result and, in the formation of Government, we need to respect that diversity, in particular in terms of the kind of parliamentary reform that is on the table at present. The change in our procedures will make it much easier to respect the kind of diversity we have seen in the result.

I believe the people rightly expect us to make progress because so many pressing issues are facing our country, many of which have been mentioned here today. We face external risks and we need to deal with many serious domestic challenges and address the social problems that have been identified by all of us. We all share a wish to deal with those and nobody has exclusivity in wanting to deal with social problems. We are all committed to dealing with the health issues and the housing crisis. There is no one person in this Dáil who has greater moral authority than others in terms of our motivation to deal with the issues of concern to the public.

What I would say about Fine Gael is that we will work with others in the national interest - we should be talking about the national interest - in order to move beyond the current impasse and to get on with the job of providing the country with both a stable and a good Government. As the Taoiseach and Deputy Martin mentioned earlier, we have been very successful in recent days and weeks in commemorating in a very inclusive way the events of 1916. I believe the people have been moved by the inclusive, respectful, dignified approach that has been taken to those commemorations. We should take that spirit of inclusivity and respect it in the process of

Government formation.

We should try to avoid posturing. Deputy Martin talked about how the public views politics now, and political posturing does not help. We really have to put the country first. I do not think we should be bound by either tribal mindsets or historical tradition. As everybody keeps saying, we are in a new situation so let us work together to fulfil the ambitions of this country and to address the challenges of those we represent, in particular the challenges people see in their own lives, within their families and in their communities.

That has been and remains the driving force behind the efforts that the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, has been making in recent weeks. Obviously, that has been reflected in the work we have done with the 15 Independent Deputies. We have been trying to work hard to look at the solutions to all of those pressing problems, whether in regard to housing, homelessness, disability, mental health issues or any of the other areas that need addressing.

I hope everybody will approach this process in a very bona fide way in terms of really trying to bring about a stable Government. I believe the people would welcome the kind of language that has been used by some here today, if not by everyone, in talking about putting the interests of the country first, rather than party interests. That is the challenge in the next few days, and I think it should be days rather than weeks. People want to see a stable Government shortly and they do not want this process dragged out for weeks on end. I believe that, with the right commitment, we can put a stable Government in place and that stable Government can then begin to work even more effectively with the Dáil than has been the case in the recent past.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: Is í seo mo chéad óráid sa Teach. Caithfidh mé a rá i dtús gur mór an onóir agus an phribhléid é dom bheith anseo ar son na ndaoine i gCuan Bhaile Átha Cliath Theas. Tá súil agam go mbeidh mé i mo Theachta Dála dícheallach agus fíor-éifeachtach i rith na mblianta - nó b’fhéidir na seachtainí - seo chugainn.

This is the first time I have had the opportunity to address this House, even though I have already voted seven times on the election of a Taoiseach, which may be a record in itself. I think I have voted the same number of times on the election of a Taoiseach as I have voted in general elections.

For the past three weeks, I have been a member of the Fianna Fáil negotiating team, which has been a great honour. I want in the first instance to commend the Independent Deputies with whom we have been negotiating during the past three weeks for the purpose of trying to put a Government together. Those Independents have approached the talks with great diligence and seriousness, and I know they have a desire to ensure this country is provided with the Government it requires.

One of the issues with which I have been dealing with the Independents is the whole area of justice, and I am very pleased the Minister for Justice and Equality is present in the House. There are many issues in respect of justice that need to be reformed in this country. Some of them have been mentioned in the draft discussion document put forward by Fine Gael but I believe they have not been put forward sufficiently. I want to identify three of those issues, the first of which is in respect of judicial appointments. We need to depoliticise the appointment of judges so we get the best people occupying those very important positions in our superior courts as well as in the courts of local and limited jurisdiction. Another area of justice that needs reform is in respect of the Parole Board, which has been in existence for many years but

which needs to be put on a statutory basis. This is something any new Minister for Justice and Equality must take on board immediately. We also need to ensure greater powers are given to the Criminal Assets Bureau. We had the opportunity of discussing with officials from the Department of Justice and Equality the issue in respect of a review of the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau but, although that review began in 2011, I regret to say it still has not concluded. Those are just three very important issues in respect of justice that need to be addressed.

We need to recognise that the result the people have delivered is unusual and not the traditional result thrown up by an Irish election. We need to recognise that more time than usual is going to be required to put together a Government. This has not been the longest period of time from a general election to the formation of a Government given that, back in 1992, it took 45 days. While we are going to beat that, we should recognise that, in the future, we are going to be looking at minority Governments more often than in the past.

Fianna Fáil has played its part very seriously in these negotiations and we will continue to play our part as a responsible party that will always put the country first. I do not think we should be criticised for taking time in respect of these negotiations, given that their outcome will have huge consequences for this country not simply for the next two the three years, but for the next ten years. I believe the only valid alternative and real option for the Government that is departing is a new Government led by Deputy Micheál Martin and Fianna Fáil. If that is not available, Fianna Fáil will be responsible in its obligations to the people of this country and in this House in recognition of any role a Government has to play.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: According to the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine, 350 people die in this State as a result of overcrowded emergency departments. This means that, in the 40 days in which Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have refused to talk to each other, 35 people have died in this State in overcrowded emergency departments. These are not people coming to the end of their lives but people who are dying as a result of those overcrowded emergency departments.

Some 5,715 people are in emergency accommodation today. In the 40 days that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have refused to discuss Government face to face, roughly 280 extra people have joined the ranks of people in emergency accommodation.

Tuesday next, 12 April, will mark the tenth month since Clerys closed. That was a textbook case of tactical insolvency. No doubt we will have a round of crocodile tears from all the parties in this Chamber, but the fact is that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael may still not have spoken to each other. The disaster about this is that there are solutions to these problems. For example, I have a Bill that I want to bring before of the Dáil which would pierce the corporate veil and which would ensure that these tactical insolvencies cannot happen and yet, because of this Government hiatus, caused by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, I will not be able to do that.

People watching today will feel it is surreal to see Deputies Micheál Martin and Enda Kenny hector each other 30 feet apart from each other but not go into a room to discuss Government as of yet, 40 days later. The truth is, as has been mentioned, Sinn Féin wants to be in government. We want to be in a position to make the necessary changes, but the numbers are not there, and anybody who says they are there is simply looking to draw us into the farce in which other Deputies are involved at the moment. We are honest and upfront about what we want to do and we made our decisions and laid our cards on the table very quickly to expedite the process of Government formation. Mark my words, Sinn Féin does not want a Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil

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Government.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It obviously does.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: However, the people have voted the way they have voted, and to bin the mandate that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have been given so soon after they have been given it would be a democratic disgrace-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is not our mandate.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It is a disgrace that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are faffing around with the mandate that they have been given while immediate crises wrack this country. The truth is that the two centre-right parties are holding this country to ransom. They are saying to people with housing and health problems and people who are unemployed and suffering poverty and injustice that they must wait while they set about improving their political fortunes into the future. However, people cannot wait. The country has seen Deputy Micheál Martin texting Deputy Enda Kenny and maybe Deputy Kenny WhatsApping Deputy Martin-----

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Or phoning him.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: -----while the mammoth tasks of this country remain to be solved.

Deputy Simon Harris: Snapchat next year.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: One of the problems I have at the moment is that there are mandates here in this Chamber that could be acted upon. For example, in my constituency we have the problem of the North-South interconnector, which the previous Government sought to overground. Sinn Féin wants this interconnector undergrounded, and I understand Fianna Fáil and a certain amount of the Independents also want it to be undergrounded-----

Deputy Damien English: So does Sinn Féin in the North.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: However, Alex White, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, is proceeding with the previous Government's policy on this issue. He does not have a mandate, yet those in this Chamber with a different mandate are being prevented from doing the job that they are meant to do, and that is happening right across the whole process.

My colleague Deputy Gerry Adams suggested today that we propose a committee to deal with housing and everybody nodded piously at that. He suggested the only way that it could happen was for the Taoiseach himself to propose it and make it happen, yet we will get to the end of this debate without the Taoiseach making that proposal, and that is a shocking indictment of his position on housing and his inability to deal with the issue. I am asking the two political parties to end this Groundhog Day and this republic of farce and either transform their mandate into a Government or get off the stage and call an election.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): With the permission of the House, I would like to vary the speaking slots from five minutes to three minutes in order to accommodate everybody who I have on the list of those who wish to speak because currently we have a 30 minute slot but it will take 42 minutes in addition to what we have already taken-----

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Extend the time.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Take the time out of the later debate.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Let me finish please.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Let the Cathaoirleach finish.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The purpose of requesting the reduction to three minutes is to be able to move onto the next-----

Deputy Eamon Ryan: On a point of order, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Just a second, Deputy, I am not finished. That will leave us with 42 minutes, which will allow us then to move onto the next item on the Order Paper, statements on Dáil reform.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: On a point of order, if time is such a difficulty, I suggest we take that time difference out of the later debate and use our time here to discuss what is the important political issue of our time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to do that. Under Standing Orders, I cannot deduct time from an item on an Order Paper that has already been agreed.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Where was the agreement that we would cut to three minutes?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I am trying to be as fair as possible to everybody, including Deputy Ryan. He is speaking after Deputies Alan Kelly and Bríd Smith. I want to make it very clear that there is an opportunity for everybody in the House who has indicated to me that they wish to contribute to give three minutes of their time. If I can have the agreement of the House, we can proceed in what I think is the fairest way of dealing with the issue.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Am I on that list?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I do not have the Deputy on it.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I was on the list.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Ceann Comhairle has written the list.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: It was done quite a while ago. I am sure Deputy Michael Moynihan can-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy can speak to Deputy Moynihan.

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I will be as quick as I can. I join the Taoiseach and other Deputies in congratulating those who organised the events surrounding the 1916 commemorations. The way in which it was conducted was absolutely incredible. I would particularly like to congratulate RTE on its role. It often gets a lot of criticism but it played a fantastic role. We should all also acknowledge the role of the Defence Forces. I acknowledge the work of the 2016 team, particularly the coordinator, John Concannon, who was the right man for the job and did an incredible job.

The Tánaiste has outlined Labour's decision regarding the vote on the Taoiseach today. I will not go into that as we are short of time. It has been six weeks since the election, and I

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have spoken about the 1916 commemorations, but by and large the public is now concentrating on what we are doing in this House. They have moved on, we have had our space and what we have seen to date has been a bit of a charade. We have seen a bit of flirting, we have seen negotiations going on between Fianna Fáil and Independents, Fine Gael and Independents, and we have had a version of Lanigan's Ball: I stepped in and he stepped out again. Then there were negotiations through Instagram and Twitter. Deputy Micheál Martin would update us all through Twitter or Deputy Mattie McGrath would go on another radio station, looking for more attention. What we have had is a pantomime, and the public is not laughing. What has been generated has shown that within that pantomime there is very little difference between the two principal participants, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. We are looking forward to seeing the flirting finish and the courtship start this evening, and hopefully we will all be back in a few weeks' time with a Government that is stable and a marriage that we can all witness.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Will Deputy Kelly be best man?

Deputy Alan Kelly: I have looked at some of the proposals being put forward, particularly regarding housing, and there is very little difference between them. Everything that has been proposed, as far as I can see, in some way has been proposed or copied and pasted from documents that have already been put out there.

The position of the Dáil is that Fine Gael is the largest party, Fianna Fáil the second largest, then Sinn Féin, then Labour, smaller parties and others. Those numbers show the inevitability of the marriage that we all know is necessary in order to have a Government, and the pantomime that we have had has to end. Let us all face the fact that a quarter of the people elected to the Dáil have no intention of ever serving in government. Sinn Féin does not want to go into Government, and that must be acknowledged. That is fine by me because I do not want them to go in either. Fine Gael is making some sort of effort; Fianna Fáil is being too cute by half. I found Deputy Martin's contribution here tonight to be one of the most patronising I have heard in the Dáil in many years. The simple fact of the matter is that in 2011 we in the Labour Party had to put the country first at its most difficult time, and we did that. Deputies might disagree with what the Labour Party did, but it produced and it went into government for the benefit of this country.

The marriage that is being proposed - the courtship will begin later this evening - is required for the sake of the country. If the courtship ends soon, the alternative is for all of us to do what Deputy Varadkar tweeted about, which is to get our posters ready.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I can give a perspective of somebody who is brand new to the House, its procedures and atmosphere. It has been a painfully slow 40 days, as Deputy Boyd Barrett alluded to earlier. It is in my mind all the time how dreadful this looks to the public, which as others have mentioned is suffering from the housing crisis, disabilities and being left on trolleys while waiting for health care. People like the Luas strikers and those voting tonight in Tesco on industrial action if they do not get their pay rise must be frustrated in thinking about the maths of what is going on here. For 40 days, we have been highly paid, both through salaries and expenses, with some of us getting more than others. We are being paid to do nothing, as we have done nothing, and the financing and resources have been wasted while many in this House would criticise Luas drivers and others for taking strike action to improve their conditions.

One of the repeated mantras that keeps coming back to me and jarring in my brain is the idea that we are all trying to fulfil the ambitions of this country and we must put the interests of the

country first. Look at the diversity of political opinion in the House. The interests of this country are not shared by everybody in this country when Deputy Enda Kenny and Deputy Micheál Martin speak about putting the interests of the country first, as they mean certain interests. I mean different interests. There are competing interests.

I can give the example of the question of homelessness and housing. The Minister responsible for housing, who has just spoken, has repeatedly driven the interests of the private market, developers and builders in the question of dealing with the housing crisis.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Bríd Smith: We are interested in ending the housing crisis and beginning the provision of tens of thousands of social houses, which is the only way of addressing the issue. Driving it into the private market, with private landlords and developers, will ruin any possibility of ending the problem.

More than 90 Deputies were elected who would act on water charges, and those to my left have very clearly stolen the clothes of the left in saying they would do something about water charges. Nothing has been done. Can we at least get our act together to do something about the issues we have in common? People from many parties stood outside the Taoiseach's office today to demand repeal of the eighth amendment. Let us get our act together and do something about that.

