



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

Leaders' Questions	2
Order of Business	12
Prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing (Extraction of Hydrocarbon) Bill 2016: First Stage	20
Prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing Bill 2015: Leave to Withdraw	21
Finance Bill 2016: Financial Resolutions	21
Ceisteanna - Questions	23
Brexit Issues	23
Brexit Issues	29
Topical Issue Matters	35
Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)	35
Priority Questions	36
Child Care Costs	36
Child Care Services Provision	37
Child and Family Agency Funding	39
Youth Work Projects Funding	41
Child Care Costs	43
Departmental Budgets	45
Homeless Persons Supports	47
Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children	50
Child Protection	52
Traveller Accommodation	53
Early Childhood Care and Education	55
Brexit Issues	57
Topical Issue Debate	59
Garda Districts	59
Ambulance Service Accommodation	61
Counselling Services Provision	64
Customs and Excise Controls	66
Social Welfare Bill 2016: Order for Second Stage	69
Social Welfare Bill 2016: Second Stage	70
Public Sector Pay: Motion [Private Members]	93

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 8 Samhain 2016

Tuesday, 8 November 2016

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

*Paidir.
Prayer.*

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Yesterday there were secondary schools closed across the country. Today there are secondary schools closed across the country. It is happening for a number of reasons, including fundamentally because there was a failure to engage early and effectively on the secondary school strikes and the situation pertaining to the ASTI and the issues it had raised. The first issue relates to equal pay for newly qualified teachers. For some reason, the Government has not committed publicly to finding a pathway towards equal pay for newly qualified teachers, which would go a long way towards dealing with the issue, on which the TUI and the INTO made progress. I warned last week that the system might have wanted to punish the ASTI for staying outside the Lansdowne Road agreement and said it should resist that temptation, but it has not. We are now in a situation where feelings are becoming more entrenched and resolving the dispute could become more difficult.

The second issue, in terms of yesterday's closure of secondary schools, relates to substitution and supervision. The ASTI is looking for flexibility on the Croke Park agreement hours, on which some flexibility has been shown to the TUI and the INTO. I support the Lansdowne Road agreement and accept that everything has to be resolved under it, but there is provision in it for flexibility on the Croke Park agreement hours. Before any Lansdowne Road or Croke Park agreement was made, teachers had been engaged in extracurricular activities for a long time. There are many good teachers who are brassed off when officialdom tells them to pencil in this and that because, frankly, they have been doing it for years when it comes to sport, music, debating and cultural activities. We should keep this fact at the backs of our heads. That contribution by teachers has always been made. The issue of substitution and supervision can be dealt with if there is the will to do so and there is a way under the Lansdowne Road agreement.

My third point is that leaving certificate and junior certificate students are suffering too much. They are the real victims of this industrial dispute. We know about the centrality of the leaving certificate examinations and how difficult and challenging it is for any student in his

or her leaving certificate year. The absence of contingency planning led to the closures yesterday when teachers turned up for work but the gates were locked. The argument was made that schools did not have enough supervisors to provide cover, but it was within the capacity of school managements to open the schools to examination students, particularly leaving certificate students. There would not have been health and safety issues in the teaching of leaving certificate students. That is an important point because today students are very pressurised. A greater effort should have been made, in terms of contingency planning, to open the schools for examination students, in particular. Does the Taoiseach accept that there was a failure on the Government and management side in providing for adequate contingency measures to facilitate the opening of schools yesterday? I ask him to indicate when that issue will be resolved. I also ask him to indicate whether he is prepared to give a commitment on the issue of equal pay for newly qualified teachers in finding a pathway to a successor to the Lansdowne Road agreement.

The Taoiseach: First, I am disappointed that the strike has continued. I can confirm for the Deputy that it is not anybody's intention that the system should penalise ASTI members. There are four industrial disputes involving the ASTI and the Department of Education and Skills. In respect of the first, the question of equal pay for new entrants, this issue has been the subject of long hours of negotiations by the Department and the Minister within the Lansdowne Road agreement. The Deputy is aware of the increased opportunities to secure permanent positions and increases in pay, ranging from 15% to 22%, for new entrant teachers, as applies in the case of the Irish National Teachers Organisation, INTO, and the Teachers Union of Ireland, TUI. The Minister has spoken at some length about equality and what it actually means.

Regarding supervision and substitution, the Deputy seems to be suggesting schools or their boards of management should be pressurised into supplying personnel who would have to be vetted in order that schools could open. However, he is aware that the ASTI prevented school principals from engaging in that way, which creates a difficulty. Those who are suffering most are the 220,000 students, particularly those in junior and leaving certificate examination classes who do not have their teachers teaching them. The issue arose because, as a union, the ASTI decided unilaterally to reject working an extra one hour per week. It is true that for years, in all grades of teaching and many other public services, people gave of their time voluntarily, over and above the stipulated hours. However, in this dispute teachers are turning up for work but the schools cannot open because of health and safety regulations. Money is on the table to pay those teachers who want to teach. The issue of substitution and supervision is one that could be resolved very quickly, which would mean that teachers would receive their payments, schools could open, pupils could be taught, parents would not be discommoded and teachers would also be able to do the job they set out to do.

The three remaining disputes are under negotiation. In respect of new entrant pay levels, substantial money is on the table and the benefits are available to ASTI members, to those teachers who need the money. We are only a few weeks away from Christmas and this is not by any means ideal. I hope the talks that are taking place will continue and that a conclusion can be reached pretty quickly in order that schools can reopen, that there will be supervision and substitution and that the payments on the table can be made to teachers. I hope the benefits achieved in the discussions that have taken place and been successfully concluded with the TUI and the INTO on new entrants' pay could also apply to the ASTI.

The two remaining disputes require further discussion.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Hoping will not solve it or get it sorted.

On supervision and substitution, in some schools one is only talking about 100 leaving certificate students and in others, 80 or 60. While some schools may have more than 100, the Taoiseach cannot tell me that it was not within the capacity of school managers to facilitate the opening of schools to teach these students. This is a serious issue because students get lost in the debate. They are the pawns in between, but there is only one year in which a student does the leaving certificate examinations. Whether one likes it, they are crucial examinations in terms of the future development of young people and their career opportunities. There is complete uncertainty and nobody can give them a clear pathway to the resumption of their courses and studies. It was within the capacity of management to keep schools open, but my suspicion is that the Department and the Government decided to bring the dispute to a head and allow teachers to go out. That is why there was no will to keep schools open and sort out the supervision and substitution issue, particularly for examination students. If there was an issue with 500, I could accept that. However, I question the point that it was not within the capacity of schools to open to facilitate the teaching of leaving certificate students.

In respect of newly qualified teachers and equal pay, the Minister of State, Deputy English, said last week on “Claire Byrne Live” that it will happen in the successor agreement. Every Minister is nodding their head and saying it will happen. Why can the Government not say it publicly? I understand the Minister said it previously so why can the Government not say that there is a pathway to equality of pay for newly qualified teachers? It may be in the successor agreement but at least, there is a timeframe, commitment and pathway. This would go a long way towards getting this sorted.

The Taoiseach: It is not just a case of hoping it will resolve itself because it will not. It will only be resolved through continuation of the bilateral talks that are taking place between officials on both sides. As the Deputy is aware, the president of the ASTI made a comment about the WRC. Whether or not the WRC becomes involved is a matter for it. This is a dispute that must be settled. A situation where over 220,000 students and their parents are discommoded and teachers are left without pay is not a proper one. The situation pertaining to supervision and substitution resulted from the direct and unilateral action of the ASTI in the summer not to work the extra hour per week, which I regret. This matter can be resolved quickly. I hope there is a willingness to see an end to this dispute that would allow the money on the table to be paid to the teachers, the pupils to be taught and the schools to get on with their business. The remaining element of the benefits that come from the collective situation are available to ASTI teachers who need them now. I trust that the continued bilateral discussions that are taking place will lead to that conclusion quickly.

The Deputy’s question is a valid one but it is one that should not have arisen. I do not accept that the Government, the Minister and the Department were lax in not dealing with this. This has dragged on for quite some time but the one hour not being worked results from a unilateral decision made by the ASTI that has affected its own members to their detriment. There is money on the table to pay them. This issue is one that could be resolved very quickly.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Taoiseach does not accept that the Government has a responsibility for the current situation in which over 500 schools are closed. This represents 70% of the secondary school sector. A total of 250,000 students are affected. Tens of thousands of them are in examination years, including the leaving certificate. They are missing out on valuable course work and their family schedules and routines are up in the air. It also affects thousands of teachers who have made it very clear that they would rather be in their classrooms instead of on picket lines. Yesterday, they were effectively locked out of their workplaces. They are

engaged in industrial action because of very legitimate concerns about their pay and conditions. Those concerns are shared across the public sector following seven years of pay cuts. The Taoiseach should know this as a former teacher. It has particularly impacted because this was one area in the public sector in which there was a large number of new recruits over the past ten years.

The issue of pay equality cannot be dodged and must be addressed. It is very simple and straightforward - equal pay for equal work. In 2016, surely the Government can accept that basic principle but not one Minister is prepared to agree to the principle of pay equality let alone set out a timetable for when it might be achieved. Young teachers are earning up to €8,000 less per year than their colleagues who were hired before 2012. Is that fair? Clearly, it is not about equality but it is obviously acceptable to the Government.

Even though gardai have to vote on the package, last week's negotiations with An Garda Síochána surely show that the issues at play are not insurmountable. Agreement can be reached. What is required is a meaningful dialogue that sets out a clear and sensible path to the provision of pay equality. The Taoiseach knows that this cannot wait until 2018. A new pay agreement is needed. The Lansdowne Road agreement is clearly críochnaithe and must be replaced. The issue of allowances also has to be dealt with. That would go a long way towards satisfying teachers' concerns. It is obvious that pay equality needs to be put in place sooner rather than later. Putting it on the long finger as Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have done so many times in the past will not resolve the issue. Will the Taoiseach, on behalf of the Government, accept the principle of pay equality? He should accept it without equivocation. Will the Government open dialogue with the ASTI on that basis? Does the Taoiseach agree that the Lansdowne Road agreement must be replaced with a new agreement that sets out a clear timetable for having a single pay scale for all public sector workers and the restoration of allowances?

The Taoiseach: On supervision and substitution, at the heart of that industrial dispute is the withdrawal by the ASTI from working an extra hour per week.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It does not cover supervision and substitution.

The Taoiseach: What was working that extra hour about?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Taoiseach knows that it is a lie.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy.

The Taoiseach: In many cases it was about arranging parent-teacher meetings in such a way that they could be held outside school hours, which would have accommodated everybody, as well as supervision in corridors, schoolyards and so on. It is all very fine to say, "Open the schools." Boards of management are required to ensure adequate supervision and safety in corridors, schoolyards and so on. On that issue, there is money on the table to pay teachers in the morning. It was a decision taken unilaterally by the ASTI, which I very much regret. Obviously, as the Deputy is aware, in a pressurised society people have to discommode themselves or make special arrangements to attend parent-teacher meetings that are held during school hours.

The Deputy's question about equality is at the heart of what Government tries to do in terms of fairness. The Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, has focused, in particular, on creating better opportunities for people from disadvantaged areas in the school system and higher education. The recent budget contained a number of measures to deliver on this. Equality for others needs

to be referred to also. The Deputy must also bear in mind the issue of equality among public servants in different parts of the country and different parts of the public service-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: Pay equality.

The Taoiseach: ----- and between public servants and those who work elsewhere or who do not work at all. We have seen developments in the past week that show the concept that one size fits everybody does not work either. Obviously, the Lansdowne Road agreement caters for this. Schools are closed today because of the withdrawal from working an extra hour in the context of supervision and substitution.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That is absolutely pathetic.

The Taoiseach: That matter can be resolved quickly.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The strike is about equal pay.

An Ceann Comhairle: One speaker, please.

The Taoiseach: I hope there will be a willingness to bring this particular dispute to an end. As Deputy Micheál Martin pointed out, for those children in junior certificate classes and particularly those in leaving certificate classes this is a very important semester. It does not do anybody any good and disadvantages the students in leaving certificate classes, in particular, who need the teaching hours from teachers who are prepared to teach them. There is money to pay them, but it has resulted in a dispute because the ASTI, unfortunately, withdrew from the collective responsibility to work an extra one hour per week. In the interests of students, in particular, and paying teachers a few short weeks before Christmas, this element of the industrial dispute should be focused on immediately and sorted out.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I asked the Taoiseach to accept the principle of pay equality, but he dodged the question. I listened to the Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, say it beggared belief the ASTI would engage in industrial action. What beggars belief is that the Taoiseach thinks it is okay for new teachers to work for up to €8,000 a year less than their colleagues who are doing exactly the same job. That is why the teachers are out on the picket lines. In many cases, it is not because of their own pay scales, but because they are in solidarity with new recruits.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time, Deputy Adams.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Government seems to be trying to ratchet up what it might see as pressure on the teachers but it is making the situation worse. The Government is not addressing the issues and it is having a detrimental impact on pupils and families. I put the question again, and it is a simple question requiring a simple answer. Is it the Government's position that there will be pay equality for all teachers within the system or not? The Taoiseach does not have to say when it will be-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Adams.

Deputy Gerry Adams: -----but is it the Government's position that there will be pay equality and does he agree the Lansdowne Road agreement has to be replaced by a new agreement?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Adams referred to the question of the difference in pay, particularly for new entrant teachers. This matter is of particular concern to those who are caught in this

particular trap.

Deputy Gerry Adams: And for us too, and for the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: The TUI and the INTO sat down with officials, in the context of the Lansdowne Road agreement, and negotiated a great deal of benefit, monetary benefit, and a strategy for the future. That means that in the case of new entrant members, their pay will increase by 15% between 31 August 2016 and 1 January 2018, from €31,009 to €35,602. An individual member recruited since 1 September 2015 will see a 22% increase in his or her pay between 31 August 2016 and 1 January 2018, from €31,000 to €37,723.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: What about the qualification allowances?

The Taoiseach: I would point out that a previous administration took away the incremental payments for graduate nurses and it has taken all these years to get that rectified, and it was rectified in negotiations with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. This is an opportunity for ASTI members, and particularly for those young new entrants into teaching, to have pay increases, of a very substantial range from 15% to 22%, which are there for them now. That is the strategy that should be adopted here. As I have said, fairness and equality across all these different categories are central to the Minister's objectives in this case.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: So, the Taoiseach does not believe in paying the allowances.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Collins on behalf of the Rural Alliance group.

Deputy Michael Collins: There are four primary response agencies in Ireland; the fire service, the ambulance service, the Garda and the Irish Coast Guard. The Irish Coast Guard is the only primary response agency that is not legislated for in the State. The Irish Coast Guard is the fourth blue light service and it needs to be a stand-alone, legislated, primary response agency. The current system within which it operates impedes the growth and progress of the service as decisions are being made by managers in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport who have no direct involvement with the emergency service. A stand-alone legislated, primary response agency would have a chain of command structure filled by qualified and experienced coast guard personnel as is the case in the other three legislated primary response agencies within the State.

The main role of the Irish Coast Guard is to rescue people from dangerous seas, inland waters, mountains and caves, to organise immediate medical assistance and transport and to assist boats and ships within the State's jurisdiction. In any one year the Irish Coast Guard expects to handle around 2,500 maritime emergencies, assist approximately 4,500 people and save the lives of some 200 people. It will task coast guard helicopters on missions some 800 times, evacuate medical patients from the islands to hospitals on 100 occasions, assist other nations' coast guard services approximately 200 times and make nearly 6,000 maritime safety broadcasts to shipping, fishing and leisure craft users. The coast guard's role in our State cannot be underestimated. The crews of over 950 male and female volunteers are real life heroes. Currently, there are only three sector managers for the entire State. They have a combined job of managing all coastal units, which is a near impossible task. A minimum of another six sector manager positions and at least nine assistant sector manager positions need to be made available immediately in order to provide the support required and deserved by the coast guard volunteer coastal unit. In my own area in west Cork our coast guards in Goleen, Toe Head, Kinsale and Castletownbere are always ready to respond to calls, as are their colleagues throughout the

State, to rescue cliff walkers, to search for missing persons or to assist in search operations, such as the infamous cocaine seizure in Dunlough Bay in west Cork in 2007. I ask that legislation be enacted as soon as possible to protect the Coast Guard and ensure the future of the world class organisation which volunteers have worked so hard to develop. Following the enactment of legislation I ask that a budget be put in place to facilitate hiring additional sector managers and assistants. Will the Taoiseach assure us here today the Irish Coast Guard will retain all of its helicopter bases and mission co-ordination centres?

The Taoiseach: Nobody can disagree with the sentiment of what Deputy Collins is speaking about. The Civil Defence, mountain rescue teams, the RNLI and the Coast Guard service provide extraordinary benefits to the people. The Coast Guard service is especially relevant at this time because of the loss of an esteemed and valued member recently in County Clare. I should point out to Deputy Collins there has been an extensive and expensive budget for the Coast Guard service over recent years, with a fleet of new Sikorsky helicopters and other facilities, including the upgrading of the station on Valentia Island and number of other stations.

Speaking to some of the Coast Guard service recently, I advised them that in respect of the issues of concern to them they should submit their proposition to the Government and the Minister concerned. I agree these are men and women who give of their time voluntarily in extraordinarily difficult conditions because they wish to do so to help save lives and bring people to safety. Nobody can underestimate in that quadrant of services the courage, tenacity and commitment of ordinary people throughout the country. This is a service that is very much valued by the people. It is very much appreciated by the people and the Government will continue to support it. Twenty or 30 years ago these services were in their infancy and had very inferior facilities and capacity. It is very different now. While, unfortunately, accidents and tragedies happen at sea all of the time the Coast Guard service is one which stands up to the highest international standards and we will continue to support it.

Deputy Michael Collins: We both agree the Irish Coast Guard is one of the most progressive search and rescue organisations in the world. This is in no small part due to the volunteer Coast Guard teams. They do this on a voluntary basis and are out there on average 10,000 man hours per year, 24-7, 365 days a year, putting their lives at risk to help others. The helicopter service which the Coast Guard provides for the State is among the most modern in the world and provides an invaluable service to the people of the country. We and they need legislation to ensure the successful future of this primary response agency. The Taoiseach has said they are very much valued, and we all know their value, but will the Taoiseach assure us the legislation will be enacted as a matter of urgency?

The Taoiseach: As I have stated, the people who give of their time voluntarily for the Civil Defence, mountain rescue teams, the lifeboat service and the Coast Guard service are to be admired for their extraordinary commitment and courage. If we decide to legislate for a voluntary group we need to consider its implications very carefully. It is fair to say the Coast Guard service is very professional and operates to very high standards in terms of its training, its use of equipment, and the on-call situation it has as volunteers. Legislating for volunteers is certainly not an exact science. Deputy Collins can take it the Government and the Minister are very amenable to discussing these issues with the Coast Guard service. I recently advised it to send in its propositions on this and in other regards. From the Government's point of view, not only do we value the service but we will continue to fund it where we can to improve the level of services and facilities it has and its capacity to do its job. The question of legislation is one for discussion and the Coast Guard service knows and understands this.

Deputy Seamus Healy: The Taoiseach, the Minister for Education and Skills and the Government have broken their agreement with the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland. They have locked out teachers and locked out 250,000 students. There is only one industrial relations agreement between the Department of Education and Skills and the ASTI and that is the Haddington Road agreement, freely entered into by the Department of Education and teachers. Except where that agreement explicitly states otherwise, the agreement expired last 30 June. Crucially, a key area where the agreement extends into the future is that of supervision and substitution and how these are to be paid for. The agreement states that:

A gross additional payment equivalent to the 2011 lower payment rate paid for supervision and substitution will be included in the common basic scale for teachers. This will be included in two moieties with half included in the school year 2016/17 and the second half included in the school year 2017/18.

Teachers turned up for work to teach but the Taoiseach and his Minister broke their agreement by refusing to pay for substitution and supervision. They closed schools, locked out teachers and locked out students rather than honouring an agreement that they freely entered into. They are prepared to pay parents, citizens and members of another union in the same school but they are not prepared to honour the agreement they freely made with the ASTI.

Clearly this is not a question of money. It is an attempt to coerce and bully a union into a new agreement and Mussolini, Franco and their Irish blueshirt ally, General O'Duffy, would be proud of the Taoiseach and his Government today. His claim that the ASTI has unilaterally withdrawn from Croke Park hours is completely false. The Haddington Road agreement makes no provision for the maintenance of these hours beyond 30 June and, as the Taoiseach well knows, the majority of teachers do additional hours far in excess of Croke Park on an ongoing basis to support and develop students in music, arts, drama, sports, transitional year projects, etc. In any event the Croke Park hours have not been worked for months and this has not necessitated the closure of schools.

The Taoiseach and his Government are breaking the Haddington Road agreement. They are locking out teachers and using students as pawns to bully the ASTI into an agreement. Will the Taoiseach stop breaking the Haddington Road agreement, pay for supervision and substitution and allow our students and children back to school? Will he and his Government stop locking out teachers and holding students as hostages to force a trade union into an agreement to which it is not party and which union members have rejected? The Taoiseach should leave William Martin Murphy, the infamous Dublin employer who locked out workers in 1913, in his grave. He can stop the lock-out today to allow teachers and students back to work and he should allow the right to free trade unions in this country.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Finian McGrath is looking uneasy.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is going well when he can bring William Martin Murphy and General O'Duffy into the dispute. Deputy Healy is a good student of history and must have done his homework well.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Does the Taoiseach endorse what he said?

The Taoiseach: He is wrong, however, when he says the Minister and the Department have locked students and teachers out of schools. Boards of management are responsible for the opening of schools and for seeing that there is proper supervision in hallways, schoolyards and

classrooms.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Pass the buck.

The Taoiseach: The Minister has not closed down schools. The issue of supervision and substitution has arisen because the ASTI unilaterally withdrew from the collective agreement to work one hour extra per week.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Wrong again.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is not true.

The Taoiseach: That one hour was for parent-teacher meetings to be held during school hours to accommodate everybody. The pay of teachers in the INTO and the TUI includes a component of over €1,500 per year for supervision and substitution, as part of a negotiated deal through the system of collective agreements. That amount was and is available to the ASTI and would have been paid to its members but for the fact that they withdrew from that part of the agreement. I am sure Deputy Seamus Healy will agree that students should be able to go to school in what is a very important semester and that teachers should be available to teach them. The problem is not one which has been caused by the Minister, but he will do what he can to assist in bringing about a solution because we all want to see schools open, teachers teaching their students and students having the opportunity to learn and do their work, particularly those who will be doing their junior and leaving certificate examinations in June next year. The leaving certificate examinations will not be long in coming around again and students will need all of the time they can get for projects and doing other work with their teachers during class hours. This is an element which is causing serious difficulty because people do not know when schools will be open again. The fact that principals were denied the opportunity to get involved in making arrangements in this regard has not helped. Money is on the table for substitution and supervision payments, one of four issues on which the ASTI is in dispute with the Department and which could be resolved.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: What about equal pay?

The Taoiseach: I trust that the bilateral discussions that are ongoing will bring about a speedy resolution of this dispute and that we can then move on to-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The strike is about equal pay.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Seamus Healy: It is clear to anybody with an independent view that the Taoiseach, the Government and the Department of Education and Skills have locked out teachers and students. The Taoiseach's claim that the ASTI unilaterally withdrew from the Croke Park agreement on working hours is completely false, demonstrably so. He has claimed in the past few days that there is no money available to pay teachers. That is also false. In the last two budgets the Minister for Finance gave back €172 million to the wealthiest 5% in the country, €120 million of which was provided in budget 2016 and €52 million in budget 2017. We know from the Central Bank's report that the wealthiest 10% in the country own assets worth over €100 billion, an increase of €35 billion on peak boom levels, and that they do not pay one cent in tax on that money. I am asking the Minister and the Taoiseach to ensure moneys will be made available. The super rich have oodles of money which, if there was the political will to do so,

could be taxed at even a small rate. A 1% wealth tax on the super rich would help to pay for a huge amount of work to be done. Will the Taoiseach at least reverse the payment of the €172 million to the super rich in the last two budgets and make the money available for schools, pay and pensions restoration?

The Taoiseach: Returning to the question the Deputy asked originally about the industrial dispute arising from the withdrawal from supervision and substitution duties, money is on the table to deal with the issue.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Pay it.

The Taoiseach: In respect of the deal negotiated under previous pay agreements, there is a component of €1,500 per annum for teachers who involve themselves in supervision and substitution duties.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Pay it and schools could open in the morning.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy knows that.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I know that teachers have been locked out and that the Taoiseach could stop the strike this afternoon if he wished to do so.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy, please, let the Taoiseach respond?

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy expects a board of management-----

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Taoiseach did not engage directly with Deputy Seamus Healy, we could get through the answer.

The Taoiseach: I will engage with you.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: There is only one boss.

The Taoiseach: If Deputy Seamus Healy expects a board of management to open a school without providing for adequate supervision of students or staff, it will not do so because of health and safety regulations.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Many of them managed to do so.

The Taoiseach: This is a matter that can be resolved. As I said, money is on the table to pay teachers now.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Pay it.

The Taoiseach: The dispute resulted directly from ASTI withdrawing from working the extra hour for which supervision and substitution moneys are available now.

Deputy Seamus Healy: That is untrue, demonstrably so.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is not about supervision or extra hours.

The Taoiseach: I trust that the bilateral discussions which are under way and about which Deputy Healy knows will bring about a speedy conclusion to this particular industrial dispute between the ASTI and the Department.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Taoiseach should not be allowed to tell lies. The extra hours are not supervision.

An Ceann Comhairle: Resume your seat, Deputy Coppinger.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is correcting the record. The extra hours have nothing to do with supervision.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please resume your seat.

Order of Business

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on the rapporteur for the Business Committee, Deputy Clare Daly, to announce the Order of Business for the week and to move the proposals regarding arrangements for the taking of that business.

Deputy Clare Daly: Today's business shall be No. 9, Financial Resolutions for the Finance Bill 2016, one of which is on today's Supplementary Order Paper. Government business shall be No. 3, Social Welfare Bill 2016 – Order for Second Stage and Second Stage. Private Members' Business shall be No. 77, motion re Deputy and Senator pay under the Lansdowne Road agreement. Tomorrow's Government business shall be No. 3, Social Welfare Bill 2016 – Second Stage (resumed). Private Members' Business shall be No. 22, Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016 – Second Stage. Thursday's business shall be No. 10a, all-party motion re Calais to be taken without debate; No. 3, Social Welfare Bill 2016 – Second Stage (resumed); No. 15, Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 – Second Stage (resumed); No. 16, Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 – Second Stage (resumed); and No. 1, Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2014 [*Seanad*] – Second Stage. No. 11, the report on the formal recognition of Irish Sign Language from the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, will be taken in the evening slot.

I refer Members to the report of the Business Committee of 3 November 2016. In relation to today's business there is one proposal. It is proposed that the Financial Resolutions for the Finance Bill 2016 shall be moved together and decided without debate by one question, and that any division demanded thereon shall be taken immediately.

In relation to Wednesday's business there is one proposal. It is proposed that Second Stage of the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016 shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at 6.30 p.m.

In relation to Thursday's business, there are five proposals. It is proposed that:

(1) the Dáil shall sit at 10.00 a.m., and shall sit later than 7.48 p.m., and adjourn on the conclusion of the report on the formal recognition of Irish Sign Language;

(2) the all-party motion on Calais shall be taken without debate;

(3) Second Stage of the Social Welfare Bill 2016 shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at 3.30 p.m.;

(4) if the Social Welfare Bill concludes before midday, the weekly division time shall be taken at the normal time, that is, after questions on promised legislation, and, if the Social Welfare

8 November 2016

Bill does not conclude before midday, the weekly division time shall be taken at 3.30 p.m.; and

(5) if the weekly division time is taken at 3.30 p.m., Oral Questions shall be taken on the conclusion of the weekly division time.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three proposals to be put to the House today. Is the proposal for dealing with today's business agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with Wednesday's business agreed to?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is not agreed. Since the Business Committee last met the week before last, an issue we have discussed this morning and which is of the gravest importance to the entire country has come into view. We have major disruption of our secondary schools. Students or teachers are locked out, depending on how one wants to view it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a proposal in relation to the Order of Business?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I have a proposal. There has been claim and counterclaim today on the reasons for the teachers' dispute and the method by which it can be resolved and that requires that we have a debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Deputy proposing-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is simply unacceptable that this could continue.

An Ceann Comhairle: What is your proposal, Deputy? Let us not have a debate about it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: My proposal is that we have a debate. I accept that we cannot have it today given the schedule before us, but it is reasonable to propose that there is a proper debate tomorrow to give everybody an opportunity to clarify his or her views and to put forward proposals to resolve it so that this lock-out does not continue and tens and thousands of young people are not further discommoded.

An Ceann Comhairle: Therefore, the question is being opposed.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Yes.

Question, "That the proposal for dealing with Wednesday's business be agreed to," put and declared carried.

Deputy Regina Doherty: The Business Committee-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: What?

Deputy Regina Doherty: The question was put to the Business Committee.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That was two weeks ago. The lock-out has happened since then.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am asking for a bit of urgency to respond to something that is happening now.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Boyd Barrett, please.

Deputy Bríd Smith: We did not know two weeks ago that the gates would be closed tomorrow and on Thursday and Friday.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are proceeding to take Thursday's business. Is the proposal for dealing with Thursday's business agreed to?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We have a real problem with Thursday's business as we face the prospect on Wednesday that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are going to cut out the voices of smaller parties in the Dáil. I could not let Thursday's business go through without recognising that. Does the Taoiseach support the proposal that smaller parties would not be able to share time if they are in a common group and the time available being cut? How can we agree to Thursday's business when the Government party and Fianna Fáil are working together to shut down the voices of smaller parties, starting on Thursday-----

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

Deputy Eamon Ryan: -----if the motion on Wednesday is passed?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Deputy should not be telling untruths to the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is nothing that I see on the agenda to address the particular concern of Deputy Ryan.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: There is a danger that on Thursday we will not have the same speaking rights that we have today, if the Government and Fianna Fáil plans, working together, are agreed.

An Ceann Comhairle: You are pre-empting what might happen at a committee of the House. It is not in order to do so.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I wanted to flag my concerns. I will come back on Thursday if there is that eventuality.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your concerns are noted.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Does Deputy Ryan believe in equality? He clearly does not.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy Martin. Deputy Adams has the floor.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I want to object to the imposition of the guillotine on Thursday on the Second Stage debate on the Social Welfare Bill. Teachta Aengus Ó Snodaigh objected to this in the Business Committee. The Government said very clearly there would be no more guillotines. That is the basis on which I am coming forward. I ask the Taoiseach to allow any Teachta who wants to make a contribution on the Social Welfare Bill to be allowed to do so.

Deputy Regina Doherty: As agreed at the Business Committee the other day, we have allocated nine hours to Second Stage of the Social Welfare Bill this week. The members of the committee were good enough to extend the sitting time to facilitate those extra hours. As agreed, if we have more speakers than there is time available, we can order the business to go on next week. Right now, I do not have any speakers to take me past tomorrow. Deputy Adams might tell his colleagues that if they want to keep the debate going, they might contact the

Whips office to get some speaking time.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am pleased that the Government has conceded the point that there will not be a guillotine.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please can we have order.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I want to repeat my point on the proposal in regard to Thursday. If the lock-out goes ahead on Wednesday, I simply cannot believe we will finish out the week without a serious discussion in this House. It is a dereliction of duty for the House not to debate the issue in detail and try to find a solution.