From Deputy O'Callaghan's final comment, I detect that we will have white smoke soon, with some arrangement to put a Government in place. It is outrageous that we are taking another week off and getting no business done in the House. This side of the House is working closely with the Right2Change and the Right2Water Deputies to put together a joint motion on water charges. We will work with others interested in doing this and I am calling on the public to get outside the gates and support us. I am calling on the public who voted for us and the real people fighting back to try to change their lives in this country. We are concerned about them. There are competing interests in this country and they are the interests of the rich versus the rest of us. We represent "the rest of us".

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I was delighted to support the nomination of Deputy Ruth Coppinger. It was historic for Dáil Éireann, as was the previous nomination of Deputy Boyd Barrett. I have always believed in the unity of the broad left and I had hoped, through the decades, that my former party would have been the fulcrum of such a broad left Government or even led such a Government. I was elected as a Right2Change candidate and an Independent 4 Change. My preference still is for change and we should have a change of Government. That was the decisive feeling of the people. In particular, all of those who stood on the platform of Right2Change should perhaps have a single nomination for Taoiseach, with people supporting that broadly across the political spectrum. We should try to fulfil the will of the people in this regard.

A few days after the general election I received an invitation from Deputy Micheál Martin to meet him and discuss the issues of concern and what we both saw as the future for our country. We had a very pleasant meeting for approximately 45 minutes. I outlined to him the ferocious and major concerns from my own constituency, particularly with regard to housing, health and disability services, as well as the requirement for the abolition of water taxes. At the end of the meeting I said that I obviously could not support his nomination for Taoiseach as I believed

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that in so many areas Fianna Fáil was not prepared to take the dynamic action required and I would not be able to fulfil my Right2Change mandate. A few days later, the Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, also kindly invited me to a discussion and we again went through the key areas of concern facing the people. The Taoiseach reiterated the policy stances that he and his party took in the general election. I also said at the end of the meeting that I could not support the nomination of the outgoing Taoiseach because I had been elected as a Right2Change candidate and the people wanted change badly. That was one of the fundamental results of the election.

I was struck in both meetings by the fact that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have so much in common. For example, the previous speaker was the Minister responsible for housing. On this side of the House we urged him desperately to introduce serious rent regulation but he would not do it. He could not achieve it because on that critical policy issue, which affects the provision of social housing so much, he was relentlessly opposed by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. I was shouted down by Fianna Fáil on that subject as well. The parties have so much in common.

There is a duty to govern and six weeks have passed. We urgently need a Government to tackle problems. That heroic young woman, Ms Erica Fleming, is in the building right now, explaining to Deputies her circumstances and those of her family. There are 1,600 other children living in homeless accommodation and hotels this evening. We need urgent action.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Thank you, Deputy. You are way over time.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The conservative parties can do that, although I would be happy to oppose them. If, however, they do not come together-----

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

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: -----there is an obligation on the Right2Change parties and progressive independents and parties to put together a Government in this State. One or other of the conservative parties should see what it can do in supporting such a Government, which would be very dynamic.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Please, Deputy, take your seat.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: In the past, some of the Deputies from the left have often been the most effective Ministers.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: We in the Social Democrats decided to abstain on each of the votes for Taoiseach today because we did not see an outcome to start with and we felt this was, essentially, postponing the inevitable. We do not have to like the results of an election but as democrats we must accept them. The reality is this issue is both mathematical and political. The mathematical point is that the two large blocs of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael between them got sufficient numbers to form a Government.

There is a political element as well. Part of the reason this country is polarised is the political direction it has taken, not just in the past five years but in the past 20 years or more.

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It is no surprise we have a housing and homelessness crisis because it comes down to political failure. It is no surprise there is a problem with white collar crime and corruption because there has been an approach of light-touch regulation. In recent days, the Panama files have

shown evidence of that international relationship in which, unfortunately, Ireland has played a part.

In some of what has happened today, there has been a lecturing tone about responsibility. There is a responsibility for creating some of those crises, including housing, health, the lack of prosecutions for white collar crime, and the absence of disability services. Essentially, we want to play a constructive role whereby we will stop this Punch and Judy type of politics. However, a programme is needed for the Dáil as well as for Government if there is to be an involvement for the polarised Dáil that citizens have elected. It is polarised because society is polarised and we have ended up with a very unequal society. Some of that concerns the lack of progressive budgeting and the extent of child poverty.

We ran seeking a mandate for a strong economy, honest politics and a fair society. We must interpret our mandate in terms of what we do, but we want to play a constructive role. We believe such a role is within a Dáil with a programme to take a broad strategic approach to health, housing, corporate governance, child poverty, crime and many other issues. We must take a strategic approach while acting constructively if the Government pursues those issues in the interests of the country.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I join others in congratulating and commending everybody who took part in the Easter 1916 commemorations. One moment struck home for me on Sunday, 27 March, outside the GPO. The words of the Army's head chaplain rang true when he said:

Another day begins. Give us the courage to step on new ground, eyes young again with energy and dreams. Help us to believe in beginnings, to listen to the voices that challenge and to sing a new song for Ireland.

He set out in very clear terms what that new song might be: respecting social justice, both unity and diversity, and respect for our environment.

I commend the Taoiseach and his colleagues on the work they did in the process of engaging with the Independents and our own party. To date, however, the outcome in that 109 page report presented last night does not sing to me with a vision for Ireland. Unfortunately, such a minority Government, be it led by Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil, has neither the numbers or the coherence that answers the call made outside the GPO for a new song that might inspire us.

We have a duty on all sides to try to create a Thirty-second Dáil which manages to get through the 100th anniversary of the First Dáil with a Government which is able to work over the intervening two and a half years. I listened to what Deputy Micheál Martin said with respect. I commend Fianna Fáil on a constructive negotiation process, but I disagree with what Deputy Martin said, that it was not yet conclusive. I do not see how the current negotiations with the current arrangements and configuration will lead to any conclusive Government. I would like to hear in detail from Fianna Fáil Members how they think that will work. They got 43 votes for Taoiseach today, not one additional one, while Fine Gael got 50 plus Deputy Lowry's. That is the reality of what happened here today.

If we are not to see a Thirty-third Dáil before the centenary of the First Dáil, we all have an obligation and a duty to consider how this could be done differently. If it is not possible for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to work together, perhaps there is some other national form of government that might possibly work. I listened to Deputy Broughan and Deputy Catherine Murphy saying, and I listened to Deputy Catherine Connolly saying privately earlier, if she does

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not mind me saying so, that maybe the smaller parties and Independents should meet together without Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael to consider what the options might be. Perhaps we should not do that in Government Buildings but in some independent place of our own choosing in our own time.

The current arrangements are not working. Something needs to change. We all have a responsibility to answer that Easter 1916 commemoration call to sing a slightly different song of Ireland.

Deputy Shane Ross: It seems to me that what is happening in the Dáil this evening is a microcosm of what has been happening in Irish politics for a very long time. We are debating the creation of a Government, which is possibly the most important thing we could be debating in the next five years. We have curtailed debate on that to 30 minutes. We curtailed the speeches to five minutes and other speeches to three minutes. We plead that we do not have time to discuss this issue for some reason which I do not understand. We have not been meeting or sitting, but if we were serious about what is happening here today, we would have given far more time to far more people to thrash out what is really happening.

Those who have said that what is happening in Government Buildings and in the Fianna Fáil offices is a charade are utterly wrong in doing so. We in the Independent Alliance do not want any plaudits from the Taoiseach or anybody else for going to meetings to discuss the formation of a Government. We regard that as a duty which was given to us by the electorate and we are simply responding to their call. It is difficult. I applaud Deputy Eamon Ryan and Deputy Catherine Martin of the Green Party who attended those meetings for a while. Deputy Ryan then decided, for reasons of his own, that he was probably not going to get out of it what he wanted or that it would not work in the way he wanted. At least, however, he attended, contributed and made an effort. It is not easy for any of us to talk to those people who, weeks beforehand, we had opposed. They had said things about us, and we about them, which are difficult to swallow in a short time. That was our duty and it is what we have done and are doing. It is an extraordinary situation for Sinn Féin to call this a charade. I congratulate that party, however, on being able to form a Government with the DUP in Northern Ireland. I think that is an appropriate response to what that party's Members are saying about what is going on today.

Those talks are not easy. While I agree with those who have said that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have not made that visionary jump - they are conservative parties by their very nature and may be incapable of making that visionary jump which is necessary - they have moved and are trying at least to take on the message. The response has been inadequate so far but the message is being delivered that unless they cross that Rubicon, we cannot contribute to the formation of a Government.

We are pledged to take this process the extra mile. If it fails, it fails but we are determined to fulfil what the electorate has asked us to do, which is to introduce a new and radical element into Irish politics which has never been seen before.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Over the past couple of weeks, much has been made of the responsibility of Independents to engage with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in terms of looking at how to form a minority Government that would rely on the support of either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. I met Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael before the round-table discussions in Government Buildings took place. After consulting my supporters, I decided not to participate in that process. I came to the conclusion that it was a farce more quickly than those who did participate in that

process. From talking to Independents who did participate, it seems that the general consensus among everybody is that it has been fruitless because there have been no discussions between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in conjunction with it.

I knew this beforehand. I decided not to take part when I listened to what each side had to say and what it intended to do. Some of the documents I was presented with showed that there was no willingness to make changes and fundamentally change the Government. I was elected with a mandate for a fundamentally different type of Government and I did not see that this could arise from that process.

It will not arise from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael coming together either but it gives us the opportunity to have a fundamentally different Government at some stage in the future. This comes down to the biggest difficulty in this process for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The dogs in the street will say that there is no difference policy-wise between Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. The only difference is around personalities and a bit of history. Since 1932, either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael has been in Government and has controlled the Opposition in this House. Both parties have controlled this House and the functioning of politics in this country since 1932 and they are desperate to continue to exercise this control into the future.

Deputy Micheál Martin spoke earlier about the fundamental challenge of reforming politics. The people have taken on that challenge but Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have not recognised it yet because they voted both of them into a majority situation. This is the fundamental change that can and should happen as a result of this process because this is a Government that works. Everybody told us before the last election how the numbers decide what happens. Those are the numbers and the only thing stopping it happening is the fact that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael want to control both sides of the House indefinitely. This is the fundamental change and this is the thing we must challenge. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael must accept that politics has changed fundamentally and their iron grip on Government and Opposition is ending. If it does not end now, it will end after the next election.

Dáil Reform: Statements

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House that the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform has agreed an interim report which has been laid in the Oireachtas Library. Copies of the report are available at the back of the Chamber if Members need to refer to it. This report is a first step in our journey towards a reformed Dáil. The sub-committee will continue to meet throughout April to agree reform proposals that will be presented to the Dáil for approval. Consequential changes to Standing Orders will be presented as soon as possible thereafter, it is hoped by the end of April or very early in May.

The Taoiseach: I welcome the opportunity to speak about the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform, including its interim report. On 10 March 2016, when the House reconvened following the election, for the first time in its history, the Members had the opportunity to elect a Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot. This change in Standing Orders was introduced by me before the general election in order that people would be able to implement it and not have to talk about it at the end of the Thirty-second Dáil. This change was introduced along with changes to allow the selection of Chairs of Oireachtas committees using the d'Hondt system and a requirement that the Taoiseach appear before the Working Group of Committee Chairmen twice a year. Each of these changes was designed to enhance the role of Parliament.

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The election of the Ceann Comhairle, which was the first by secret ballot in the history of the State, means that his office is now more independent and, as holder of the office, the Ceann Comhairle has a direct link to his Deputy colleagues as never before. On 10 March 2016, the House also voted to establish a new Dáil sub-committee chaired by the newly elected Ceann Comhairle and representative of the entire membership of the Dáil. The sub-committee sought submissions and received 25 different sets of proposals from parties, individual Deputies and others, including a comprehensive reform document from my party. The sub-committee has undertaken to evaluate the way the Dáil works, review the submissions it has received and report back to the Dáil with a set of reforms that will allow the Dáil to work more effectively.

The sub-committee's interim report and the statements in the House today are only the first steps in a reform process which will build on the reforms of the past five years and which will, over the next number of weeks, recommend a number of changes to Standing Orders. I understand that the sub-committee's interim report touches on a number of areas. These include allowing Deputies to abstain formally from a vote, establishing a business committee representative of all groups and parties in Parliament to set Dáil agendas on the basis of consensus, splitting Oireachtas committee and plenary time, allowing more than one Technical Group in order that everybody has an opportunity, reducing the threshold to form such a group to five Deputies instead of seven, providing a fixed time for the taking of votes, which should be of some assistance in terms of more family-friendly hours, and reinstating the Ceann Comhairle's powers introduced in the last Dáil to question the adequacy of ministerial replies to questions.

I welcome this interim report, which is all it is. I look forward to hearing all the views of the sub-committee members and the other Members of the House. In its interim report, the sub-committee outlined that it will meet continually over the next number of weeks to discuss scheduling Dáil business, parliamentary questions, the way Oireachtas committees work, how the Oireachtas deals with financial scrutiny and the legislative process. I understand that the sub-committee hopes to agree a final report by the end of this month.

Parliamentary reform is an ongoing process. The previous Government introduced three packages of Oireachtas reform which introduced Topical Issues, pre-legislative stage scrutiny for legislation, which has been a very valuable contribution, additional Leaders' Questions, and a process to allow Deputies to have their Bills debated on Second Stage, which did not apply previously. At the outset of this Dáil, the sub-committee is seeking to review how this House works, build on those recent reforms, which have been successful, and introduce new reforms where they are required.