Deputy Regina Doherty: The Business Committee-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Business Committee did not meet last week.

Deputy Regina Doherty: We talked-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: This has come up since then. If the Minister of State, Deputy Doherty, does not understand that an urgent crisis has arisen since last week, then she is living on a different planet to the teachers and tens of thousands of pupils who have been discommoded.

An Ceann Comhairle: You have made your point.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have order?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I urge the Government to allow for such a debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: Wait now, please. Deputy Boyd Barrett, in fairness, is entitled to silence. Let him make his point.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I put that to the Government.

I refer to the all-party motion on Calais, to be taken without debate. The problem is that we have not seen the motion. When will we see it? I am not signing a blank cheque for a motion that relates to the fate of 200 extremely vulnerable children. I will not agree to an all-party motion, which we have not seen, without debate. Can we see the motion?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has made his point.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: If the motion is not what has been sought by the Not On Our Watch group, we want it amended and we want a debate. If it is what has been sought and what has been discussed in this House, happy days. If there is any row-back in the motion that is to be tabled by the Government in terms of the 200 unaccompanied children, we want a debate on it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let us get an answer to the Deputy's question. He might resume his seat. Will the Taoiseach take the question on the motion relating to Calais and the children from France?

The Taoiseach: Outstanding discussions need to take place between the relevant parties.

Dáil Éireann

This matter was referred to at Cabinet this morning and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality made observations on it. The House is aware that the Government agreed to take in 4,000 migrants, or asylum seekers-refugees, and that work is under way. We are cognisant of the difficulties with the Calais camp, which has now been dismantled. I understand that the situation has, if one likes, reduced from one that was a humanitarian crisis to one that is being somewhat better managed by the French social authorities. Tusla has made comments about the situation here also. Discussions are taking place between the parties to see if agreement can be reached. We would like to help, but there are other factors to be taken into account in respect of our capacity and available facilities. As soon as agreement is reached, if it is reached, everyone will see the motion.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will there be correspondence to every Member?

The Taoiseach: Yes.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Can I object to that?

An Ceann Comhairle: No; the Deputy has raised the matter.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am not agreeing to that. We cannot sign a blank cheque.

Question put: "That the proposals for dealing with Thursday's business be agreed to."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 93; Staon, 0; Níl, 25.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Staon</i>	<i>Níl</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>		<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>		<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>		<i>Brady, John.</i>
<i>Brassil, John.</i>		<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>		<i>Collins, Joan.</i>
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>		<i>Collins, Michael.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>		<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Browne, James.</i>		<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>		<i>Cullinane, David.</i>
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>		<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>		<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>		<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>		<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>		<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>		<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>		<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>		<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>		<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>		<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>		<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>		<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>		<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>

<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>		<i>Smith, Brid.</i>
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>		<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>		<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>		
<i>Curran, John.</i>		
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>		
<i>Daly, Clare.</i>		
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>		
<i>Deasy, John.</i>		
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>		
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>		
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>		
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>		
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>		
<i>English, Damien.</i>		
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>		
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>		
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>		
<i>Harty, Michael.</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>Kenny, Enda.</i>		
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>		
<i>Lahart, John.</i>		
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>		
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>		
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>		
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>		
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>		
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>		

<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</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'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>		
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>		
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		
<i>Wallace, Mick.</i>		
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Regina Doherty and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett and Joan Collins.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: The business is agreed for Thursday. I call Deputy Micheál Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Lansdowne Road agreement was a central part of the programme for Government and the confidence and supply agreement. Last evening, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Leo Varadkar, made the comment that the context had changed.

8 November 2016

I understand the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is to meet the unions, and the Government has assessed the matter this morning. In negotiating the confidence and supply agreement, Fine Gael was adamant that the Lansdowne Road agreement would be central to public pay policy and that if there were to be any confidence and supply agreement, our party would need to sign up to it. Other political parties signed up to it subsequently. From what I am hearing from Ministers, it seems there is a change and that the Government is changing tack in regard to the Lansdowne Road agreement given what happened over the past week or so. That the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Varadkar, said the Government would have to examine what changes could be made to the agreement and that the context had changed indicates the Government is changing course regarding the Lansdowne Road agreement. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform made comments last week on bringing forward the scheduling. Where stands the Lansdowne Road agreement now?

The Taoiseach: We made it very clear that the Government stands by the Lansdowne Road agreement. Clearly, the decision of the Labour Court has to be considered by the GRA and the AGSI in respect of their members balloting on its recommendations. Obviously, the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, met the public service committee of the ICTU and today sees the first meeting of the Public Service Pay Commission. This morning the Government obviously considered this issue. Following a discussion on the Labour Court's recommendations issued last week and pay policy more broadly, it reiterated its commitment to a collective approach to industrial relations and pay policy. It will have to reflect on the most effective means of delivering economic security and stability for the country. Clearly, the Lansdowne Road agreement is a central part of this and the Government will continue to stand by it. In the context of the Labour Court's findings, the recommendations will require careful consideration by the Government also. That is why the Minister met the public service committee of the ICTU. As I said, today also sees the first meeting of the Public Service Pay Commission.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister has already met the ICTU.

The Taoiseach: Yes. He met it yesterday.

Deputy Micheál Martin: To be frank, I do not believe the Taoiseach has brought clarity to the issue.

The Taoiseach: I will bring clarity to it.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Is Deputy Micheál Martin reassured?

Deputy Micheál Martin: We might have to meet to discuss this issue.

The Taoiseach: The Government issued a statement-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Is Fianna Fáil still supplying?

The Taoiseach: -----and the Minister will be responding later.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Supply is getting scarce.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Does Deputy Micheál Martin have confidence?

The Taoiseach: The Government strongly supports and will stand by the Lansdowne Road agreement.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Supply is limited.

The Taoiseach: The Government sees a collective approach to ensure economic stability and progress for the good of the country.

Prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing (Extraction of Hydrocarbon) Bill 2016: First Stage

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing and all other practices to extract Hydrocarbon from coal seams, shale rock and tight sands in Ireland.

I am aware that the week before last we debated Deputy Tony McLoughlin's Bill which I supported to ban fracking. In parallel with whatever work he was doing on that Bill, I was working to update a similar Bill that I had submitted last December, namely, the Prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing Bill 2015. I withdrew it from the lottery because it had become clear in the aftermath of events in Antrim that the definition of hydraulic fracturing did not necessarily cover other forms of unconventional extraction of hydrocarbons that essentially were fracking or paved the way for it. Like Deputy Tony McLoughlin, I was working with Friends of the Earth, An Taisce and other groups to refine the Bill to make it more specific and allow it to catch up with technological developments.

I am happy with Deputy Tony McLoughlin's Bill, as I signalled to him two weeks ago. I commend him, including for giving a voice to campaigners in his area and environmental campaigners generally who are fighting to ensure we will rule out any possibility of engaging in hydraulic fracturing. However, there is a small difference between his Bill and mine. Actually, it is a significant difference and I suspect that he will probably agree with me. If we have moved towards an agreement or a consensus that we should rule out hydraulic fracturing onshore, as I hope we have, that prohibition should apply offshore also. That is the additional feature of my Bill.

I do not intend to add my Bill to the lottery at this point. We will see how the debate goes on Deputy Tony McLoughlin's Bill on Committee Stage when I hope he and the Government will be open to an amendment to include the offshore in the prohibition of hydraulic fracturing and unconventional extraction. The reason is simple. Human health, the impact on the environment and the need to address climate change were the three key issues on which the House seemed to agree were at stake in trying to ban hydraulic fracturing. The evidence suggests human health, the environment and water will be adversely affected by hydraulic fracturing and that there is no justification, particularly in the light of our Paris Declaration commitments to address climate change urgently, for extracting more hydrocarbons or finding new ways to do so. If that is true onshore, self-evidently, it is true offshore also.

A further important concern people have raised is seismic impacts, for example, the potential for earthquakes to occur and so on. There is considerable evidence that this technology can contribute to earthquakes and that it has done so.

The precautionary principle that was cited in the debate about hydraulic fracturing onshore

8 November 2016

needs to apply to hydraulic fracturing offshore also. Our offshore territorial waters are a precious resource, just as our land resources are. All of the reasons that have been recounted - tourism, biodiversity, human habitats, animal habitats and so on - apply just as much offshore. Any prohibition on fracking must, therefore, apply offshore. It is in that context that I am submitting the Bill. I hope including it in the lottery will not be necessary further down the road if the Government is open to accepting my amendment to Deputy Tony McLoughlin's Bill on Committee Stage. If it is not, I will try to press ahead with my Bill.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing Bill 2015: Leave to Withdraw

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I move:

That leave be granted to withdraw the Prohibition of Hydraulic Fracturing Bill 2015.

Question put and agreed to.

Finance Bill 2016: Financial Resolutions

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I move the following Resolutions:

THAT sections 784, 787G, 787K, 787O, 787R, 787S and 790D of Part 30 of, and Schedule 23B to, the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which relate to Retirement Annuities, Personal Retirement Savings Accounts, imputed distributions from certain funds and the limit on tax-relieved pension funds, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Part 8 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for rules for the taxation of deposit interest, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which deals with the taxation of special purpose companies set up to securitise assets, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Part 27 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which deals with unit trusts and offshore funds, be amended by the insertion of Chapter 1B into that Part and

that that Act be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT--

(1) Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999), which provides for mineral oil tax, and Schedules 2 and 2A to that Act, which provide for the rates of that tax be amended, and

(2) sections 55 and 56 of the Finance Act 2014 (No. 37 of 2014), which previously provided for the measures referred to in paragraph (1) and were not commenced be repealed,

in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 2 of Part 3 of the Finance Act 2010 (No. 5 of 2010), which, in sections 71 and 72, provides for a relief from natural gas carbon tax for natural gas used for high-efficiency heat and power cogeneration, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 3 of Part 3 of the Finance Act 2010 (No. 5 of 2010), which, in sections 82 and 83, provides for a relief from solid fuel carbon tax for coal used for high-efficiency heat and power cogeneration, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999), which, in section 100, provides for a relief from mineral oil tax for mineral oil used for high-efficiency heat and power cogeneration, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 1 of Part 10 of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 (No. 31 of 2010), which relates to special schemes, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 126AA of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 (No. 31 of 1999), which provides for a stamp duty in the form of a further levy on certain financial institutions, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 86 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 (No. 1 of 2003), which provides for an exemption from capital acquisitions tax in the case of a gift or an inheritance of certain dwelling houses, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

Question put and agreed to.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Brexit Issues

1. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach the measures in place to engage with Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas on Ireland's position ahead of the negotiations with the United Kingdom following the vote to leave the European Union. [32801/16]

2. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the all-Ireland forum on Brexit that was held on 2 November 2016. [33523/16]

3. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the civic dialogue conference. [33550/16]

4. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the reason he indicated at the civic forum that the British Government could initiate Article 50 by December 2016. [33802/16]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 4, inclusive, together.

The all-island civic dialogue on Brexit which I hosted last week with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade was an important opportunity to hear a wide range of views on the implications of Brexit for this island. The dialogue was the first in a series of sessions to discuss both the challenges and the opportunities arising from Brexit on an all-island basis. It was an open and inclusive event, bringing together around 300 people from all parts of the island of Ireland, representing a broad range of civic society groups, trade unions, business groups and non-governmental organisations.

I very much welcome the constructive engagement of those who attended from political parties, North and South, including many from this House. I was also impressed by the quality of the interventions from across civic society, from large business groups to local and community representatives from Border areas. I was struck by the appetite of the audience and participants for deeper consultation and engagement. As I said during my remarks at the event, this is just the first part of an ongoing dialogue. We need more detailed discussions across a number of specific themes and sectors which will form the next phase of our dialogue. We will hold a number of sectoral consultations in the coming weeks and months and I will convene another all-island civic dialogue in plenary format early next year.

During my remarks at the dialogue I noted that the Prime Minister, Ms Theresa May, had indicated that she would trigger Article 50 by no later than the end of March but that this did not preclude her from taking this action at an earlier date. That was a simple statement of fact at the time, although the subsequent ruling of the High Court on the role of Parliament on Article 50 reduces the likelihood of an earlier notification.

I will continue to update the Members of the House on Brexit related issues through a range of methods, including weekly responses to parliamentary questions and Leader's Questions, regular briefings for party leaders, as required, making statements to the House before and after European Council meetings and making statements to the House itself, as required.

Deputy Paul Murphy: To follow up on the Taoiseach's comments on Article 50 and when it would be triggered, he seems to be rowing back somewhat from the comments that were reported in terms of a real possibility that it could be triggered earlier than March and even before the end of this year. In particular, I ask the Taoiseach for his opinion on the latest developments on Brexit in Britain in the context of the decision of the High Court. Does the Taoiseach agree

that while it is appropriate that the British Parliament should discuss a mandate for the Brexit negotiations for the British Government and that there should be such a democratic discussion and accountability of the British Government to the British Parliament, it would be absolutely wrong for the Parliament or the courts to act to try to subvert or deny the wishes of the people, as expressed in the referendum, to exit the European Union?

Deputy Gerry Adams: I commend the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Government for holding last week's civic dialogue. I also thank all those who organised the event which ran very smoothly. It was informative, wide ranging and many voices expressed their opinion on Brexit. While the Unionist parties did not participate, I am certain they were listening to what was discussed at the forum. I am sure they are still listening to what is going on.

What is going on is not very good, as we all appreciate, for the people of this island, whatever our position may be on the constitutional issue. Monday's report by the Department of Finance and the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, reveals some of the very real dangers. The report finds that a so-called hard Brexit would permanently damage the economy, reducing its size by almost 4% and increasing unemployment by as much as 2%. It goes on to give some detail around all this. I know that there is currently a short-term gain for retailers in the North, which I am sure is welcome in places like Enniskillen, Derry and Newry but that will be short-lived and will ultimately lead to inflation and an increase in the cost of living for citizens in the North.

How do we combat all this? The Taoiseach should give us more meat in terms of the plans and the next steps in the programme for the civic dialogue. He has not gone any further today but has simply told us that it will meet again next year. We need to have more detail, particularly about the notion of moving the conference throughout the island.

I was at a disability rights conference in north Louth recently, organised by Ms Martina Anderson, MEP. An issue was raised there which I had not thought about previously. It was very clear that the rights of people with disabilities, which are now legislatively based, will be done away with if the British, or rather the English, Government leaves the European Union and drags the North with it. This is another issue of grave concern.

The last time we discussed this matter I asked the Taoiseach whether he had asked Prime Minister May about the implications for the Good Friday Agreement post-Brexit. I particularly asked if the Taoiseach had asked her about the Human Rights Act but he did not answer me. He just ignored the question entirely. Later the journalist Justine McCarthy asked the same question and the Taoiseach on that occasion told her that he had not raised the issue with Prime Minister May. I congratulate Justine McCarthy for being able to get the answer that I was not able to get. The Taoiseach also said that he did not have enough time but I would suggest that he did not make it a priority. That is part of the problem. This Government does not have the imagination, vision or investment in the process of political change on the island, particularly arising from the Good Friday Agreement. We must raise these issues and we look to the Taoiseach to do so. He must stand up for people in the Six Counties who expressed their vote. They have not given their consent to being dragged out of the European Union at the whim of a right-wing government in London. I ask the Taoiseach if he has had the opportunity to raise any of these matters relating to the Good Friday Agreement with the British.

Has the Taoiseach been briefed on the recent High Court decision in London and its implica-

tions? That decision came the day after the Taoiseach's comment to the effect that he thought that the British Prime Minister might trigger Brexit before March. Has the Government been briefed on this issue? Has the Taoiseach raised any of these crucially important issues, which as equal co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, he is obliged to protect?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I feel the civic forum went well. The participation of stakeholders in business and farming and the raising of workers' issues, trade unions and so on were quite effective. However, if it is to be a true dialogue, it must continue and we must get down to specifics with the various sectors that are represented. The potential impact on the academic and research communities is, for example, a very real issue, as is the concern around North-South interactions and the all-island economy.

We have heard various fears expressed by different sectors, but I am not clear on what the Government's response will be. It is interesting to note that the more one looks at the budget, the more one sees that it failed to make any adequate provision of substance for Brexit. When one reads last month's publications from the Department of Finance on the sectors that are exposed to Brexit and yesterday's report from the Department and the ESRI, one sees that even in the context of a so-called soft Brexit, there will be downside repercussions for Irish economic growth, GDP and employment unless action is taken. We need to move into the space of putting it to our European colleagues that direct aid will be needed for some industries. The reports from the Department of Finance indicate that traditional manufacturing will be under threat, the regions outside of Dublin will be badly hit and the Border regions will be hit hardest by a hard Brexit or even a soft Brexit. The Department identifies particular sectors that are at risk including farming, agrifood, traditional manufacturing, tourism and others. The thinking cap should have been on with regard to what will be required in the next year or so and then in the aftermath of Brexit actually happening. Are scenarios being prepared in terms of the supports that the Government may have to provide to transition certain SMEs out of trouble, that is, those which are heavily reliant on the British market to sell their produce? The same question applies in quite a number of other areas, including our VAT rate, for example.

We must accept the urgency of this because it is very serious. Brexit fundamentally alters the economic model that we have been operating since the 1970s. The model we have been working under for the last 45 to 50 years will be turned upside down by the decision of the British to leave the European Union unless Britain magically gets a Norway-type deal, with full access to the Single Market, without tariffs. We would love to see such a deal, but we are not getting any sense of that happening right now; therefore, we need to prepare for the negative scenarios. One can add into the mix the negative figures on income tax and the fact that retail sales are beginning to flatten out. Manufacturing output in general is down again this month. I accept that these are monthly figures but if one puts it all together, there are significant challenges ahead. Will the Taoiseach indicate whether he has approached the European Commission and pointed out these realities and the fact that intervention will be required? Has he outlined or published his negotiating goals or principles in advance of any of this? It is important that this would happen. I would argue that maybe the time has come for us to have a meaningful discussion in this House about the measures we will be looking for to mitigate the impact of what has been a disastrous decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. It is time to talk substance. There is a degree of superficiality in terms of the debate.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I join others in commending the Taoiseach for facilitating the first "open mic" for all the different stakeholders who feel this momentous decision by the United Kingdom will impact on them. I stayed for the full debate because I thought it was most

important. I agree with the Taoiseach that the impact of Brexit is probably the most serious issue we will face as a nation in our lifetime. It will certainly be as challenging as the economic disaster we battled our way through for the past few years.

In respect of the first question on the Order Paper today, it is and has been important to allow all the social and economic actors in this State to have a voice and we need to continue to do this. Fundamentally, we need a united clear voice in this House. I am not reassured by the notion that the Taoiseach will be amenable to answer normal Leaders' Questions or take Topical Issues or anything else. We need a structure. We need some way in which the negotiating position of the 27 member states is impacted by the best interests of the people of this island, North and South, because as other speakers have said, nobody will be impacted as much as the people on this island. I do not expect the Taoiseach to give me an answer now, but I ask him to reflect on how the Oireachtas can move into a different forum to ensure we deal with the issues of substance about which Deputy Micheál Martin spoke. We can all identify the challenges but we must scope out the best solutions and influence the negotiating position of the United Kingdom in the first instance. One of the things that struck me in the debate at the forum was the notion that we would wait until negotiations start and somehow have a tripartite discussion involving the 26 member states, Ireland and the United Kingdom. It will not be like that. It will be the United Kingdom with a set-out position and the European Commission negotiating for the 27 member states; therefore, we need to influence the opening positions of both the United Kingdom and the 27 member states before Article 50 is triggered. I ask the Taoiseach to give serious consideration as to how we can as an Oireachtas deal with that issue.

Deputy Gerry Adams asked whether there have been any specific briefings relating to the judgment of the UK High Court. One issue many of us have talked about is the possibility that at the end of the negotiation period of two or three years, the people of the United Kingdom will have the chance to vote again. Implicit in the judgment was that once Article 50 of the Lisbon treaty is triggered, it is irrevocable. Without treaty change, there is no comeback from this. That is a fundamental issue. Does the Taoiseach have legal advices that this is the position or will it ultimately be a determination of the European Court of Justice?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Unfortunately, I could not attend the dialogue last week because I had a commitment-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The Deputy should not take too long because we have time restrictions and are over time.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I agree with Deputy Brendan Howlin. There will not always be agreement but there will be agreement in some areas and we should try to achieve agreement in these areas and work together regardless of whether it is taking up issues with the European Union or the British Government around things like grant funding in Northern Ireland, making sure we do not have a hard Border and other issues relating to particular sectors. In so far as the dialogue has started, is there recognition that one of the lessons of all of this is that our economy is not diversified enough and that it is too dependent on a couple of key sectors, notably beef? I submitted a question that was not taken. I was contacted by the Iranian ambassador before the summer break who told me that Iran was willing to sign a contract for beef with this country worth €2 billion if we were willing to re-establish the embassy in Tehran. That is something the Taoiseach should know. The Iranians even offered a building in Tehran if the Taoiseach did decide to re-establish the embassy.

8 November 2016

I saw a shocking graph at a meeting at the weekend which showed that when one stripped out of our growth figures-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The next question will be curtailed because the Ceann Comhairle-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: -----intellectual property-related trade-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The Ceann Comhairle indicated as he was leaving that the next question would have to be curtailed if a contribution went on too long. I am sure he was not anticipating the Deputy's speech.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Nobody else was interrupted.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We are moving on. The Deputy has had more than his fair share. He did not have a question.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Paul Murphy raised a question about Article 50. It is only 18 weeks to the end of March. I would not want anybody to be complacent and wait until the last few days in March expecting that only then will the Prime Minister decide to trigger Article 50. When I made that comment at the civic forum, what I had in mind was that we have no time to waste and that we should be looking at what we must discuss and get ready for. At the time, it was the Prime Minister's right or it was assumed to be her right to trigger Article 50 whenever she thought it appropriate. As that could be any time from December through to January or February, it might not be at the end of the March. The UK High Court has made its ruling on the basis that only Parliament has the authority to trigger Article 50, which is the legal route out of the European Union for the United Kingdom and that this precludes the invoking of Article 50 by the Prime Minister or the Government under the royal prerogative, which gives it sole authority over foreign policy and the making and unmaking of treaties. The High Court ruled that the European Communities Act 1972, which gives effect to the United Kingdom's EU membership, is a matter of domestic law and not foreign policy. Everybody is aware that the British Government intends to appeal that ruling to the UK Supreme Court. Arrangements have been made for that to happen in December. I do not know what the outcome of that will be and whether the Supreme Court will support the High Court or come to a different decision. I cannot say at this stage whether it will upset the timescale set out by the Prime Minister. She contends that Article 50 will still be triggered by the end of March 2017.

Deputy Gerry Adams mentioned the fact that the Unionist parties did not participate in the civic forum. I met Mike Nesbitt, MLA, in Stormont and hope to meet the First Minister, Arlene Foster, MLA, on Sunday in Enniskillen before the meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council on 18 November. I am sure everybody is listening to this debate. I thought that the ESRI report on a Norway or Swiss-style operation or a WTO arrangement spoke for itself in that if the Government was to do nothing, the implications would be very serious. The Government will do what it can. Our priorities remain the economy, jobs, the situation in Northern Ireland, the peace process, Border and citizenship issues, the common travel area and so on.

In response to Deputy Gerry Adams, it will be important to move some of the sectoral and thematic issues out from Dublin. As the Deputy knows, I was in Carlingford, Blackrock, Dundalk and Newry recently. At one of the meetings of the Brexit conference yesterday, we agreed to go to Newry for the next thematic session which will involve education and research. We will set out a timetable throughout the country, North and South, for those thematic issues.

We will have a further plenary session early in the new year. I have been invited by the Newry Junior Chamber and the Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade to go back to Newry and I intend to take up that opportunity. I have made the point that the Government will continue its co-guarantorship requirement in respect of the Good Friday Agreement. I understand that has been reiterated by different British Ministers.

Deputy Micheál Martin is right. We discussed a number of sectoral areas, including energy, the agrifood sector, hospitality, education and research, water, and human rights. Following yesterday's meeting of the Brexit committee, all these themes and sectors will be outlined and we will decide where they should be held around the country and in the North, followed by a plenary session afterwards.

I made the point about the Brexit committee. I have had to deal with questions about whether to appoint a Minister for this or a Minister for that. This is a national challenge for everybody. For that reason I recall back in 1969 when Jack Lynch - God rest him - was standing here, they had several options about how to deal with the challenge then. In this case it is about Ireland, the people, the economy and our future. It should be led by the Taoiseach, the Department of the Taoiseach with everybody involved. Let us figure out a way here of having everybody discuss it here. We could devote an hour and a half or two hours every week to Brexit; I do not mind. We could set up an Oireachtas committee to deal with it. It is appropriate that the party leaders should be briefed regularly. If they require information individually it should and will be given to them because they each need to be able to talk to their people in Brussels. In that sense these things are important.

What we know is as follows. First, Article 50 will be triggered by the end of March.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Not December.

The Taoiseach: Second, there will be no return to a hard Border. Both Governments agree the benefits of the common travel area should be preserved. We stand by the Good Friday Agreement. There will be no access to the Single Market without freedom of movement of people. The European Council makes the political decisions about all of this.

What do we not know? We do not know whether the British Government intends to stay with the Single Market, pull out of it or have elements of it made available to it. Does the United Kingdom intend to remove itself from the customs union, which would bring other complications? The economy, jobs, the people and our relationships with Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the European Union remain central to our priorities. It is appropriate that we should discuss measures that might be taken here. Some extra facilities were made available to the agencies, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has introduced a scheme for those in the agriculture sector. It might be possible to expand that into the food business and so on.

I have no objection to the House having a weekly session for an hour or whatever Deputies want. If the committees can agree, I would be happy to do that in order that the people are fully briefed because everybody has to wear the national jersey here.

In response to Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett, I have spoken to the Minister, Deputy Charles Flanagan, in respect of embassies in different locations around the world. I am aware of approaches that were made in respect of Iran, but that is a matter for a separate analysis.

As far as Brexit is concerned, I would like to think we give everybody the fullest information possible when it is needed and appropriate in order that everybody clearly understands the impact of this decision is the most serious of the past 50 years.

Brexit Issues

5. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Taoiseach if he has sought bilateral meetings with the First Minister for Northern Ireland, Arlene Foster, and the leader of the UUP, Mike Nesbitt, regarding Brexit and the all-island civic dialogue. [33516/16]

6. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Taoiseach the status of any further discussions with the devolved administrations in the United Kingdom, in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales regarding Brexit. [33530/16]

7. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meetings on 3 November 2016 with the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties. [33551/16]

8. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Taoiseach if he has been in contact with the Northern Ireland First Minister since the civic forum on Brexit was held on 2 November 2016. [33804/16]

9. Deputy Eamon Ryan asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meetings with the leaders of the UUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin that took place on 3 November 2016 in Stormont; and the understandings that were reached regarding the legal and constitutional developments in regard to the invocation of Article 50 during the Brexit process. [33825/16]

The Taoiseach: I propose to answer Questions Nos. 5 to 9, inclusive, together.

I was in Northern Ireland last week to meet representatives of the Newry Chamber of Commerce to hear at first hand of the challenges of Brexit in Border areas. I also outlined the Government's concerns and position in a speech at an event organised by the Newry Junior Chamber. Subsequently, together with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan, I held bilateral meetings with the leaders of Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the UUP and the Alliance Party in Stormont. Our discussions focused on how best to work together to achieve the best possible outcome for Ireland and Northern Ireland in the context of the forthcoming negotiations and discussions on Brexit.

It did not prove possible to meet representatives of the DUP on this occasion. However, I will be attending the Remembrance Sunday service in Enniskillen on Sunday together with the First Minister, Arlene Foster, MLA. I also expect to meet the First Minister in Dublin in advance of the North-South Ministerial Council which takes place in Armagh on 18 November.

I will also attend the British-Irish Council meeting later this month - I believe in Cardiff - where I will have the opportunity to meet the leaders of the devolved administrations as we continue our work on the implications of Brexit for all member administrations.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I thank the Taoiseach for his answer. Everybody who attended the all-Ireland civic dialogue was aware of the absence of the Unionists, from both the DUP and the UUP. It was also clear that if we are to have a consensus approach it is important that their input is facilitated in whatever way we need to devise to ensure they are comfortable to bring those influences into a dialogue or a discussion. The Taoiseach has had discussions with

the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the best way to do that to ensure we have a joined-up approach to dealing with issues. Everyone has outlined a myriad of issues, but the single biggest issue is trade. I am struck by the blind optimism that I hear from every British voice about the inevitability of a trade deal, although they have an embargo, if one likes, on the notion of the free movement of people. I believe this is blindly optimistic and it will have detrimental effects on this island.

During a recent trip by the British Prime Minister to India to do a trade deal, the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Modi, linked access of Indian workers and students as part of trade. It was suggested by *The Observer* that the post-Brexit India-UK trade deal has now suffered a hammer blow. The more dialogue the United Kingdom has with other third countries the more it will find that it is not so easy to deal with trade issues. We need to have our view as to how we can secure our linkages into the British market. That means having a joined-up view from the island of Ireland, meaning we need to work out how to get the DUP and the UUP involved.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We have only 11 minutes left and we will try to get the Taoiseach's reply, if everybody co-operates.

Deputy Joan Burton: Has the Taoiseach spoken to the Northern Ireland deputy First Minister on the proposal aired in the newspapers in recent days? The current legal indications are that a vote on Brexit will be required in the British Parliament and that is likely to be very close. Many MPs from Scotland and England who have attended various meetings have very strongly indicated their view and expectation that there will be a vote. Has the Taoiseach asked the Northern Ireland deputy First Minister in the event of such a vote being called - a very important vote - if Sinn Féin MPs will take their seats in Westminster and vote in favour of the interests of the whole island of Ireland?

In our discussions so far and the many question and answer sessions with the Taoiseach here, there has been a very strong approach by all the parties, including Sinn Féin, to an all-island approach. I was a little surprised to see a Member of the European Parliament denouncing the idea without even giving it any consideration in terms of what the advantages might be. At times parties do have to act in the national interest and in the interests of the island. Has the Taoiseach had an opportunity to discuss that issue with the deputy First Minister?

I turn to what will happen when Mrs. May triggers Article 50. This is something on which we have to have legal advice from the Attorney General. What will happen to the European Union's legal relationships with the United Kingdom? We are given to understand that once the United Kingdom triggers Article 50, there will be no going back. Clearly, the court case may result in prolonged discussions, but essentially - as can be seen from the ESRI's report yesterday - it looks like Britain will be out of the European Union by 2019. Perhaps the Taoiseach might let me know if he has heard anything from the deputy First Minister and whether the island of Ireland's interests will be put first? I know that when elections were last held, it was not expected that the people of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, would vote for Brexit, but it may be important to utilise all the votes on the island of Ireland in the interests of all the people on the island of Ireland.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I very much welcome the invitation from the Newry chambers and the decision to hold a meeting of the civic dialogue there. That is very good. Unlike the Labour Party, Sinn Féin sticks to its electoral mandate. We were not elected - it was my great honour to represent the people of Belfast for a long time - to take our seats in the British Parliament. It

is a foreign parliament; it is not our parliament and we owe no allegiance to the English Queen. However, we wish her and the people of Britain well. We have been part of developing new relationships between the people of this island, with our Unionist friends and the Government in London, but that is another day's business.