The Ceann Comhairle presides over a Dáil that is unprecedented in its range of representation and probable number of partisan individuals. Business can never be conducted the way it was conducted previously because of those changes. There must be a difference between the constitutional responsibility of the Executive - the Cabinet of the day - and the effective working of Parliament. This situation can bring about huge change in the culture and attitude of Government towards parliamentary work, a change that is required from the public service in servicing the House and Members and in respect of membership of the Opposition. This is because the changes being proposed in terms of committees will require a much greater level of engagement and responsibility and, as a consequence, a much greater level of accountability from all the Members in discussing financial Votes, matters pertaining to the budget and so on. In effect, it will not be just the traditional "look for more money for every sector" attitude when the overall Vote allocations are determined for each Department. The committees relevant to them will have to discuss the amounts being proposed for the different sectors and Members

will have the opportunity to make their recommendations. Given that they will have a limited amount of finance available for any particular Vote, that will bring about a change in the attitude to and the requirement for contributions from Members.

I thank the Ceann Comhairle for taking charge of this sub-committee and I thank the 17 Deputies who are members or substitute members of the committee for the work they have already put into it. I hope it will be possible to bring about agreed consensus and recommendations that do make the working of the House more effective and transparent and that it engages every Member. I will put in this proviso: if a recommendation is implemented in the House and is found not to work after a period of months, it could be adjusted to make it work.

Everybody comes in here with the same level of mandate after election by secret ballot and is entitled to an opportunity to have his or her say. This Thirty-second Dáil, because of the decision of the people, can bring about a sense of liberty and freedom and a freeing up of opportunities for elected Members to have their say and participate in a more whole and engaging way in our democratic system than the traditional workings of this House have allowed over the years.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I welcome the progress that has been made under the chairmanship of the Ceann Comhairle towards developing a substantive package of Dáil reforms. This effort remains in its early stages and I hope it will be possible for agreement to be reached on the remaining points on the agenda. The starting point for Dáil reform has to be that this becomes a Parliament in which every Member can make a contribution and, equally, in which every Member accepts his or her responsibility to propose credible long-term solutions for issues of concern to the Irish people.

As the banking inquiry showed, many of the core failings that led to the worst financial and fiscal crisis in our history were ignored by the Oireachtas in the years before the recession. A different approach to speaking time and the answering of questions would have done nothing to set a different course for public policy. Holding the Government to account is an essential role for us to play, but it is not the only role. We need to break with the idea that the Government must be the driving force behind all policy and all that is left for others is to oversee and challenge its work. We need a more dynamic Parliament that is more independent but also more expert. Real reform is not a question of creating more space for speeches. It is a question of creating more space for serious engagement with issues. Fianna Fáil supports the idea that we must have mechanisms whereby all Deputies have a realistic opportunity to contribute to the full range of the work of Dáil Éireann. The ability to participate in committee work and to speak in the Chamber should apply to all. Equally, we must avoid a situation in which there is no respect for the larger and national mandate that parties earn.

I welcome the work the committee is undertaking in finding a fair balance. The establishment of a business committee is something that Fianna Fáil proposed three years ago and that we welcome today. It is an important step towards ensuring that legislation receives adequate attention and that we avoid the overwhelming control of our agenda that has been seen in recent years. An important and consistent part of the reforms being proposed is that the Ceann Comhairle must oversee and decide many more difficult matters. We support this and see it as a logical extension of the *de facto* nomination of the Ceann Comhairle by the Taoiseach of the day. We must, however, all be clear that these reforms will not work if Deputies routinely attack the Ceann Comhairle and seek to grandstand every time they do not get their own way. Parties and Deputies will regularly disagree with the schedule. If every time this happens they question the good faith of the Chair, there will be no progress.

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We welcome the proposal to allow the Ceann Comhairle to rule on whether a question has been answered. This is of course very different from saying that the Chair can oblige a Minister to answer to the satisfaction of a Deputy, something that does not happen in any Parliament in the world. This is a major reform and we hope that this new discretion signals a departure from the practice that has developed in recent years of Ministers rejecting and transferring questions without justification.

Potentially the most radical and significant work of the committee will be its decisions on proposals concerning the scheduling of legislation and the budget process. As the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, has pointed out, our budget process is almost designed to maximise conflict and minimise oversight of new policy. Last year we gathered for a Spring Economic Statement which was intended to set out the parameters for the budget to come. It did nothing of the sort. Instead, there was a massive end-of-year rush to fix the figures to fit electoral needs, something which was confirmed yesterday by the acting Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, James Reilly. The reformed budget process has to ensure that discussions of macro policy and Department-level initiatives are separated and that the traditional budget day festival of surprises and spin is ended.

The same applies to the scheduling of legislation. No functioning parliament allows unlimited debate on every issue. Equally, no functioning parliament allows a government the right to manipulate and control everything about the scheduling of legislation. It should be said that there is literally no chance of these reforms working unless additional resources are made available to establish an independent budget office and to resource the Ceann Comhairle's new roles. In the election Fianna Fáil recognised this by providing for the cost of Dáil reform in its proposals. We believe that a resolution to fund the implementation of additional measures should be introduced at the same time as the adoption of the final package of measures later this month. A good start has been made and we look forward to the completion of the work in the weeks to come.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCeann Comhairle as an obair atá déanta aige go dtí seo. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeadh muid ag déanamh na hoibre seo, go háirithe nuair nach bhfuil aon obair eile ar siúl againn ins an Dáil. Tá seans againn, nuair nach bhfuil rudaí eile ag cur isteach orainn, díriú ar na fadhbanna a aithníonn na daoine a bhí anseo roimhe seo agus a aithníonn na Teachtaí maidir leis an mbealach gur féidir linn an Dáil seo a dhéanamh níos éifeachtaí don obair gur chóir dúinn a bheith ag déanamh. Tá sé an-tábhachtach go dtabharfaimid faoi aon mholadh a chuirtear os ár gcomhair ar bhealach deimhneach. Táimse gafa le ceisteanna leasú Dála mar aoire ag an bpáirtí ó 2002 agus ceapaimse gur chóir dúinn éisteacht cheart a thabhairt agus féachaint an bhfuil aon cheann de na moltaí praiticiúla, mar sa deireadh thiar thall, ní fiú tráithnín iad muna féidir linn na moltaí sin a chur i bhfeidhm i gceart.

Since I first engaged with Dáil reform, when elected party Whip in 2002, I have always said we should approach it in a positive way, listen, and, where there is a problem, explain that problem. Some of us are old hands at that and understand the practicality of some proposals. In other cases, maybe because we are old hands, we are stuck, or institutionalised in a way. We are rigid and say this will not work or that will not work. It has been very useful thus far to listen to those who are new to the Dáil and those who have been here before and managed to get a break for a while and have approached the work in a very positive way. The Ceann Comhairle is to be commended on his approach. We have come to agreement on issues that have floated around Dáil reform for several years. At least now we seem to be making progress on some very positive issues.

I hope we will conclude our business soon and then continue once the Dáil is up and running, because this is a process that in some ways does not end. There are some very practical proposals which we have already reflected and agreed on. As some say, nothing is agreed till everything is agreed, but we can accept some of the proposals and submissions made by the parties and from outside the House. These include the lowering of the group threshold to five, the proposal agreed in the last Dáil of an “Abstain” button for divisions, and the use of the clock, which was introduced in the last Dáil, and its extension to other business in the House. We considered whether it was practical to continue the Friday sittings, whether they are the most effective use of our time or the House’s time and whether we can encompass or capture what was intended in those sittings in the usual sitting time of the Dáil. The reintroduction of the Topical Issue Debate, which was only a sessional order in the last Dáil, has been welcomed by most Deputies. I believe we should increase the numbers, but if we stick to the four we can see how effectively it is working and whether there is demand. We need to gauge the demand and the number of Topical Issue requests being submitted. If it is popular, we need to deliver on that.

Another issue that has exercised Deputies of all parties is ensuring we get replies to parliamentary questions, written and oral, that are related to the question asked. I hope the extra powers we are encouraging the Ceann Comhairle to use will address it.

I approached this in a positive and practical way. There are issues that do not fall within the remit of this committee but that the Dáil needs to get to grips with, including the question of electoral and political reform. How do we ensure we have a permanent electoral commission that deals with some of the practical problems we experienced in recent elections? It should be within our gift to ensure that happens this time. It has been proposed by many parties for a long time and was also one of the issues that the Convention on the Constitution supported. That is an exercise I praised the previous Government on implementing. I suggest the next Government should continue with it because it was a very useful exercise for those of us who took part in it. In particular it was a very useful exercise in participatory democracy, allowing the citizen a say in how politics is run.

We need to address change and reform of the Seanad. It is not tinkering with the schedule and Standing Orders that we are doing here but the substantive change which many of us believe the Seanad should undertake. The electorate said they wanted it because they rejected the proposal to abolish it. If they want it, on the basis of those who have spoken to me, I presume they want substantive directional change.

We also have treaty obligations to deliver on some proposals. The Good Friday Agreement called for an all-Ireland civic and constitutional forum, which we still have not delivered. That could be a reformed Seanad or a constitutional convention on a permanent basis, but we have not addressed it in any shape or form. We have not properly addressed recognition of the mandates of parliamentarians from the Six Counties.

We have approached this in the positive way to date and some useful proposals have been agreed. There is no argument. We have discussed, debated and agreed or compromised. Not everything that has been agreed so far fits in fully with what I or my party has sought. However, we are willing to compromise because at the end of the day it is not just for the benefit of the parliamentarians. Anything that makes my life easier, I will take it, but at the end of the day that is not what we are about. We want to ensure the time I spend in this Chamber or in committees is put to its most effective and positive use for the electorate and society as a whole. That is the most important thing. It is to be hoped we will be able to focus on that and ensure its delivery.

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Some people have said it was not an issue in the general election. A number of people raised it with me and asked how we would change how the Dáil works and how we would address empty Chambers. One then gets into a debate and people say that is not what they see. There are perceptions and there are the practicalities of operating this Chamber. Sometimes we, as politicians, need to put aside our party positions and explain to the public that there are practicalities about how we carry on our business here. There are times when the Chamber does not have to be full because the committee rooms are all full. Four or six committees sitting can take away 50 or 60 people. I hope that is one of the proposals to be addressed in the new Dáil reform package to be put to the Dáil in the next few weeks.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I call the Minister, Deputy Howlin.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Go raibh maith agat, Acting Chairman.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: On a point of order, we agreed on speaking time that reflected that members of the sub-committee, who are representative of the entire Oireachtas and not of the Government, were speaking to tell the Dáil our vision and what we had discussed. In direct contravention of the spirit of that the Taoiseach rose to speak, outlining his vision for Oireachtas reform.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: As did Deputy Micheál Martin.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Deputy Micheál Martin had to respond and I do not object to other leaders having the same opportunity.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Deputy-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Deputy did not object then.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I have an answer.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: In allowing the Taoiseach go against this-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I have an answer.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: There is an order which did not allow the Taoiseach to speak.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I know. I have an answer. When I took over from the Ceann Comhairle, he informed me that we were working on two papers, one on the screen and one which relates to the order.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: However, I am-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): There was a deviation from that and when this particular sequence finishes, which it is about to do, I am informed it will revert to the order again.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am speaking about the orders we agreed today and not the order that is in front of the Acting Chairman.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I am sorry, Deputy, but I will not change that. I ask the Deputy to allow Members to proceed. This sequence is coming to an end.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We are not taking ourselves seriously as a Dáil if we constantly subjugate ourselves to an Executive, as we did in this debate.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): If you-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I was going to address that very point.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I have no objection to the Minister speaking.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Deputy did not make an objection when his leader was speaking in defiance of the order. I immediately approached the Ceann Comhairle because I think it was wrong that we had a change and in the spirit of change the novelty was that members of the committee who had worked for the past three weeks would be called upon in alphabetical order.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): That is right.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I think that was a great thing. I approached the Chair as soon as that was not happening.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I do not blame the Minister.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: However, I am told that was agreed, and Deputy Micheál Martin and the representative of Sinn Féin were called in sequence.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Dáil did not agree to it.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It is a little annoying that the Deputy only objected when I stood up.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No, I was not objecting to the Minister.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I heard the Deputy the first time.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I will speak through the Chair. I do not wish to be in any way controversial on this. I did not go into the committee with the expectation that we would have the degree of co-operation there was. Everybody from all sides of the House went into that committee in a spirit of co-operation. I pay tribute to the Ceann Comhairle and to all colleagues who worked on the committee for their positive engagement on the issue in recent weeks. I was about to say then that it is a pity we stumbled in this debate because part of the transformation was to have members of the committee in alphabetical order giving their views on it.

The debate has been constructive and useful. Much of what was discussed and agreed is technical. Many people who talk about Dáil reform, particularly those looking in from an academic perspective, do not think we are really talking about the timing of taking votes, grouping votes or disaggregating plenary from committee. In fact, most of them have no idea what we are talking about if we talk in those terms. These are what might be described as organisational issues. They are important but probably do not represent the reform people have envisaged when talking about fundamental Dáil reform.

Many of the things we did in the previous Parliament are much more reforming in that sense, for example, deepening freedom of information, having a register of lobbyists and regulation of lobbyists, giving overarching protection to whistleblowers and so on. The provision of

these technical matters is important. Committee time has to be organised in a way which will allow Deputies to be usefully engaged in the process of debate. We cannot be in two places at the one time. This crossover has been driven by the volume of business that the House needs to conduct. When I first came into this House, all the work was done in the Chamber, including all Committee and Report Stage work. All the press watched the Dáil in one manifestation doing its work. The fact that now one can have four committees, as well as the plenary sitting, means we are four times more productive. However, that is certainly not the perception. As Deputy Ó Snodaigh said, we need to do much more explaining of this. Using this Chamber, as well as the Seanad Chamber, for committee work will be part of that.

We have a comparatively small number of Deputies, with a reduced number in this Dáil than in the previous one. When we compare ourselves to the European Parliament, or even to the House of Commons with close to 700 members, for us to develop the skills-sets to ensure the sort of expertise which is a matter of norm in other parliaments, the scale involved is much different. We have to be, by definition, jacks of many trades to function here and make useful contributions on a variety of issues.