Deputy Joan Burton: Is that a “No”?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I think so.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Taoiseach was enumerating what we did and did not know. One of the things we know but which he did not say is that Brexit will reshape the arrangements and relationships between the peoples of these islands, on this island and between us and the European Union. We talk about the national interest and an all-island vision. We need to stand by the vote of the people in the North. We need to ensure and argue for options other than Brexit. We need to argue for special designated status for the North within the European Union. Much of what the Government is arguing for is concessions for the North outside the European Union. That is not acceptable and does not show the imagination and vision required, especially if I go back to my primary point, that Brexit will reshape arrangements and relationships. Do we stick with the *status quo*, the old partitionist field entity, or do we look at other possibilities to move forward? I commend that approach and have done so, as has the deputy First Minister, not least because that is the result of the decision, democratically made, of folks in the Six Counties. I also remind the Taoiseach - I am sure he is sick listening to me make this point - that he has a responsibility above and beyond that of the Taoiseach and the Government which is co-equal guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement. The last North-South Ministerial Council----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Time, please.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Beidh mé críochnaithe i gceann bomaite. The joint communiqué following the July meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council states: “We agreed to work together to ensure that Northern Ireland’s interests are protected and advanced and the benefits of North/South co-operation are fully recognised in any new arrangements which emerge as regards the United Kingdom’s future relationship with the European Union”. The Government, therefore, has a responsibility under point 17 of Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The Deputy’s time is up.

Deputy Gerry Adams: -----to represent the views of the North-South Ministerial Council. The Taoiseach has the result of the vote, responsibilities under the Good Friday Agreement and also the responsibilities of a member state.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I accept that Sinn Féin has had a strong view for a long time on abstentionism at Westminster. It is, however, a very curious form of abstentionism because its members have never abstained from taking salaries or expenses at Westminster, or the Saxon shilling. They take the money and run, or they do not actually go over at all but still take the money. I read that a couple of million had been pocketed by Sinn Féin over a couple of years at Westminster that Sinn Féin wants to have nothing to do with. A pure, principled form of abstention would have seen it abstain from all aspects of the Westminster Parliament, but that is the view of----

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Deputy would be an expert on principles.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Equally - I believe it is true - it is extraordinary hypocrisy. On the one hand, it is abstaining for the optics that nobody-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Deputy should look in the mirror.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We dealt with the issue of abstentionism in 1927 in the second election.

Deputy Gerry Adams: What about the confidence and supply arrangement?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Come on; focus.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I believe the decision of the DUP to abstain from being represented at the forum was also a mistake.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Then contest with the DUP in the North.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): One speaker at a time, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I also believe the tone at the DUP conference was not constructive. To describe anybody scared of the impact of the Brexit vote as “remoaners” was dismissive. It showed a basic refusal to engage with the realities. If one listened to people at the forum, they were very worried. They were from the third level sector, the academic sector, businesses and the farming community in the context of the the CAP ultimately. Hardly anyone is cheering from the sidelines and even those who voted for Brexit realise deep down that there will be a real impact. It was not the right tone for the First Minister to set. She said her relationship with Dublin was great, but the Taoiseach did not meet her last week. There does not appear to be any urgency to the relationship between the First Minister and the Government in Dublin. It is now four months since the referendum on Brexit and the level of direct contact has been ridiculously small, either for the political optics from the DUP’s perspective or from what else I do not know, but something needs to change. The issue is too serious for the people on the island of Ireland to have that low level of contact; it is at the same level it was before the vote. Perhaps the Taoiseach might indicate if it is the DUP’s demand that Brexit be discussed at the North-South Ministerial Council. If it is, we have to make sure the council will meet more often than it does. Does the Taoiseach accept that the twice a year format is clearly not adequate and has he requested a new timetable for meetings of the council? Has he requested specific work plans from the sectoral committees of the council on Brexit? Such plans would be very important.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I add my voice to those of the other speakers who have said to the Sinn Féin leadership that it should consider doing the unthinkable. This is not an ordinary time. Nothing would reflect this fact better than its presence at Westminster to defend the Good Friday Agreement. Deputy Gerry Adams is absolutely right - we all have an obligation to do this. What message would be sent if Sinn Féin members did attend the Parliament at Westminster to act in that way? We would very much commend them for and support them in doing so. There would be no one slagging them for giving up their electorate if they were to do so as these are unusual times.

Will the Taoiseach also stand up for the Good Friday Agreement by supporting the other legal case taken by Mr. Stephen Agnew, the leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland, with Assembly Members from Sinn Féin, the Alliance Party and the SDLP, as well as others, which

8 November 2016

was heard in the High Court in Belfast? I hope I am not infringing judicial propriety, but there was a very conservative judgment which I argue, if reinforced in the Supreme Court where the case is due to be heard in early December, would seriously infringe on the rights of Irish nationalism.

4 o'clock

Will the Taoiseach, similar to the Scots and Welsh administrations, take a direct interest in that case, recognising that we do have a direct constitutional interest in the Brexit process, particularly in defending the rights set out in the Good Friday Agreement? I have a real fear that this case, if it is not argued sufficiently or won, could lead to a diminution of the Good Friday Agreement without us having any say on it. Will the Taoiseach seek legal representation for the Government in it?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): There are only three minutes left in the game.

The Taoiseach: There are only 30 seconds. We are in overtime.

To answer Deputy Brendan Howlin, I did meet Mr. Mike Nesbitt, leader of the UUP, and he presented me with a document. The basis of his party's argument is the protection and progress of the economy of Northern Ireland and the good relationships it has with the Republic. The Deputy pointed to the various statements coming from elements in Britain which caused a deal of uncertainty. I hope that, as time marches on, there will be greater clarity. As the Deputy is well aware, the agri-sector and business in general are intrinsically linked with the UK market. Between the North and the South there is a market for beef, pork, dairy, milk and all other products. It has been a seamless operation for many years. A point was made to me in Newry and Carlingford the other day about the situation that applied when there was real trouble with security along the Border. Of the 200 roads leading into Northern Ireland, 18 were approved, while the others were blown up on either side. That is the way it remained for 30 years. No one wants to go back to a situation which remotely approaches this.

Deputy Joan Burton mentioned speaking to the deputy First Minister. I do not speak for the Sinn Féin Party. Its president has answered that question for the Deputy. It will not take its seats in the House of Commons-----

Deputy Joan Burton: Would the Taoiseach like it to do so?

The Taoiseach: -----although, as Deputies Joan Burton and Eamon Ryan said, the situation is unprecedented. Secretary of State Davis responded yesterday to questions in the House of Commons about the common travel area and what Brexit might mean for our citizens. He has proposed to write in detail about the preservation of these benefits, on which I agreed with the Prime Minister when I met her.

It was made very clear to me in Stormont by the SDLP that we had voted here in a referendum on Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution on the territorial claim to Northern Ireland and that, if and when Britain left the European Union in 2019, the negotiations - I referred to this issue at the Magill school - should cater for a situation where the people of Ireland, North and South, wished to see a united Ireland, in the same way as happened when East Germany was assimilated into West Germany. This is an issue that was raised specifically with me and it is something which should be part of the negotiations which should be far seeing enough if that

were ever to transpire to be the case.

Brexit will reshape the relationship between the islands. When I spoke to Sinn Féin, obviously with the leader and the deputy First Minister, two issues were raised. One concerned an alternative strategy, while the other concerned special status. Whether they would be the same is a matter for discussion. We have a situation where we have a special status in Northern Ireland. It is the only peace process in the European Union that is supported by the Union. It will be the only land border in the European Union with the United Kingdom if and when it actually leaves the Union. On top of this, the process is embellished by the United States and the European Union with PEACE funds and INTERREG funds, through cross-Border activities, health and education co-operation. I point out to the House that letters of offer have issued in respect of INTERREG and PEACE funds and that 17 major projects will continue, as we expect, in the coming years with substantial moneys from the European Union. We want to see this special status, these special circumstances and particular benefits continuing. This is an issue we need to discuss in the context of whether it is the right strategy to follow. It should be, as it would be easier to do this than to try to develop something entirely new.

Deputy Micheál Martin referred to the North-South Ministerial Council. I agree that establishing it was a very good idea. The Deputy has been in attendance at meetings-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: I think we all agree that it was a good idea.

The Taoiseach: Many issues which might not have been of great international significance have been dealt with quickly. In this case, it might be necessary to look again at what we need to do in the context of North-South relationships and the island approach to the negotiations in respect of our contact with the United Kingdom and this country's place in the European Union. The meeting in Armagh will be chaired by the First Minister and the DUP and Government members will attend. There will be a special meeting before it to synchronise the issues raised, Minister to Minister, which are important in terms of the sectoral and thematic discussions. The sectoral committees are working on their programmes which I expect to be finalised before 18 November. We need a schedule in respect of North-South relations and Brexit for the North-South Ministerial Council, as the case might be. I do not disagree with the Deputy. It might be necessary to hold a couple of special meetings as needs be, perhaps every quarter, to update and see how things are progressing in the discussions and negotiations.

To answer Deputy Eamon Ryan, we will have an interest in the court case that is taking place. I will speak to the ambassador, Mr. Mulhall, in seeing to it that it is properly covered. As I stated, Secretary of State Davis announced yesterday in the House of Commons that he would write in detail about the protection of the benefits arising from the common travel area which have applied since the 1920s and which we do not want to lose.

Topical Issue Matters

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A were received by the Ceann Comhairle and this is a list with the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Barry Cowen - the withdrawal and relocation of ambulance services from Edenderry to Tullamore; (2) Deputy David Cullinane - the need to expand Our Lady of Mercy national school in Stradbally, County Waterford and related demographic pressures; (3) Deputy Michael D'Arcy - the nationwide

review of Garda districts in the programme for Government; (4) Deputy Josephine Madigan - the anti-social behaviour in Stepaside, County Dublin; (5) Deputy Frank O'Rourke - the need for an additional VRT test centre as a matter of priority in north Kildare; (6) Deputy Brendan Griffin - the inclusion of the Orkambi drug in the long-term illness scheme; (7) Deputy John Curran - the treatment of non-TUI members in Collinstown community college, Dublin 22; (8) Deputy Tony McLoughlin - Revenue's presence at ports and airports in the west; (9) Deputy Eugene Murphy - the need for a safety review of the N5 route from Tarmonbarry to Ballaghaderreen; (10) Deputy Peter Burke - a sustainable future for the Imperial Tobacco factory unit and grounds; (11) Deputy Carol Nolan - the proposed outsourcing of haulage services in Bord na Móna; (12) Deputies Mick Wallace and Richard Boyd Barrett - the latest rental sector report; (13) Deputy Catherine Murphy - fare increases on the Maynooth line for commuters between Leixlip and Dublin; (14) Deputy Seán Crowe - the challenges faced by drug task forces across the State; (15) Deputy Marc MacSharry - support for the glamping tourism project in Enniscrone, County Sligo; (16) Deputy Pat Buckley - to discuss the need to reduce waiting times for counselling at primary care level; (17) Deputy Mattie McGrath - concerns about advisers to the Citizens' Assembly; (18) Deputies Clare Daly and Anne Rabbitte - to discuss the staffing crisis in maternity hospitals; (19) Deputies Bríd Smith and Thomas Byrne - the ASTI dispute; (20) Deputy Bernard J. Durkan - concerns about a prominent site at Naas, County Kildare; (21) Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin - pensions inequality in taking career breaks to care for children or the elderly; (22) Deputy Martin Ferris - concerns for the fishing industry in the light of Brexit; and (23) Deputy Fergus O'Dowd - the need to increase speech and language therapy services in County Louth.

The matters raised by Deputies Michael D'Arcy, Barry Cowen, Pat Buckley and Tony McLoughlin have been selected for discussion.

Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)

Priority Questions

Child Care Costs

18. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the lack of income progressivity in the universal child care subsidy as announced in budget 2017; and her views on whether the scheme is fair on households the income of which falls just above the income threshold for the targeted child care subsidy. [33783/16]

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Does the Minister have concerns about the lack of income progressivity in the universal child care subsidy as announced in budget 2017? Does she believe the scheme is fair on households the incomes of which fall just above the income threshold for the targeted child care subsidy?

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The new scheme which I announced recently is highly progressive overall. It will encompass both universal and targeted elements which can be incrementally expanded over time. International evidence

indicates that systems based on universalism are associated with lower rates of child poverty and deliver better outcomes for all children, with disadvantaged children benefiting more when services are provided within a universal programme design. Progressive universalism further recognises the importance of the provision of additional support for those with the greatest need.

Eligibility for the targeted aspect of the new scheme is based on net parental income and the highest levels of support will be offered to those on the lowest incomes. It is fairer and more accessible than the current targeted subsidy programmes, under which many low income families are not currently able to access subsidised child care because of the requirement to be in receipt of certain State benefits or attending certain training programmes. It will also enhance targeted schemes. For example, a person in receipt of the maximum level of subsidy under the current community child care scheme, which is by far the largest of the current targeted schemes, might face a weekly co-payment of €89 per week. Under the new scheme, a person in receipt of the maximum rate of subsidy will have an average weekly co-payment of about €12 per week.

The universal subsidy for children under three recognises that the cost of child care is generally highest when children are under three years of age and this cost can result in many parents having to stop work outside the home when paid maternity leave ends. Recent reports also suggest that cost and sustainability issues are affecting the availability of child care places for children under three years.

Finally, the Deputy has also asked about families above the income cut-off for targeted subsidies. While all targeted schemes, by their nature, have thresholds and cut-off points, the new affordable child care scheme is designed to be flexible, with the ability to adjust income thresholds, subsidy rates and income taper rates over time and as further Government investment becomes available.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I welcome the closing remarks on being flexible and on income subsidy adjustment. If I was a parent on €29,000, under joint income I could not avail of the €2,800 subsidy but would only get €900 per annum. If I want to progress in my career and I am on €28,000, where is the avenue for me to do so? I need to understand what options and what degree of flexibility are available to me but, at this moment, that detail is not there. Parents need to understand how the flexibility works. If I progress in my career and go from €28,000 to €29,000, how do I notify the Department? How is the child care provider protected in view of the change of income?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: Some of the Deputy's questions relate to the workings of the scheme. The Department is working extremely hard to ensure this ambitious objective is achieved and to provide clarity to people on what kind of subsidy they will receive in light of their net household income. This information will be on the website, which we are designing and will have in place before the scheme implementation date of September 2017. If a person's net income changes over time we will make clear how that will ultimately impact on the child care subsidy available. We are working to develop and launch an information scheme to provide the information by the beginning of next summer.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Information and a new website would be very welcome as parents feel a little bit in limbo, as do the crèche providers. Given the new subsidy, does the Minister have any fears about the inflation of fees in crèches? There is a huge concern over this. The child care worker is among the lowest paid in the sector at the moment. They are looking after

our most precious and are the first link to education but we are paying them, on average, €10.47 per hour. Is the Minister concerned about increases in crèche charges?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I am happy the Deputy asked that question because we have had discussions about it. Yes, I have a concern over this and there are different ways of addressing it. My primary concern is that, as the child care sector grows and as qualifications and workload increase, people within the sector are paid a better wage for what they do. As we implement the subsidisation programme there are possibilities that the sector will respond in certain ways but I have established an early years forum and I am discussing the issues with the sector. I have provided additional funding in recognition of non-contact time for 2017 and we will continue to discuss the issues as we move towards 2018.

Child Care Services Provision

19. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether the required capacity currently exists to meet the needs of the implementation of the single affordable child care payment; the plans she has in place to expand the capacity of the public child care sector over the coming years; the progress likely to be made on such capacity planning by the time the scheme is commenced; and if she is satisfied that all children seeking a place on the SACP scheme will have a place for 2017. [33785/16]

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Baineann an cheist seo le cumas na Roinne agus na hearnála dul i ngleic leis an scéim nua atá curtha ar bun ag an Roinn. The question asks what the Department is doing in terms of capacity planning for the new scheme and whether it believes current capacity will be sufficient. If not, will sufficient capacity be in place when the new scheme starts in September next year?

(Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am very pleased that from September 2017, a new affordable child care scheme will be introduced to provide financial support for parents towards the cost of child care. Approximately 79,000 children will benefit from the new scheme in its first year, including 25,000 children who will benefit from the universal subsidy. An estimated 54,000 will benefit from the targeted subsidies, including 31,500 children who already receive support under the current targeted subsidy schemes and 22,500 new beneficiaries. Some of the new beneficiaries will already be availing of formal child care but without any financial support from the State at present.

My Department commissions an annual survey of child care providers in which capacity is a key area. As of April 2016, there were up to 20,000 vacancies in child care providers nationwide. However, the issue of capacity in the sector is complex and cannot be understood by reference to current vacancies alone. Some services, depending on their infrastructure, are able to increase and decrease capacity in response to demand through the recruitment of additional staff or adaptation of available space, while other providers are in a position to extend premises or move to a larger premises. The Department receives several hundred applications from new providers wishing to enter into contract every year, while a lower number of providers close.

While there is no clear evidence to suggest a lack of capacity for the new affordable child care scheme at this stage, my Department will continue to carefully monitor trends in this regard.

I would also like to highlight that capital funding for the early years sector of €4.5 million was made available in budget 2017, which will support strategic investment in capacity.

Finally, in order to meet the needs of parents whose preference is to use a childminder, and to build capacity to cater for increased demand in future years, my Department has commenced talks with Childminding Ireland in recent months to explore a number of options around how quality can be assured within the childminding sector.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I have significant doubts about how this will work in September next year. I have doubts about capacity and what this will mean for prices. The Minister and the Department have said that they do not expect there to be any issues but are keeping it under review. The Department states that it expects the scheme to improve labour market activation and participation but a degree of contradiction is inherent in not expecting a significant rise in capacity but expecting labour activation to increase.

It is important that increasing capacity and capacity planning are not market led. Such an approach was a disastrous failure in regard to broadband and has been a failure in many other areas. It has to be led by the State and the community sector. There has to be serious capital investment and while the Minister has outlined the capital allocation my recollection is that it has been reduced from the previous year's budget as a result of everything that is happening in Oberstown. I believe it needs to be increased.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The Department is monitoring this in different ways, such as through a Pobal exercise on vacancies and county child care surveys on capacity and place numbers. It is difficult to determine what the demand will be, or even what the current demand is in certain places, and to match demand and capacity. I have confidence in the Department's ability to monitor that in an appropriate way, such that it can identify potential deficits in particular areas. On the other point made by the Deputy, there have been all sorts of estimations in terms of the required capacity to meet the anticipated increase in terms of labour activation.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: The Minister will be aware that the Association of Childcare Professionals has indicated that it intends to hold a day of action and protest on 17 November. I commend it on that because I believe that workers and professionals in this sector have been taken for granted by previous Governments and by this Government. We are asking them to deal with an increase in capacity, and as a result a significantly changed sector, yet they are unlikely to see any improvement in their conditions. There has been no improved access to the Learner fund and because of that a significant category of workers is maintained in low-paid, insecure employment without any ability to progress. There was also a failure to deal with the seriously problematic and very unfair situation whereby child care workers are expected to sign-on during the summer months. These are people who have qualifications, which they worked very hard to achieve, and they deserve more respect and better pay. They deserve a fair deal from this Government.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I am well aware that the Association of Childcare Professionals is planning to organise. The association has been in communication with me in regard to its concerns. I am supportive of the right of people to raise their voices on issues of concern to them. This will assist me in my work as Minister in the context of budget 2018. I acknowledge that there is a day of protest planned and I believe that it is important that it happens and that the association gets an opportunity to raise its concerns. I have no difficulty with that.

I have indicated a number of times that while this is a radical new step in terms of the sustainability of the infrastructure we have in this country in relation to child care, it is only a first step. I have not been able to provide for everything in the context of budget 2017 but I have managed to identify and commit €14.5 million of my budget allocation for 2017 to current providers in respect of non-contact time, which was one of the key requests they had in terms of their conditions.

Child and Family Agency Funding

20. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding allocated to Tusla in budget 2017 which will go towards implementing the provisions on aftercare contained in the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015; and the progress being made by Tusla in ensuring that every child leaving care has an aftercare plan in place. [33784/16]

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: The backdrop to this question is the EPIC conference on care-leavers held in Dublin Castle about three weeks ago. The question posed to me and other members of the panel on that day, including representatives from Tusla and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, was how much funding allocated to the Tusla budget in 2017 will go towards implementation of the provisions on aftercare as provided for in the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015. Perhaps also the Minister would give an update on the progress being made by Tusla in ensuring that every child leaving care has an aftercare plan in place.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I thank Deputy Rabbitte for her question. I am committed to implementing the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 which entitles eligible young people to a formal aftercare plan prepared by Tusla in collaboration with the young person leaving care. I am pleased that the Act places an explicit as opposed to an implicit duty, as is currently the case, on Tusla to satisfy itself as to the young person's need for assistance and support as he or she leaves care.

My Department is working closely with Tusla to ensure that the provisions of the Act can be fully implemented as quickly as possible in the coming months.

Currently, there are approximately 1,900 young people in receipt of aftercare services from Tusla. In the first six months of this year, 315 young adults were discharged from State care on reaching the age of 18. Approximately 98% of them were eligible for an aftercare service and 91%, or 280 young people, availed of it.

In regard to funding, the Deputy will be aware that I secured an additional €37 million for Tusla in budget 2017, bringing its total allocation to €713 million. Tusla will shortly prepare a business plan for my consideration, in which it will set out how it proposes to allocate its total funding for the year, including its spending plans for implementing the legislation on aftercare and in respect of all the other services it provides.

It is important to note that these costs arising relate only to implementation of the provisions of the aftercare legislation. Young people leaving care typically receive supports relating to accommodation, further education, employment and training, which are funded by other Departments. This means that the part of Tusla's budget for 2017, which is ultimately allocated to aftercare services under the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015, will represent just a small proportion of the total spend by the State on those in receipt of aftercare services.

I believe that our young people leaving care deserve high quality supports throughout the system and that full implementation of the Child Care (Amendment) Act will be a key element of how our society helps them to make this critical transition in their lives.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I welcome that a business plan is being put in place by Tusla. On the day of the conference we heard that 6,144 children are in receipt of aftercare plans. A large proportion of these 6,144 children, who were in attendance at the conference, were of the view that they are not getting the aftercare plan to which they are entitled, and for two reasons. First, if they were in care for less than six months, they did not qualify and, second, if they were over 17 years of age they also did not qualify. I hope that this issue will be addressed in the context of the business plan. Another issue raised at the conference was the situation facing children who did receive an aftercare plan in that unlike every other child of 17, 18 or 19 years of age living at home if they fell out of education their aftercare plan fell apart.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I am aware of the conference. I met the director of the conference, Ms Jennifer Gargan, subsequent to it and I have offered to continue the conversation by meeting with some of the young people concerned to discuss the issues raised by the Deputy. The benefit of the new legislation is that it will entitle young people to an aftercare plan for the first time. This will make a significant difference in terms of some of the issues raised by the Deputy. Up to this point it has been a matter of good practice only to provide an aftercare plan but Tusla will now be required by law to prepare an aftercare plan. I believe this is an important part of helping young people to achieve their potential as they prepare to leave care. This will be an advance.

In regard to implementation of the legislation, Tusla has introduced a number of new practices and has developed dedicated aftercare teams. It has also standardised the financial supports that it offers to those leaving care and it is putting inter-agency aftercare committees in place at local level.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: All of what the Minister has mentioned is welcome. In regard to the business plan, I would welcome inclusion in that plan of a mechanism to document that every child entitled to an aftercare plan has received it. I would also like to see provision within the plan of capacity to ensure that any child leaving care who, like any other children of his or her age, decides to drop out of or change course, can be accommodated to remain in the same environment. Everybody is entitled to a second chance. We are speaking in this regard about the toughest years in a child's life in terms of having to choose courses and so on. If they could remain in the same environment, it would be the best step forward.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I welcome the Deputy's passion and commitment on these issues. The Deputy is correct that it will be important that the relevant aspects of the legislation, once commenced, which I hope to do in the next couple of months, are monitored to ensure their effectiveness over time, which I can promise in terms of the ways in which Tusla has developed monitoring, statistics and percentages around how it is meeting its commitments. That refers to policy objectives but also, in this case, legislative requirements. The business plan is necessary to identify how important this is in terms of my Department. That makes a difference in terms of the funding, about which the Deputy asked earlier. The Deputy's concern around ensuring that taking time out of education does not jeopardise the after-care plan is noted. I thank the Deputy.

Youth Work Projects Funding

21. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will develop along with an organisation (details supplied) a European youth centre in order to ensure that the potential of the centre is reached in the interest of national youth work development. [33872/16]

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister for her work in office to date. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs announced earlier this year €26 million in capital grants with a closing date for applications in May. Announcements on successful applications were made in August with the total moneys to be disbursed across two strands. In Kerry, we had €96,000 among Tralee, Listowel and Castleisland. The application from the centre in Killarney was refused. The Minister had visited the centre and that visit was very much appreciated. It was considered to be a new development for the purposes of the application, but this is not accurate as it is an ongoing project which is now taking on further importance as part of Ireland's commitment to the Council of Europe having been labelled as a European youth centre.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: My Department administered a capital funding scheme in 2016 for youth projects and services which was strictly limited to projects funded under a number of specific schemes.

An application for capital funding was received from Kerry Diocesan Youth Service, KDYS, in respect of a European youth centre. Unfortunately, the application was found to be ineligible by the appraisal committee for the youth capital scheme 2016 to 2017 as KDYS is not in receipt of funding under any of the specified schemes.

However, I am pleased to note that my Department provided funding of some €505,000 to KDYS in 2016 under other headings. These include funding for youth services under the special projects for youth scheme which supports projects that target young people who are disadvantaged, including young Travellers and young people who are out of school and at risk of drug or substance abuse or homelessness.

Work on the development of a new capital funding scheme for 2017 is under way. My Department is engaging with each education and training board's youth officer to identify the capital needs of the youth sector. I hope to announce details of this new capital scheme in the coming months.

I will be happy to explore the options for funding the European youth centre proposal further with KDYS having regard to the resources available to my Department.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister. I appreciate her response because I know her heart is in the right place when it comes to the centre in Killarney. She took time out to go there in the summer and I appreciated her visit, as did everybody there. Given that the Department's capital grants fund was €26 million, it appears not all the moneys were disbursed. I estimate that there could be over €600,000 available. I appeal to the Minister to partner with KDYS to develop the European youth centre. The service is open to significant departmental input to ensure that the development of this centre goes ahead in the interest of national youth work. It does not take me to tell the Minister for her to understand the great work centres like this are doing not just in Killarney town but throughout Ireland. She is far better at this than me in that regard. It is very important work. I appreciate her personal interest in it and the genuine

concern she has shown to date. The way I summarise it is to say the Minister should send as much money as she can to Killarney.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: As the Deputy notes, I visited KDYS during the summer and was impressed by the commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism I saw. Unfortunately, it was not possible to fund the European youth centre project as it did not fall within the previously established criteria for the scheme. That in no way takes away from the value of the work being done there. I am anxious to work with KDYS to support its work in future. My Department will be happy to work with KDYS to identify any other potential means to support its important work. As I have indicated, I am pleased that we were able to provide funding of €505,000 under the special projects for youth scheme.

I must correct the Deputy. The capital funding available was €2.6 million, not €26 million. That may be where the answer to his question lies.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister for that response. I appreciate her interest. All I ask is that she does her best for the centre which is doing Trojan work as she knows. I thank her for meeting with the manager and personnel working there who are giving great assistance to young people. Young people attending the centre and availing of the services there deserve great credit because they are engaging, working and participating in the schemes. We all really appreciate that. Ireland is in safe hands with the young people we have. All we need do is praise and encourage them while being positive in every way we can. The Minister as a member of Government and we as elected representatives must support them in every way we can. That is our job and what we are supposed to do.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I remember almost every room I saw in that centre. It is an extraordinary place and I was very impressed with the leadership and management team and with what it is doing and how it is reaching out way beyond its base. It is unfortunate that in terms of the capital funding scheme for 2016 the centre did not fall within the criteria because it was not receiving funding in relation to the four or five schemes operating in the Department for which capital was specified in particular. The refusal was part of the rational thinking in order to put in place capital for previously identified policies and investments. Having said all that, we are moving into 2017 and are putting in place criteria as we move forward in relation to the next round of capital funding.

Child Care Costs

22. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way she will protect against the dual income trap, as articulated by a person (details supplied), the result of which is a greater level of support being provided for one parenting choice over another; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33818/16]

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Why are we setting what Senator Elizabeth Warren has described as a dual income trap? In America, the experience was that incomes doubled because everybody started working, but disposable income fell due to a bidding war for property and the costs of health care, transport, tax and child care went up. Couples were left worse off. They were working all the time but were poorer and exposed. Where one person lost his or her job, the couple faced bankruptcy, which has happened wholesale in the USA, unable to cater for a family member who fell sick or children with special needs or any other variation from the hard-

nosed economic model of getting everyone working all the time. That is what we are doing in our tax individualisation system, with our lack of care for caring work in our social welfare system and, now, in the new policy initiative which discriminates against the very parents who are most at risk in the dual income trap, those left on a single income. Why are we doing that?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The single affordable child care scheme is a major initiative I am pursuing specifically to ensure that the costs of child care are lowered for families, in particular those on lower incomes. Irish child care costs are among the highest in the world and the burden on many families is unacceptably high.

While this aspect of the Irish situation is similar to the USA, in other respects the situation in Ireland is quite different. Some countries are seeing undue pressure on women to enter the workforce or to return to work immediately after giving birth. However, the OECD and the European Commission have noted that the participation of women in the labour force in Ireland is significantly lower than in other countries. Parents should be able to access all the social, personal and economic benefits of participation in the labour force if they so choose while also being afforded the necessary flexibility and support to enable them to care for their children, particularly during their crucial early years.

I am committed to improving the situation of all parents and, in particular, all children, whatever care arrangements are chosen, and to reflecting international evidence on how to attain the best outcomes for children in policies brought forward by my Department. I support the extension of parental leave for parents and will continue to work with my Cabinet colleagues to achieve this. The Government has also provided additional support for stay at home parents through the home carer tax credit, which has been increased to €1,100 per year.

The single affordable child care scheme has been criticised by some who claim that I am somehow discriminating against parents who remain at home to care for children or child minders or relatives who provide care for children. This is absolutely not the case and I am keen to advance support for all of these families, whether by enabling child minders to participate in the affordable child care scheme or by providing other means of support to families. If the Deputy has suggestions as to how I might address these needs, I would be happy to discuss these important issues with him.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I do not recognise the OECD or the European Commission as neutral observers. They are biased, in the sense that they are obsessed with the whole notion of economic growth and, in the case of countries which have a falling population, with trying to get as many people into the workforce as possible. They are pump-priming the dual-income trap, as happened in the US.

In response to the Minister's question on what we might do, I would take the evidence from Robert Putnam's latest book, *Our Kids*, and examine what the American model did. It destroyed social capital and created a deep divide in the country. We have to support parents on low incomes, in particular lone parents who lose out in a dual income trap society. However, we should listen to what Putnam said. It would be far better to go in the direction in which we were going, namely be neutral and give a cash payment to parents. That is what gives them security at the most critical point in time when we are growing our young children's brains.

All of the evidence, including the latest Growing Up in Ireland survey, shows that we should favour all parents, and not discriminate against some, which, I am afraid, is what is being done.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The dual income trap which the Deputy mentioned, as he knows, is the subject of a popular book written by Senator Elizabeth Warren and her daughter. It discusses the financial difficulties experienced by American middle-class families with children due to the steady rise in many fixed costs such as health care, child care and finding a good home. Senator Warren and her daughter argue that two income families today actually have less discretionary income left over compared to single income, mostly male breadwinner, families a generation ago.

However, their solution to the issue is to manage living costs for these families, such as housing, health care and education, and not to move back in time to an era when women were not given the choice to have a career and earn their own money. Instead, they argue that the solution to financial hardships lies in the sustainable pricing of necessary services.

One of the practical policy options they advocate is offering vouchers to families so they can send their children to good schools anywhere they choose. The book has its critics as well as its defenders, but we also must remember that it discusses the economic lives of the American middle classes.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I am a defender of the book and its analysis because I can see what it describes happening before my eyes in this country. Parents are experiencing rising mortgage, health insurance and transport costs because of the American economic model we are adopting.

I fully agree with the Minister that we have to address the rising cost of child care, in particular for those on lower incomes. The way to do that is to support all parents equally and get the budget allocation from the Minister for Finance. If we are serious about the most important task in our country, which is raising children, we should give parents the power to make the call how they do that.

We should not set up a system that discriminates against one form or the other and which will only reinforce the dual income trap. We need to listen to what Senator Warren said. We should provide support to everyone equally and let parents decide on the best way to spend their money. That gives them security and breaks the economic model towards which we are going. We have seen its effects on America and in the election there today. It kills social capital and a good environment in which to raise children.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: There are some good things going on in America. Reference is frequently made to Nordic countries. They are moving away from home care allowance type schemes due to their adverse impact on women's employability and financial independence later in life. I would encourage a vigorous gender impact analysis before importing such policies here.

As I am sure the Deputy will remember, not long ago we had a policy that provided €1,000 per child to families to spend on early childhood care and education as they chose. It was available to all families, whether their children were being cared for in a crèche or by a child minder, parents or other relatives. This early childhood subsidy policy did not create equal access to preschool services and Ireland was widely criticised for failing to provide universal preschool provision. The Deputy knows this as he was in the coalition Government when the early childhood subsidy was discontinued and replaced by the universal free preschool year, the ECCE scheme. I hope the Deputy is content that the ECCE scheme is used by the vast majority of parents in Ireland and the take-up of the scheme is 96% of all eligible children.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I fully support the ECCE scheme and am very glad it is in place. That does not mean that we take an approach which all the experts says is not the right approach, namely 40 hours care. The Nordic model was mentioned by the Minister. There are brilliant examples from those countries.

Departmental Budgets

23. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide a breakdown of all new funds allocated to early child care for 2017 and the way in which this money will be allocated; the Estimates for budget 2018 to maintain the services for 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33334/16]

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: My question follows from Deputy Ryan's, in a way. There is no doubt that we need to move in the direction of assisting people with the punitive cost of child care. We also need to underpin parental choice. We need to ensure that it will actually achieve what the Minister hopes it will. Given the amount of money involved, I worry whether it can achieve that. Is €32 million the full year cost? Given that the money will come in September, what will the full year cost be? In some cases, which I will go into, will it not achieve its end.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I was pleased that significant additional funding was allocated to early child care in budget 2017. The largest volume of additional funding was provided to enable the full year costs of the expansion of the ECCE scheme into a second year, and I provided €67.6 million for this. In addition, the full year roll-out of the access and inclusion model, AIM, within the ECCE scheme was provided for with an allocation of €18.07 million.

A total of €12 million was provided to supplement existing funding provided for child care available on a targeted basis to families from lower income backgrounds. This funding will facilitate the replacement of a number of schemes with a new single affordable child care scheme from September 2017. A further €7 million was provided for a universal subsidy to be available to all children using formal child care who are aged 6 months to 3 years, or when they start ECCE if they are older. This will also be available from September 2017 as part of the new single affordable child care scheme.

I have made €14.5 million available to provide an additional payment to child care providers to recognise the increasing volume of work done outside of direct contact hours with children. This funding will provide an additional payment of seven days' funding to all ECCE services and an equivalent level payment to CCS and TEC services. I have provided €1 million to enhance the level of inspection of child care services provided by Tusla and the Department of Education and Skills, and a fund of €1 million to facilitate research into the sustainability challenges faced by community child care services, in particular, and to develop a process for addressing these. This additional funding will bring my Department's budget for early years from €345 million to €466.5 million, an increase of 35% on 2016.

Additional funding will be required in 2018 to meet the full year costs of some measures being introduced for September 2017. In the case of the new single affordable scheme, estimated additional full year costs in 2018 are approximately €44 million. Factors such as demography and uptake of schemes will also be important in determining the exact amount of additional funding that will be required in 2018.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The scheme does not start until September 2017. How long does the funding of 32 million run into next year? What is the full year cost of the universal and targeted elements? I am in favour of targeted and universal elements. I recognise that people working in child care have to be paid properly and so on, and that we need to develop capacity. Given all of those requirements and the fact that we need funding for a full year, can the funding really deliver on all of those fronts? To what extent is the money that had been available to schemes that are now being wound up being rolled into this money? In other words, how much of the money is new money? I met a lone parent earlier. She explained that the closure of the community employment childcare, CEC, programme and the childcare education and training support, CETS, programme means that the maximum contribution those working on a community employment scheme had to pay is now gone. They will end up having to pay more. Lone parents will have to pay more. The new scheme will be a disincentive. We will not have labour activation, but labour deactivation.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The Deputy had a number of questions and I am with him in his sentiment in terms of his concerns. I hope that this will deliver what we are attempting to deliver. It is a first step towards introducing a radical new plan for child care. We have worked very hard to ensure it happens. I provided the Deputy with full-year costs. The year 2017 will be the first year of the full year of the second year of the ECCE scheme. We need money for that. It will also be the first year of making available the universal measure that is a subsidy for those aged under three years. That will start in September 2017. There is money available for that.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: What months will it cover?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Let the Minister answer.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: We need a lot of money for 2017 to cover the full-year cost of the two years of preschool plus the cost of the access and inclusion model, AIM. From September 2017, additional moneys will be available to introduce the single affordable child care scheme. This will include the targeted element in the new way that I am doing it as well as the subsidy for those under three years of age. That relates to the funding question. I did not have enough time to answer the other questions.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I think the Minister understood the other question. With the winding-up of the CEC and the CETS programmes, those who were availing of them are telling me that they will be required under the new scheme to make a bigger contribution to expensive child care from their already low incomes. Consequently, they will be in a worse position. It will be more difficult for them to go to work because the scheme is quite minimal. This is the problem. To make all these different elements work, we need a lot more money.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: We do need a lot more money and I trust the Deputy will continue to raise his voice as we continue to prepare for the next budget because I agree with him in that regard. In terms of his initial comments and concerns, I too am concerned about those on low incomes. This new, targeted single affordable child care scheme is streamlining and simplifying those other targeted schemes that some of the people to whom the Deputy refers are on. These include the community childcare subvention, CCS, and training and employment childcare, TEC. By doing that, we are providing a way for those on lower incomes to pay less. There may be a few cases where there will not be the potential for the capping, if one likes, of the parental contribution. I think this is what the people who are coming to the Deputy are

concerned about.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is what I am talking about.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I assure the Deputy that no one will be worse off. Most of them will be better off, but it will depend on what they are earning and the number of children, etc. This goes back to Deputy Anne Rabbitte's question. It is hard for people to understand fully how they will benefit because it will depend on their family type. However, the whole point of the single affordable child care scheme is to ensure that those the Deputy is speaking to ultimately benefit more.

Homeless Persons Supports

24. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the child focus of the national action plan on housing and homelessness; the number of children currently being supported; the ways in which, for example, transport, more nutritious meals, if living in hotel accommodation, and so on are being supported; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33331/16]

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: As the Minister is aware, a few weeks ago there were almost 2,500 homeless children throughout the country, with over 2,000 of those in Dublin alone. In July, the Minister held a summit of agencies working on the front line with homeless families, including Focus Ireland, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, ISPCC, and Barnardos. She promised a whole series of concrete and costed supports, including free transport, more nourishing food, crèche placements and so on. Last month we heard from Focus Ireland that the Minister has delivered on virtually none of those steps and my experience representing families is that the Minister has delivered nothing.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I appreciate Deputy Broughan's question.

Homelessness among children and families remains a serious problem. In September there were 1,173 families in emergency accommodation, including 1,568 adults and 2,426 dependants. I am committed to supporting the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland: the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. We have made some progress in this regard, but more remains to be done.

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive, DRHE, is working to provide free public transport for family travel and school journeys for those homeless families in the Dublin region that are residing in hotel accommodation. Each family is being given five 24-hour family Leap cards, which will be valid for use on all Dublin transport systems, allowing for family days out at weekends or during holiday periods. Distribution of the family cards is almost complete. This will be quickly followed by the distribution of the school journey cards.

My Department is funding research, commissioned by Focus Ireland, to identify issues regarding access to food and potential nutritional impacts on families in emergency homeless accommodation. My Department is also enhancing access to early years services for homeless families through a new community child care subvention scheme for homeless children. It will provide part-time childcare for children up to six years of age. It is planned to launch the scheme next January.

Also, I recently secured the agreement of the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government that the provision of accommodation for young people leaving State care would be eligible for funding under the capital assistance scheme operated by his Department. My Department and Tusla will work to ensure that any accommodation proposed, and ultimately delivered, will be provided with the appropriate levels of protective factors for the young person making the transition to independent living.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I welcome the Minister's comments about transport and the weekly child care subvention.

The Minister promised action on developing a voluntary safety guidance code for hotel staff. She was to work with the ISPCC to develop this code. Children are using locations where there is no Garda vetting of staff or visitors who are coming and going. Not that long ago there was an assassination in one of the large hotels on the north side where homeless children live.

The Minister also promised to co-ordinate with the Department of Health to provide additional child care support workers to work with the homeless children and to develop care plans. How many of those support workers has the Minister and the Department of Health managed to put in place? She also promised action on supports for children with disabilities as well as action on the particular problem of families fleeing domestic violence.

I note what the Minister has stated about nutrition but the reality is that people often depend on McDonald's, Burger King and so on because they have no cooking facilities. This is one of the reasons we need urgent action.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire had a supplementary question.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: It was recently reported that Edel House, a shelter in Cork that deals with women and children, had to turn away 281 children last year. This reflects how serious the problem is in Cork. A number of families have told me that they are worried about registering as homeless, particularly those that are in contact with Tusla, be it for whatever reason. Good families, doing the best for their children, are worried about registering as homeless and availing of emergency accommodation because they fear how Tusla will view it. Will the Minister assure the House that the Department and Tusla will contact emergency homeless services and ensure that they will make every effort, in all circumstances, to house family units together?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister has a minute to conclude.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: On Deputy Broughan's questions, the DRHE is best placed to advise on a safety guidance voluntary code for child safety in emergency accommodation. I understand it has worked with Tusla and that there is a draft national quality standards framework to cover this area of the action plan and that an information guidelines booklet is also being developed in line with this objective. We are also working with the DRHE, which is in the process of identifying the most appropriate accommodation setting for services assisting pregnant women who are homeless.

5 o'clock

It is intended that a model of extended service provision will then be developed and most likely rolled out on a phased basis once such premises have been secured. We have provided

two workers to work with Focus Ireland in assisting families in emergency accommodation. In terms of the budget for 2017, I am working with Tusla on identifying if we can provide additional support workers in that regard. I am also discussing this matter with the Department of Health.

To respond to Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire's question, I can give the assurances he seeks.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I thank the Minister for responding to one or two of the issues I raised. The reality, however, is that at least 2,500 children will be homeless on Christmas Day. Since the Minister's appointment, the number of homeless families has increased by 80 per month. While the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Simon Coveney, has primary responsibility for homelessness, the Minister has a duty of care for the children in question. She made a commitment that hotels, guest houses and similar types of accommodation will not be used to accommodate vulnerable families and children. Is the Government remotely on target to fulfil this commitment? In the interim, is it possible that all the commitments given to the key agencies last July will be delivered?

On a separate matter, women who flee domestic violence and abuse with their children are often co-tenants or co-owners of a house, which means they find it impossible to immediately access homeless services. Will the Minister take up this matter?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The Deputy's final point is an important one which I will take up.

On the overall impact of the plan for rebuilding Ireland, I am aware that the number of children who are homeless is increasing. I am also aware of the efforts being made by the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to address this issue. He set a very ambitious objective at yesterday's committee meeting regarding reviewing the progress made on the housing plan. There are two key elements involved in meeting the targets that have been set out. The first will be the success of the rapid build programme. Some 1,500 rapid build housing units are to be delivered by 2018. Approximately 350 such units are advancing or will be on site by the end of 2016 and a further 650 units will be initiated and delivered in 2017. This as something to do with the increase.

Another aspect of trying to reduce the increase in homelessness will be the reform of the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme. A HAP homeless pilot has been operational since February 2015. Reforming the HAP to ensure it is more effective will result in the creation of approximately 550 tenancies by the time it is completed.

Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children

25. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department is considering offering care to some of the unaccompanied minors who were removed from the camp at Calais recently; the arrangements that are under consideration for these children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33534/16]

Deputy Joan Burton: What action is the Department taking in respect of children who were living in the Calais camp? The Minister will be aware that it is the will of the Dáil that

Ireland provide accommodation for 200 such children.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am deeply concerned by the plight of the children who were in the Calais camp, particularly the many unaccompanied minors who were at the front line of this terrible situation. I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to review its ability to provide safety, protection and hope to greater numbers of unaccompanied children and assess the additional resources that may be needed. This work is ongoing. Options to expand our existing emergency and humanitarian supports for these young people who have no family or relatives form part of this review. While I have not had many discussions with Tusla, I have held discussions with the Immigrant Council of Ireland and Cabinet colleagues to review this country's response to the overall migrant crisis, including recent events in Calais.

It is important to emphasise that we already provide significant assistance to unaccompanied minors who arrive in Ireland on an unplanned basis. In the past five years, Tusla has taken an annual average of 100 referrals of unaccompanied children seeking asylum, with approximately 70 of these being received into care annually. Thus far this year, 104 unaccompanied children have been referred to Tusla services, of whom 58 remain in care. Tusla has a dedicated social work team for separated children seeking asylum, which provides support, assessment and care to children arriving alone in Ireland. Approximately 30% of children referred are reunited with family members or are found to be over 18 years of age.

Under the Irish refugee protection programme, Tusla has made an initial commitment to relocating 20 unaccompanied minors from camps in Greece in 2016-17. Staff have visited centres in Greece and are currently in Athens to continue the intake process for unaccompanied young people aged 16 and 17 years who have indicated a desire to be brought to Ireland. I am eager to expand our ability to make a greater commitment to these most vulnerable children.

Deputy Joan Burton: I speak for many when I say I find it impossible to understand the reason the Government has been so slow in accepting unaccompanied child migrants and migrants in general. The Minister may be aware that when I was Tánaiste I reached an agreement with the Taoiseach that Ireland would accept approximately 4,000 people and would have the services in place to facilitate this number.

The plight of migrant children, many of whom have experienced extraordinary difficulties on the journey to Europe, speaks to everybody. I cannot understand the constant references to reviews and talking to people. While I accept the Minister's bona fides in this matter, why is it necessary to engage in constant reviews with Tusla?

Many children are in need of protection. I acknowledge that many of them have never heard of Ireland and that this may be an issue because most of them want to reach the United Kingdom. If children are brought to Ireland, will they be facilitated, to the greatest possible degree, in foster care? Will the Minister provide a guarantee that they will not be placed, alone and friendless, in direct provision centres and will not be institutionalised?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I was aware of and acknowledge Deputy Burton's work on this issue and I appreciate her frustration. I, too, am frustrated and I have expressed concern about the slow pace of delivery of the programme to resettle 4,000 refugees. While the programme has made a slow start, I understand from the Tánaiste that it is increasing in rapidity.

With regard to my responsibilities, as I indicated, Tusla staff are on the ground in Greece this

week. The age criteria that will apply to the children Ireland will receive have been changed to facilitate accepting older children who wish to come here, the number of whom appears to be increasing.

Perhaps I should have been a little clearer in my earlier response. I was not engaging in reviews with Tusla but examining with Tusla how we could develop capacity and what resources would be required to take additional unaccompanied minors.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Minister outline the specific steps she has taken on this issue? If we are to assist children and focus on older teenagers, as the Minister appeared to suggest, speed will be needed because 16 and 17 year olds will soon become adults. According to the census, 11% or 12% of the population are immigrants who are not originally from Ireland. Many of the nationalities represented in the Calais camp have significant communities in this country. There are, therefore, many possibilities in this regard. We know from the work done by various UN organisations that it is possible to do this quite well and to provide children who come here with a basis for education. Many of our schools have done brilliantly on this, absorbing and integrating the children quickly and getting them to leaving certificate level.

What is the reason for the slowness in this case? While State resources are not unlimited, we have many. This involves 200 children in particularly difficult circumstances over a period of time. What commitment will the Minister give that this will be addressed within, say, the next three months?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I have already acknowledged and agree with the Deputy on the pace of this process. I have also indicated that, unbeknownst to the wider public, in any one year Tusla receives 100 unaccompanied children. That is already going on, in addition to the other commitments the previous Government worked on and negotiated. It is important to put that on the record.

To increase the capacity again, there are several items which need to be put in place, whether it is accommodation, lodging or additional social workers. That takes a certain amount of time. I am aware of the reality, as well as the concern of the people and of the House to be able to do something as quickly as possible.

Child Protection

26. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied that adequate protection is in place to ensure early reporting and prompt action in cases of suspected child abuse, whether in State institutions, foster care or in the home; the number of outstanding cases awaiting attention; the average timescale for investigating such issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33514/16]

(Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, holds the statutory responsibility for child welfare and protection. It is the appropriate body to receive reports relating to children at risk, whether in State institutions, foster care or in the home. Tusla provides the Department of Children and Youth Affairs with regular detailed reports on key performance and activity indicators relating to referrals and management of child abuse. I assure the Deputy that Tusla deals immediately with emergency cases, including, for instance, if a child has been abandoned or is in immediate physical danger or at risk of sexual abuse.

Each referral received by the agency is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the duty social work team. At the end of the first quarter of 2016, Tusla reported approximately 60% of the referrals received were of a child welfare concern. The remaining related to child protection concerns where the concern was of abuse, including neglect. Tusla refers child welfare concerns to the relevant family and community support services. At any stage, if circumstances change or new information comes to light and there is concern about abuse, including neglect, the child protection pathway is followed.

At the end of August 2016, the number of cases awaiting allocation to a social worker stood at 4,727, a 30% decrease since December 2015. The number of high-priority cases awaiting allocation was 639, a 36% decrease on December 2015. Of the 639 high-priority cases awaiting allocation, 267 were waiting less than a month, 190 between one to three months, and 182 more than three months.

The Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, inspects Tusla child welfare and protection services, statutory children's residential care centres and foster care services while Tusla inspects children's residential centres run by the private and voluntary sectors. My officials pay close attention to the findings of these inspections, follow up with Tusla and report to me on progress made.

The additional funding of €37 million which has been secured for Tusla in 2017 will provide increased resources to meet identified risks and service demands.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive reply. How satisfied is she with the speed with which the follow-up takes place in all circumstances? How satisfied is she with waiting lists and, where reporting has taken place, of the remedial actions that have taken place? Is she aware of any need for improvements in those areas?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I indicated the percentages of decreases in the number of unallocated cases. Since 2014, a plan has been in place to ensure the processes will continue to be reduced. This is the second year of a three-year initiative to tackle the issue of child protection cases, such as, for example, awaiting an allocation to a social worker. In each case, the percentages are going down according to the plan.

Obviously, this requires additional resources. I get regular reports on the speed with which this is happening. From my monitoring of it to date, it appears it is continuing to meet its target. It will need at least another year to ensure it is properly done, however.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Is the Minister satisfied that adequate provision is now being made to ensure the minimum delays occur after a reporting of a case? Is she satisfied that there is a reporting system which will conclusively indicate that remedial action and preventive measures have been taken to safeguard the welfare of the child?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: If there are serious concerns of abuse, neglect, etc., the children in question are dealt with immediately and taken away from the situation. Although they may not have an allocated social worker, that does not mean they are not being seen. There are various social work teams monitoring to the extent required. From the initial assessment, they will monitor the child's priorities and needs until the child receives an allocated social worker. I have confidence in that but, obviously, the sooner the child gets an allocated social worker, the better.

Traveller Accommodation

27. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has studied the figures provided by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government regarding the underspend of Traveller accommodation budgets by all but one local authority; the consequences for living conditions for Traveller children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33535/16]

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This question concerns the recent revelations that only a tiny fraction of moneys allocated for Traveller-specific accommodation are being drawn down by local authorities. This has a significant impact on all Traveller families but particularly on children. What is the Minister going to do about this? It has been a problem for several years, not just on her watch. Now that apparently we have more moneys than we used to, it is particularly outrageous that they are not being accessed.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I take an interest in all matters concerning the well-being of children. I am particularly conscious of the plight of vulnerable groups, including Traveller children, who we are committed to supporting.

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has informed me that housing authorities are responsible for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers, as well as the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller accommodation programmes in their areas.

I am conscious that to date, just €1.729 million of the €5.5 million allocated for Traveller accommodation for 2016 has been drawn down. However, it is usual that the bulk of capital-related expenditure for Traveller-specific accommodation occurs in the last quarter of the year, having regard to lead-in times for planning, design and construction of capital projects. To ensure maximum expenditure and delivery of accommodation, local authorities submit quarterly profiles of expenditure to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. In this regard, I am assured expenditure during 2016 is being closely monitored by that Department. Contact is ongoing with every relevant local authority to ensure drawdown is maximised. I will work with my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Simon Coveney, to ensure this capital funding is utilised to the full.

Current funding for accommodation-related supports operates in tandem with the capital programme. Current funding of €4.3 million is being provided in 2016. Over €3.2 million has been recouped to local authorities in 2016 to date, of which €0.943 million was self-funded by local authorities from surplus local property tax receipts. A similar level of current funding will be provided in 2017.

I am pleased to note that capital funding of €9 million is being provided for Traveller-specific accommodation in 2017, an increase of €3.5 million, 64%, on the 2016 allocation. This is the second consecutive year the Traveller accommodation capital budget has been increased. Included in this is provision to assist local authorities with the costs of capital works arising from the fire safety review of Traveller-specific accommodation.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I hope the Minister is not suggesting there will be a sudden rush in the last quarter to produce Traveller-specific accommodation plans. If so, she is obvi-

ously oblivious to the fact that this has been going on for years. It was going on during the boom, when councils had a lot more money than they have now. In fact, Travellers from the Blanchardstown Traveller groups staged a demonstration several years ago outside the offices of Fingal County Council.

Let me give the Minister a few startling facts. Some 29% of the funds allocated to local authorities have been drawn down. There is no point in talking about increasing them if they are not even using what they are getting. A total of 5,584 Travellers are in unsafe and over-crowded accommodation. Five children died last year in one incident in Foxrock. Normally when people die in Foxrock, we hear a hell of a lot more about it.

Dublin City Council has drawn down only 17% of its allocation. It has no plans on its books to build any accommodation in 2017. I have checked this with Dublin city councillors. Galway has the highest number of Travellers seeking accommodation but the council has drawn down only 3.25% of its allocation. Hats off to Clare and Kildare, which spent 0% of their allocations. This is a problem that they have no interest in acting upon. It is a really systemic problem.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I share Deputy Coppinger's concerns over these issues. I have shared them for a number of years. I wish to make a couple of points on what the Deputy said. I am glad she put her remarks on the public record. I hope this will encourage the Minister specifically responsible for what we are now speaking about to be motivated to ensure, or find ways to ensure, there is a drawdown.

The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness provides for the commissioning by the Housing Agency of an expert independent review of Traveller accommodation expenditure and the delivery of units, having regard to the targets contained in the local authority Traveller accommodation programme. That review has commenced and is due to be completed in the second quarter of 2017. The review will provide factual information and will be a key platform for the special working group to progress its work effectively, as committed to in the programme for Government. That working group will be established as soon as possible after the completion of the review.

The other point raised concerned the conditions for Traveller children, particularly regarding the accommodation issues we are speaking about. It is in this regard that my Department will have more responsibility. Things are going on in that regard.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I should also have said hats off to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, which has not drawn down any of its funds, despite the fact a tragedy took place in its area. Apparently, the Ballyogan work is under way and the money will be recouped retrospectively.

The Traveller infant mortality rate is 12 children per 1,000. That is a shocking figure in a so-called developed country. The rate is four times that of the settled population. I am sure the Minister knows the causes of infant mortality are associated with sanitation, access to medical care and access to clean drinking water. Many of the bays for Travellers do not have electricity. This is simply unacceptable.

The housing committee tried to reach an agreement whereby councils would be overridden, if necessary. This is because there is clearly a problem with councillors from a couple of the big parties, in particular, and also among other parties and independents, in respect of allowing Traveller-specific accommodation.

Could I ask the Minister about something I know she could do? I realise this may take time and it is not specifically her responsibility; it is that of the Minister responsible for housing. Could she end the education cuts that have affected Travellers, including Traveller children, since the period of the bailout, particularly in respect of visiting teachers?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: On that question, I raised the matter with the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Richard Bruton.

With regard to some of the Deputy's initial comments in her final contribution, my Department allocates funding - €220,000 in total in 2016 - to a number of projects and organisations working specifically with young Travellers. The overall objective of the funding to the youth sector is to support the personal and social development of young people outside, but complementary to, the formal education system. It places particular emphasis the youth work needs of young people between the ages of ten and 21 who experience social or economic disadvantage.

In taking up my Ministry, I took the chair of the consortium on Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the national strategy for children and young people. A number of objectives, particularly in regard to Traveller and Roma children, have been identified. I am overseeing and chairing the consortium to ensure, to the extent that I can and within my Ministry, we move towards tackling the inequalities in health, education and other areas for Traveller children.

Early Childhood Care and Education

28. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the report Childcare, Early Education and Socio-Emotional Outcomes at Age 5 by the Economic and Social Research Institute (details supplied) and to make particular reference to the finding that high-quality child care can offset disadvantages, such as social disadvantage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33532/16]

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: My question relates to child care. I am sure the Minister noted the survey that showed children brought up in a child care setting with a childminder or in a crèche fare no better or no worse than children brought up by their parents. That is very important because there is much guilt felt by women in this regard. High-quality care in a centre can offset potential negative effects of social disadvantage and family factors, which I saw as a teacher in west Tallaght for many years. Children who had been in centre-based settings were more able to learn readily when they came to school.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I am delighted to see research being produced that uses the excellent data provided by the Growing Up in Ireland study funded by my Department. I aim to ensure that all child care policies are firmly grounded in evidence, and I welcome this report as a contribution to that evidence base. The study is a useful contribution to our knowledge about care of children at age three and the impacts of this care. The single affordable child care scheme will be open to children from the age of six months up to age three on a universal basis, with targeted support for those most in need at that age range, and for older children. As such, children in the age category captured by the study will qualify for funding under the new scheme. Many of them are likely to qualify for funding under current schemes.

The study's findings that half of children are in non-parental care at age three, and that more than half of these are in formal child care services, mirrors the Department's existing knowl-

edge of usage patterns. The study also found that family financial difficulties, such as debt problems and difficulty making ends meet, were associated with poorer outcomes for children. This accords with international evidence. Findings such as this strengthen my commitment to working with the Department of Social Protection and other partners to reduce child poverty and deprivation. In relation to the impact of care, overall the study suggests that five year olds cared for in centre-based care, or indeed other forms of non-parental care at age three, are as emotionally and socially healthy as children in parental care. The study also finds that a range of other factors relating to child and family characteristics are of far greater importance for five year olds' emotional and social well-being. Some evidence that centre-based care provides more beneficial effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds are noted in the study but the effects are small.

The Deputy referred in particular to the issue of high-quality care and the potential this has to offset social disadvantage. The study does not comment on quality of care available in Ireland directly. Rather, it highlights a need for more research on the quality of child care settings and providers and on differential impacts of different levels of care quality. I am committed to initiating a baseline review of quality in the sector as an initial step towards this.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I am glad the Minister mentioned the Growing Up in Ireland survey and the scheme she introduced in the budget because the survey finds 42% are brought up by family relatives, 31% are brought up by non-relatives, as in childminders, and only 27% are brought up in centre-based crèches, yet the scheme she introduced in the budget caters only for the minority of parents who use centre-based crèches. The difficulty with childminders is that many are not registered. Many are women who could not afford to go back to work and who mind, for a short few years, the children of neighbours or others they know. The Government has chosen to introduce a scheme that will benefit a minority of parents directly at the expense of a child benefit increase to all parents.

Child benefit needs to be restored and there must be radical reform. The system should be tweaked to facilitate more families and made available to all families on an equal basis.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The approach that I have taken under budget 2017 is a radical new departure, but it is just a first step. A key aspect of this first step has to do with ensuring more efficient and targeted support for lower income families, in particular those with children and that are living in poverty. It will be effective in that regard over time and more effective - I agree that a policy choice was taken - than increasing child benefit universally by €5 or so on. We decided that targeting child care subsidies that, in their initial phase, supported lower income families in a stronger way than medium or higher income families would be more effective in reducing child poverty and supporting people.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I was not for a minute suggesting that it was one versus the other, namely, a choice between restoring child benefit or providing childminding services. The only way to ensure that all families can access child care is for it to be publicly provided and viewed as being important for children and for allowing women to work on an equal basis. Just as first and second level education is now accepted as being something that the State should provide, the same should be the case for preschool child care. When the Minister mentioned on RTE radio what she had introduced in the budget, she stated that she had decided to give money to public services rather than parents. The problem is that child care in Ireland is not a public service. It is utterly private. It has been outsourced to the private for-profit sector, leading to the highest child care costs and badly paid workers who have poor conditions of employment

8 November 2016

and a lack of fulfilment. An investment of €2 billion is required if we are to reach the level of service that is provided in countries like those in Scandinavia, but that would involve us taxing multinationals and ending our position as a tax haven.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I do not want Ireland to be a tax haven either. The Deputy's major point was on moving towards child care being publicly provided. Some aspects of our child care system are publicly provided, namely, preschool. A significant portion of the budget that I have delivered for 2017 will ensure that we have two full years of free preschool. Strictly speaking, it may not be public provision in the same way as our school system has developed, but funds are available for two full years of private, not-for-profit and community preschool services. In this sense, there is public provision of that aspect of child care.