Committee proceedings, by definition, receive less media attention. Often, the technicalities of Committee and Report Stage debates are too complicated for people to follow. If we are not sitting in plenary, the detailed work and minutiae of committees are not properly represented. Accordingly, I welcome the proposal for the establishment of a business committee which will broaden and deepen the old Whips system, which sets the business of the House, in a much more *communautaire* way. The critique of the system up to now is that it has been controlled by the Executive. Undoubtedly, the new proposals will allow for greater visibility and input into how the House does its business. It will, of course, prove effective, or not, in the way it operates in actuality as opposed to in theory.

We have challenges we need to resolve. The Constitution is clear in its framing of the responsibilities between the Executive and Parliament, particularly in money matters. The new arrangements must ensure the Executive - I do not envisage myself long being in the Executive - must be able to function in dealing with the people's business as well. That is why I was a little annoyed and discommoded by Deputy Micheál Martin's contribution on this issue. He talked about the budgetary process needing reform, a point on which there is a consensus.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I am sorry Minister but I was not aware of the time limits. It is five minutes each.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: No, it cannot be ten minutes for the leaders of the parties up to now and suddenly five minutes for everyone else. When I approached the Ceann Comhairle on this issue, he assured me it would be ten minutes for each speaker.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Okay, it is ten minutes all around. However, that is not what they are telling me here.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: It was ten minutes for each party leader and then five minutes for every subsequent speaker.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Acting Chairman is mixing up the order.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): No, I am not. I am reading from the order in front of me.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Can I have injury time now? I approached the Ceann Comhairle on this matter and he assured me there would be ten-minute slots for each speaker.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I am not mixing up anything. Deputy Thomas Byrne has already intervened a couple of times. Will he please wait for his turn?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I presume I am getting injury time for this as well.

I was about to refer to the review of the budgetary process, one with which I have been intimately involved over the past five years. We tried to change it. The comprehensive review of expenditure laid out all the expenditure options in each area. I then wrote personally to the chairman of each committee to ask them to examine the expenditure options before any budget was formed. At a time when we were reducing expenditure, it is understandable that this level of engagement may not have happened. However, that process was there.

The election is over. Deputy Micheál Martin need not misrepresent what happened with Supplementary Estimates at the end of last year. They were introduced for very good reasons, namely, to validate expenditure we had announced right throughout the year when we had the moneys, including expenditure on the waiting lists initiative and the summer works scheme, as well as reducing the time for the fair deal scheme. These were all announced well in advance of last summer. These were not matters added on at the end of the year as Deputy Micheál Martin suggested.

He is right to the extent that we need to further reform the budgetary process and not have the big surprise day with everybody making a secret announcement. We need to have an inclusive debate as to how we spend moneys, along with an enlarged agreement across the House on that.

It will not be lost on the public that, in all the talk about Dáil reform, the most fundamental duty which we have to fulfil is a requirement to hold the Government to account. This House is the primary instrument for doing that. It holds the Executive to account. Accordingly, to facilitate that accountability, the Opposition is resourced differently from those parties or Members which support the Government. For that reason, I have some concerns about the proposal to modify the Technical Group and membership agreements until we see what shape the next Government will be. The resources and time available to parties supportive of the Government cannot be identical to those of the groupings holding it to account. I am referring to the notion that one can be a hybrid of Government but also of Opposition.

When I raised this at the committee, I was told it worked in the Seanad. The Seanad is fundamentally different, however. In one of its key roles, it is not constitutionally obliged to hold the Government to account. We will see how that works out. However, if they are going to fulfil the requirement to hold government to account as a fundamental issue, it will be difficult to come to any conclusions on the structure of groups or their resourcing until we see the shape of the next Government.

I recall instances in the previous Dáil when Opposition Deputies objected to parliamentary questions being put by members of the Government parties because they claimed it was eating into their time. There was a legitimacy about that concern when one remembers the significant number of Deputies supportive of the previous Government. We have to get our heads around the notion that we are all equal in here, however. It is an entitlement of every Deputy to ask parliamentary questions and to have time to debate. If we are talking about easing the Whip

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system, then not every Member should be captured by the letter that is down, even with the least nuanced differences within Government. At the end of the day, every Member supporting the Government is required to support it in votes on amendments and legislation. It would be useful if we were open to allow differences of views to be expressed in this House without it being a fundamental rift in the Government. That is a maturing we all need to do.

We must look at the more diffuse Parliament of which we are now Members. We must allocate speaking times and supports to groups without affecting the larger groups. I heard the demand in the committee for perfect proportionality. Getting that balance right is going to be very difficult. We are going to have much more debate. The previous Dáil was very productive with over 250 Bills enacted. Although we are a House of debate, we are also a House of decisions. We must not have such structures that make it impossible to come to decisions on important issues within reasonable time. It is important those Members who support the Government have, by definition, greater access to the Executive and to the support structures it provides. This is an advantage that accrues to them. Accordingly, there is a need for rebalancing for those who do not have those support structures. That has always been the way with financial resources. It will also have to be the case with how we structure the business of the House. If the critique of how we previously ordered our business is about the effectiveness of the Dáil at holding the Executive to account, it is not clear to me how the proposals governing the recognition of technical groups will facilitate that now, but that is something that is a work in progress within the sub-committee. The one thing we do not want to do is to make matters worse and have less capacity, than we currently have, to hold the Executive to account.

By definition we have many reforms to present. Not all of them will work and some of them will be revisited after a period. I am very strongly of the view of the “suck it and see” variety in that we need to do it to see whether it works and to be open to changing our minds if it patently does not work. With respect to the reformed sitting day, the disaggregation of plenary and committee work and the structure of the Opposition to allow for groups to be formed, particularly of like-minded people working together to a common objective and a common platform, all of this potentially will be transformative in a way that all of us will welcome.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We will now revert to-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Acting Chairman-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): How many leaders have yet to speak?

Deputy Paul Murphy: All the registered groups, which include the Social Democrats, the Green Party, Independents 4 Change-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): A group comprises seven Members. Before Members get overly enthusiastic, the Taoiseach spoke as the leader of his party-----

Deputy Bríd Smith: This is a debate about Dáil reform and the Acting Chairman is trying to drive a coach and four through what we have-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Hold on a second. The Chair is speaking. Deputy Martin, as the leader of Fianna Fáil, spoke-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Taoiseach spoke. He spoke against the order.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Deputy Ó Snodaigh spoke on behalf of

Sinn Féin and the Minister, Deputy Howlin, spoke in respect of the Labour Party. How many more leaders remain to speak as they have a ten-minute speaking slot?

Deputy Paul Murphy: On a point of order-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: On a point of order-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I will take the Deputy's point of order.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: While this has gone awry somewhat from the beginning, it was appropriate, as the Minister, Deputy Howlin, said, that the members of the sub-committee would be the Members to speak first and that they would do so in alphabetical order.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Yes, they were the Members who were working on this.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: A mistake was made at the start by the Taoiseach and the Leader of the Opposition and, in fairness, I can understand the position of the other groups. Members of the sub-committee, including myself and others, have participated in this work and we should be afforded the chance to speak on that basis

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Hear, hear.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Absolutely.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: If we can move this along with members of the sub-committee being allowed five minutes each-----

Deputy Catherine Murphy: No.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Deputy Murphy is a member of the sub-committee.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I am a member of it but-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): If Members cannot agree to that suggestion, I want to try to come to a compromise.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I agree that is how this should have been done, that members of the sub-committee should have spoken first in alphabetical order. Like Deputy Howlin, I approached the Ceann Comhairle who also seemed to agree that a problematic situation had arisen. However, he said that this is what was now agreed.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: By whom?

Deputy Paul Murphy: On the Ceann Comhairle's list he had the Government, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, AAA-PBP, Independents 4 Change, the Social Democrats and the Green Party, all the way down, all with ten minute slots. We propose to divide our ten-minute slot into five-minute slots but we cannot accept that we would now revert to five-minute slots, now that everybody else has spoken, just like Deputy Howlin rightly could not accept that he had only five minutes.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Could I add a point? Our independent Ceann Comhairle was aware that this had gone awry somewhat and he made a suggestion as to what should happen.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We will solve it.

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Deputy Dara Murphy: Is it possible that what was suggested can happen within the time-frame?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Yes, I will try to do that.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I have no difficulty with the claim made by Deputy Murphy and others that they should speak now but the reality is that the problem was caused yet again by An Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, telling us what reform is about rather than-----

A Deputy: Deputy Micheál Martin also spoke.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I do not blame Deputy Martin, Deputy Ó Snodaigh or any of the party leaders-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I want to resolve the problem, not exacerbate it, but the Deputy is trying to do that.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No. I am making this point because this is fundamental.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I ask the Deputy to resume his seat. Can we arrange for those among the remaining groups who feel obscured or offended to speak now? The speakers in the next group will have five minutes each.

Deputy Paul Murphy: In our group we will divide the speaking slot into five-minute slots but the other groups are entitled to ten-minute slots. That cannot be changed now.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We will move on to the AAA-PBP group.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: On a point of clarification-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): No, Deputy. We are proceeding now.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Can I ask a question?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I told the Deputy what I was going to do.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I am a new Deputy-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I know.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: -----trying to raise serious issues affecting my constituency.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Everybody is in the same position.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I have sat here through much of this debate. I remind Deputy Murphy that there is another Deputy Murphy in this House.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We will get to everybody.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I am not going to continue sitting here and not be able to raise the issues I need to raise with respect to my constituency.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): No. This is about Dáil reform. It is not about constituency matters.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I understand that. I am trying to make a point.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I ask the Deputy to resume his seat and I will explain this to him. This is not about constituency matters. This is about Dáil reform.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I understand that.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): This is the issue we are debating and nothing else will be entertained except Dáil reform. If the Deputy bears with me for a little while, we will get-----

Deputy Eugene Murphy: That is what I wanted to say. If the Members who want to finish this debate keep their contributions as short as possible, that would allow the rest of the us to speak.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): That is what we are going to do. They have already agreed to do that. We have wasted five minutes already. The speakers from the AAA-PBP group have ten minutes between them.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Deputy Bríd Smith and myself are sharing time and we will have five minutes each.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Make it as quick a five minutes as the Deputy can.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Speak really fast.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: For five minutes.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It is unfortunate that happened but I will leave that point.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Proceed as quickly as possible.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I was a Member of this House for a year and a half and, without trying to bring a very sour note to these proceedings, there were many very low points in that time in terms of how the Dáil functioned. One of those low points, which I remember well, was myself and Deputy Coppinger being told to toddle along because we asked a very simple question about payment figures for Irish Water. We subsequently asked for those figures in five different ways but we never got them. The reason was that at that time 70% of people were refusing to pay, as we subsequently learned from freedom of information requests.

Another low point was when Deputy Catherine Murphy had to ask 19 times, to no avail, different questions to try to get information about Siteserv. Another low point was the repeated shutting off of Members' microphones whenever, for example, they mentioned a very rich and powerful individual in Ireland connected to Siteserv. The reality is that many of the very important issues raised by the left, by Independents and by small parties were not heard in the previous Dáil. That has to end now. That is one of the purposes of the Dáil reform process we are undergoing. The two and a half party system is over. It was finished off by the electorate 40 days ago, finishing off a process of a long-term secular decline of the two big parties. That is also part of a European-wide process, which is seeing a rewriting of political landscapes. There is a new political landscape still to be created but that means the Dail has to change. It has to change from a system dominated by the two and a half parties.

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This must be reflected in the work of the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform and what is ultimately agreed in terms of such reform to allow the opinions and views expressed by the people through the election of a wide variety of representatives, including a number of small parties and Independents, to be reflected and given a proper voice and a proper hearing in the Dáil because what happened in the previous Dáil simply cannot happen again. We welcome the formation of the sub-committee and the progress in its work so far. It has been productive. The staff involved in the production of papers at short notice should be complimented on and thanked for their work, which has been essential to the work of the sub-committee so far.

Some of the issues that have been provisionally agreed and are included in the interim report are important. The reduction in the number of Deputies necessary to form a group is essential to reflecting the reality of the changed Dáil. The agreement to allow the formation of more than one other group - let us not call them technical groups at this stage - is very important again to reflect the new Dáil we have. A provision of fair distribution of speaking time and slots to reflect proportionately the new Dáil we have is essential. The provision for the Ceann Comhairle to be able to point out when questions are not being answered is important.

There are many other issues we still need to address, even within the limited framework of the Dáil reform process.

7 o'clock

One is the proper discussion of legislation, eliminating as much as possible - and it is a lot more possible than it has been - the use of the guillotine and allowing proper time for discussion and consideration between Stages. Strengthening parliamentary questions is a key issue that we must address. The answers we get, regardless of where they come from or what agency is involved, should be put on the Dáil record. The point is that questions should be answerable to the Parliament through the Minister. It is essential that questions have a similar standing to the freedom of information provisions.

The Dáil should be able to set its own business. The business committee is an important step in that direction, but we still have the problems we see at the moment whereby, effectively, the Taoiseach is the only one entitled to propose the business of the Dáil.

The last specific point on Dáil reform is that we should talk about the Prayer. We think the Prayer should go. It is anachronistic that we start every day here with a prayer. We have an increasingly secular society. We want a secular society. We want a complete separation of church and State and in that sense we believe that the Prayer does not belong here any more.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: There are many other broader points that I want to raise but I will not. I will leave that to my colleague.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I will be really quick and I will talk really fast so that you will not give out to me, Acting Chairman.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Thank you very much. Very good.

Deputy Bríd Smith: There is a massive irony, and I hope it is not lost on the public and everybody in here, in the fact that we are starting this debate about Dáil reform with a decision by somebody - I do not know who, and I have asked many Deputies - to uproot and undo the deci-

sion that was made about the proceedings of this debate. That question should be answered, and if you can answer it, Acting Chairman, I would appreciate that. Who took the decision to undo the procedure for this debate that was agreed by those on the committee? Everybody is very annoyed about it, including me, even though I was not one of those who sat on the committee. I acknowledge my appreciation to those who sit on the committee and will continue to look at how we can reform this House. It is really important that we do that. I say that based on my experience of watching the proceedings from the outside for the last few years because I was interested in seeing how Deputies Paul Murphy, Richard Boyd Barrett and others got on in their debates. I constantly heard them being harangued when they were making points in the lead-up to a question or the discussion of a motion, but particularly in the context of parliamentary questions. I heard the former Ceann Comhairle, who occupied the Chair that Deputy Durkan is in, saying, "Ask the question, Deputy. Ask the question, Deputy. Ask the question, Deputy." We must bring reform to the point at which, when the Taoiseach, Tánaiste or Minister responsible for a Department refuses to answer or evades a question, he or she is, equally, harangued to answer the question. That person should hear, "Answer the question, Minister. Answer the question, Minister. Answer the question, Minister."

We should go further than the suggestions, not set in cement, that were just outlined by Deputy Paul Murphy. In the future we must look at the reinstatement of Article 48, which will give citizens the right to a referendum if they achieve 50,000 or more signatures.

A very serious issue is the lack of minutes from Cabinet. Why are such minutes not circulated to everybody who is elected to represent the people of Ireland? What is the big secret?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It is constitutionally prohibited.

Deputy Bríd Smith: We should see those minutes and know what decisions have been taken.

I again wish to raise the issue of our salaries. It is ridiculous that we are on these high salaries, some more than others, and entitled to these very lucrative pensions, which are paid out on a very different basis from how an ordinary worker receives his or her pension. We must consider reforming the salaries of Deputies and Ministers, and also their pensions and how they are paid. We have no right to bang on about the Luas drivers' strike, a Tesco strike or a nurses' strike when we cannot look at ourselves in an honest way and say that we are being overpaid and are over-privileged here.

Secrecy is a real problem. The idea that one can ask a question as an elected representative and not get a proper answer in the interest of protecting commercial interests must go. If someone asks a question of the Cabinet, as I will do in the near future, about how Transdev receives profits from running the Luas, I will be told it is an issue of commercial secrecy. It should not be a commercial secret; it should be open to the people of Ireland to know how that works. Likewise, it should be open to the people of Ireland to know how public-private partnerships work and how secret commercial deals are kept quiet. Furthermore, the use of consultancy firms such as PCW or PwC, or whichever way the initials go, is outrageous. They are overpaid and over-bloated. They are used to do consultancy work for Irish Water and every other god-damn thing that happens while our universities are loaded with well trained, publicly educated academics and experts in various fields. We have public bodies that could equally carry out such research on behalf of the Dáil. We must start examining things like that instead of taking on advisers who have vested interests in the neoliberal agenda.

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My final point relates to something that irks most of the population. If a Deputy runs on a promise relating to a certain issue, he or she will not always achieve what he or she set out to implement. However, I am talking about those who promise not to vote for water charges or an increase in university fees and then do vote for them. There should be some mechanism of recall for Deputies who break promises in their manifestoes, which the public believed and on the basis of which they voted for them.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I thank the Deputy. I now call on the next group of speakers. Is Deputy Catherine Murphy the first to speak?

Deputy Clare Daly: No.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Is Deputy Daly sharing time?

Deputy Clare Daly: If you check your order, Acting Chairman, you will see the Independents are next.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The order is a bit confused. I call Deputy Clare Daly.

Deputy Clare Daly: This is further validation of the absolute mess this afternoon has turned out to be through no fault of anybody here. I am sorry for Deputy Catherine Murphy. It is not her fault either. We did not change the agenda, but it is indicative of the lack of control the Parliament has over Government. Out of respect, I will be brief. I will not take the full time out of respect for the Deputies-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I thank the Deputy very much.

Deputy Clare Daly: -----particularly those who served their time on the sub-committee. This Dáil should be the forum for that committee to continue its work throughout the lifetime of this Dáil. If we ever get a government together, it is something that we should take forward and consider very much in the context of what exists in other parliaments. I want to look at some points the committee has addressed, which I think are good and are moving in the right direction, but I will also spend time on some things that the committee has not considered but that we have a unique opportunity, at this juncture, to spend some time on. It is a fact that instead of a scenario in which the Dáil controls the Government, providing accountability, the Dáil has really been a creature of the Government, which has set the agenda, run the committees, and rigorously – in a vicious manner, in many ways – implemented a Whip system. The very odd Opposition amendment that gets through is entirely at the Minister's discretion and is really just lip service rather than anything substantial. One of the key things that needs to be examined, which is linked to the Constitution, is the Whip system. In Finland and Germany, Members of Parliament are constitutionally guaranteed freedom to vote whatever way they want. Article 38 of the German Basic Law says that Members of the Bundestag shall be representatives of the whole people, not bound by orders or instructions, and responsible only to their conscience. That should be the case here, albeit in such a way that, if one likes, members of political parties or groupings are required through the discipline imposed by their political parties to support undertakings they gave in a general election. The reality is that we have a Whip system here which, rather than forcing people to stand by the mandate which they contest at elections, whips them into line to make sure they do not stand by the promises that they put to the people. The provision that exists in Germany and Finland should be provided for here. It is an essential democratic provision. This is also linked to the right to recall mentioned by Deputy Bríd Smith.

If somebody patently stands before the electorate on a certain promise and then comes into the House and does the opposite, it is not good enough to say that the people should be expected to put up with that person for five years or however long it is without the right to recall. That is a very important provision.

The issues of independent scrutiny and investigation were raised in a number of areas in the previous Dáil. We saw it in terms of Garda accountability, NAMA, the foster care scandal in the HSE, which was set up by the last Government, IBRC and so on, much of which was stalled and held in the hands of the Government.

This Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform should look at a provision, which exists in the German Parliament and particularly in the Danish Parliament, that in areas affecting the governance of the country, if 20% of the Members of Parliament seek a commission of investigation, it is required that it will happen within a certain timeframe and a declared budget. It should not only be a creature of government, it should be mandatory that it is undertaken. In situations where such an investigation may infringe on the entitlement of persons to their good name, there should be an independent judicial investigation. This is something that happens in Germany and Denmark and should be adhered to here. If the Dáil reform group is to continue, we should look at the best examples from Europe and the rest of the world. Other areas of democratic accountability should be built into the powers of the Oireachtas. The Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP, should be answerable to Dáil Éireann in the performance or lack of performance of his or her duties. If 20% of Oireachtas Members or Oireachtas committees require that person to come in and answer, he or she should be obliged to do so.

There are a huge number of issues and we are only beginning this task. I like some of the measures that have been put forward and I very much agree that we need to change the way questions are directed. I am glad that some measures will be imposed in that way but we have to go further. We spent the lifetime of the previous Dáil trying to get answers to questions on the US military use of Shannon only to be kicked from Department to Department in a very deliberate manner by civil servants who seemed to be hell bent on not giving the answer that was genuinely sought. Not only should the changes being put forward by the committee be suggested but sanctions should be imposed on Ministers who deliberately do not answer questions. The guillotine has to go and we need to look at measures. Essentially, when we talk about Dáil reform, we are talking about democratic accountability. An amendment to the Freedom of Information Act providing for full disclosure of all materials, for example, concerning NAMA, IBRC, all other State agencies and agencies obtaining State funding, should be part of this.

Who knows what will happen or if we will have a Parliament in which we can advance some of these issues. One thing is very clear in all of this - it cannot be divorced from our Constitution. It cannot be divorced from the fact that our Constitution is completely out of touch with the reality of a modern Ireland. It was somewhat ironic that the Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, convened a housing meeting last week given that he was Minister for a number of years during which he blamed the Constitution for why he could not deliver on many of these matters. All of us have experienced issues on which we wanted to bring change and have been told that the Attorney General has said it cannot be dealt with. We need a proper, accountable Constitution for the modern age. That should be part of the discussions.

In deference to others who took part in the sub-committee, I will not take my full time.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I welcome the work the sub-committee is doing. I am a mem-

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ber of the sub-committee and the engagement at it has been very useful and frank. It has been a very open and refreshing approach. There are many things on which we differ but the approach has been a good one. Arguments have been made today on replicating what we are doing with regard to Dáil reform in a number of other issues in the interim, such as housing. This would be very beneficial.

It is unfortunate that we did not start out today with the order that was agreed. That shows a difference in approach. It was possible to change the order earlier by reducing the amount of time that some of us got to speak. It was possible to change the order for this so there is a question about that and we need to get answers on it tomorrow.

One of the aspects of Dáil business of which I have been very critical is that it does not reflect what was set out in the Constitution in that there is no separation between Government and the Dáil, something that was envisaged by the Constitution. When people talk about a strong Government, what we really need is a strong Dáil. That is what we are mostly aiming at. Some of the proposals have been talked out and we have come to a consensus. It will be one of a series of draft reports that collectively will make a difference with the proviso that there will be a review in six months time to see if things worked and to tweak or change the things that did not work. That is a helpful approach.

In terms of Oireachtas reform, it is essential, and it feeds into some of the points that have been made by others, that we have political reform and not just Dáil reform. That goes beyond and, in some ways, intersects with what we are doing. The issue of transparency is becoming a more critical one. A recent example is the Panama papers. I have had my own struggles and am still having them in terms of getting answers under the Freedom of Information Act. Without transparency, there cannot be accountability. If one is on the Opposition side of the House and is holding Government to account, there has to be the prospect of transparency to do that job. If one can get more information by way of freedom of information than by way of parliamentary questions, I would question the value of parliamentary questions apart from a timing issue.

There are many other things about which we will need to talk once we go through the issues that will affect Standing Orders and that we can bring in pretty quickly. The Minister, Deputy Brendan Howlin, spoke about the previous Government being very productive, with 250 Acts passed. The problem is that 249, which is almost all of them, came from the Government side. We had a Friday sitting which was a superficial change. It did not matter because of the size of Government. Irrespective of the size of Government in the future, there is a unique opportunity now to change the nature of politics and to stop the Punch and Judy, offensive type of politics that sets a tone which is really offensive to the majority of people who are interested in watching how the business is done. More powerful, properly resourced committees where legislation can be introduced would make a difference.

The issue of the Whip and the sanctions is important. People who lose the Whip can lose their office, be taken off committees or have no prospect of being able to speak on issues. In some cases, we have seen people sanctioned for things their own party had advocated in advance of the general election.

Would we have had the crash had we had a functioning Dáil operating in a transparent environment? Would we have had institutions such as the HSE designed in the way they were? Would we have had Irish Water at all if the process had been thought out and people's inability to pay had been examined? This, for example, was one item that came up repeatedly. Includ-

ing people and this more polarised Dáil in decision-making better reflects precisely what people intended by their votes. I argue that strengthening transparency in decision-making includes vetting all Government appointments and independent judicial appointments in order that there is separation. In addition, it includes replacing the Official Secrets Act, which is inconsistent with freedom of information. I have argued for an anti-corruption agency that would have a single approach to co-ordinate anti-corruption measures. This is about examining the institutions because while it is one thing to have legislation, there is another side to ensuring such legislation can be delivered properly, be it in this context or in respect of services to be delivered. Moreover, the establishment of an electoral commission would mean doing things in an entirely different way.

While many matters concerning political reform could be added to Dáil reform, I am quite positive thus far regarding the behaviour of the sub-committee and how it is acting. I am hopeful this first group of meetings will be sufficiently productive to show there is the possibility of delivering something that is meaningful, rather than superficial reform in respect of the manner in which Members conduct business in this House.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I call Deputy Eamon Ryan. Is the Deputy taking the full ten minutes?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I probably will not.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The Deputy does not wish to share with anybody else.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I do not and if I can, I will be brief.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The Deputy should proceed.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I wish to echo the earlier comments of Deputy Catherine Murphy and a number of other speakers. Those of us who are members of this Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform have pretty much common agreement that it is working well. Nothing could illustrate this better than the contrast with this Chamber which, in the first three days on which it has been sitting has not had the same sense of collaboration or of getting business done in a timely and effective manner. That is a pity in some ways and if there were television cameras inside the room off the main entrance hall in Leinster House for the meetings members of the sub-committee are having, it might restore a little public confidence in a political system that people can share experience and ideas and that politicians in particular are the right people to be making these decisions. Unlike anyone else, we have certain expertise in how this place works and it is absolutely right that it falls to politicians, rather than bringing in academics or outside experts as some have suggested. No outside expert could have relayed some of the detail that came out of the discussion held earlier today on the nature of how this Parliament works by those who are within it. To confirm what the Cathaoirleach has heard from others on the sub-committee, it is working and during this hiatus in the political system, Members should avail of this opportunity over the next three or four weeks to get as much out of the system as they can. I wish to have its remit broadened, as other speakers also have noted. It is a pity that such a collaborative sharing of expertise in the nature of Dáil business is not being applied to resolving what must be done with the Seanad. Members on all sides would acknowledge the method for electing the Seanad is not working and is neither an open, transparent, participative process nor a fair process. I refer to how some people have five votes, whereas other people have none. I regret

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the sub-committee does not have the ability to take items such as Deputy Zappone's previous Bill or other Bills to establish whether it could agree, in the same collaborative fashion, on some mechanism for the Seanad, that is, of recognising the decision by the people in the referendum four or so years ago, which I read to mean they did not seek to remove the Seanad but did wish to reform it. Once members of the sub-committee have finished their business with the Dáil proceedings, why would they not look to ascertain whether they can get common agreement on how they would proceed on that issue? I do not suggest the precise measure here but why not use the same round-table process involving 14 or 15 Deputies to ascertain whether success can be achieved in this regard?

I also believe Members agree, pretty much across the House, on the need for radical reform of local government. I refer to many of the ills to be seen in this Chamber and many of the problems Members have in giving out that they are engaged in localism or clientelist politics here. Perhaps it is because sufficient power is not being given back to local government or, I would argue, to regional government. Doing so would free this House to be what it should be as a much more strategic centre of thinking for the State. I certainly would welcome the same process in this regard or, as the sub-committee finishes this process on how the Dáil is reformed, to examine whether cross-party agreement can be reached on how local government can be reformed. As some Deputies from the Anti-Austerity Alliance also noted earlier, that should be extended yet further to ascertain whether there are mechanisms of direct democracy in which one could engage citizens in a referendum process that would restore or strengthen that sense of civic engagement with the Republic. I would move on to this third tier of reform, which I believe to be necessary.