Brexit Issues

29. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the plans she has in place to deal with the potential loss of substantial funding to the youth work sector as a result of withdrawal of EU PEACE funding post Brexit. [33539/16]

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Baineann an cheist seo leis an ról atá ag an Aontas Eorpach i maoiniú cláracha ar nós PEACE. The programme and the EU have taken an active role in recent years in promoting peace and reconciliation. Much of the funding went to youth projects, particularly in Border counties, North and South. What steps does the Minister intend to take to ensure that provision is not lost in those counties?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: I understand that funding under the PEACE IV programme has been secured until 2020. We will examine needs in the area for after that period. The EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation is a unique Structural Funds programme aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society in Northern Ireland and the Border region of Ireland. It represents the EU's commitment to supporting the peace process across the region and was initially launched in 1995.

The PEACE IV programme 2014-20 represents a European Regional Development Fund investment of €229 million and will provide support to projects that contribute towards the promotion of greater levels of peace and reconciliation. The programme places a strong emphasis on promoting cross-community relationships and understanding in order to create a more cohesive society. The core objectives of PEACE IV will be to support actions that develop and deepen reconciliation between divided communities; increase tolerance and respect; promote increased community cohesion and contact; enhance cross-Border co-operation; and address the legacy of the past.

PEACE IV proposes activity in a number of areas, including children and young people. Under this theme, there is a focus on activities for disengaged young people. The programme makes reference to the potential of youth work initiatives and, in this regard, my Department has been actively engaged with its counterparts in Northern Ireland and with the youth sector to maximise the fund's potential. PEACE IV is a valuable programme and I will work to ensure that we derive the full benefits from it.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I thank the Minister for her reply, but the answer largely reads as if there has been no change in the situation since the referendum. Of course, that is

not the case. When the President of the European Commission, Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, was asked whether PEACE funding would continue after Brexit, he stated that it would not. He stated that, until the treaties ceased to apply to a member state that had notified in accordance with Article 50 its intention to withdraw from the Union, the member state would remain a member of the Union with all rights and obligations of a member state, including those related to the implementation of the PEACE IV programme, and that this would cease at the time of Brexit.

These programmes are neatly tied together in a cross-Border manner. The British Government has committed to matching funds until the middle of next year but no further. As soon as Article 50 is engaged, the future of the PEACE IV programme and the subsequent PEACE V programme is under threat. What implications will this have for youth projects in Border counties?

Deputy Katherine Zappone: My plan is to keep funding in place post Brexit. That is what I will work towards. I am happy to receive suggestions from the Deputy on how to support this. He was present in the Chamber when questions relevant to this matter were directed to the Taoiseach regarding PEACE funding and our commitment to what has been secured and guaranteed. On 3 November, calls were made for proposals, with a closing date for applications in January 2017. My Department has been working with its Northern counterpart to put in place the first tranche of funds in this regard. There may be some additional challenges from Brexit, but there is a Government commitment, particularly in terms of my Ministry, that PEACE funding will continue. We are working towards that objective.

An Ceann Comhairle: That concludes questions to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I am entitled to ask a supplementary question.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is, but we are out of time. We must operate in accordance with the clock and the time allocated.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Topical Issue Debate

Garda Districts

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: This is a simple question. Page 98 of the programme for Government outlines that there will be a review of Garda districts. When will the review start, what will be its timeframe and when is it expected to conclude?

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): On behalf of the Tánaiste, who cannot be here today, I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter.

The Government has, in its programme for a partnership Government, recognised community policing as the embodiment of An Garda Síochána, providing a means of recognising that every community, both urban and rural, has its own concerns and expectations. It commits the

Government to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing in every community, including the most minimal response times possible. In support of this objective, the Tánaiste has asked the Policing Authority to oversee a review of, among other things, both the boundaries of Garda districts and the dispersal of Garda stations in rural areas.

I understand that the authority has, in accordance with section 117(2) of the Garda Siochána Act 2005, formally requested the Garda Siochána Inspectorate to examine the dispersal and use of resources available to the Garda Siochána in the delivery of policing services to local communities and to make recommendations to provide a more effective, visible and responsive policing service. The authority has informed the inspectorate that the review should take account of the changing environments in rural, developing urban and suburban areas, the views of local communities, the allocation and deployment of Garda resources at the local policing level, including the use of the Garda Reserve, Garda facilities and Garda equipment as well as relevant recommendations made in previous inspectorate reports. The Tánaiste looks forward to receiving the review from the authority and I am informed that it should be available within 12 months.

Separately, the programme also commits the Government to launching a pilot scheme to reopen six Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings could have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order. Accordingly, the Tánaiste has requested the Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of her statutory functions in relation to the distribution of Garda resources in the State, to identify six stations for reopening.

The Government's overarching commitment is to ensure a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. In furtherance of this, the Tánaiste recently announced that the Government has approved her proposal for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Siochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300. In addition, the Government's capital plan 2016-2021 provides €205 million for investment in Garda information and communications technology, ICT, infrastructure and some €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet.

Taken together, the Garda Authority's review in conjunction with the above measures, reinforce the Government's commitment to enabling significant reform in An Garda Siochána and to providing a high profile and visible policing service for our communities.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: I thank the Minister for State for the reply, which indicates that within 12 months the review will be completed, including the review of Garda boundaries.

I wish to put on the record my strongly held view that the decision by Assistant Garda Commissioner Jack Nolan, who was then based in the south east, to merge two districts was a terrible one. It was the worst decision on the policing of the south east at that time and to date. Two districts, Enniscorthy and Gorey, were merged into a single Garda district which has a population base of 85,000. It is bigger than seven or eight counties in the country. In that one district there is only one superintendent and two inspectors.

I want to put the negative impact of the decision on the area into context. I was informed that three new inspectors would be appointed for the three Garda districts in County Wexford, namely Wexford, New Ross and Enniscorthy. The latter comprises the two aforementioned merged districts. I did not jump for joy at this news because the population of the Enniscorthy district is equivalent to the population of the two other districts. The other two districts got one inspector each but Enniscorthy only got one new inspector, even though it has a population of 85,000.

I repeat that it was a terrible, if not ludicrous, decision. At one stage, there was talk of removing the civilian staff, the sergeants and the inspector from the district but thankfully that did not happen. The staff remained and Enniscorthy district now has four civilian staff, sergeants and an inspector. I want the Gorey district to be reinstated as a full policing district. It is one of the fastest growing districts in the country. To do what was done by the Assistant Garda Commissioner, Jack Nolan and the then Garda Commissioner, Martin Callinan, was reckless. I want that decision reversed.

The Minister of State has said that we will have a decision within a year and I look forward to that.

Deputy David Stanton: Once again, on behalf of the Tánaiste, I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter in the House. As I mentioned, the Policing Authority has, in accordance with section 117(2) of the Garda Siochána Act 2005, formally requested the Garda Siochána Inspectorate to examine the dispersal and use of resources available to the Garda Siochána in the delivery of policing services to local communities and to make recommendations to provide a more effective, visible and responsive policing service. As Deputy D'Arcy knows, the Garda Síochána is very professional in the carrying out of its business. In addition, the Tánaiste has asked the Garda Commissioner to identify for reopening six Garda stations that were closed under the district and station rationalisation scheme. Work is underway on both of these initiatives and the Tánaiste looks forward, with interest, to their completion.

In the meantime, the Government is fully committed, in line with the programme for Government, to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing of every community, including the most minimal response times possible. I am sure that note will be taken of the Deputy's comments this evening. This commitment is underscored by the Government's accelerated recruitment programme and the ongoing major investment in the Garda fleet and the ICT infrastructure of An Garda Síochána, which will facilitate the provision of high-visibility and mobile policing services to communities. Taken together with the ongoing Garda modernisation and renewal programme, these measures will better equip An Garda Síochána and facilitate the provision of a 21st century policing service that fully meets the expectations of our communities.

Once again, I thank the Deputy for raising this matter and assure him that I will convey his views to the Tánaiste.

Ambulance Service Accommodation

Deputy Barry Cowen: I thank the Ceann Comhairle's office for allowing me to raise this issue today.

I raised this matter in February 2012 when, at that time, there was great fear and worry on

the part of staff and the general public in the Edenderry, north Offaly, Kildare, Meath and West-meath areas regarding the ambulance service. The worry centred on the working conditions associated with the ambulance facility which was housed at that time on the grounds of Ofalia House, a HSE community care facility for the elderly and the sick in Edenderry. Despite the fears and worries the interested parties worked to the best of their ability over time but earlier this year HIQA announced that the facility could no longer be used for that purpose. The ambulance service was forced to relocate to Tullamore on the understanding that the relevant works would be carried out at the Ofalia House facility and the service would return to Edenderry within three months.

Thankfully, on foot of concerns raised by me, many other public representatives and the public, the HSE located a site which is close to the fire station in Edenderry and planning permission for a new ambulance facility was granted earlier this year. After the relocation to Tullamore, there was a fear on the part of staff and people living in the locality that if temporary accommodation was made available within three months, the commitment to provide a new, purpose-built facility might not be honoured. All of the public representatives in the area took up the case, including the Deputy opposite, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, I am glad to say. We sought assurances from the National Ambulance Service and the HSE that the new facility would be forthcoming in order to be able to reassure the public and the staff. We have received various items of correspondence, including from the assistant chief ambulance officer of the HSE to myself in response to a Parliamentary Question submitted at the end of October and from Mr. Martin Dunne, the director of the National Ambulance Service, to myself, local Deputies and councillors. A meeting was held with local public representatives six weeks ago, at which more detailed information was provided. At that meeting, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, who is a Minister of State in the Department of Health, confirmed what was contained in the briefing documentation. The confirmation was that not only would temporary accommodation be forthcoming in the near future because a site had been identified, as was detailed through some of the correspondence that was made available to us, but more importantly, a firm commitment was given that action would be taken on foot of the granting of planning permission for a new purpose-built facility.

I am taking the opportunity to raise this issue by means of a Topical Issue so that the public can be assured once and for all that given the commitments of the HSE and the National Ambulance Service and the fact planning permission has been forthcoming and a site for temporary accommodation has been identified, that this will be forthcoming and made available and that we can get a commitment that the new facility will start construction in the very near future. If a date was forthcoming, it would allay everybody's fears and allow people to get on with their work. In respect of the locality and community of north Offaly, west Kildare, south-east West-meath and part of Meath and its close proximity to the N4, it is of pivotal importance in respect of responses to emergencies as they arise. I am glad the Minister of State with responsibility in the Department of Health is here so she can assure the House and, by extension, those we represent that this will be resolved forthwith.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As somebody who is as anxious as Deputy Cowen in respect of the retention of the ambulance service in Edenderry, I thank him for raising this important matter. It is a good opportunity to brief the House on this matter. Since 2006, the National Ambulance Service, NAS, has operated a service from Ofalia House, a HSE care facility in the Edenderry area. This service was most welcome when it was established ten years ago. However, the HIQA review pointed to the

need for some internal reconfiguration works in Ofalia House to ensure compliance with best practice. A fund of around €2 million was provided by the previous Government to carry out those refurbishment works. Works commenced in April 2016 but because of health and safety requirements, the NAS had no option but to vacate the premises. As one who visited it and saw where the service was trying to operate out of when there was a building site around it, I could understand the decision to put the safety and health of the people who work in the ambulance service to the forefront.

While the original intention had been for the NAS to return to Ofalia House on completion of the building works, as we now know, a major part of the facility previously used by the NAS is no longer available due to the requirement for hospice beds within Ofalia House. It, therefore, became necessary to relocate the ambulance service to Tullamore. I acknowledge the excellent service provided by the people based in Edenderry and the fact they co-operated and were so willing to understand what was going on and, at the same time, were anxious to get back to base. As the Deputy is aware, it is proposed to build a new ambulance station in Edenderry. A site has been identified and planning approval has been received. I understand that pending the development of the new station, the NAS, in conjunction with HSE Estates, is actively seeking temporary accommodation for the service in the Edenderry area so that it can resume from Edenderry as soon as possible while clarifying that it is still providing a service while it is based in Tullamore.

Of course, we are all aware that the NAS has undergone a very significant process of modernisation in recent years and a number of important service innovations and developments have taken place. The national emergency operations centre has been established while improved technology has been provided to improve response times. We have developed the intermediate care service to provide lower acuity hospital transfers, which frees up emergency ambulances for the more urgent calls. The establishment of a permanent emergency aeromedical support service to provide a more timely response to persons in rural areas has also been a welcome development. All of us, including Deputy Cowen, know people who have had their lives saved because of that aeromedical support service.

We are also looking at alternatives to the current model of care, which requires every patient to be brought to an emergency department. The options under consideration include “hear and treat” where clinical advice is provided over the phone to callers who can then, if appropriate, be referred to other care pathways. We have evidence that people’s lives have been saved by using the “hear and treat” methodology. I am advised that a recruitment process is under way for the necessary staff to facilitate the roll out of a pilot “hear and treat” model of care.

This ambulance reform programme is taking place against the backdrop of the HIQA review of ambulance services, which was published in late 2014, and the NAS capacity review, which was published earlier this year. The capacity review examined overall ambulance resource levels and distribution against demand and activity. Implementation of the recommendations of the capacity review will require a multi-annual programme of phased investment in ambulance manpower, vehicles and technology. In that regard, the Deputy can be assured that increased funding will be available to the NAS for 2017. The detail of the improvements to be funded will be provided in the HSE’s 2017 national service plan. My officials are working closely with their counterparts in the HSE and the NAS to agree priorities in relation to the 2017 allocation.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I thank the Minister of State for her response. She rightly acknowledges that planning permission was sought by the HSE on behalf of the NAS to provide for and

8 November 2016

put in place a new facility in Edenderry and that it has been granted. She went on to mention that a national emergency operations centre has been set up and that HIQA reviews in 2014 and earlier this year talk about a capacity review and various pilots schemes to seek to have that brought into force and a broader roll out depending on its success.

That is all well and good, and I wish the Minister of State well with that, but I will return to the nub of this issue. A commitment was given, permission was sought and granted and the public, local representatives and I were assured that this will be acted on. I just need the Minister of State to clarify that this will proceed and that this has not been moved sideways or backwards because of the various reviews, the new national emergency operations centre and the capacity review that is being undertaken to see what pilot schemes will bring about the potential for permanent facilities at various locations. I am interested in resolving the issue relating to Edenderry and the greater north Offaly area and adjoining counties, which it serves. I need affirmation and confirmation that having gone to the trouble of getting planning permission and giving a commitment to the locality and its representatives, including the Minister of State and myself, there is no question of that commitment being lost. We need it to be confirmed in the House so that we can assure those people and everybody concerned that this facility will be in place and that commencement will take place this year based on the commitments given to us.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: As Deputy Cowen will recall, the Edenderry district convened a meeting with all of the Oireachtas Members and local councillors recently. Due to the considerations and concerns mooted by everybody, I proposed that we would arrange a meeting with the HSE, because it is delivering the service and not the Department, senior management in the ambulance service and the Minister for Health to provide those reassurances and clarity, which we all require, to ensure people at local level were confident that the HSE was determined to push ahead with the service and the facility the town of Edenderry and the wider area so clearly deserve and expect to have. I can confirm to the Deputy that we will have that meeting. A date has been proposed and everybody will be invited to the meeting. It will be a great opportunity for us to further probe the HSE on this. I feel confident that there will not be an issue but at the same time, it is a project that is being developed by the HSE which will be accountable for what it has done to date and what it plans to do in the future. I am looking forward to having that meeting and inviting Deputy Cowen and all the other public representatives who require clarity, as do I. It is welcome that we will have the opportunity to do it.

6 o'clock

I again thank the Deputy for raising the issue about which we are all very concerned.

Counselling Services Provision

Deputy Pat Buckley: The demand for counselling in primary care, CIPC, is steadily growing. The number of referrals increased from 14,407 in 2014 to 17,000 in 2015. Waiting lists for access to a first appointment are long and growing. A total of 2,496 people were waiting for counselling at the end of the first quarter of 2016. Of these, 45%, or 1,119 people, were waiting for between four and 12 weeks; 21%, or 520 people, were waiting for between 12 and 24 weeks; and 5%, or 139 people, were waiting over 24 weeks. In the improving access to psychological therapies, IAPT, service in the United Kingdom, the target is that 75% of referrals be seen within just six weeks and 95% within 18 weeks. These waiting times for those in need of emotional and mental support at very difficult and troubled times in their lives are not

acceptable. A long wait for counselling is not just a possibility; it is the norm. Over 26% of people waited at least a quarter of a year for their first appointment. Who knows what people in a vulnerable state may go through in this time? How many on the lists engaged in self-harm or self-harming behaviour, made an attempt on their life, or sought emergency support which, of course, was found wanting.

Even when people gain access to the CIPC model, they are only offered eight sessions. That may well be enough for some, but it is far too little for many. Mental Health Reform, which has been to the fore in raising this issue, has called for an expansion of the number to 20 sessions, as in the United Kingdom. The Minister of State must also work to expand the CIPC service to be available not just to medical card holders but also to people on low incomes who are above the medical card threshold. Far too many people on low incomes forgo needed counselling because they cannot afford it. This in the end has untold costs.

The CIPC service is only available to adults. This is a major gap, given the clear potential for positive outcomes from counselling for younger people who are particularly at risk and poorly placed to afford such counselling. Jigsaw and other programmes do good work, but they could and should be supplemented when needed, particularly when we know that child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, remain understaffed in most cases based on a recent HSE report.

A major concern for people who wish to see an improvement in this and other mental health services is the failure by the Government to live up to previous pronouncements on budget increases for these services. The Government has now promised to increase the mental health budget by just 1.8% or €15 million in 2017 - less than half what it claimed on budget day. Will the Minister of State commit to reviewing this funding level which is clearly inadequate to address growing demand and the need to improve services generally to implement A Vision for Change? This €15 million is simply not enough and feels like a box-ticking exercise by a Government that, having promised an increase, felt obliged to provide the crumbs off the table but dressed them up as something better when the media were watching.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. We all agree that there has been a change in the mental health services and that change needs to continue towards a more preventive and community-based model. It should not commence when a mental illness becomes too difficult; we need to protect people's mental health in the very early stages.

A commitment was given to improve access to psychological therapy and early counselling therapies. Following on a commitment in the 2011 programme for Government, the HSE counselling in primary care, CIPC, service was established and formally launched in July 2013. The primary task of the CIPC service is to provide accessible short-term counselling for adults on low incomes who hold a medical card and present with mild-moderate psychological difficulties in a primary care context.

The service is overseen and managed within the framework of the HSE national counselling service, NCS, and provided in each community health organisation, CHO. Each director of counselling within the NCS is responsible for the overall clinical governance framework for the CIPC service in their area. It is co-ordinated on a day-to-day basis in each area by one or more counselling co-ordinators. There are ten counselling co-ordinators in the CIPC service which sources suitably qualified counsellors on a sessional basis to provide for the needs of

individuals using these services.

The Deputy mentioned some of the figures. It is important to go through them because obviously the figures have increased. There has been a growing demand for the CIPC service and consistent growth in the level of service provision. The referral rate increased from 14,407 referrals nationally in its first year to 17,000 in 2015, an 18% increase. In the first quarter of 2016 alone there were in excess of 4,500 referrals nationally to the CIPC service.

Since its launch the CIPC service has offered in excess of 128,000 counselling sessions, with 42,000 offered in 2014 and over 65,000 in 2015, a 50% increase on the figure for 2014. Some 6,000 counselling sessions are being offered every month by the CIPC service. If it continues at this level, it will represent a 12% increase on the figure for 2015. The number of referrals is increasing, as is the number of counselling sessions.

In keeping with its primary task of providing accessible short-term counselling for adults in order to facilitate timely intervention with psychological difficulties, the majority of clients are seen within three months of referral, as evidenced by a breakdown of waiting times at the end of March 2016. Of the 2,496 clients waiting for counselling nationally at the end of the first quarter of 2016, 718 were seen within the first month. A total of 1,119 were waiting between one and three months. I agree that we need to get that figure down to or as close to one month as we can. We also need to reduce the figure of 520 clients who were waiting between three and six months. Analysis of the 139 clients waiting over six months indicated that the majority of this group had specific requirements such as limited client availability to attend counselling.

The Deputy expressed concern about young people's ability to access the CIPC service. As part of the programme for Government investment in 2016, €5 million has been allocated to primary care services to provide counselling and psychological supports for children under 18 years. Additional initiatives to enhance early intervention and prevention services include embedding the existing Jigsaw services and the planned addition of five more youth mental health services - two in Cork, two in Dublin and one in Limerick.

Deputy Pat Buckley: I thank the Minister of State for her reply. She accepts that there is a significant and growing demand for the CIPC service. We have had numerous discussions in the House about mental health and it keeps coming back to the same thing. We know that there is increased demand for the CIPC service. Why can we not fund it properly? The Government had promised to spend approximately €30 million on mental health services and now we are talking about €15 million. We know that there is a demand for 24/7 crisis intervention centres. We also know that there is a huge issue with understaffing in the CAMHS. The mental health budget has to be increased. I, therefore, ask the Minister of State to look at the issue again. I cannot overemphasise that not enough money has been invested in mental health services and people will suffer as a result.

Deputy Helen McEntee: We need to look at the funding increase in the mental health section within the Department of Health. Between 2011 and 2016 an additional €115 million was allocated at a time when the budget of every other section within the Department of Health was cut. There has been a focus on mental health and increasing the funding available for mental health services. In previous years we found that when funding was allocated, it was not spent. There has been an increase of almost 24,000 in the service plan for this year, with an additional €50 million for the national forensic mental hospital, which is very much part of implementing A Vision for Change. This will allow us to outline the service plan which we are currently in

the process of doing. The further development of counselling supports for those with mental illnesses for people over and under the age of 18 will form part of that plan. Our priority, and my priority, is to set out €35 million worth of projects that can be planned in a way that every single penny of the €35 million will be spent. The last thing I want is to stand here in one year and say we have not been able to spend all of our funding or that all of the allocated funding has not been spent. We are initiating €35 million worth of new development and new projects. Some €15 million of that will be spent next year. Almost an additional €10 million will be spent in increasing our staffing resources. This additional €10 million will go in to staffing wages which is an integral part of improving our services. If we do not pay our staff, if we do not retain our staff and if we do not attract new staff to the service then we will never reach those figures the Deputy speaks about. We need to continue to increase our funding, we need to continue to invest but we also need to plan and make sure we spend the money we say we will spend.

Customs and Excise Controls

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for selecting this matter, which seeks to highlight the need for Revenue to increase its presence at the ports and airports in the west, with the aim of tackling drug importation networks in this State.

This is an issue of national importance as drug smugglers and international drug gangs continue to wreak havoc in the State on a daily basis. It is an important issue for the people living in the west who are on the front line of this importation battle between the smugglers and Irish officials. It is very important for the Garda and Revenue officials in the north west. They have expressed to me their deep concerns with regard to the lack of drug surveillance operations at our ports and airports.

The Minister of State, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, will be aware that we got very lucky last month when a consignment of cocaine worth some €5 million washed ashore on a beach in County Clare. This consignment had become detached from a boat at sea and eventually washed ashore in Ireland. We do not know where the drugs were destined for and we do not know where they came from. All we know is that 75 kilos of cocaine washed ashore for the public to discover and that our customs officials with dedicated customs cutter boats were not aware of this consignment before it became detached. This particular incident has raised once more my deep concerns which I have raised with the Department of Finance and with Revenue on several occasions around the west coast of Ireland being used as a drug importation channel by drug cartels. Revenue and the Government are not on top of this worrying situation and I firmly believe that illegal and dangerous drugs are coming into Ireland illegally via the west coast. In a reply to the Taoiseach in October 2013, Liam Irwin said Revenue attaches the highest priority to combatting the smuggling of controlled drugs and that it is committed to playing an active role in working against this criminal activity and those responsible for it. While I accept that this sentiment is the true intent of Revenue in this regard and that lack of resources is the reason why Revenue may not be on top of the situation, I wish to highlight some major issues why we are not reaching the aims of this intent in the west.

With regard to sea access in the west, I am advised that the Revenue fleet of operational cutter boats is not sufficient to cover surveillance and interception operations for the entire west coast. It is clear to see that Revenue simply needs to prioritise more funding in order to purchase more boats and for more customs personnel to increase our operations in this area. I

am further advised that the Killybegs deep water port in County Donegal has no Revenue drug detection personnel in operation. This is despite the fact that boats of any shape or size can arrive and leave this port at any time of the day. Perhaps the Minister of State will explain why this is the case. It seems odd that such an important port would have no drugs customs officers based there. With regard to airports in the west, and Knock Airport in particular, I am advised that there is now no dedicated drug detector dog based at Knock airport or in the midlands west region since March 2016 when the previous dog died. Will the Minister of State provide details as to when this dog will be replaced and what is the overall cost involved?

I also want to highlight that there is no permanent Revenue drug detection staff at Ireland West Airport Knock. This is despite the fact that more than 800,000 passengers will use the airport in 2016.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I have further been advised that no data on the private aircraft which enter and leave Knock airport is being kept and that there is no customs checks on these flights. This is a scary reality given the incidents in the past involving private flights carrying drugs into Ireland. This is something which needs to be looked at going forward. The public is in danger from these drugs gangs and the effects of their products on society.

An Ceann Comhairle: I invite the Minister of State to respond. He might get that dog back.

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I thank the Ceann Comhairle, and I thank Deputy Tony McLoughlin for raising this important matter. The Deputy's commitment in this area is long-standing and well known. The deployment of Revenue staff is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I am advised by Revenue that they use a broad range of data, intelligence and analytical technologies to identify and evaluate risk. Insights and intelligence are increasingly important in directing Revenue's attention to and response to risk including action to confront suspected non-compliance. Compliance and enforcement resources are deployed within regions and districts on a risk priority basis and are designed to maximise effective outcomes having regard to the risk being targeted. Revenue has significant numbers of its staff deployed countrywide engaged on activities that are dedicated to targeting and confronting non-compliance. These activities include anti-smuggling and anti-evasion, investigation and prosecution, audit, assurance checks, anti-avoidance, returns compliance and debt collection. More than 860 Revenue staff are currently serving in Revenue's Border, midlands and west regions.

Revenue's intervention and control role at points of importation and exportation is carried out by officers engaged on enforcement duties and are responsible for the implementation of customs controls. Revenue has an enforcement presence, as required by reference to risk, at all key airports and ports and at other strategic locations throughout the State. As previously alluded to, it places particular emphasis on developing an intelligence based focus at both national and regional level, deploying resources to areas of highest risk. Enforcement strength at particular locations is augmented, as necessary, with additional personnel on a risk assessment basis, or when particular operations are taking place focused on illegal activity.

I am satisfied that compliance and smuggling risks are properly evaluated and addressed, and resources appropriately allocated by Revenue. I am also assured that Revenue keeps the

matter of risk assessment and resource allocations under regular review. I am advised by Revenue that, as part of its risk focused approach to the discharge of its role in relation to illegal drugs importations, harbours and inlets along the coastline are monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis from the point of view of the potential for smuggling. This work is supplemented by Revenue's customs drugs watch programme, aimed at encouraging members of the public, coastal and local maritime communities etc. to notify Revenue in confidence of suspect or unusual movements at sea or around the coast through a confidential 24-7 drugs watch freephone facility. This is a highly valued and successful programme, as evidenced recently by the seizure of a large quantity of drugs near Liscannor, County Clare following a report through the drugs watch programme.

I will turn to Revenue's role in protecting society from the importation of illicit drugs. I know that Revenue is active in targeting and combatting drug smuggling and in playing its role, in conjunction with the other relevant agencies, in combatting this criminal activity. As a stakeholder in the Government's national drugs strategy, Revenue plays an important role in implementing the supply reduction pillar. Strategic and operation plans, which are managed on a national basis, are in place to ensure Revenue meets its commitments under the strategy. This ongoing commitment is bolstered by the deployment of the two Revenue customs cutters, two large-scale X-ray scanners, several mobile scanners and drugs detector dog teams. Revenue works closely with other agencies in the State, including An Garda Síochána and the Naval Service as part of the joint task force on drug interdiction. Revenue also works closely with the Health Products Regulatory Authority, in acting against the illegal drugs trade. Revenue also leverages its contacts within international law enforcement agencies to proactively profile drug trafficking networks. The relevant authorities in the State work closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland to target organised crime groups that are involved in a range of criminal activities, including the illegal drugs trade. This work to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime is being supported and reinforced by the establishment, in the framework of A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, of the joint agency task force, which includes Revenue. Revenue is also actively involved in international fora, including the EU's Customs Cooperation Working Party, Europol and the World Customs Organization, in working together with other administrations, agencies and services to counter the trafficking of drugs and drugs precursors.

I am satisfied with the priority afforded by Revenue to tackling tax evasion and illegal activity such as drugs smuggling and with its risk focused approach to the deployment of resources. I am also satisfied that it is fully focused on leveraging its co-operation with other State and international agencies and organisations to identify and tackle risk.

The Minister supported the provision of additional resources to Revenue at its request in budgets 2015 to 2017, inclusive. This has facilitated the allocation of staff to tackling non-compliance in all its guises.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I thank the Minister of State for his reply, but I reiterate that I firmly believe customs officials in the Border and midlands region should have the relevant tools and resources to tackle drug smuggling. On this basis I call on the Department to increase the amount of funding available to Revenue to enable it to increase its personnel and capabilities to combat drug smuggling along the west coast. We need customs drugs officials based in Kellybegs and Ireland West Airport Knock as a matter of urgency and they need the equipment to be able to conduct their work sufficiently. We also need a new drugs dog at Ireland West Airport Knock and additional customs cutter boats operating along the west coast.

8 November 2016

Does the Minister of State believes the State is doing enough to protect our coastline and airports from the illegal importation of drugs and other contraband with the system that is in place? I am concerned we are not winning the battle against the drug gangs. The Minister of State will have to agree with me when I state urgent thought should be given to Revenue establishing new units, similar to CAB and headed by customs, to target the vast quantities of drugs coming into the country, with a combined approach between the Garda, customs, naval officers and fishermen. Radio control towers would be a crucial first step to increase our efforts in this regard.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: To reiterate, the Minister is happy to support any case Revenue might make for additional resources, including for dealing with the implication of Brexit over the coming years. The Deputy has provided specific information which he thinks will assist Revenue and I know Revenue will be happy to receive it, in particular the issues raised in so far as sea access to the west is concerned. He raised issues regarding Kellybogs deep water port and Ireland West Airport Knock. I will provide to Revenue the information provided to me by the Deputy and I ask that he does the same as well as with regard to the ideas raised in so far as how Revenue's abilities can be enhanced in this area. This information and these ideas would be welcomed by Revenue.

Social Welfare Bill 2016: Order for Second Stage

Bill entitled an Act to amend and extend the Social Welfare Acts; and to provide for related matters

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Social Welfare Bill 2016: Second Stage

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The purpose of the Bill is to provide the legislative framework for the implementation of the measures announced in budget 2017. It also contains a number of largely technical measures which aim to resolve minor deficiencies identified within the welfare code. Overall, the Bill represents a prudent approach, with modest increases across the board alongside more targeted measures; an inclusive approach, which ensures that the recovery benefits everyone, with no one left behind; a progressive approach to making work pay, through positive reforms to the social insurance system and access to benefits extended to the self-employed; and a targeted approach with measures to assist lone parents, low income farm families and school children.