If I may, I will consider briefly reform within this House. It is interesting that when one gets into an honest and open debate about it, one recognises that one needs a stronger Opposition and a stronger Parliament. However, if Members are being honest with one another, they do not wish to kill the goose or to create a system in which the Government cannot function. Much as people might dream up elaborate systems in which parliaments, like Athenian congresses of old, could run the Government and run the country in some interesting way with Aristotle on one side and Plato on the other, within the Constitution we need an Executive. We have a mechanism whereby a Cabinet is appointed and that has Departments. I do not believe this Parliament will overthrow completely the working mechanism of the State for the past 80 or 90 years and suddenly succeed without a government. Consequently, in whatever form, we need to get a system in this House that works for Government as well as for Opposition or which gives the ability for Members to do what is their core role, which is to hold the Government to account. Those who are in government need this as much as do those in opposition. As a Minister, sometimes one actually welcomes that as a way of bringing one's Department with one and of organising it. As the Acting Chairman himself is aware, there is a responsibility here in how this is managed, in order that Members receive proper replies to questions from Departments. In addition, Members have a responsibility, if I might draw the Acting Chairman's attention to this point-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Please do.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: On this side of the democratic system, Members have a responsibility not to flood the public administration system with so many questions that its staff is unable to do its job effectively.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I heard the Deputy.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I thank the Acting Chairman because it is necessary to engage the public service in this process and it is necessary for Members to play their bit in getting real in holding the Government to account and getting real with what is happening in Europe, as well as holding what is happening in Europe and overseas to account. Consequently, all Members have a responsibility. I believe the training or the responsibility starts in the committees. I can only speak from personal experience but the five years I spent on the Opposition benches of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, in the company of the Acting Chairman, was one of the best learning experiences of my political time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I remember.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The ability to go into real detail, as the joint committee did, on issues such as broadband or energy policy is the central training ground. Effectively, in politics knowledge is power and the knowledge of what one can really do to improve society and the economy comes from those years and years of hard work and hidden committee work. This is what Members must strengthen and what they must encourage and must value. I believe the broad changes that Members are in the course of introducing appear as though they might help to do this. Consequently, I support them and look forward greatly to the remaining meetings.

I agree with Deputy Catherine Murphy in that there are other issues I wish to consider. Members should consider the Prayer at the start of the day and consider what is done in the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Scottish Parliament and give consideration to different ways of doing this. Perhaps a minute's silence sometimes might work.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: That is done in the Seanad.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: There even could be arrangements to have a mechanism whereby, when Members are in a row and it is going really wrong, someone rings a bell and all Members take a deep breath and breathe for ten or 60 or 100 seconds before they resume.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Members will be doing yoga next.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: It might be a nice reform to introduce some reflection and pause for thought in Members' working procedures. Members should be creative, innovative and open to different mechanisms. I stated I would not take the full allotted time and in that spirit, I am happy to note this sub-committee is working. I look forward to the rest of its work and that spirit infusing wider political reform in local government and the Seanad during the lifetime of this Dáil.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I thank Deputy Ryan. Have we any more leaders?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Yes.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I am sorry, Deputy Adams. I know you are a leader-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I am the leader today.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): -----but your leadership position was

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overtaken by a previous speaker, Deputy Ó Snodaigh, but your turn will come up. Deputy Pringle, you are a leader of which group?

Deputy Thomas Pringle: The Independents.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No, he is not.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I represented the Independents grouping on the committee. This House has gone around-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Is that agreed? Is Deputy Pringle taking ten minutes?

Deputy Thomas Pringle: No, I propose to share time with Deputy Katherine Zappone.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Is that agreed?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: No.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): There is an objection. That is not agreed.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Hang on a minute.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I represent Fianna Fáil on the committee-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I know, but hold on for a second.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Someone has amended the order of the House.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Ar aghaidh leat, Deputy Pringle.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): This is not the committee now.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: We went around all the groupings in this House-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I want to explain something. We are at cross-purposes. What happened is the sequence started all over again. We had leader after leader and we have gone so far down that road and are coming to the end of it. The quicker we get on to the sequence of individual members of the committee, the better. Five minutes each will be allowed. I hope that those who spoke as leaders will not come in again with five minute contributions afterwards.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: They cannot.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): That would be of considerable assistance. Can we agree on the time remaining? There is only one leader left and he is prepared to share time.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Yes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): They will have five minutes each. Are either of you members of the committee?

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I am a member of the committee.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Hold on now for a second. Deputy Pringle is a member of the committee.

Deputy Mick Barry: So was Deputy Murphy.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I know that too. Some were and some were not. I presume Deputy Pringle is not coming in again as a member of the committee. The Deputies will have ten minutes between the two of them or five minutes or four minutes or whatever.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: There is no provision for sharing time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We will try to reach agreement on it.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: We will take less than five minutes each.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Deputy Pringle, you have the fastest ten minutes ever.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Thank you, Acting Chairman. It has been said by other Members that the way this debate has developed shows how difficult it is to get the culture of change in through the Parliament. The Dáil subjects itself totally to the Taoiseach when he happens to be in the House and is offered the first opportunity to speak, which is what caused the whole problem in the first place. The order of the day was to be that the members of the committee would speak in alphabetical order as the first contributors to this debate.

As stated by other Members, the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform is working well and a lot of consensus has been reached at the committee meetings. That has been very positive but it is a pity it did not transfer through into the operations of the House today. We have to live with that for the time being and hope it will work much better in the future and that the new changes will filter through to the workings of the House. The report before us deals with a number of issues and I wish to deal with some of them. On the formation of groups, Deputy Howlin mentioned earlier that we cannot deal with this until we know the make-up of the minority Government or whoever it is will make up the numbers of the Government. It is important to remember that the work of the committee will affect future Dálaí as well. We, therefore, need to get this right at this stage. We cannot focus solely on the make-up of this Dáil when deciding on how groups will operate. The principle that a grouping of five will be agreed to through the reform process is the right principle. Along with that principle, how those groups will be resourced and structured so that they can participate within the workings of the Parliament needs to be addressed. That is vitally important. It has been brought up at the committee already but it needs to be concluded as part of the process.

The proposal on abstentions in the voting process is a positive one. A suggestion that Members would be able to explain the reason for their abstention and that this would be facilitated through the record in some way was made at the committee. This should be allowed. It will be interesting to see how the proposal relating to the business committee, which is very welcome, develops and works because that will change definitively how the business is ordered in the House. However, it is important that the business committee would assert itself over the Legislature and the independence of the Dáil in terms of deciding the business of the House.

It is vitally important that the Dáil does exert itself. As I understand it, this House, during

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this interim period when there is a caretaker Government in place, could and should be taking decisions by way of votes and resolutions and instructing the caretaker Government to do certain things rather than allowing the current situation. There are massive, pressing issues outside this House such as the homelessness crisis and the water taxation issue. We have no opportunity to debate those issues on the floor of the House today because this House, as a result of its standing orders and past rulings of the Chair, has, in effect, suspended itself. This means that this House cannot decide any of those pressing issues while a caretaker Government is in place. That is totally wrong.

I will give an example. The caretaker Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine signed Statutory Instrument 125 of 2016 into law on 1 March. That statutory instrument will have serious implications for fishermen but we have no way of scrutinising it or dealing with any motions that could rescind it. What makes this even more stark is that, in response to a parliamentary question, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine admitted that the statutory instrument does not have a sound legal footing. Yet he went ahead and signed it into law. He is a caretaker Minister in a caretaker Government which is taking decisions and this House is unable to scrutinise them. That is wrong. Even in this caretaker situation, this House should be in a position to scrutinise and direct the caretaker Administration to stop doing some of the things it has been doing because they will have serious impacts across the board, not to mention the housing crisis and the rest of those pressing issues which need to be addressed. With that, I conclude and hand over to Deputy Katherine Zappone.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I thank Deputy Pringle for sharing the time available. I welcome the interim report and the frank, open and positive tone that clearly was in the committee because it is being reflected in the contributions of members of the committee here as well as those of us who are responding briefly to their work. I thank them for their generous efforts. It is a great lesson to listen to this debate as I, a new Deputy, move from the experience of what probably was a more reflective Chamber to this one.

It is critical that we move towards the strong Dáil about which Deputy Murphy spoke. I am happy to have had the opportunity to make a submission to the committee and one of the suggestions I put forward has been taken on board in its interim report. The committee has acknowledged the increased role an Opposition can play in the Thirty-second Dáil. That is absolutely essential if the Dáil is to represent the views of the people accurately. That has not always been the case given much of the power in the last Dáil was centralised among a small group of decision-makers and we have heard other Deputies reflect on that matter.

The proposal to allow abstaining as a voting option is welcome. This may be an acknowledgement of the possibility of a minority Government and that abstaining will not be seen as an act of not engaging with the legislative process but, instead, as an action of itself. Abstaining on key votes could soon be an act that must be carried out by Members of the Opposition, be they members of political parties or Independents. I also welcome the suggestion for the opportunity to explain those abstentions. I also look forward to future recommendations of the committee, in particular recommendations relating to financial security in the budget process. We need to empower fully all Members of the Parliament to take a meaningful role in the budgeting process and for it to be one that gives us an opportunity to work towards counteracting recent regressive budgets and austerity cuts. I would bring an equality and anti-poverty lens to my analysis of the budgets and the use of an independent analysis to support these.

I hope the appetite for reform shown in the Dáil today, about which other Deputies have also

spoken, can be reflected in an appetite for real and genuine reform in the Seanad. I firmly believe the will of the people ought to be implemented with one person, one vote for the Seanad. I am hopeful that can be achieved, especially given that many of the current candidates in the Seanad election are running on a platform for reform. Deputy Murphy and others have referred to the issue of the Prayer in the Dáil. We reformed that in the Seanad. There was much debate on the issue to ensure it would reflect a more modern Chamber. Ultimately, our compromise was one minute of silence with one minute of a Christian prayer. The Dáil could go further than that in its efforts to reform, perhaps with a couple of minutes of silence so everybody has an opportunity to draw on their ethical source or their spiritual sense of being part of the wider community as we begin to debate in the House.

To conclude, as many Deputies have said there is clearly a need to move beyond the adversarial nature of the Chamber. I am delighted I had the opportunity to participate in this and to spend time here because there is a contrast between what is taking place now with what took place earlier in the day. As both an optimist and a realist, I acknowledge that political reform is an ongoing process and that the Oireachtas has much to fix. However, I believe there is a renewed appetite. There have been many calls for new politics since the election but it will only be new politics if it translates into new results. I look forward to the ongoing reports from this apparently very productive committee.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: When we talk about Dáil reform, we must return to basics. We must return to our function, roots and legal basis. What is our mandate? That comes from the Constitution. The problem with Dáil reform and how the Dáil has operated over the decades is the relationship between the Dáil and the Executive. Article 28.4.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann is absolutely clear in this regard - the Government shall be responsible to Dáil Éireann. Deputies are in the driving seat. The Government is our creature. We elect a Government - I assume we will elect a Government at some point - so it is our creature and it is sent to do the executive work of the State, but we are in the driving seat and it is responsible to us.

The reality over many decades is that the Government has controlled the Dáil and its business in the same way as in the Westminster system. That is the reason the Dáil has not been seen as an effective Parliament in holding a Government to account, getting answers to questions and dealing with issues in the country. The numbers in this Dáil do not add up for the old system. The reason I was particularly annoyed when the Taoiseach stood up and spoke, in what I considered to be a contravention of the order on which we voted, was that this was a direct contradiction of what we are seeking to do in Dáil reform. We are the Deputies of the House and are meant to be in the driving seat, as the Constitution provides, by holding the Government to account and telling it what to do by legislating, yet here the Taoiseach was standing to speak as the Executive, essentially telling us what was his vision of Dáil reform. That was the wrong way around for the debate tonight, and not the way the debate was structured. We must always remember that the Government is responsible to the Dáil. If we remember that and that we are in the driving seat - we make the decisions in this Chamber, not Secretaries General or the Civil Service - we cannot go too far wrong. This is not understood particularly well at official level and we must make it understood.

We have a responsibility to change the way we have done business for decades, while reflecting the constitutional position. Deputy Ryan said we cannot undo the traditions since the foundation of the State and the relationships that exist. I agree. There is an interdependence in some ways between the Executive and the Parliament. However, we have never fully fulfilled our role in holding the Government to account.

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Two items Fianna Fáil has put forward in its document are key to this. One is establishing a proper office of legal counsel to the Oireachtas. The difficulty we have faced over the years I have been a Member of the Dáil or the Seanad is that every time one has a good idea, particularly if one is in the Opposition, one is immediately told by the Government that the Attorney General has advised that it may well be unconstitutional. It happened many times in the Seanad when I and my colleague, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, drafted Bills. It also happened when Fianna Fáil was in power. The only way to counteract that is to have an office of legal counsel to the Oireachtas. Incidentally, that person should be on a par with the Attorney General and should be able to sit with the Attorney General as an equal, if that were necessary. The person should be able to give advice to us that is not subsidiary to the advice of the Attorney General but is considered equal. Our own senior counsel or highly respected lawyer should be advising the Oireachtas on what is and is not constitutional. The Attorney General is the legal adviser to the Government. Legal advice by its nature is confidential, which is why Governments traditionally have claimed confidentiality. That is understandable, but the way around it is to have our own legal advice which is on a par with that. That office must be paid for, and there is a cost attached to this, and established relatively quickly, certainly in the medium term.

In addition, we need an Oireachtas office of policy and economic analysis. There are excellent researchers in the Oireachtas and they are extremely useful in providing information to us as well as analyses of various policies. By and large, however, the vast majority of the information we receive comes from Departments. In addition, there is the issue of charges on the Exchequer and amendments that cannot be accepted because they may cause a charge on the Exchequer. That is a significant issue for the Opposition, in particular, but I hope Government Deputies will put forward amendments to legislation as well. However, it is a major difficulty. In my view, although nobody has ever said this to me, the Ceann Comhairle or the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad decides whether something is a charge on the Exchequer based on advice from the Departments. That is the wrong way around.

As I said, the Government is responsible to us. We are here on behalf of the people to hold it responsible and accountable. We are in the driving seat. It is up to us to make the rules, not the Cabinet. I am glad no Cabinet Minister is present, with no disrespect to them, because all 158 Members of this House are in the driving seat. We are equals and we must put this forward. In fact, with the current configuration there is no other way around it. However, it must last for the decades to come.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy Byrne. Incidentally, there is a parliamentary legal service available within the House and it is populated by eight personnel, at least.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Yes, but that has never been available to opposition parties-----

An Ceann Comhairle: It is available to all.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Yes, but it is not a counterpoint to the Attorney General.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is available to all Members.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: A Cheann Comhairle, could you give the list of speakers for the remainder of the debate?

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes. They are Deputies Regina Doherty, Eoghan Murphy, Darragh O'Brien, Louise O'Reilly, David Stanton, Eugene Murphy, Gerry Adams, Bríd Smith and Carol

Nolan. We will not reach all of them, but Deputy Regina Doherty is next.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I have never been so happy that my name begins with a “D”. I am a member of the committee and it is a pleasure to sit around the table with people from all parties and none and to be able to agree on something in a relatively short period. We have only had three meetings. I pay tribute to the work achieved so far and the interim report before the House today. I need not go into the details of it because everybody can read it.

I am lucky to be back in the Chamber for a second time after my first term over the last five years, and I am grateful for it. A great deal of politics is played in this Chamber but there is not a great deal of policy on an average day. To change the culture through the changes we are proposing is probably the most important thing we can do. The reason we are changing groups, and acknowledging and accepting that there are more types of organisations, parties and groups in the House, is to empower them to be representatives and to be equal in their mandate to every other Member of the House. When looking around the House I fear that there are some people who think they are more equal than everybody else. That must change. Every Member of the House, be they from a big or small party, an independent or from an alliance, has the same mandate as everybody else and should be empowered to be as fully representative on behalf of the people as they can be. I welcome the changes we are proposing and I appreciate everybody’s input to them.

I wish to refer to two matters which are very significant in the changes we will make. One is the change to our committee structures, although I acknowledge it is not in today’s report. I was a member of the health and children committee for the last five years. I did not realise there were 24 members because only the same six or seven people came, week in, week out, and they were very interested in pursuing in a non-partisan way the agenda of the committee. It was a real pleasure to be part of it. To be a member of a committee should be seen as a privilege. The authority and work of that committee should be elevated and we should try to give it more powers than it had in the past.

From a backbench perspective or an Opposition perspective, the opportunity to put forward legislation as proposed in the amendments to Standing Orders is very important. While we had this before, as speakers rightly said, the legislation never really went anywhere without the blessing of a Minister. It has been very frustrating as a backbencher for the past number of years to have ideas and amendments to put forward on legislation but not be allowed to put them forward, or if Members were allowed to put them forward, they would not have been allowed to vote on them if it was not something their party agreed with. The purpose of each of us in the House, with our individual mandates, is to make law the best it can be. It is not in the gift of a particular Minister to make something perfect at the beginning of a process. Every Member’s views, opinions and amendments should be taken on board, and that can and will happen with the changes we are going to make to Standing Orders, which I very much welcome.

The process has started and it is a pleasure to be part of it. I very much look forward to the changes, in particular the change of culture that will arise from the changes in the next couple of weeks.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: Despite the initial confusion over the organisation of time this evening, I do not think there was anything sinister on the part of the Executive. I very much enjoyed the opportunity to hear everyone’s contributions by being in the Chamber. It is a genuine privilege to be on the committee. If I may, I would like to congratulate you, a Cheann

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Comhairle, on your election because I have not had the chance to do so.

When the last Dáil changed the Standing Orders so that we could elect the Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot, it represented a fundamental change in how this place does its business. I found it difficult at the time to explain to people why it was so significant and fundamental, and why it meant the Dáil would now be in a better position to hold the Government of the day to account and why the Dáil would be more independent. I found myself leaning back on the example of the Westminster Parliament, given it changed its way of doing business in 2007 to elect a Speaker by secret ballot. That came into effect in 2009 and, immediately following that, we saw the flow of powers from the Government to the Speaker, and so to the people.

That is what we are seeing right now in the creation of this reform committee. Again, it is a privilege to be on the committee and to get to work with everyone in this House who is making such a positive contribution, those who gave contributions from outside the committee and the staff who are working so well on it. People have to realise that what we are seeing is that the power to reform how we do our business is no longer in the hands of the Government. No one party or group can now force its will on how this place should do its business. That is a fundamental change in how we do our business and it is incredibly significant. The power to reform our parliament and the responsibility to do that rests with the Ceann Comhairle and with the committee. We have never seen this before, so it is exciting and a real opportunity. It must not stop with this initial phase that the Ceann Comhairle has planned and it must continue through the lifetime of this Dáil and into the next.

Some people outside of the Chamber and, indeed, some within it do not believe it is that important. However, how this place works or does not work impacts the lives of people in this country every day. What we do is important. However, if we are not doing it properly, we begin to undermine ourselves. We then also undermine the practice of politics but, worse than that, we can actually undermine the fabric of society and do a lot of damage to people's lives. That is not to overstate things. There is a very real thread between what we do here and what happens in Irish life. That thread should be as strong as a rope but, sometimes, I feel it as weak as string, particularly when we come to very significant issues we have debated in this Chamber in the past five years, the way we have debated them and the results that have come from that, in particular the negative way the people have reacted and responded to that, and the damage this has done, not just to the body politic, but also to the country.

Eight years after the financial collapse, as a group of elected representatives, we are still in a position of responsibility to rebuild the faith of people in their political system and their politicians. That is why we have to reform this place and why it is so important to make our Parliament more diverse, representative, accountable, open, responsible and responsive to the needs of the people.

In looking, with others, to set up this committee to do this work, we in Fine Gael put together an Oireachtas reform programme. What we sought to do in that document was to put forward certain ideas. We are not claiming originality for those or that we invented them, but we wanted to put forward ideas in good faith in order to say that, regardless of when a Government is formed or who is in government, we will sign up to these measures because we see them as being important. In tandem with that, we agree that, as a party, we would seek to relax the Whip system in the Chamber and also in committees, which is very important.

We must all come to this with good faith and, to an extent, we have to come to it with a

Rawlsian veil of ignorance in order that the changes we make as a reform committee will empower Deputies and the Oireachtas, but will also recognise the constitutional responsibilities and obligations that are there for Government. We all have to be responsible in making changes because, ultimately, we do not know what bench we might sit on in this House following the changes we make. That will require a change of attitude and of mindset.

The work of the committee is under way and, as I have said, it is a privilege to sit on it with my colleagues from across the House. The Ceann Comhairle has set a very ambitious time-frame and the proposals in the interim report are very welcome. Again, the establishment of the business management committee is another fundamental reform of how we do our business. We, as parliamentarians, will decide how we do our business on a weekly, monthly and sessional basis, which is very important. If we have the will ourselves, we will be able to avoid the use of the guillotine, but it will fall to us to do that. If we can approach the business committee in the way we have approached the reform committee, through seeking consensus and trying to be more mature in our work and less confrontational, hopefully, that attitude, culture and belief will translate into the work we do and the *modus operandi* as we approach each of the issues that will face us over the next months and years.

To conclude, it is important to recognise more groups in the Dáil. Standing on a party platform is important but, at the same time, as we do our work here, we must recognise the voice others have. I look forward to the further work that will continue in the next weeks and months and, hopefully, throughout the lifetime of this Dáil session.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Darragh O'Brien.

Deputy Jack Chambers: On a point of order, I want to express my dissatisfaction on behalf of many of the Deputies who are not members of the committee and who will not get an opportunity to raise our reforms and what we would like to put forward to the committee. This a cross-party issue. Today, we are seeing the committee members give a regurgitation of their debate within the committee itself but we are not hearing from any of the other Deputies throughout the parties. That needs to be formally recorded. We need a further opportunity to debate these reform proposals because newer Deputies are not getting an opportunity to bring forward our ideas on Dáil reform and that needs to be addressed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. My understanding is that we will return to this issue when we meet again on 14 April, so there should be a continuation. The point is valid. I call Deputy Darragh O'Brien.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I will do my best to stick to the facts. Every Member of this Chamber has an important role to play and I know that our parties and relative groupings are consulting their members and, although what they are bringing forward are not even draft agreements, this is the work to date. What I stated at the committee is that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and I firmly stand by that. The reason I stand by it is that, if we are to achieve real change, that change must be fundamental, meaningful and real. While there are issues that can be dealt with swiftly and on which there is broad agreement, such as the issue of allowing an abstention, if we were to just do the simple things, that in itself is not reform. Most parties and groupings are in agreement that the Dáil should have more control and power and Members should be able to exert their power as individual Deputies and as members of parties. That is why I have welcomed the proposals to date on the business committee, which are an important step forward. When we get to our meeting on 13 April, the independent budgetary

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committee or economic oversight committee - whatever we call it - and the independent legal office are an absolute must.

I would say to some of the hurlers on the ditch, who exist in this Chamber as well, that with extra power comes extra responsibility. When we build the process of a budget from the ground up, and are inclusive about it, all of the Members who are elected by the people across the Twenty-six Counties of the Republic have a duty to feed into that. Those extra powers that I want will bring about those extra responsibilities.

Furthermore, it is crucial that this reform agenda has started in advance of the establishment of a Government. When a Government is established, whoever it is, it will, in the main, only permit the reforms that suit it.

8 o'clock

That was true of the last Government and previous ones, led by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and that is why it is important that we do it now.

I commend the Ceann Comhairle on his chairmanship of that committee. In fairness, I have also been pleasantly surprised - I would say this to other Members who are not on the committee - with the make-up of the committee and how well it has worked to date. Maybe Deputy O'Reilly does not think so, but I think it has worked well to date and that we can reach a consensus and an agreement, but we must also be aware of the mandate that each of us holds and each of our parties holds. Of course it is important that smaller groupings are heard, but it is also important that proportionality is applied. The people voted for 50 Fine Gael Deputies, 44 Fianna Fáil Deputies and 23 Sinn Féin Deputies so if we are to be representative, smaller groupings and independents cannot have more time or more say than parties that received higher votes in the recent general election.

The incoming Government, whatever that is, must move very quickly to a full abolition of the Economic Management Council. We have been talking about the top-heaviness of the Executive and the power of the Cabinet over the Dáil. That was acute in the previous Dáil, particularly because there was a cabinet within a Cabinet. That cannot be allowed to persist. Regarding how business is scheduled and dealt with, the excessive use of the guillotine in the last Dáil is something we should see an end to also.

Reforms were made in the Seanad as well, and I am glad to have had the experience of being a Member of the outgoing Seanad. It was a less adversarial Chamber, more legislation was agreed across the House and people had more opportunities to talk and feed into legislation. We should look at what is done well in the other House and bring that into this House, and I think that is something that we will do. I look forward to the conclusion of the reform agenda. There are other meetings, and I agree with Deputy Chambers that it is very important that all Members of the House feed into this process and that the Ceann Comhairle makes sure that that happens. It is open to all Members now - I know Deputy Chambers made his own submission - and all Members can make submissions at any given stage. Real reform is fundamental, and it is fundamental change that is required, not just tipping around the edges, and that is why nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: In advance of the most recent election, the issue of Dáil reform, inasmuch as those specific words are concerned, was not necessarily raised with me on the doorsteps. What was raised was the desire that people had that, when they sent me here to do

a job, I would be able to do that work in a timely and efficient manner. What they wanted, and what people all over this island want, is real and meaningful political reform, which does not just tinker around the edges, but is tangible, ambitious and has a real impact. We need reform that goes to the heart of our political system, and it is long overdue. As a member of the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform, I believe that we may only be able to scratch the surface of what is really needed. We may only be able to make a small impact. Nonetheless, Deputy Ó Snodaigh and I in Sinn Féin have approached our task with a view to maximising the impact that we can make so that we can make our work more efficient and so that the people who sent us here to work hard on their behalf can see that that work is getting done.

The caretaker Government promised much in 2011 about political reform but delivered very little, if anything. In fact, one only has to look at the number of pages in the documents that it submitted in advance of the meeting of the committee to see that even it acknowledges the scale of the work that they left for the people in their aftermath. It is imperative that while we talk a lot about new politics and reflecting what the electorate really wants, we do not lose sight of the fact that the caretaker Government missed five full years of opportunities to do what it now agrees we should be doing.

As a new Deputy, I have witnessed around the table of the committee the frustration of those who have many more years of parliamentary experience than I have. I have witnessed their frustration about the delays and obstacles that are very often put in their way. I was shocked that, following the introduction of gender quotas, one of the parties used their three slots to send three men. That was disappointing. I think that if we are going to talk about new politics-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Pathetic. I will not take advice from the Deputy, but thanks.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: -----we should really walk the walk as well as talk the talk. Notwithstanding what I believe are the limitations of the committee, it is imperative that all nominees do their best to ensure that the House and those who are elected to it can serve the needs of their constituents. All the Members who attend this committee should have a clear mandate from their respective groupings and parties to ensure that they can agree to proposals as they emerge and that we can, as a committee, bring a full suite of proposals to the floor for debate and discussion that has the confidence of all of the members of the committee.

In advance of a Government, whatever the hue or shape it takes, now is the time to make these reforms, to agree principles that will serve us into the future and not to be short term about it. Finally, I urge every Member to give serious consideration to ending the practice of beginning our day with a prayer. It is outdated. I suggest we begin with two minutes of reflection, during which Deputies can perhaps reflect on the reasons we have been sent here and how we can best do the work that we have been sent here to do.

Deputy David Stanton: I congratulate the Ceann Comhairle on his appointment and wish him well. He has made a good start.