The Bill provides that the maximum rate of all weekly benefits will increase by €5 so that people of working age, as well as retired people aged 66 or older, will all see an improvement in their weekly income. Increases for recipients aged 66 years and over will come into effect during the week ending 10 March 2017. This includes, for instance, all those in receipt of the contributory State pension and the non-contributory State pension. Pensions next year will be

€8 per week higher than in 2009, which means nearly all pensioners are back to where they were in terms of payments from the Department, even if we factor in the abolition of the telephone allowance and reductions in the fuel allowance. I intend to build on this in future budgets by continuing to increase the State pension at a rate greater than the rate of inflation.

The increases for other recipients will come into effect during the week following 10 March, so that all of those who rely on social welfare for their income will have the increased rate paid by St. Patrick's Day. Approximately 840,000 working age people will gain from this increase. It covers people in receipt of 30 different payments, including invalidity pension, disability allowance, blind pension, illness and partial capacity benefit, occupational injury benefit, widow's, widowers and surviving civil partner's pensions, one-parent family payment, back to education allowance, maternity, paternity and adoptive benefit, farm assist, carer's benefit and allowance, pre-retirement allowance, supplementary welfare allowance, back to work enterprise allowance, jobseeker's benefit, jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's transition payment and employment support payments to participants on community employment, Tús, Gateway and the rural social scheme.

It was very important to me and to all of my colleagues in government that nobody was left behind as we sought to extend the benefits of the economic recovery to all sectors of society. Recipients of working age payments, widows, carers, the sick and the disabled have seen no increase in their income since the cuts of 2010 and 2011. Even after the €5 increase they will still be €11.50 per week worse off than 2011 when the Government came into office, so I plan to continue to increase these rates above the rate of inflation in future budgets if resources permit.

Overall, almost 1.5 million people will benefit from these increases and local communities and businesses will also benefit in turn from increased spending. A social impact assessment, using the ESRI SWITCH model on a non-indexed basis, of the social welfare budget package found that people in lowest income quintile, the 20% of people least well off in society, gain the most from budget 2017 measures. The ESRI also recognises explicitly that this was as a result of the inclusion of the weekly rate increase for working age rates of payment.

Alongside the increases in weekly rates, the Bill also provides for very progressive changes affecting the self-employed, a sector which is critical to sustaining the Irish economy. Sections 4 and 9 establish the legislative basis for a new deal for up to 380,000 self-employed people who pay PRSI at the S class. The self-employed sector is hugely diverse and includes people such as farmers, professionals, taxi drivers, small business owners and tradesmen and tradeswomen. Until now, the PRSI contributions they pay have enabled them to qualify for a contributory State pension on reaching pension age. This contributory pension is of course, in itself, a substantial benefit, but I have been concerned for a long time that the social insurance system does not respond adequately to the risks which the self-employed face in the course of their working lives. I am pleased therefore that budget 2017 marks a major step in resolving this deficiency. Section 9 provides that from March 2017, the self-employed will be allowed access the optical, dental and hearing benefits currently available to employees under the treatment benefit scheme. This section also provides that when the range of optical and dental treatments is expanded from October of next year, both employees and the self-employed will benefit equally.

Section 4 provides that the self-employed will be entitled to apply for invalidity pension for the first time with effect from December 2017. This will mean that where a self-employed person is no longer able to continue to work because of long-term ill-health, he or she will have

access to the safety net of State income support without a means test. The person's savings, assets or partner's income will not count against him or her. This is all part of the Government's policy of making work pay and encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship. I intend to extend the benefits available to the self-employed through the social protection system and will look at further options in the coming year.

Budget 2017 included a package of measures supporting lone parents, encouraging them into the workplace and into education, and helping to reduce their child care costs. All lone parents on one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition and jobseeker's allowance will receive the €5 increase in the weekly rates of payment. Those who enter education will receive a €500 annual cost of education allowance, which will be made available to back to education allowance participants with children from the next academic year in September. This will apply to cohabiting and married couples. It will be for anyone in receipt of the back to education allowance who has children. This will help parents, including lone parents, to return to education. The income disregards for the one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment will rise by €20 from €90 to €110 per week reversing, in part, previous reductions to encourage one-parent families to stay in work, return to work and work more hours. For those earning €110 per week or more, it will increase the combined take-home income by up to €15 per week and my intention is to allow for this from 1 January, subject to the passage of the Bill.

The single affordable child care scheme being provided by the Government will also significantly reduce the cost of child care for lone parents and low-income families. It is a step change in State support for child care in Ireland. I have also provided increased funding for school breakfasts, which will help lone parents and low-income households more generally. Some 63% of one-parent family payment recipients do not receive any income from paid work. The changes in budget 2017 and the Bill will assist lone parents into education and to keep more of what they earn where they are back in employment. They will help them to escape the trap of long-term welfare dependency.

As part of the Government's commitment to rural Ireland, I plan to completely reverse cuts to farm assist, a programme which helps more than 8,000 low-income farm families and fisherfolk. At a time of falling farm incomes, it is essential that we strengthen the safety net for farmers who are on the margins. Even farmers who do not qualify for farm assist should have the reassurance of a strong safety net should they need it. Many farmers who benefit from farm assist live in remote parts of the country with very limited prospects of an off-farm income. Therefore, in recognition of the crucial work undertaken in rural communities under the rural social scheme, an additional 500 places will be made available next year.

Young jobseekers under the age of 26 years generally receive age-related reduced rates of jobseeker's payments of €100 or €144 per week. These will increase proportionally with the general rate increases. However, the focus of the Government is on helping and encouraging young jobseekers into employment and education. We do this by actively engaging with and helping them to receive additional training and educational qualifications that will assist them to find a job. I strongly believe welfare should be a second chance or a safety net, not a way of life. Therefore, from next September, when a young jobseeker participates in my Department's back to education schemes, he or she will be entitled to receive the full maximum rate of jobseeker's payment which will then be €193 per week, as opposed to the €160 which they currently receive. This 21% increase represents an extra €33 a week and demonstrates the State's support for young jobseekers who seek to enhance their lives. It is the biggest single increase in the social welfare package. Of course, more remains to be done and I am determined that

we will help more young people in the most effective way possible by helping them into the workforce or education.

I will now give a brief outline of the various sections of the Bill. Section 1 provides for the definition of certain common terms used in the Bill.

Section 2 provides for one of the technical amendments to the social welfare code which are being carried in the Bill. In this instance, the definition of a qualified adult in the Act is being amended so as to formally provide that a person in respect of whom an increase for a qualified adult is being paid is not disqualified from receipt of a half-rate carer's allowance in his or her own right. To be absolutely clear, the scheme has been operating since its inception in line with the policy intention that a person can qualify for a half-rate carer's allowance in his or her own right when she or he is a qualified adult on another person's claim. No one has lost out in the interim and this amendment merely serves to tidy up the governing legislation in this area, lest there be a challenge.

Sections 3 and 4 provide for the addition of paternity benefit and invalidity pension to the list of schemes for which class S contributions, payable by self-employed persons, are reckonable. Paternity benefit has been open to the self-employed since the scheme was introduced in September, while invalidity pension will be open to the self-employed from December next year.

Section 5 provides for a technical amendment to the legislation governing entitlement to illness benefit which secures the existing practice and policy intention whereby the rate of payment to a claimant is held constant for a period of 312 benefit days or one year. In practical terms, this ensures a claimant is not negatively affected where his or her claim for illness benefit straddles two years and the governing contribution year changes as a result. This section also confirms the existing practice whereby a claimant on a reduced rate illness benefit payment can gain as a result of a change in the governing contribution year when my Department will ensure the higher rate is paid.

Sections 6 to 8, inclusive, provide for the increase of €5 in the weekly rates of maternity benefit, adoptive benefit and paternity benefit which will come into effect in March 2017. The main changes in the rates are dealt with in sections 18 and 22 to which I will come shortly.

Section 9(a) is similar to sections 3 and 4 and provides for the extension of treatment benefit to the self-employed. This section will come into effect in March 2017. The purpose of section 9(b) is to widen the application of the treatment benefit scheme beyond what is currently provided for, which is limited to dental and optical examinations. Once the necessary discussions with the bodies representing dentists and opticians are finalised, I will introduce regulations to make an expanded treatment benefit scheme available to both the employed and self-employed with effect from October 2017. I am a strong supporter of the contributory principle, the idea that people who pay into the system should benefit from it. We should not divide society into one group that pays for everything but receives little in return and another that contributes very little but believes itself to be entitled to everything for free. Social insurance is the contributory principle at its best and I envisage more benefits being linked with it in the future.

Section 10 is another provision which brings policy and practice into line with the legislation. Put simply, it allows lone parents in receipt of both the one-parent family payment and blind pension to retain both until their youngest child turns 16 years. This has been done on an

administrative basis to date, pending the tidying up of this aspect of the social welfare legislation.

Section 11 provides for an amendment to the definition of qualified child for the purposes of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme to provide that the qualified child must be ordinarily resident in the State. This will formally bring the definition of a qualified child for the purposes of the scheme into line with that used in the wide range of other schemes operated by the Department.

Section 12 is an amendment to require employers, where they are requested to do so, to provide information for the Department on child benefit claims. This mirrors the existing requirements in a number of other schemes operated by the Department such as family income supplement and the back to work family dividend. These powers are particularly relevant in the case of child benefit payments made on the basis of employment in the State under EU regulations. In order to determine entitlement at the initial claim stage and ensure the right to ongoing entitlement can be validated, the Department must be able to secure confirmation of details from employers.

Section 13 deals with situations where a person has an entitlement to maternity, paternity, health and safety or adoptive benefit, as well as the back to work family dividend. Since January 2015, the back to work family dividend offers financial support to families moving from social welfare into employment where the claimant, having taken up employment or self-employment, stops claiming a jobseeker's payment or a one-parent family payment. It has been brought to our attention that, under the legislation, someone in receipt of the family dividend cannot concurrently receive payment for maternity, paternity, health and safety or adoptive benefit. Where that happens, payment of the family dividend is suspended until entitlement to, for example, maternity benefit is exhausted, at which point payment of the family dividend is resumed. This practice is disruptive for affected individuals, as well as being very cumbersome from an administrative perspective. Section 13 provides that maternity, paternity, health and safety or adoptive benefit may be paid concurrently with the back to work family dividend.

Section 14 provides powers to allow regulations to be introduced to prescribe a specified time for making a paternity benefit claim. Again, this measure is a standard provision which applies to the full range of welfare schemes.

The purpose of section 15 is to ensure there are adequate legislative powers to enable the Minister for Social Protection to set out in regulations the conditions which apply where a person nominates another to act as his or her temporary agent to receive or collect a social welfare payment on his or her behalf.

Section 16 is another technical amendment. It simply provides that the current references in the social welfare consolidation Act to members of An Garda Síochána being seconded to the Department by the Minister to exercise the powers and duties of a social welfare inspector will now, more accurately, provide that the gardaí in question are seconded to the Minister.

Section 17 deals with the position of Romanian and Bulgarian nationals and their families who were working in Ireland during the transitional period from 2007 to 2011. The section provides that contracts of service in the State in which they engaged during that transitional period fall within the categories of employment where a person is regarded as an employed contributor. As a result, PRSI contributions paid by Romanian or Bulgarian employed contributors

during the transitional period will be recognised as valid.

Section 18, along with Schedule 1, provide for new rates for social insurance benefits. The increase of €5 in the maximum weekly rate of the State pension, contributory, will be paid from 10 March next year, as will the increase in the widow's, widower's and surviving civil partner's contributory pension where the claimant is aged 66 or over. The increases in all the other insurance-based payments will come into effect in the week ending 17 March in line with the payments calendar. Proportionate increases for those in receipt of reduced rate payments and for qualified adult dependants are also provided.

Section 19 provides for the inclusion of a reference to the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme, GLAS, operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the relevant Schedule to the Act in order to formally provide that income from this scheme should be partially disregarded in assessing means for social assistance payments. Section 20 provides for the reintroduction of the income disregards and tapering arrangements which applied to the farm assist scheme prior to budget 2012.

Section 21 provides for an increase in the earnings disregard for the one-parent family payment, from €90 to €110 per week, reversing previous reductions and offering a greater encouragement to one-parent families to stay in work, return to work or work longer hours. As I mentioned earlier, taken together with the increase in the weekly rate of one-parent family payment this will, in many cases, increase take-home pay by €15 per week. Subject to the passage of this Bill by this House and the Seanad prior to the Christmas recess, this measure will come into effect from 5 January 2017.

Section 22, along with Schedule 2, provide for new rates of social assistance payments. All maximum weekly allowances are being increased by €5, with proportionate increases for those in receipt of reduced rate payments. Proportionate increases for qualified adult dependants are also provided. As with the insurance-based schemes covered by section 18, the increases for those aged 66 and over will be paid in the week ending 10 March 2017, with all other increases coming into effect over the course of the following week. Section 23 sets out the standard provisions in relation to the Short Title, construction and commencement of the Bill, once enacted.

The measures contained in this Bill will be supplemented by other budget measures which do not require amendments to the primary legislation. For example, the payment of the Christmas bonus early next month, which will benefit more than 1.2 million people at a cost of some €221 million, is one such measure. The Bill reflects the prudent approach of the Government to ensuring that the economic recovery, which is under way and which is reflected in increasing numbers of people securing employment, is not put at risk. There are meaningful, if modest, increases in social welfare payments which will benefit individuals, families and their communities. There are also specific targeted measures which will provide additional supports to vulnerable sectors of our society, including one-parent families and low-income farm families and fishermen.

The Bill is also reforming in recognising the unique contribution which the self-employed make to our economy and society. It strengthens the connection between PRSI contributions and benefits through, for example, the enhanced treatment benefits in respect of dental, optical and hearing care for the employed and self-employed and access to invalidity pension for the self-employed. I should mention at this point that I intend to bring forward a Committee Stage amendment which will change the social insurance status of city and county councillors as pub-

lic officeholders so that, in general, their income as councillors will in future be liable for class S PRSI. In return for their PRSI contribution of 4% they will be able to access the same benefits as a self-employed person paying the same amount. This will end the injustice of councillors paying PRSI but receiving nothing in return for these contributions, unlike the employed and self-employed, who pay the same percentage.

I also wish to advise the House that I will bring forward another amendment on Committee Stage to update the provisions in the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act which relate to habitual residence. My colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, expects to be in a position to formally commence certain provisions of the International Protection Act 2015 before the end of this year. The Act deals with the entry into and presence in the State of people in need of international protection and as a consequence the relevant sections of the Social Welfare Act will need to be updated and aligned with this legislation.

This is the first Social Welfare Bill to be introduced under this Government. I hope it is one of many that will improve living standards, assist people to move from welfare into work, support self-employment, promote self-reliance and develop a strong social insurance system based on the contributory principle.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: This Bill seeks to implement the social welfare changes announced in the budget. Contrary to speculation, Fianna Fáil did not draw up budget 2017 but it did influence it. As a result of the influence we exercised in the budget we are beginning to see an element of fairness being restored to the social welfare system after five years of harsh, punitive and regressive budgets. This budget, for the first time in many years, is not weighted in favour of those least in need. Fianna Fáil can take a certain amount of credit for that.

I was never a fully paid up member of the school of economics such that when one has money one should spend it. However, that is precisely what we did in the past in terms of social welfare and I make no apologies for our having done so. In 1997 and 2007 under Fianna Fáil and Fianna Fáil-led Governments, basic social welfare rates increased by 123%, which is three times the 41% increase in the consumer price index and double the 61% increase in gross average industrial earnings. It is true to say that in the teeth of the financial crisis, in 2010, we were forced to cut social welfare. That was a very painful decision, politically, and one which cost Fianna Fáil dearly. However, we did not cut pensions or ancillary benefits and so the cut was the minimum possible that we could impose in the particular circumstances.

Despite the increases that we provided when times were better it is true that we did not make anybody in receipt of social welfare rich. Nobody who is reliant on social welfare to survive from week to week can be described as being well-off. What we did was lift a lot of people out of poverty, although only barely. That is the reality. Bad or inadequate as social welfare provisions here may be, they compare very favourably with those in our neighbouring jurisdiction across the Border. For example, in this country jobseeker's allowance for people under 25 years of age is €100 per week, soon to increase to €102.70 compared with €65 in Northern Ireland. For people here aged over 25 years it is €188, soon to increase to €193, whereas in Northern Ireland it is the princely sum of €82.23. Similarly with jobseeker's benefit. Disability allowance here is €188 per week compared with €93 per week in Northern Ireland. Carer's allowance here is €204 per week for people under 66 years of age and for people over 66 years of age and caring for one person it is €242, compared with €69 in Northern Ireland. I wonder

who is in charge there?

Deputy John Brady: It is Westminster controlled.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The maximum rate of contributory old age pension in this country is €238 per week compared with €175 in Northern Ireland. We heard a lot of guff this morning at the Joint Committee on Social Protection about lone parents and how certain parties were not looking after them and other parties are going to look after them. The rate of lone-parent allowance in this country is €188 per week, soon to rise to €193 as a result of this budget. The rate of lone-parent payment for a person over 18 years of age in Northern Ireland is €81 per week. The rate of payment for a person under 18 years of age is the princely sum of €65 per week.

Deputy John Brady: Maybe Fianna Fáil would work with us to end Westminster control of that system.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The Deputy's party is sitting in the Executive and it is happily presiding over that system, which it handed over to Westminster because it was not willing to accept responsibility for it. That is the reality.

Deputy John Brady: Perhaps Fianna Fáil would work with us to have control over it handed back to the Assembly instead of-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: That is the reality. Sinn Féin accuses Fianna Fáil of having abdicated its responsibility. The people who abdicated responsibility are the people who ran away at the first sign of responsibility. Instead of availing of the opportunity to approach a very weakened Fine Gael Party and offer it their support on condition that its policies were implemented Sinn Féin disappeared and waited until a Government was formed and then crawled out from under its rock to criticise it.

In so far as this Bill is concerned, there are measures in it which I do not particularly like.

Deputy John Brady: The Deputy has just justified it.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: More important, there are measures which are not in the Bill which should be in it. The poverty figures demonstrate that we still have a long way to go. Fianna Fáil is not opposing the Bill on Second Stage, but I have a few things to point out to the Minister about various aspects of the legislation which we will be discussing further on Committee Stage.

I welcome the increase in the rate of pension, although I regret the fact that it will not apply until 10 March 2017. It was usual in good times and bad for budgetary increases to kick in from 1 January the following year. I would like to see that system restored. However, I make no apologies for campaigning for an increase for pensioners. If one looks at what has happened for them in the past five years, one can see the withdrawal of the free telephone rental allowance, the decimation of the household benefits package, restrictions in qualification for a medical card and the introduction of water charges and the property tax. All of these are matters which bear down heavily on those with fixed incomes. It was time pensioners got a break.

Deputy John Brady: Fianna Fáil started it.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am very glad that we helped to persuade the Government to give them that break.

I also welcome the increases for those of working age. However, nothing has yet been done about the averaging system for pensions. This was a particular measure introduced by the previous Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, and it has given rise to a situation where a person who enters the social welfare system just before his or her 56th birthday and pays stamp for ten years will be entitled to a full pension. If somebody pays stamp equal to 20 years contributions over a longer period, in many cases, he or she will be entitled to less. A system which provides that one receives a higher pension in making fewer contributions is patently unfair. I know that this is a particularly difficult problem to unscramble. However, we have all had people in our constituency offices who paid stamp back in the 1950s or 1960s before leaving the workforce, generally because they got married. They later re-entered the workforce. Surely, it is not beyond the wit of the entire intelligentsia in the Department of Social Protection to find some way to mitigate the impact. The homemaker's scheme which Fianna Fáil introduced in 1994 was an attempt to do this to some extent, but there are many hard cases. Many people come to me to point to their situation which is impossible to justify.

Above and beyond this, we must tackle the question of pensions generally. The demographics show that after 1980 the birth rate dropped substantially and it only began to recover in the early 2000s. However, it never recovered to its 1980 peak. That is one side of the equation. The other is the fact that we are all living longer, which is something to be applauded. We should not look at pensioners and the elderly as bed-blockers and a demographic time bomb. They are the ones who worked hard to build the country. Unfortunately, however, the numbers are such that the social welfare system will become unsustainable in a relatively short space of time. The statistic is that there are five workers for every pensioner, but that is due to change gradually in the next 30 years to a ratio of 2:1. That is a relatively short space of time and more and more pressure will be placed on the system in the interim. That has been evident for some time and it is incumbent on us as a society to look for solutions. There has been a great deal of talk about solutions, but little or no action has resulted from it.

Traditionally, one of the things successive Governments did to encourage people to provide for themselves was to give them tax relief. Studies conducted by the ERSI and others have identified a significant dead-weight loss associated with tax incentives for those in the upper income levels. In other words, they had the resources to save and would probably have provided for themselves anyway. As such, the tax relief was a bonus. That is why the last Government and its predecessor began the process of reducing this pension-related tax incentive. I cannot judge where we are in relation to it, but it is probable that we have reached the point of diminishing returns. The Minister may be aware of the very important document produced by Social Justice Ireland which recommends a universal pension scheme. What is proposed is that the revenue gained in abolishing all tax relief on pensions would be sufficient to provide for a universal pension. I have read the document and it is impressive, well put together and well argued. Whether the figures stand up, I am not qualified to say. However, I would like to hear the Minister's views on the matter.

Defined benefit pension schemes are disappearing rapidly. We have proposed in the past few years a few simple amendments which would at least help to arrest that trend or mitigate the position for workers when a pension scheme collapses. However, we did so without success. In her wisdom, the previous Minister advised the Dáil to vote down the amendments. I see no reason a healthy pension scheme should not be required to be at least 90% funded before it can be closed down. There are various other factors in liability calculation. The liability calculation is absolutely artificial. It is an accounting fiction. While a certain amount has been done

in that regard in that trustees are now entitled to a greater extent to invest in Irish Government bonds, surely that process should be accelerated. I think it was Einstein who said the definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. There is a touch of that about the pension system. We have heard plenty of talk and discussion, seen plenty of papers and documents and had plenty of seminars but very little action. The previous Minister used to regale us with tales from far-flung places such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand where a marvellous system of auto-enrolment had been introduced. That system was introduced recently in the United Kingdom. A recent study conducted by Mercer shows that it has worked very well there where 90% of young people have not opted out. In fact, 80% of people under the age of 35 years have managed to keep paying at the highest possible rate. It is time to have a very serious look at the pension system here. It is a problem which is coming down the line and I trust the Minister will turn his attention to it once the Social Welfare Bill is out of the way.

We have all made representations on behalf of single parents. In fact, the matter was discussed again at the Joint Committee on Social Protection this morning. The Minister will be aware that Dr. Michelle Millar and Dr. Rosemary Crosse were commissioned by his Department to carry out an independent analysis of how the changes to the lone parent allowance made by the previous Government had played out. The result is a searing indictment of the new system. The authors state:

One of the greatest concerns of those interviewed about the policy changes is the reduction in the combined income of those one-parent family payment recipients who were in part-time employment prior to the change. With the exception of those countries that introduced a time limit on welfare payments, there is no evidence of activation resulting in lone parents in receipt of welfare being financially worse off as a result of policy change. Policy often has unintended consequences but if the premise of activation policy is to reduce poverty levels by increasing the number of lone parents in paid employment, then a policy which results in lone parents in paid employment being financially worse off has evidently created an unintended consequence and needs revision. This neither encourages welfare recipients to enter into employment nor will it result in an increase in the income of the household; rather, it has the perverse effect of encouraging welfare dependency and reducing household income.

7 o'clock

By any standards, that is a pretty damning indictment from somebody who was commissioned by the Government to conduct an independent report on how the system is working. Various charts have been produced by people who represent lone parents showing how lone parents who go to work fare. We are supposed to be encouraging lone parents to go to work, but they will lose money as a result of these changes.

Right on cue, a number of organisations representing lone parents have released literature advising lone parents, whose working family dividend will run out, that if they are in receipt of child maintenance, they should switch from FIS back to jobseeker's transitional payments. In other words, they are advising them to switch from work-related to welfare-related payments, which is the precise opposite of the policy intention behind those changes. They were meant to move people from welfare to work, but they are moving them from work back to welfare. A number of organisations which have communicated with us, including the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and SPARK, have pointed out that there are many anomalies in the current system.

For example, a lone parent returning to education may be eligible for the SUSI grant depending on whether he or she is in receipt of rent allowance. The system is riddled with anomalies like that. I welcome the change announced by the Minister. Any improvement is obviously welcome, but I noted in the public expenditure statement accompanying the budget that the change would cost €9 million per annum. I received a reply from the Minister on 17 August. I had asked what the cost of changing the age limit to 12 years would be and I was told it would be €9.9 million. Quite frankly, that would be a much better approach and would not cost the State anything. I commend the presentation from Dr. Michelle Millar to an Oireachtas committee to the Minister. She suggested a number of alternative ways of dealing with the matter. It is a running sore and will not go away.

I welcome the proposal to increase jobseeker's allowance from €160 per week to the top rate, which is something I recommended, for people who re-enter the education system. In this and in other jurisdictions there is a differential between the rate of social welfare paid to people aged under 25 and over 25 years. We can argue the case in different ways. I am not persuaded that the differential needs to be extended further, but it will be as a result of the Bill. Somebody on the full rate of jobseeker's allowance will receive an increase of €5 per week, but somebody on the lower rate, which is applicable to people aged between 18 and 24 years, of €100 per week will only receive an increase of €2.70 per week. Therefore, the gap continues to widen.

Somebody in the public domain asked the Minister about this recently, and he said he did not want to send out the wrong signal. I understand that, but what are we saying? Are we saying that if we give somebody who is 23 years of age and unemployed €102.70 per week he or she will strive mightily to re-enter the education system or grab a job, whereas if the same person was given €105 per week he or she would sit at home? I do not think there is any logic to that view.

I refer to the activation system. We all know that society is changing, and we are in an era where traditional skills are disappearing and people have to upgrade their education on a regular basis. It is only right that there should be a system of reskilling and retraining. Generally speaking, we call that activation. However, unfortunately in this country, activation is tied to compulsion. We have a system of retraining and reskilling which is compulsory. Changes made in the past couple of years have introduced compulsion to a much greater degree than had previously been the case.

We now have a situation where if somebody is offered a training or an education course, regardless of how irrelevant or inappropriate it may be, he or she must sign up or lose some or all of his or her welfare payments. Equally, if somebody is offered a job, regardless of how low paid, insecure or inappropriate, he or she must sign up or face social welfare penalties. We are ramming square pegs into round holes from one end of the country to the other. I know people who were offered jobs, through JobPath, which they had no interest in or qualifications for and which were located up to 50 km from Limerick city. The cost of going to work would mean they were at a loss over and above what they received in social welfare payments.

The social welfare system has become more authoritarian and unsympathetic. It is forcing many people into low-paying and unskilled jobs which, of course, only benefits employers. We have to examine the system quite seriously.

The Minister will recall that the Government instituted a study on JobBridge. I will not take up the time of the House or embarrass certain people by reading out some of the testimonials I

have received from people who had very bad experiences with JobPath and Turas Nua. A very detailed study into the operations of Turas Nua and the sort of results it has or has not produced, as the case may be, is now overdue.

I welcome the extension of the social insurance system to invalidity pensioners. However, I note the committee which considered this, namely, the advisory group on tax and social welfare which reported in 2013, came to the conclusion, for reasons which are quite a mystery to me, that any extension of the social insurance scheme to the self-employed should only be for long-term benefits and should not cover things like occupational injury benefit, illness benefit, etc. A certain reasoning was given for that conclusion, but to my mind, to put it at its most polite, it is less than persuasive. In comparison to other European countries, we are way behind on this matter. The countries which have social insurance schemes for the self-employed cover long-term and short-term illnesses.

There are a number of ways in which we could introduce such a scheme. There could be a compulsory increase in employers' PRSI. We could allow people to voluntarily sign up to the scheme. Alternatively, we could have recourse to the taxpayer. The Minister has opted for the latter. I note he is following the advice of the advisory committee that reported in 2013, which rejected a voluntary system. Again, in so far as I could understand the language used surrounding the reasons for the refusal, it seemed to be the case that the committee said we had never done this before so we cannot do it now.

To say the least, that is a peculiar view given that other European countries, including advanced countries and recent entrants to the EU, have voluntary schemes for illness benefit for the self-employed. These countries include Denmark, Finland, Germany, to some extent, Spain, France, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland and even Lithuania. We have been told that we cannot have such a scheme because we never had one before.

The Minister has allocated €5 million to the introduction of the invalidity pension for the self-employed from December of next year, which is 14 months away. There was a social welfare briefing during the week, which I unfortunately could not attend. A member of my office asked what would be the cost of it in a full year. The figure given was €25 million or something of that nature. My understanding from replies I received from the Department previously was that the cost would be €74 million per year. Perhaps €74 million covers short-term illness benefit as well and that the figure of €25 million just refers to invalidity pension. Will the Minister comment on that?

We have to tackle poverty traps. There are elements to the social welfare system that disincentivise people from going to work. For example, the three-day rule provides that a person working 15 hours per week over three days can sign on for social welfare for the remainder of the working week. If that person is working 15 hours per week over four days, it is not possible. That is blatantly unfair and does not recognise the realities of the modern workplace. It should be an hours-based system. There will be some complexity in moving to such a system, but we will inevitably have to move in that direction.

There are also disincentives built into the present operation of the family income supplement, FIS, scheme, which needs refinement. Does the Minister intend to abolish the scheme? He has spoken about introducing a family dividend. Will that be a substitute for the FIS scheme or will it be introduced alongside it? This is a relevant issue.

Many other possible reforms would not cost the State a penny. For example, the time has come to abolish mandatory retirement. We should set up a special unit within Intreo or IDA Ireland that is specifically aimed at those aged more than 50 years. It is time to give more flexible access to private pension funds. That has worked well in the UK also. It will be necessary to have a proper advice scheme to advise people on what to do with their money and how to approach the matter though.

There will come a time when we will have to have a special cost of living for those with disabilities. Only 30% of those with disabilities are part of the workforce. Disability spending has reduced by approximately 10% in the past five years, which was a time of increasing demand. Everyone knows that it is more expensive for those with disabilities to live from week to week than it is for the average, fully healthy person.

The back to school clothing and footwear allowance was substantially reduced over the past number of years. Looking at the figures, it would not cost a great deal to restore it to some extent. It should be restored at the earliest possible opportunity because it was designed to assist, and only assisted, the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable of the population.

We can say the same about fuel allowance. At a time of rampant fuel poverty, there has been a partial restoration of the fuel allowance, which had been reduced, but the partial restoration is not sufficient.

This morning the lone parents' organisations pointed out to us that non-custodial parents are now receiving correspondence from the Department of Social Protection to the effect that they need no longer contribute to their child's upkeep, which is scandalous. This legislative lacuna occurred when the concept of jobseekers' transition was created and it is time it was dealt with.

We need to seriously consider overhauling the social welfare appeals system. It would not be a matter of reinventing the wheel. Detailed studies have been undertaken on this issue by the Free Legal Advice Centres, FLAC. This organisation has pointed out the deficiencies in the system and put forward far-reaching proposals for reform. I can find no argument against any of those proposals.

I hope this is the beginning of the end of regressive budgets. I am looking forward to the debate on Committee Stage. There are a number of aspects to the Bill that I would like to see changed and there are a number of matters that I would have liked to see included in it, but we will return to that debate on Committee Stage.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Is Deputy John Brady sharing time?

Deputy John Brady: No, I will take the full 30 minutes.

Let me just say that I will not take lectures from a Deputy who is a member of the party that brought this country to its knees. Contrary to the spin-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Spin?

Deputy John Brady: Yes, spin. He comes in here and states that his party lifted all of social welfare recipients out of the poverty trap, even if it was, to use his words, marginally. I will read the list of cuts for the record of the House. Fianna Fáil, the partitionist party, states that the Six Counties is not part of this country, so not only is he a hypocrite, he is also a member of a partitionist party.

This is the party that targeted the blind, the deaf and the disabled. It halved the jobseeker's payment to those under 20 years of age to €100.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Why does Sinn Féin not do something for the poor in the North where it is in charge? Sinn Féin is in charge in the North.

Deputy John Brady: It cut the minimum wage. It cut maternity benefit and the student support grant.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Sinn Féin members are the most two-faced hypocrites I have ever met in my entire life.

Deputy John Brady: It introduced prescription charges. It cut carer's allowance and carer's benefit.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Deputy Brady, without interruption, please.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: He interrupted me.

Deputy John Brady: It removed the Christmas bonus, reduced rent supplement, closed the back to work allowance for new recipients-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: We increased it first, before we reduced it.

Deputy John Brady: -----and cut child benefit.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: We never had the dole as low as it is in the North.

Deputy John Brady: Contrary to lifting social welfare recipients out of the poverty trap--

Deputy Willie O'Dea: We never had dole payments of €80 a week.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I will stop the Deputies. Deputy O'Dea must allow Deputy Brady to speak without interruption.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I hate hypocrisy. I hate hypocrisy and lies.

Deputy John Brady: Contrary to the spin that Fianna Fáil lifted social welfare recipients out of the poverty trap, it compounded the poverty further and deeper. Deputy O'Dea is correct that there was a presentation on lone parents' matters. He knows that 22.1% of lone parents, which is one of the groups over which he cries crocodile tears in this House, live in a constant state of poverty, but that is thanks to his party, Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Sinn Féin had its chance to join the Government.

Deputy John Brady: I set that out to set the record straight.

After the budget, during a "Prime Time" debate, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, listed all of the similarities between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. He stated that they both shared common policy objectives, that they both come from much the same background and that they are both supported by much the same people across the country.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: He does not get everything right.

8 November 2016

Deputy John Brady: It was a bit like an awkward conversation between a married couple, where one partner justifies to the other all the reasons they are meant to be together.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Is that the best you can do? Is that your best shot?

Deputy John Brady: The Minister for Finance did leave out a number of points on what makes Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil two peas in a pod. There are many more similarities to add to the Minister's list, which are clearly evident from budget 2017. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have utter contempt for young people. Across the board, every social welfare recipient will see a €5 increase in their payment, except for those aged under 26 years. Those aged 18 to 24 years in receipt of a jobseeker's payment will receive-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: It is a long way from-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Deputy O'Dea-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: This guy is okay with what is paid across the Border-----

Deputy John Brady: I hope the Acting Chairman has stopped the clock. The heckling obviously demonstrates that the truth has touched a raw nerve.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: You would like to think so.

Deputy John Brady: Every time I come into this House and remind Fianna Fáil of what it implemented and imposed on people across the board-----

Deputy Willie O'Dea: What is it a week-----

Deputy John Brady: -----its members react as Deputy O'Dea reacts now. I ask the Acting Chairman to stop Deputy O'Dea and to allow me to speak uninterrupted.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I have on numerous occasions asked Deputy O'Dea to stop. I ask Deputy Brady to address the Chair. There is a reason for a Chair being here. I will chair this debate.

Deputy John Brady: Please do chair it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): The Deputy knows that I am one of the fairest people in the Chair.

Deputy John Brady: Absolutely.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I have asked Deputy O'Dea not to interrupt him. I ask him to please address his remarks through the Chair and to continue with his contribution.

Deputy John Brady: Those aged 18 to 24 years in receipt of a jobseeker's payment will receive an increase of €2.70. Those aged 25 years will receive an increase of €3.80. Instead of struggling to live on €100 per week, those aged between 18 and 24 years will now struggle on €102.70 simply because of their age. These increases were hardly surprising coming from the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Leo Varadkar, given that he struggles to comprehend how any young person could be on a jobseeker's payment in the first place. He made his feelings towards young people crystal clear; the full rate of jobseeker's benefit is far too generous

for them. The Minister has also expressed confusion about young people with poor English and qualifications coming to Ireland from foreign shores and taking up employment in a matter of weeks, while young Irish people seem unable to do likewise. Apparently, to use his words, “there are lots of jobs.”

Not content with running thousands of young people out of the country when it purposely cut jobseeker’s payments in the first place, the Fianna Fáil Party has played its part in ensuring the discrimination against young people it started in 2009 will continue. While it engages in the pretence of being outraged by the level of the increase and has vowed to reverse it, the crocodile tears Fianna Fáil has shed about a tiny increase in payments for young jobseekers come a little late in the day. It was part of negotiating the budget and, ultimately, can take responsibility for the measures for young jobseekers. In contrast to the numerous U-turns it has made since the general election, its message for young people has remained consistent - they should live on €100 a week and be grateful or leave the country. I assume this is one of the common policy objectives it shares with Fine Gael.

Sinn Féin welcomes the increase in the back to education allowance for jobseekers aged under 26 years to a new full rate of €193. However, given that recipients of the allowance do not qualify for the maintenance component of the student grant, the current rate will not sustain a young person through a three or four-year course. For many young people, returning to college also means having to move to access a college course and incurring additional costs which the back to education allowance will simply not cover.

While it was not anticipated that the Government would make life more difficult for lone parents, the common policy objectives it shares with Fianna Fáil have made this possible. The single biggest issue for lone parents, the reduction to seven years in the cut-off age for the one-parent family payment, is not addressed in the Bill. While it is argued that the Government reforms were implemented as an incentive to encourage lone parents into employment, family income supplement, the in-work support for lone parents, has not been increased. As a result, many parents on family income supplement would be better off if they transferred to the jobseeker’s schemes.

It has been well documented that the lone parent reforms have had the perverse effect of encouraging welfare dependency and reducing household income. A recent report undertaken by the UNESCO child and family research centre at NUI Galway echoes this view. It concludes that the policy has left lone parents in paid employment financially worse off.

The Government seems to ignore the blatant fact that the capacity of a lone parent to work and care is not equal to that of a two-parent family. Lone parents are unable to participate in full-time employment when they are a child’s sole carer because they are locked out of accessing child care owing to a lack of availability and the substantial costs involved. The Government’s promise to introduce a Scandinavian child care model on the back of the lone parent reforms is nothing but a distant memory. Difficulties with the cost and availability of child care have been repeatedly acknowledged as an issue of concern for those parenting alone who wish to return to paid employment. Analysis by the OECD indicates that full-time day care for two preschool children accounts for 40% of the family income of an Irish lone parent on an average income compared with an OECD average of 13%. A report by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission recommended that the State reverse the reforms to the one-parent family payment until such time as an adequate and affordable child care system was in place. Perhaps ignoring this recommendation is also part of the shared policy objectives of Fianna Fáil and

Fine Gael.

According to the Government, lone parents also have the option of returning to education or engaging in training, neither of which can be accessed without proper child care. The Government needs to get its head around the fact that, in the absence of affordable child care, returning lone parents to work is not a realistic prospect.

An end to the farce known as JobBridge has been announced on numerous occasions, including as far back as 1 May 2016. I welcome the reduction in funding for the scheme in budget 2017 as a clear signal that it will be abolished. However, I am concerned that the Minister for Social Protection has been unable to provide details of a new scheme now that JobBridge has been closed to new applicants. The issues that gave rise to the serious concerns highlighted in the Department's audit of JobBridge cannot be allowed to continue in the replacement scheme. In that respect, JobBridge 2.0 will not cut it and a root and branch reform will be required. As I have outlined previously, Sinn Féin has proposed a credible alternative to JobBridge. I urge the Minister to examine our alternative proposals as a means of getting young people into the workforce.

The annual €500 cost of education allowance introduced for parents and lone parents in receipt of the back to education allowance is not new as an earlier payment was abolished in 2013. Without access to affordable child care and the maintenance element of the student grant, lone parents will find that returning to education is not a sustainable option.

Child maintenance is another major issue that is impacting on lone parents. The Department places an onus on lone parents to seek maintenance from former partners. On the one hand, it issues letters to the parent who is liable to pay maintenance in which it states maintenance payments are no longer obligatory once a child reaches the age of seven years, while, on the other, it tells lone parents they will face financial sanctions if they do not seek maintenance. This approach places lone parents in an impossible and sometimes dangerous position and must end. Lone parents do not feature in the considerations of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. That the Minister has not even bothered to respond to the UNESCO child and family centre's report reinforces this view.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael make commitments before elections, only to dump them when elected. In their election manifestos they pledged to increase the living alone allowance, yet no such increase was provided for in budget 2017.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: How much is it in the North?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): No interruptions, please.

Deputy John Brady: Older people living alone are among the most vulnerable in society. Many of them rely solely on the State pension for income and face the same increase in the cost of living as all other households. Additional charges placed on older people, for example, the family home tax, water charges and the increased prescription charges, have placed a major burden on older people living alone. Fine Gael has maintained the prescription charges for medical card holders introduced by Fianna Fáil in 2010. In targeting the sick and weak both parties have shown that they have no shame.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The Deputy is the last person to talk about shame.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Please allow Deputy John Brady to proceed, without interruption.

Deputy John Brady: I have touched another raw nerve.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The Deputy is shameless.

Deputy John Brady: That is the Deputy's reaction every time I touch a nerve.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I ask Deputy Willie O'Dea not to interrupt.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am being provoked.

Deputy John Brady: Neither party is concerned that people are choosing what medication they can do without week to week. This is something else both parties have in common. While Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil both acknowledge fuel poverty - Deputy Willie O'Dea referred to it himself - they failed to turn about any of the cuts imposed on fuel allowance. The rate remains the same. Currently, 28% of households across the State experience fuel poverty. That means we have older people who are cold in their own homes. We know Ireland has the highest levels of excess winter mortality in Europe with an estimated 2,800 excess deaths every winter, yet Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have failed to address this in budget 2017. The reality is older people travel on public transport during the day to keep warm. They ration fuel at home because they cannot afford it and are having to go to bed early just to stay warm.

During the general election campaign, I met a lady who told me how she goes to her local library to keep warm. She meets many other elderly people from the community there. This is happening the length and breadth of the State. Our elderly have to go into public buildings to keep warm because of the gross inadequacy of the fuel allowance and the fuel poverty 28% of our population experiences. This is utterly unacceptable. Budget 2017 has done nothing in that regard. Due to the inaction of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, this will continue.

There was a song and dance about the €5 increase in the State pension. When we looked at the fine print, however, we realised older people will not see the increase until five months after the budget, a date unknown until the Social Welfare Bill 2016 was published last week. While it is acknowledged older people need this increase, the message from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is they will have to wait for it. The Bill fails to address all of the significant inconsistencies which exist in our pension system. We have the most bizarre ongoing situation where 65 year olds are being forced into jobseeker's payment on retirement as a consequence of abolishing the transitional State pension. The only income available to those who are obliged to retire at 65 is a jobseeker's payment. The Department is not interested in whether these people are actively seeking employment, the main criteria for receipt of such a payment. It just wants 65 year olds to take the jobseeker's payment quietly for the year. Many cases involve a person retiring at 65 who has worked for maybe 40 or 50 years who has diligently paid pension contributions but is now told they cannot access their pension for a year. As of April of this year, there were more 65 year olds in receipt of jobseeker's payments than any other age category. That is a total of 5,075 men and women aged 65 across the State.

In recent weeks, a lady made contact with my office on this matter. Her late husband was forced onto the jobseeker benefit on retirement. He had worked his entire life and, for him, signing on caused him frustration and distress. The lady told me how the Department instructed her late husband not to leave the country for any lengthy periods or he would lose his payment.

The couple had hoped to visit their children and grandchildren in Australia, a country difficult to visit for a short two-week stay. The Department, however, dictated what this man could and could not do. This situation caused huge distress to this man on his retirement. He did not want to be made feel he was to receive payment for no work on jobseeker's benefit. On retirement, he was made feel he was supposed to be seeking work while, at the same time, he was restricted when it came to visiting his family abroad.

That is only one case of many. Forcing 65 year olds into a jobseeker's payment will not sustain the State pension system. It does not work and it leaves older people at a financial disadvantage receiving €64 less than they would on the State pension. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil saw no need to address this in the Social Welfare Bill.

Women are also bearing the brunt of the changes made to the State's contributory pension scheme by Fine Gael. When it comes to retirement, the gender pension gap between men and women is 35%. The number of PRSI contributions needed to receive the State pension remains at 520. This was significantly increased from 260 in 2012. The primary reason for the inequality in the pension cuts is that women often have to take time out of work to rear children or were forced out of jobs due to the marriage bar. Despite inequality for women, however, neither Fine Gael nor Fianna Fáil saw the need to address women's pensions in budget 2017 and, consequentially, in this Bill.

Those with disabilities will see a €5 increase in their payments but the promise of a new motorised transport grant remains just that - a promise with no action. Three and a half years after a commitment from the Taoiseach in this Chamber, there remains no replacement grant in place. Transport costs are cited again and again as expensive and difficult to manage. Those with disabilities cannot be left to wait another three years for this replacement.

It is not enough to give those with disabilities an extra fiver and leave it at that. Those with disabilities need to be encouraged and given the same opportunities as others to avail of full paid employment. This has been done fantastically through the likes of the WALK PEER programme and the work it has done in supporting young people with disabilities into the workforce. I welcome the provision of €2 million in 2017 for projects which provide pre-activation supports for people with disabilities. However, we need to know where this money is going and the details of it. We have asked repeatedly as to whether the WALK Peer programme will get funding next year. Those involved in it do not know if they will. The Minister and Minister of State with responsibility for disabilities have abdicated their responsibility in this regard, failing to give groups like WALK PEER an answer and certainty about their funding.

I welcome the increase in the school meals programme, especially given the significant issue of child poverty experienced by families every day. It is not news that parents are struggling to feed their children or to provide a warm home and sufficient clothing for them. It is a stark reality for people out there.

One measure which did not appear in this Bill is any increase to the back to school clothing and footwear allowance. This is a missed opportunity. Time and again, as September approaches, voluntary organisations are left to pick up the tab due to the Government's inaction on tackling back to school costs. The struggle for parents to cover these costs year on year will continue unless there is an increase in the back to school clothing and footwear allowance. I am sorry to see that my and others' calls to the Government to increase this payment were ignored.

Sinn Féin welcomes the provision of paternity leave and benefit. We welcomed and supported this Bill when it was brought forward ahead of the summer recess. It is legislation that Sinn Féin had called for consistently and it is a welcome start in developing Ireland's parental leave practices.

To be welcomed in this Bill is the extension of access to certain social welfare benefits for the self-employed, including farmers. This, again, is a welcome first step in providing security for those who are self-employed when and if they need it. The unchanged rate of PRSI for the self-employed is also to be welcomed. We know that the self-employed have seen little or no support from the Government throughout the recession. In many cases, unfortunately, a number of businesses did not survive. We must support those who take a risk in setting up their own business and taking on employees. I hope to see a further rolling out of social protection measures for the self-employed.

Year on year, Sinn Féin provides a fully comprehensive alternative to the budget that is fully costed by the Department of Finance. In this year's one, we addressed head on the real issues that the most vulnerable in society face annually. A social welfare Bill brought forward by Sinn Féin would look very different from the one we are debating this evening. Sinn Féin would not stand over discrimination against young people in our social welfare system. In our alternative budget, we included a €40 increase in the jobseeker's payment for the under-26s as part of its restoration over two budgets. We also included the increase in the back-to-education allowance for under-26s to the full rate, and we welcome the fact that the Government has done this.

For lone parents, we included an increase of 10% in the FIS and an increase in the cut-off age for the one-parent family payment to 12 years as a starting point. Eventually, we would hope to restore it to its former level. These measures would have directly targeted lone parents and in some way address the issues they face on a daily basis.

When it comes to older people, Sinn Féin brought forward an older persons package worth over €410 million, including a three-week extension to the fuel allowance, a €9.50 increase in the living-alone allowance, and reinstating the transitional pension for 65-year-olds, as well as further measures to address the inconsistencies within our pension system. For those with disabilities, we proposed an increase of €5.50 in the disability allowance and the blind person's pension. With that, we also allocated €1.1 million to secure and replicate the WALK PEER programme, which supports young people on disability allowance to move into paid positions of employment in the open labour market and further education or training in mainstream settings.

The coming together of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil has done one thing well in that it has allowed them to see that they are, in fact, both the same. Of course, this does not come as news to many of us. Approaching this Social Welfare Bill and following on from the budget, we have seen two things - Fine Gael carrying the can for the continuation of the measures imposed by Fianna Fáil before it, and Fianna Fáil throwing its own party policies out the window and chasing after Fine Gael in every single thing it does. The marriage of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil does work. It works for the developers and the bankers, it works well for the wealthy, it works for those who inherit rich estates and other inheritances, and it works well for the Ministers and the Government, who do not forget their own pay increases. Let us be very clear, however, that the marriage of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil does not work for the ordinary people. It does not work for young people, it does not work for lone parents, it does not work for our older citizens, and it certainly does not work for people with disabilities and children.

The Social Welfare Bill in its present form does not do everything it could have done. It is the result of a budget that further marginalises our young people, lone parents and those living alone. As the main Opposition party here, Sinn Féin has little room to bring forward amendments to this Bill given the fact that, as an Opposition party, we cannot table amendments that constitute a charge on the Exchequer or on the public. Having said that, it is my full intention to frame amendments in such a way as to bypass the restrictions so a proper debate can take place on the many issues that should have been dealt with in this Bill. I look forward to a debate on Committee Stage. We will certainly be tabling a number of amendments. As I said at the start of my contribution, it is important that the record be set straight on the hot air blown into this Chamber by Fianna Fáil. It compounded the poverty levels of the very people it is in here talking about and trying to lift out of the poverty trap.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate on behalf of the Labour Party. The Social Welfare Bill is very important. It is fundamental in terms of giving legislative effect to the various measures relating to the social welfare system announced in the budget. I welcome the first attempt at a social welfare Bill by the Minister, Deputy Leo Varadkar, although it was somewhat unprecedented for a budget to be announced with no date for the payments to start until several weeks later. It is encouraging that he has taken into account some of what we in the Labour Party proposed in our alternative budget. We clearly welcome those measures. The Minister has tried to spread the increases across nearly all categories but it is what he has left out that is most revealing.

I have been self-employed since 1980 so I must confess an interest. I have always been on this hobbyhorse of how the self-employed were treated. Many of the proposed increases and improvements to entitlements for the self-employed will not come into effect until much later in 2017. For a long time, I have championed the cause of the 380,000 individuals affected. This number is growing again. It was 180,000 not too long ago. I am glad to see the change is contributing to the drop in unemployment. Those concerned are risk takers and innovators. Not only that, they are also tax collectors for every Government. They take on all the risk and employ people. They have been badly treated and are not at the races in terms of benefits, apart from the contributory pension, to which they contribute until the age of 66. The invalidity pension will not be extended to the self-employed until December 2017. While this will result in a saving, it could not have been left much later next year. Given current developments, I wonder who will be Minister at that stage.

The improvements to the PRSI dental and optical benefits will not come into force until October. The Minister has been playing games with many of these announcements.

I had better declare another conflict of interest. I have a brother who is a councillor. I was glad to see the changes for the councillors but I am beginning to wonder whether the focus has been on an event outside here rather than on something in here. I was somewhat surprised that something that was debated *ad nauseam* from the time I was a councillor myself – I was a councillor for a number of years – did not find its way into the Social Welfare Bill *ab initio*, rather than coming in later as a Committee Stage amendment. The whole place knows that what was going on with councillors was robbery. They were paying 4% into a black hole and getting nothing in return. I agree the Minister believes some benefit should derive from a contribution but councillors were treated very badly. Now they have bigger administrative areas to cover. I refer to municipal districts and other lunatic proposals that we implemented and that should be dumped at the first opportunity. We have been asking councillors to travel vast distances. I do not know the position in Limerick but I know about the geographical areas in Westmeath.

There are multiple meetings. When I started off as a councillor, there were 13 or 14 meetings per year, and I am sure it was the same for Deputy Willie O'Dea. Now there are that many every month. I am glad about the Minister's measure but I do not like the way things are done. The measures in the Bill should be up front; let them go, and let everybody in here nail his or her colours to the mast. An awful lot of people in here are into funny money and talking about all sorts of things.

I was in government when the troika was coming in telling us to cut social welfare back to the rates that applied in Northern Ireland. The Minister, Deputy Varadkar, was in government at that time also. We were borrowing money from the lender of last resort, the ECB. The troika was telling us what to do, but we held out. I will take no lessons from anyone who says that we did not. We fought hard. There were cuts but, by hell, people would really have seen cuts had the outside bodies implemented what they wanted to. Deputy O'Dea was right, in that everything in the North just a few miles up the road was half the rate that it was in the South. I recall the early morning meetings when we fought to try to protect rates. We were in the last chance saloon.

I come from a humble background. I do not mind admitting it. I would love to give more money to everyone, but it should only be enough to live while incentivising people to get out. That is important. We cannot create a poverty industry. I do not subscribe to that. I was the eldest of ten. We had a small, menial wage coming into the house to keep us going. There was no social welfare or crutch at that time in the 1950s and 1960s.

As the Minister knows, I have been calling for improvements for the self-employed for some time. During the worst of the economic recession, protection of the social welfare system was given the utmost priority by the previous Government, which had the Labour Party at its heart. Almost €20 billion was protected when cuts were happening everywhere. I do not want to go into the history of that again. We also commenced a policy of equalisation in the taxation treatment of the self-employed compared with employed people by increasing the earned income tax credit for the self-employed. That policy of equity, fairness and justice must be completed. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, has committed to this and money is scarce, but the sooner it is done, the better.

As Deputy O'Dea knows from being an accountant, the self-employed have a case. The PAYE allowance was implemented on a current year basis but self-employed people were treated on a previous year basis. They are being treated on a current year basis now, but they are still not getting the same treatment. If I were not a Deputy, I would bring a case on their behalf against the Departments of Finance and Social Protection, but that is another matter. The Government would be ahead of people in that regard. The self-employed were badly treated.

As the economy improves, the Minister must ensure a level playing field for the self-employed. I welcome the changes, but more needs to be done. They are entitled to a safety net in the social welfare system for when they fall into personal difficulty such as illness or lose jobs unexpectedly, which was a common event during the recession. I recall sitting in my clinics in Mullingar on cold Fridays trying to deal with self-employed people who had fallen ill but for whom nothing was available. They provided valuable employment for others, but the first thing that the Department of Social Protection always did - in fairness to Deputy Burton, she rectified this - was ask them to account for everything that they had earned in the previous year. That was like accounting for the snow that had fallen two years prior. I used to get extremely angry about that. I might as well be honest - we had many a heated parliamentary meeting about it

until Deputy Burton made some amendments. Everyone had the view that the self-employed were well off, but I can never forget that they provided a considerable amount of valuable employment for others.

The self-employed are liable for PRSI payments under a class S rate of 4%, which entitles them to such benefits as the State contributory pension or the widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension. The extension in the range of benefits is important, but the self-employed do not qualify for jobseeker's benefit irrespective of how long they have been making contributions. They are compelled to seek recourse to the jobseeker's allowance, which is means tested. For many, this is their first encounter with the social welfare system. It can be an emotive and tortuous process, in so far as their assessments must reflect the incomes that they got from their businesses in the previous 12 months. I hope that the Minister will apply fairness to the social welfare system in trying to achieve a just and equitable solution for the self-employed. I believe that he is committed to doing so.

Given the context of specific PRSI schemes underpinning the equality objective, the system should recognise self-employed people's position as employers as well as employees. We must confront this issue in a positive and constructive way to address the plight of the self-employed.

There is still no entitlement to illness benefit or jobseeker's benefit despite the fact that, as Deputy O'Dea pointed out, it is available in other EU countries. The Minister is not afraid of change, but departmental bureaucrats are always afraid of it and of trying something that they have never tried before because there could be "ramifications" and so on. This must be addressed. Self-employed people are more likely to fall ill because many of them are out in the rain and snow working hard. They cannot come inside because, unlike years ago, they have no set times or hours. The Minister must let us know what his plans are in this regard. I hope that it is not just window dressing. I do not believe that it is.

The changes are welcome, but what about those payments that the Minister did not increase? I must address some of them. Deputy Brady referred to a number of them. The Social Welfare Bill is disappointing for me and the Labour Party because it does nothing to address children living in poverty. There was an argument during the summer about a €5 increase. Deputy O'Dea ensured that he got some plaudits. That is politics. When one has been around here for as long as he has, one makes sure to fight one's corner. There were wins for some people, but there was nothing for children. The Bill fails to provide any increase in those payments that make the most difference to those with children and who live in poverty. The Bill shows little vision about how to address child poverty. Social transfers are critical to solving the problem, but nothing has been done to address it.

From child benefit and family income supplement, FIS, to the qualified child increase, no increase in respect of children has been provided to the front line of helping parents on social welfare. Someone asked what the Government had against children, given that it did nothing in the budget for those most in need. The budget package outlines no ambition or vision for addressing child poverty. Choices were to be made in the budget. The Government made some that were right, which is only natural, but it was wrong in this regard. According to a recent UNICEF report, children are now the most neglected group in Irish society.

Many options for addressing child poverty could have been considered by the Government, but the budget made a clear statement on where the Government stood by making no increases in the payments that made the most difference to children. The Minister managed

to find money - I appreciate that it is not easy, as I was there five or six years ago - to increase nearly every payment and extend multiple benefits. Thankfully, some of those were for the self-employed. However, he failed even to consider others. FIS, child benefit and domiciliary care allowance play a critical role in addressing child poverty and supporting low-income families. The increase for a qualified child is the most targeted payment in our social welfare system. It is given to those who are in receipt of social welfare payments and who are raising children. Means tested, it is worth €29.80 per week. I must ask a question. Does the Minister believe that this weekly amount is sufficient to raise a child? He could have made a real difference to those children who are at risk of poverty by increasing the rate. Even a small increase of €3 or €4 would have made a significant difference, as it would amount to approximately €200 per year, which could be critical where children are at risk of poverty.

The back to work family dividend, which is linked to the qualified child increase, has not been increased either. It was a novel and worthwhile introduction in its time. By adding a few euro, the Minister could have made a substantial and targeted difference. It would have given extra support to lone parents and those who were trying to return to work. As seen in the small weekly increase for those aged under 26 years, though, the Government does not care too much for young people or children who need family income support.

The Government increased the minimum wage by 10 cent per hour - this was recommended by the commission, but the increase was miserly - but did not provide any increase in the rate of FIS. This will create difficulties because families dependent on FIS will suffer a real decrease. During the crisis, FIS supported many low-paid families to remain in work and has been a critical part in making sure that work always pays. In Fine Gael's circles, the Minister and his colleagues may not be aware of the importance of FIS, but it plays a key role in supporting families in low-paid jobs. Despite increasing the minimum wage, FIS rates have been left unchanged and there has been limited comment on this important issue. In last year's budget, the limits for the first two children were increased by €5 each, taking the payment to €511 and €612. As the Minister should know, FIS provides 60% of the difference between one's salary and the cap. Given that there has been no increase in the cap, those on the minimum wage will see a reduction in the amount that they receive.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I regret that I must interrupt the Deputy, but we must adjourn the debate. The Deputy will be the first called tomorrow, when he will have 16 minutes. I thank him for his co-operation and Members for their contributions.

Debate adjourned.

8 o'clock

Public Sector Pay: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy David Cullinane: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

accepts that:

— the legacy of eight years of cuts to pay and public services continues to place enormous pressure on ordinary people and households;

— there is a two-tier recovery and the majority of households have yet to see any discernible difference in their everyday lives; and

— pay equality within the public sector remains an outstanding legacy issue of the crisis and bailout and needs to be tackled;

acknowledges that the Budget 2017 measures announced on 11 October, 2016 do not tackle pay inequality in the public sector in any substantial way nor do they tackle the two-tier recovery and its effect on the majority of households; and

calls on the Government to stop pay restoration due for Teachtaí Dála, Senators, Ministers of State, Ministers and the Taoiseach as part of the Lansdowne Road agreement.

I am proud of the fact that my party has tabled this motion for consideration by the House. I was hoping that the Government and the Fianna Fáil Party would accept the motion. I note that Ministers, Ministers of State and the Taoiseach have said they will not accept the pay increases, which is interesting and I welcome that fact. However, they do not seem to want to extend it to Members of this Dáil, which is a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Fianna Fáil Party to explain.

This is an issue of fairness. The Minister may disagree, which he is entitled to do, but for me, this is a core issue of fairness. It is also an issue of leadership. I have listened to the Minister's utterances in the last number of weeks on public sector pay and on the reasonable demands that are being made by workers right across the public sector, be they gardaí, nurses or teachers. They are demanding that core issues are dealt with, most particularly the issue of equal work for equal pay but the Minister is not in a position to say that he will commit to that, implement and deliver it. He is preaching pay restraint to public sector workers earning less than €65,000 who are not getting any realistic levels of pay restoration. At the same time, he is presenting an agreement which prioritises pay restoration for those earning more than €65,000, including Teachtaí Dála.

Let us look at the figures. A Deputy is paid a salary of €87,258 per year. I believe that Deputies should be, and are, reasonably well paid. We earn a salary which is 2.5 times the average industrial wage. The situation is that on 1 April next - whatever genius civil servant came up with that date did not do irony - or on April Fool's Day, those earning more than €65,000, including Deputies, will get the first tranche of their pay restoration, followed by the second tranche on 1 January 2018. That means that Deputies will receive an increase of €5,400 or €100 per week. Average public sector workers, those who work on the front line like gardaí, nurses, teachers, those who clean the streets, who work in our local authorities and so forth, are on an average salary of €40,000 and will get €1,000 in pay restoration, equivalent to €20 per week. When one takes taxes into account, the amount is actually a lot less. Deputies and those earning more than €65,000 will get €100 per week. How can the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform sit there and say that is fair? The excuse used by the Minister to justify this is that Deputies' pay is linked to grades in the civil service and in that he is correct. However, so too is the pay of Ministers, Ministers of State and the Taoiseach. If the principle is so precious, how is it that the Government is able to break it for Ministers? The Government knows that it

simply would not wash that Ministers and Ministers of State would take the proposed increases, which for Ministers would have been 10% and for the Taoiseach, up to 14%. The Government knew this would not wash and could not be justified and it was right about that. I welcome the fact that the Government acknowledges this and that Ministers are not taking the pay increase. However, Deputies seem to be special and can be treated differently but I do not believe that is justifiable or right.