I spent 15 years on the Opposition benches, and in that time one reform occurred, namely, the introduction of Leaders' Questions, which were kind of happening anyway, but they were formalised in Standing Orders. There was nothing else, zero, zilch. Once reform occurs, it gets built in and people think that is the way it always was. In the last Dáil there were a number of reforms, such as the bringing of Topical Issues forward to the middle of the day, extra Leaders' Questions and legislative scrutiny. The latter was a major reform and happened down

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in the dungeons of the committees, and a lot of people did not know it was happening. Over the past five years, 7,386 witnesses came in and spoke to, engaged with and gave their views to Members of the Oireachtas. That is a very significant reform. This pre-legislative scrutiny meant that the legislation was scrutinised prior to being published. What happened prior to that was legislation was published, brought in here after being through the drafting office and finished and set, and Deputies could do nothing of any substance with it whatsoever. At the pre-legislative committees, though, members were able to take the heads of the Bill and make major changes on the advice of NGOs, expert groups and ordinary citizens, who came in to suggest those changes to the Government Department and the Minister. In the main, quite a number of those suggestions were taken on board.

Deputy Zappone and I worked very closely in the justice committee and brought a large number of Bills and reports through that committee, and they are there on the record. That was a major change but, because it happened away from this Chamber, where the grandstanding and politics occurred, it was very often unseen and unheard. However, it did make a difference because one of the main jobs we have here is to produce, scrutinise, analyse, discuss and debate legislation. That is very hard to do in a Chamber like this where somebody comes in and reads out a 20-minute speech, possibly a script that someone else has prepared for them. I have noticed over the years - I am here almost 20 - that sometimes people come in and read a script and one knows it is the first time they have seen it. I suggest, as one reform, that we get rid of scripts. It is in Standing Orders anyway that no scripts should be used, apart from those of Ministers, who must be accurate in a legal sense. Apart from that, we should internalise the material, make it our own and be able to speak to the topic. We can have bullet points but reading out a script that a researcher has prepared is not really making the legislation our own.

We should be more involved with the budgetary process. We tried this with the justice committee, as well with the idea of following the money. The OECD produced a report last year and the Oireachtas working group of Chairs asked for it. A former Deputy, Mr. Liam Twomey, was very much involved with that. A fantastic report was produced, with one table illustrating specific issues in parliamentary engagement. There is an index of legislative budgetary institutions in the OECD and Ireland is the poorest of all. We do not scrutinise the budget at all to any extent. This takes time, work and effort. We must roll up the sleeves, swot and study. We must spend time in the committee rooms. How many Deputies are prepared to do that and spend the time that I and Deputy Zappone did with the justice committee, out of sight and out of mind? People are worried about being home in the constituency.

Fianna Fáil has produced some very interesting suggestions in its proposal for Dáil reform, although I have one point of difference with the Deputy who spoke earlier, which is the idea that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. That was the case up to approximately ten years ago. The Government Chief Whip at the time, former Deputy Pat Carey, and I tried that idea and although a package was always produced, when somebody objected to one issue in it, nothing happened. We must be careful about that. If that proviso is included, there is a risk that one Deputy on the committee might not agree with an issue and then nothing would happen.

I wish this initiative well and it is exciting. The committee should carry on anyway as a standing committee right through this Dáil.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak to this issue. As somebody who has been a Member of Seanad and Dáil Éireann, I am delighted to be back. I thank the people of the constituency of Sligo-Leitrim, including those in west Cavan

and south Donegal, for ensuring my return. I welcome the reform being proposed as every one of the 158 people elected to the House should be - and in fairness are - treated with respect. It is important that every one of us has the opportunity to raise the issues of the day, particularly national matters, affecting our areas. Ironically, during today's nominations for Taoiseach, Deputies Adams and Boyd Barrett raised a very important issue for my constituency. This is the queuing of ambulances outside Sligo general hospital. That has happened before and I know there were nine ambulances queued outside the hospital three weeks ago. Only for this debate on Dáil reform, I would not have the opportunity even to mention that. As a representative for a constituency, whether a Deputy is on the Government or Opposition side, from a small or large party or Independent, a Member should be entitled to raise the issue of the day affecting the people whom they represent. That is very important.

I wish the 17 people on the committee well in their deliberations. When these issues must be raised, there should be a Minister present to give some answer on how problems can be solved. There is no easy solution to the problem of people waiting on trolleys in hospitals but as a backbench Deputy, my opinion is that if the carer's allowance application process could be dealt with more sympathetically and quickly, rather than people waiting eight or ten months for answers, we would not have our current problems in the hospitals. It is sad that this must be examined.

Everybody in the Chamber has his or her idea about how to improve matters but we do not get the opportunity to express those ideas, unfortunately. I welcome anything that could relieve that problem, whether the issue in question relates to agriculture, health or education. We must have somebody to answer the questions we raise on behalf of our constituents. People have said they take issue with the prayer being said before we start the business. I do not see anything wrong with a prayer, which is a reflection before we start very important work in dealing with the issues affecting the country.

Deputy Jack Chambers: It is great to be able to speak. I apologise for my earlier remark but the point still stands that we need greater input from many of the Deputies who might be new to the House so they can give their opinion on Dáil reform.

An Ceann Comhairle: Some Deputies who are not new to the House did not turn up.

Deputy Jack Chambers: Some members of the committee did not show up to contribute to the discussion on Dáil reform, which might demonstrate their level of seriousness in engaging with the issue. Deputy Micheál Martin, the leader of Fianna Fáil, put this on the agenda in the week after the election and real reform is needed in the coming weeks. I welcome the establishment and work of a cross-party sub-committee on Dáil reform, which I hope will bring meaningful reforms to the table. As a new Deputy, I was taken aback on our first day here to hear Deputy Doherty dismissing or sidelining the need for Dáil reform. Deputy Louise O'Reilly has reinforced that Sinn Féin perspective. We all have similar concerns relating to health, housing and so on but to dismiss or sideline Dáil reform is wrong. Her membership of the committee undermines that idea.

We need to introduce reforms so we can have debates on key issues and bring more oversight. We must empower the Dáil. This, rather than the negative posturing and empty populist rhetoric coming from the side, will bring about a difference. The attempt to derail Dáil reform serves no purpose and I hope Sinn Féin will embrace the spirit of reform and respect this House. We are at a fundamental crossroads-----

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Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I am a member of the committee, I have worked very hard and I intend to do so in future. I am not glib about or in any way dismissive of Dáil reform.

An Ceann Comhairle: The point has been made.

Deputy Jack Chambers: We are at a fundamental crossroads in Irish politics and we can embrace proper, real and substantive Dáil reform to restore the spirit and capacity of the Irish Parliament to provide the counterbalance to the Irish Executive. We must not present anaemic, minor or symbolic reforms that would make little or no difference to the workings of Irish democracy. Now is the time to make the fundamental change and shift so we can uphold the respect for and potential of Dáil Éireann. The reforms in the coming weeks must alter the nature and quality of Irish politics and debate.

I have submitted my own document on Dáil reform. One issue is attendance and quorums and Standing Orders should be amended so more Members must be present. It is not realistic to believe everybody can be here all the time because there is a need for committee work and so on but there must be a greater threshold of attendance. Standing Orders could be amended with this in mind.

There is power currently vested in the Taoiseach under Standing Order 24 to control the summons and postponement of the Dáil. This should be amended so the majority of Deputies can be collectively empowered to summon the Dáil from any adjournment that may have been imposed by the Taoiseach or the Executive. This would help balance the degree of control over our parliamentary democracy. We must work to prevent legislation being guillotined by raising the democratic threshold and requiring the agreement of the Ceann Comhairle and two thirds of attending Members to support the legislation. There is an absolute need for democratic consensus around guillotined legislation. If legislation is of national importance, it should require a higher democratic threshold to be progressed. That would increase the level of debate, oversight and input on matters of national importance that may require an accelerated progression through Dáil Éireann.

I propose the expansion of debate for Topical Issues to limit the current form of tit-for-tat, and to ensure a greater depth of debate and accountability of government. This Dáil must end the current archaic process of Ministers whose background knowledge of an issue is limited. They must debate beyond the answer that is given to them by a departmental official. They should be able to go beyond it. It might be advisable to extend powers to the Ceann Comhairle, as has been moved in the Dáil reforms, to ensure that Ministers who appear for Topical Issues are accountable for the questions asked. If any further questions are asked, which are not reasonably responded to, such questions could perhaps be followed up in an extended topical sessions period in the week following the Topical Issues event that arose in the previous week.

This extended Topical Issues session relating to questions in a previous week should be added to the current Dáil schedule with new additions to current Standing Orders. I welcome the proposed reforms which will vest powers in the Ceann Comhairle to ensure that Ministers respond properly to the questions asked.

As a strong mechanism of reform, all major Government announcements, including Exchequer returns and departmental initiatives, should be formally announced in the Dáil Chamber before any public announcement. This would allow debate and oversight on such announcements where they can be teased out. Prior leaking of such announcements should be sanctioned

and investigated by the Dáil and the Ceann Comhairle's committee.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should conclude now.

Deputy Jack Chambers: We need to end the practice of Ministers swanning around in their chauffeur-driven cars making announcements about this, that and everything relating to their Department. Their powers are vested from this Dáil and they should respect them when making those announcements.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please conclude now, Deputy.

Deputy Jack Chambers: I hope my own contribution, as well as the proposals from other parties and Deputies, will provide a collective platform to achieve the progress on Dáil reform that we are all striving for on behalf of our people and our Parliament.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before calling Deputy Adams, I wish to make two points. First, 23 written submissions were made in respect of Dáil reform. I want to assure Members that each and every one of them has been carefully considered and will be considered further between now and the end of April.

Second, I realise that other Deputies who are not members of the committee cannot know how the committee is functioning. It is, therefore, appropriate to say that it is functioning extraordinarily well. It is receiving positive and active support and participation by every member. As Chair of that committee I am inordinately proud of how it is functioning and I want to pay tribute to all the members involved.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá mé fíorbhuíoch díot, a Cheann Comhairle, as ucht an deis a thabhairt dom labhairt faoi leasú na Dála.

I also welcome the publication of the interim report and commend the committee members involved, as well as the Ceann Comhairle's stewardship of that committee. Some useful progress has been made but much more is required if it is to be as meaningful as is needed. Reform of the Dáil does not just mean tweaking Standing Orders or how we schedule business, but reforming the institutions more generally and getting away from the more antiquated practices that prevail within these precincts.

On the first sitting of the Thirty-second Dáil, we in Sinn Féin were prevented from having motions that were properly submitted on scrapping water charges, health and hospital crises, Moore Street, and making the case for the establishment of a commission of investigation into the sale of NAMA's loan book. We wanted all of these debated here, but were not allowed to do that.

At the last sitting on 22 March, Deputy Ó Snodaigh and I attempted to move a motion to suspend Standing Orders to allow for a meaningful debate on homelessness, health, water charges and child care. However, we were told that the current Standing Orders actually prevent Standing Orders from being suspended, contrary to all normal practice in any other assembly. This clearly needs to be changed.

Meaningful reform on how we conduct our business also means the provision of Northern representation, ending the practice of excluding the introduction of money Bills from the Opposition benches, and affording Dáil committees the power to introduce legislation. That can and should be done.

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I know that the Ceann Comhairle is very open to all of these suggestions and to reform of practices in the Chamber. I welcome that and, as I said earlier, I commend his stewardship of the Dáil reform committee. One issue which I raised many times with his predecessor and with the Committee on Procedure and Privileges is the fact that in this place of work there is a facility for Members of the Dáil and Seanad to have access not to one but two bars. I spoke to the Ceann Comhairle about this matter quite recently. It is absolutely bizarre. I have met citizens and Members of the Oireachtas intoxicated in the corridors quite a few times, and even since the Thirty-second Dáil has met in session. This is absolutely bizarre. The fact that a bar would be in a workplace is contrary to all modern practice. I am as fond of a drink as anybody else, but the fact that its opening hours operate on the basis of parliamentary privilege is equally bizarre.

We also have an unacceptable situation whereby media facilities for Opposition parties and Deputies are limited either to the plinth or the portico. The Government can bring members of the media to Departments and offices, but there is not even media access to the audiovisual room in Leinster House. There was a rather remarkable occurrence today when we did a press event on the plinth earlier. We were talking about the homelessness motion that we were trying to get passed and I noted that a young homeless woman, Erica Fleming, was going to give a briefing at my request on the issue of homelessness. I said to members of the media there: “Why don’t you come along?” One of the staff approached one of our press officers and told them that under the rules of this Dáil that is not allowed. Therefore, journalists are barred from briefing sessions which are open to members of the public. Clearly this is complete and absolute nonsense when we talk about the Dáil being transparent and open. That is not the way a modern parliamentary democracy should work. The media have a huge responsibility in covering the workings of the Dáil. The Government and the Oireachtas have a responsibility to ensure that we are very open in all of these matters. That means that the media should have access to modern facilities and briefings on important matters that have been organised by parties or Deputies. They should be able to report from the Oireachtas in as professional and modern a way as possible.

We also need to address the issue of late sittings. I return to this issue of the bar opening times, which has an adverse impact on the fantastic staff within the Oireachtas, including ushers, catering staff and all others upon whom we are so dependent to help us to do our jobs. They have family lives and while I am sure none of them minds working long hours if we are dealing with emergency legislation or other important matters, it is totally unacceptable that they should be stuck here because some Deputies want an after-hours drink for themselves or their friends. If they want that, let them go to a local hotel. The people who work here, including ushers, should not have to sit here waiting for them to have their pleasure.

Reform has many aspects and I would hope that in the coming weeks, as the reform committee continues its work, all the issues, and not just those related to this Chamber, can be open for discussion and change.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Adams for his contribution and I hope the debate will continue on 14 April.

Before the adjournment of the Dáil, I must mention that on the vote for the nomination of Deputy Enda Kenny for appointment by the President as Taoiseach, the numbers on the Níl side were added incorrectly and announced as 80 Members against the motion. The tellers have accordingly agreed that the correct result of the division stands at: Tá, 51; Níl, 81.

Written Answers follow Adjournment.

Dáil Éireann

The Dáil adjourned at 8.30 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Thursday, 14 April 2016.