The Minister cannot come into this House, as he has done in the past, and argue that we cannot do this because Deputies cannot set their own pay levels or break the parity between civil servants' pay and that of politicians when the Government is breaking that parity in the context of Ministers, and rightly so. That is a red herring and the Minister knows it. There is nothing stopping Deputies from collectively taking a decision in this House on this matter. This is a time when we have huge industrial unrest and genuine grievances among public sector workers whose demands are not being met by the Minister or the Government. Despite several attempts by Deputy Adams and others to get the Government to commit to the principle of equal work for equal pay, the Government says "No", turns its back and will not give such a commitment. It is telling those who came into the public sector in 2011, who are doing the same work for less pay, that it will not deal with them, that they will have to wait. There is no timeframe for when the Government will deal with this issue but when it comes to Deputies, there is certainty and pay restoration. How can the Minister justify pay restoration for those earning more than €65,000 but not for those earning less than that amount? That is what I mean by fairness and leadership.

The Government, in this year's budget, increased the minimum wage by 10 cent per hour. The lowest paid workers in this State were given a pay increase of 10 cent per hour but Deputies will get €100 per week. There are many people for whom an increase of €100 per week is unimaginable but for Deputies, it is a reality. The public cannot understand how that can be possible when we have the real problems that are pressing down on so many families in this State. Budget 2017 was known as the "fiver budget" - a fiver for those on welfare and a fiver for most people, including Deputies, who will also benefit from the tax cuts in the budget. However, there is an additional bonus for us in the form of pay restoration of €100 per week. It is simply not fair.

The Minister needs to commit to a new pay agreement and to realise that the Lansdowne Road agreement is dead in the water. He also needs to realise that it is simply not fair or sustainable to stumble on until September 2018 with his head in the sand, pretend that what is happening around him is not happening, hope all the noise will go away, that the reasonable demands from nurses, gardaí and teachers will go away and do deals here and there that will get him over a hump or through a week or two. It will not work. The Minister is facing real discontent if he does not face up to the real sores in the public service at the moment.

The Minister must put this in the context of our public services. The difference between my party and Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that we value public services. We want genuine, world class public services. We want to invest in our health service, to make sure that those who are working in it get the best possible support and are operating in hospitals that have sufficient bed capacity. We want schools that have proper buildings rather than prefabs. That is the vision we have. We want world class public services and we want decent pay and equality for public servants. This Government turns its face against that but when it comes to Deputies' pay, anything is possible. Pay restoration for Deputies is written in stone and cannot be undone but in reality, it can.

Sinn Féin Deputies have made it clear that we will not be taking this pay increase. I have listened to some of the responses from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil Deputies on this issue and they get very defensive about it. I raised this issue with the Minister previously and he asked me what I do with my money. In asking such a question, the Minister is trying to conflate separate issues. Sinn Féin Deputies have never said that we do not draw down our full salaries from the State. I draw down my full salary of €87,258 and I use some of it to employ somebody in my constituency. That is what I do but that does not have an impact on the taxpayer. Accepting this pay increase of €5,400, however, would have an impact on the taxpayer. It would impose an increased cost on the Exchequer but worse than that - and this is what the Minister does not understand - it would demonstrate a very poor lack of judgment and leadership on my part. The Minister and his Government came into this House and presented a budget that gave €5 to the most vulnerable and to most working families but did not deal with the real issues and challenges in health, housing, child care and so on. The Government is telling public servants, who are doing a fantastic job on the front line, that they will have to wait. It preaches wage restraint and argues that pay equality cannot be achieved because the country cannot afford it. It seems we cannot afford any of these things but we can afford pay increases for Deputies. That is as much a matter for Fianna Fáil as it is for Fine Gael. We have a chance here tonight and tomorrow when the vote is taken to say collectively in one voice, as Members of this Parliament, that we believe in fairness and are showing leadership and that at a time when reasonable demands are being made by those in the public sector earning less than €65,000 per year that are not being met by the Government, we do not believe we can accept these wages increases. It simply would not be fair. At a time when so many other things are happening, we have so many other demands and when the Minister says "No" and turns his face to them, it would be wrong and send out entirely the wrong message if this should happen. I appeal to Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party, which says it is the party of working people, to support our motion.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. We have a clear choice before us tonight with the proposal from our party. We have a choice between giving leadership and good example, and putting more money in our pockets. Those of us who have a good salary should not demand more. Deputies have take-home pay of between €45,000 and €50,000 out of a salary of €87,000. That is enough for anybody and we should not be demanding €5,400 more. We should not jump the queue while low-paid public servants, many of whom depend on family income supplement, wait. The question for all 158 Deputies here is do we actually need it? I do not and I know that very few other people in the House can say honestly that we need another €5,000 in our pockets. Public servants on €35,000, €36,000 or €37,000 will get an increase of roughly €1,000 while we line up and take over €5,000. That is not fair. People on the minimum wage will receive an increase of 10 cent per hour in January. That is awful. What kind of message does that send out to the people passing on the street here? What kind of message does that send out to the public? I have heard young teachers and young public servants being lectured in recent weeks - lectured by us. They are being lectured by people in here who are prepared to have that kind of inequality.

Under a previous Fianna Fáil Government, the minimum wage for someone working 39 hours per week was cut but that has been restored. Ten cent per hour is an insult and the figure should be increased. Only those on middle and low incomes should get an increase. We need to reduce pay for top earners and increase it for those with the lowest incomes. The first in the queue should be clerical officers, manual workers in the public service and what are termed the lower grades. People on €22,000 or €23,000 per year should get the largest increase. Half of workers in this State earn less than €28,000 gross per annum. This translates into take-home

pay of about €400 or less per week.

We need to create a society based on solidarity, not greed. What better place to start than in here? We should take the lead. There have a clear choice here tonight for Deputies. We either want to lead by example or operate by double standards. I appeal to people across the political divide to do the right thing. The money saved, which is a modest amount, could be used for homeless services. If you walk out through that gate here tonight, you will fall over people whose feet are hanging out of doorways - unfortunate people who are forced to sleep rough. Money should be put into services like that, not into our pockets. Let us not lecture gardaí, young teachers, young nurses and low-paid public service workers. Let us try to create some equality and start with it here.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I understand there are three people left to speak. I remind them that there are just over six minutes left.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Táim buíoch as an deis labhairt ar an rún seo. Gabhaim mo bhúiochais leis an Teachta Cullinane as ucht an rún a chur faoi bhráid na Dála ar son Teachtaí Shinn Féin. Tá sé do-chreidte nach bhfuil Teachtaí Phine Gael agus Teachtaí Fhianna Fáil chun a gcuid tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún os ar gcomhair. Mar a dúirt cainteoirí eile, the proposed salary increase for Deputies will bring their salaries to over €92,600 over the next 18 months. Ministers are in line to do even better. They will get €4,000 per year over the next two and a half years, an extra €11,735 in total. Not to be outdone, the Taoiseach is in line to do even better. He will get almost €5,000 per year next year, the year after and the year after that bringing his salary or that of his successor up to €200,000. This is at a time when young people have been told by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil that all they are worth is an extra €2.70 per week and pensioners, carers, citizens with disabilities and others in receipt of social welfare are told they are worth just €5 extra per week.

This is not acceptable or fair. Deputies earn a basic salary of €87,258. We are very well paid. It is a wage the majority of workers will never earn. All the time, Ministers are telling gardaí, nurses and teachers to stop legitimately asking when their pay will be restored. They are arguing to get their pay restored. The average public sector worker on €40,000 per year will get pay restoration of €1,000 and the Government expects such workers to roll over and accept this, while Deputies will be paid €92,000 per year. A stop can be put to this tonight if Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil step up to the plate and show an ounce of leadership. Sin an rud ceart agus an rud cothrom le déanamh. Iarraim ar achan Theachta tacú leis an rún.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The turnout this evening is something of a disappointment. Where are the Government and Fianna Fáil Deputies this evening? Are they hiding? Are they hiding in their offices, are they sitting at home with their feet up watching this or are they hiding in the Dáil bar laughing and joking about this? Why do they not have the courage of their convictions to come in here and stand up and say why they feel they have a right to reward themselves a pay rise of €5,400 on top of a salary of €87,000? Why are they not here to stand up and defend what it is that makes them so special above everybody else? We all know that Ireland is experiencing a two-tier recovery but this measure compounds the wealth divide even further. In last month's budget, we saw Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil slapping each other's backs congratulating each other on throwing pensioners €5. Sure it was the best you could do, lads. Public servants who earn under €60,000 will get a pay rise of €1,000 over the next two years. Meanwhile, Deputies feel entitled to pocket and pilfer €5,400 over two years on top of a salary of €87,000. I would tell those who are here and others who are absent to go back to their

8 November 2016

constituents - the workers who earn the minimum wage, the workers who are on zero-hours contracts, the newly qualified teachers, the nurses, the gardai and the people who are hounding job centres day in and day out looking for work but who cannot get it - and tell them what it is that makes them feel so special and above everybody else that they deserve a salary of €92,000. Have they become so aloof and detached from any semblance of fairness and equality? Have they got to the stage that they actually think this is fair or just? New politics, my backside. It is the same old, same old.

In any other country, this type of greed would be seen as a scandal and rightly so. In Ireland, it is just more of the same. We have got used to the self-serving greed of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. There is only one Fianna Fáil Member here out of 50. I ask him to do the right thing and try to show the people that Fianna Fáil is no longer up to its neck in self-serving greed and sleeven politics and to back this motion.

The issue we are discussing is whether Deputies should be paid a salary of €92,000 or to continue with the €87,000 salary we are currently being paid. I have two questions for any Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil Deputy who intends to vote in favour of this pay rise and a salary of €92,000. Is €87,000 not enough for them? What makes them think they need an extra €5,400? It would be interesting to hear Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Members stand up tonight and answer those questions. We all know the country is struggling. The recovery is happening, but very few are experiencing it. The vast majority of people in the State have seen no real benefit from recovery. It would be a welcome act of solidarity for this Oireachtas as a whole to decide-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has----

Deputy Imelda Munster: ----- that we do not need this payment and support this motion.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has exceeded not only her own time, but also the time of her colleague, Deputy Nolan. I must now call the Minister. I note that Sinn Féin has a slot later and perhaps her colleague could be accommodated then.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I move amendment No. 4:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“acknowledges the substantial contribution that public servants have made towards the stabilisation of the public finances and the economic recovery;

recognises that pay restoration has to be balanced and affordable in the context of other Government expenditure commitments;

supports the full implementation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, encompassing 280,000 public servants in 22 trade unions, as providing a fiscally sustainable pathway to pay restoration;

confirms that every Minister and Minister of State will waive the pay restoration due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement but reconfirms the importance of maintaining the link between the pay of TDs and the Civil Service grade of Principal Officer for both pay reduction and pay restoration measures; and

welcomes the establishment of the Public Service Pay Commission to provide a road

map on the orderly and affordable unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest.”

The Government amendment focuses on the importance of the full implementation of the Lansdowne Road agreement encompassing 280,000 public servants in 22 trade unions, as providing a fiscally sustainable pathway to pay restoration. The amendment also reconfirms the importance of maintaining the link between the pay of Deputies and the Civil Service grade of principal officer for both pay reduction and pay restoration measures. I listened, as I should, with interest to what the Sinn Féin speakers said. It became even more apparent to me as they went on that this is a motion that is simply nakedly populist.

Deputy David Cullinane: One could abolish the USC.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: It is nakedly populist in seeking to drive a further wedge between those who are privileged to represent and those they look to represent.

I agreed with one thing Deputy Munster said. At least she could acknowledge that a recovery is happening. I know this is very difficult for Sinn Féin to do.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister without interruption.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I am used to them interrupting me. They do not like to hear a response to their attempted arguments. At least there was an acknowledgement that a recovery is happening. I acknowledge that recovery is incomplete. A recovering economy is not the same as a recovered economy or a recovered society. The difficulties and challenges that so many people face are very apparent to me as a Member of Dáil Éireann and somebody privileged to serve in this Government. Those scars and those wounds that need to be healed are not served by Sinn Féin attempting to drive a wedge between those that people in Dáil Éireann look to serve and those they look to represent.

I ask Deputy Adams in particular if he has listened to a single statement from any Minister recently regarding their declaration on ministerial pay. The Taoiseach, every Minister and every Minister of State have agreed to forfeit any element of pay restoration under the Lansdowne Road agreement.

Deputy David Cullinane: Is that not populist?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy-----

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I know that Deputy Adams would not want to acknowledge that in his contribution.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Will the Minister give way?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Will the Minister give way?

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I would be delighted to.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The proposition is very simple. If the Minister is straight and serious about the rhetoric in which he is engaging, why does the Government not support the motion?

8 November 2016

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I do not know how relevant-----

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: It is very rich of Deputy Adams to talk about rhetoric. I will ask him a question. The Government has shown its commitment to responding to the needs we know are there by saying that it is the right thing for Ministers to forfeit their salary restoration. The Government amendment states that it believes it is right for the pay of Deputies to be determined by what happens with the pay of principal officers.

Deputy David Cullinane: What is the Minister's pay linked to?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ciúnas, le do thoil.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: Again Sinn Féin Members want to put the questions and use the rhetoric, but when their arguments are challenged they do not have the tolerance or patience to allow other people to speak.

It is important that such a link be maintained because politicians should not set other politicians' pay.

Deputy David Cullinane: However, the Minister sets his own pay.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ciúnas, le do thoil.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: This link between Deputies and principal officers has been maintained over the years, meaning that people in this House do not determine what they are paid. That is the right principle to ensure that other interests do not compete in allowing Deputies and Senators to determine their salaries. In response to a claim Deputy Cullinane made in his opening statement, if Deputy Adams feels so strongly about this, he should return his salary to the taxpayer and do what any officeholder has done. We have returned, as we should, our element of pay restoration back to the Exchequer because that is the right thing to do.

Deputy David Cullinane: And what we are doing.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I ask Deputy Adams and his party colleagues to do the same.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Will the Minister give way again?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Through the Chair.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I am addressing the Chair, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I ask Deputy Adams and his Sinn Féin colleagues to do the same.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Will the Minister give way again?

Deputy Martin Ferris: The Minister asked a question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Now listen-----

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I am very happy to allow Deputy Adams in, but I know he would not extend such a courtesy to me.

Deputy Martin Ferris: The Minister asked a question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will allow Deputy Adams very briefly.

Deputy Gerry Adams: If the Minister knew all the things he thought he knew, he would be a wiser man than he is.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I am glad I let the Deputy in to share that pearl of wisdom with the House.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If they want to have a bilateral, they can have it outside.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Let me respond to the Minister's question. Sinn Féin Deputies will not be taking this increase and will be signing it back over to the taxpayer. We believe in equal pay for equal work; the Minister does not-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has responded.

Deputy Gerry Adams: -----and that is very clear.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Adams-----

Deputy Gerry Adams: He sets the salaries for teachers.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister, without interruption.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: That is not the question I asked.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Address them through me.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: What I said was that if Sinn Féin felt so strongly about this principle, its Members should return to the Exchequer all of the salary that they are not accruing to themselves. The reality is that the cost to the Exchequer for every Sinn Féin Deputy in this House is the same as for any other Deputy.

Deputy David Cullinane: We accept that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy, please-----

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: That is the reality. If Sinn Féin Members feel so strongly in their views in this matter, they should do the right thing. If Deputy Adams has conceded the principle that it is right that Ministers should forfeit that element of salary restoration, then that element of salary restoration he is due as a Deputy should be returned to the Exchequer. Given that he has now conceded that principle on the floor, I ask Sinn Féin Members to extend the same principle to the rest of the salary they currently do not accrue. That is the right thing to do. If Sinn Féin Members feel so strongly about their principles, they should implement them in a way that they have asked us to do.

I wish to comment more broadly on some of the other matters facing the House and the Government this evening regarding many of the claims about the status of the Lansdowne Road agreement. I emphasise the Government's absolute support for the Lansdowne Road agreement and for all those unions that are inside the Lansdowne Road agreement. I acknowledged earlier, as did the Taoiseach in response to questions from Deputies earlier in the House, that the ruling from the Labour Court last Thursday night regarding the resolution of matters facing An Garda Síochána was made by an independent body that has served the State very well in dealing with industrial relations challenges the country faces. The Government, of course, accepts the recommendation it has made. I also acknowledge that this recommendation will have conse-

quences. On foot of that, yesterday I began engaging with the public services committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU, which has made its views known. I met representatives from ICTU to reaffirm the Government's support for a collective agreement which is the Lansdowne Road agreement. More than ever, I wish to make it clear that the only way for the State to respond to the industrial relations challenges and the need for economic stability is in a collective and an overall manner. It is for this reason that the Government remains as committed as ever to the Lansdowne Road agreement and will be engaging with the parties to that agreement to ensure it is maintained. I do this in the context of the many risks and challenges we face from abroad and it is even more important that, in the context of Ireland's small and open economy, we have an ordered way in which we can plan our affairs. That is acknowledged in this motion.

I heard Sinn Féin speakers disparage a €5 increase in the different social welfare rates. This was the first increase in the rates since 2009 and it happened due to the change in our economy that Sinn Féin said would never happen. However, that change did happen. I acknowledge that a €5 contribution can make a difference to people but I also acknowledge that they need more and there are needs out there to which the Government and the Dáil-----

Deputy David Cullinane: What about €100?

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: -----must respond.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister's time is up.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I understand fully the nature of those needs. The way the Government and the Dáil can respond better to them is by having an agreement that respects those in our public services and those who depend on such services. We can also respond by maintaining that agreement. It is ill served by the rhetoric and inconsistency that we have heard from the Sinn Féin Party this evening.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister. There are 20 minutes in the Fianna Fáil slot and I understand Deputy Calleary will be sharing time with Deputy Eugene Murphy.

Deputy Dara Calleary: The reason Fianna Fáil will not be supporting the Sinn Féin motion is simple and relates to the link that was established in 2000 by the Buckley report, which conferred independence in respect of the setting of the wages of politicians in the State. This is an independence that is international and which is also done in the Northern Ireland Assembly. That link is important because it means that Deputies or Senators cannot, on a whim, give themselves an increase at a time of their own choosing. That link is utterly independent of the political process and political input. It means that we took cuts when cuts were taking place in the general public service. I acknowledge that the level of our wages is extremely significant but the people here work hard for that and they take the wage that is going. It is important to say that the salary being recovered will bring it back to a level of €92,000, the salary that was paid to Deputies in 2011, 2012 and 2013 when it was paid to many members of the current Sinn Féin Parliamentary Party. They took it. In fairness to Deputy Cullinane, what he does with the money is his own business. When one makes a virtue of not taking a salary and then takes it-----

Deputy David Cullinane: I never made a virtue out of it.

Deputy Dara Calleary: The Deputy does so.

Deputy David Cullinane: I never made a virtue of that.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Given that he takes the money, he must answer for what he does with it.

Deputy David Cullinane: I was asked to by the Minister.

Deputy Dara Calleary: The Lansdowne Road agreement, which was supported by Sinn Féin up until today, lays out a process for income recovery for a large number of public servants. That process started last year for those on lower pay. It would be ideal if it were done quicker. That is the space into which we are now moving but the notion that it can - or that we should - exclude specific parts of the public service from it just for political purposes is wrong and fundamentally undermines the agreement.

Deputy David Cullinane: What about Ministers and Ministers of State?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Cullinane had his opportunity to speak.

Deputy Dara Calleary: What Ministers wish to do is their matter.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Cullinane had his opportunity and cannot continue like this.

Deputy Dara Calleary: What Deputy Cullinane wishes to do is his matter. I do not agree with, and I do not engage much in, the over-the-top criticism that is often presented in this House in respect of Sinn Féin. However, in the context of Sinn Féin undergoing its own internal pay review, it is ironic that this has not even been mentioned. Sinn Féin uses terms such as “double standards”, “leadership”, “fairness” and “sleevan politics”, but those in the party come in here and protest that they are not taking an increase while they are actually giving themselves an internal increase. That, Deputy Munster, is sleevan politics of the highest order.

Deputy Imelda Munster: At no extra cost to the taxpayer.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy David Cullinane: If the Deputy would listen, he would know-----

Deputy Dara Calleary: Those in Sinn Féin ignored that and did not mention it in their public discussion. Deputy Munster may seek to do it at an appropriate time during her contribution.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Deputy Calleary is way off topic.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Dara Calleary: This is an opportune moment to comment on the overall situation regarding the Lansdowne Road agreement, especially in the context of the events of recent days. The Minister agreed to the establishment of the public service pay commission in the confidence-and-supply agreement signed last May. During the summer, however, a number of issues relating to the Garda and the teaching profession were placed on the long finger and this has resulted in a major breach of trust between a large number of the public service unions and the Government. Many of those issues were non-pay related and had no impact on the matters we debate this evening. For example, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality guaranteed access to the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court for the Garda in early summer but did not proceed with this. That forced the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors to reverse its decision to support the Lansdowne Road agreement. The Government

8 November 2016

has failed to come to the table with proposals on junior certificate reform that the ASTI could implement and accept. Now the Government has made an issue of the Croke Park hours, has forced ASTI into justifying its position on these and has forced its members out onto the streets.

Meanwhile, the agreement itself has shown delivery with regard to allowances and a pathway for the lower paid teachers. The Government, however, does not wish to reflect the spirit of the agreement in committing itself to equality of pay. All of that has combined to create the perfect storm which we are facing this evening and which has utterly undermined the Lansdowne Road agreement. The Minister and his colleagues must take responsibility for where matters stand, particularly in the context of how the public service and public service pay issues have been mishandled since last May. What we now need to see is a pathway to how the Government is going to manage this. It cannot be the make-it-up as you go along approach that has been presented to us since last Friday morning. We need an actual pathway with a number of initiatives that will rebuild the trust that has been broken. That rebuilding must be done in a cohesive and coherent fashion. In turn, this would allow the unions to engage with the Government and represent their members' interests in a cohesive manner that would take account of the challenges the State is facing - such as those relating to Brexit - and what it may face tomorrow in the aftermath of the US election results this evening. The Government rapidly needs to restore confidence in its ability to manage the situation or that confidence will disappear.

When the issue of politicians' pay was dealt with by politicians - and the Leas Ceann Comhairle was in the House at that time - it did not serve politicians or public life well. It is better dealt with in the absence of politicians' involvement. It is better dealt with by people who are not part of the bubble that is Leinster House, namely, those who look on coldly and observe. In the past, these individuals recommended cuts. If they recommend such cuts again, we will accept them. As long as those to whom I refer are independent and not subject to political interference, we will always support their decisions.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I shall carry on where my colleague Deputy Calleary left off by stating that the key in respect of this issue is independence. We have to keep the decision independent. When it was in the hands of politicians, the general public had a totally different perception of it. That is why we must keep it totally and utterly independent. I had not planned on speaking in this debate. Having been in the House since 4 p.m., I thought I had done enough speaking. As I sat in my office preparing for tomorrow's work, however, I heard the spin. Those who engaged in that spin are not here. Some are sitting at home with their feet up or are in the Dáil bar laughing at us.

Deputy Pat Buckley: They are.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: They are afraid to come into the House. I do not play people, I play the politics.

Deputy Imelda Munster: And the Deputy-----

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I am here and I am debating the issue. I want to keep the decision on politicians' pay independent. It is good for politics, for credibility and for the Dáil that said decision is made on an independent basis. I did not set my salary; my salary was set for me. I did not look for a pay increase-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: Through the Chair-----

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I did not seek a pay increase and I did not look for this issue to be debated in the House this evening. However, what has been put before us must be acknowledged. We have to keep the decision independent because if we do not do so, responsibility for making it will be returned to politicians. Who knows where it would go, up, down or wherever? It was left in the hands of the politicians for long enough. When it was introduced in 2001 it was welcomed by all sides. I find it remarkable that when the FEMPI report was discussed here in 2015 it was backed by the party which has tabled the motion this evening. Is this what we call underspend, talking out of the two sides of their mouths? I hope not, but it clearly is that way.

It is disingenuous to think that people are sitting at home with their feet up when we know for a fact Members are in their offices working or have just left committee rooms, having sat there from between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. We know that debates and conversations are taking place about Calais in offices here tonight. It is very disingenuous to send out the message that we are afraid to discuss our salaries. This is not the case. What we want is to keep it the way it is presented and keep it entirely and utterly independent. What people do with their wages when they receive them is their choice. It is not the choice of anybody else. I will not support the motion before us this evening. We must keep it independent.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I will take a few minutes to be involved in the discussion. I do not have a difficulty with being here and discussing this, because there is nothing to hide. I was thinking about the time when politicians had control over voting their own pay rises. I did some research on this and I could not see any time when they had control themselves until the year 2000 when they actually decided to take a reduction in wages. This reduction has happened and now we have the restoration of this pay.

I also have a serious difficulty with politicians, from every party or independent - I am not referring just to Sinn Féin - who go around telling the public and the media they will not take this rise, when some of them have two or three businesses with far greater sources of income. This proposal is very rich coming from individuals who do this. I am a new Deputy and I do not hold any of my old jobs. I was partly involved in a business and another job but that is no longer the case. I rely totally on the good salary from this job and the expenses.

I will tell the House about a Deputy in a rural constituency. I have opened my third office and my expenses will not cover the cost of it. To give my constituents a proper service I must delve into my salary to cover the cost of the third office. When we open our first office every Deputy is generously helped out and that is fair enough. I am in the rural constituency of Roscommon-Galway, which is more than 100 miles long, and I have opened my third constituency office. I have one in my home town of Strokestown, I have one in Roscommon town and, as Deputy Anne Rabbitte knows, I have opened one in Ballinasloe. There is a huge cost factor in doing this and many Deputies are aware of this. I do not know how Sinn Féin does its calculations, it is entitled to do whatever it does, but I am sure Sinn Féin pays for the rent of its office through another way and it comes out of Dáil salary expenses. It might be done differently, or different from the way other Deputies in the House do it, but it is the same thing.

We must pay for rent and conferences. I organised a blood conference and I had to pay for all of it. I could not cover it with my expenses; I had to use some of my wages to cover it. I have no problem with this. The constituents of Roscommon-Galway elected me and I will spend the money to give them the service they deserve. My staff and I will ensure our offices are open five days a week and sometimes at weekends. There is much expense involved in this.

8 November 2016

Like many other Deputies and councillors - we do not talk about it - we give generous amounts of money to voluntary groups and charities. That is never mentioned. I make these points not in a whingeing way and not giving out because we must do it. I am glad I have the salary and the expenses to do it. It is very important this point is made here this evening.

With regard to public sector pay, I am glad there is some light at the end of the tunnel in the Garda dispute, but in the Chamber this evening I urge that the ASTI think of the students. I know many of them are very annoyed and hurt at how the Government has handled this issue. The Minister, Deputy Bruton, has not handled it well, if we are to be honest. I urge the teachers for the sake of the students to try to get back into the classrooms, particularly for those gearing up for exams who must start work on them. We urge the ASTI to go back into the classrooms and to suspend this. We can all see where they are coming from and recognise some of the difficulties but we all acknowledge that the only show in town at present is the Lansdowne Road agreement. Perhaps through this there can be some give or take, or perhaps even a strong statement from the Minister at this stage. I know that Ed Byrne, the president of the ASTI, said a number of weeks ago that if the Minister indicated certain things in a public statement it might progress this issue. I urge all sides to bring this to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: It is open to every party to use its Private Member's time in whatever way it wishes, but it is disappointing that Sinn Féin is seeking to politicise Deputies' pay and the implementation of the Lansdowne Road agreement itself. The same Deputies take every cent of pay, expenses and allowances available to fund their political activity. Sinn Féin elected representatives take pay, expenses and allowances from four different parliaments, namely, the Oireachtas, Stormont, Westminster, where they do not turn up for work, and the European Parliament.

More than a decade ago the review body on higher remuneration in the public sector recommended that the salary of a Deputy be linked to the maximum point on the principal officer's scale. This removed Deputies' pay from the remit of votes in the Dáil where Deputies were expected to vote for or against pay increases for themselves. This practice was rightly found to be unacceptable and was rightly changed. Deputies' pay should never be decided by votes in the House but rather by an independent process.

The report of the review body on higher remuneration in the public sector, which benchmarked the duties and responsibilities of a Deputy to that of a principal officer in the Civil Service was very reasonable and balanced. Under FEMPI legislation and the Haddington Road agreement, Deputies' pay was rightly cut during the financial crisis. From a peak of more than €100,000 per annum, Deputies' pay was reduced by €13,000. The salary is now subject to the 4% class K PRSI contribution and the pension levy where it previously was not.

The allowances paid to Deputies were also rightly reduced and are now much more transparent. I am not denying it is still a well-paid job, but this type of populist motion about politicians' pay will not resolve the industrial relations disputes under way in the State. The Labour Party has called for the Government to open discussions on a successor to the Lansdowne Road agreement. We have also called for the re-establishment of an employer-labour conference to act to ensure disputes between employers and trade unions do not become a full-blown crisis.

The House would be much better served debating practical solutions to the issues of the day which we now face in industrial relations rather than wasting time on symbolic gestures such as this motion. The Labour Party continues to support the principle that politicians should no

longer decide their own pay and that it should continue to be linked to the salary of a principal officer in the Civil Service. Is there truly an argument for principal officers in the Civil Service not to have pay restoration under the Lansdowne Road agreement? If not, and I have not heard one, I do not see the argument or logic for Deputies doing so.

We considered not contributing to this time waster of a motion this evening so this is as much as we are willing to contribute on the debate. We have made our point clear and that is the reality of it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: As far as we are concerned, Deputies are paid too much. We believe the pay of public representatives should be linked to that of those they represent. In this way, public representatives would have an incentive to improve the lot of the majority. Part of the disconnect between politics and the majority of people is in the fact that the material circumstances of public representatives, in our case Deputies and Ministers, are on a different planet from those of the majority of those whom they represent.

Against that background, it is a no-brainer for us to state that it is unacceptable for Deputies to receive a €5,000 increase when somebody on the minimum wage gets an extra 10 cent an hour. Some 23% of workers in this country are officially low paid, a figure that has dramatically increased in recent years, and people on social welfare and pensioners got a miserable €5 extra per week, while a young jobseeker got even less at half of that - an utterly miserable increase. Secondary schools across the country are closed and may be closed for quite a long period if this Government does not relent, instead of refusing to pay the €6 per week extra per teacher that was promised to them under the Haddington Road agreement. The Government reneged on a promise, not the teachers - as suggested by the Taoiseach earlier today. The teachers stuck to the agreement and wanted to be paid €6 per week per teacher, some €300 per year, but it has been decided that we cannot pay that. We are willing to allow the schools of the country to close and to lock teachers and students out but it is okay for Deputies to get an extra €5,000 to take them up to the extremely well-paid salary of €92,000. That is unacceptable but the Government, and the political establishment of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, do not understand how unjust it is.

I heard somebody say that Deputies worked hard and that is true but so do people who work in Tesco. So do nurses and many of them, I suspect, work a lot harder than Deputies. So do teachers and so do firemen. So do the ushers in this House, who will leave here an hour or two after we leave and who also do not have equal pay for equal work. It is not just the teachers and nurses who do not get equal pay. A teacher who joined after 2012 gets approximately €6,000 less for doing the same job than somebody who was already employed. We are going to give ourselves a €5,000 increase but we cannot give it to low-paid nurses or teachers or the ushers here who will leave an hour or two after we have all gone. Their family lives are often wrecked by the ever-changing hours in this House but it is okay to do that to them and to teachers, nurses and other public servants. I do not think that is acceptable. It is important to give them a shout out because they make this place function as public servants, like teachers and nurses make the State function.

If the Government forces this through we will publish where we are giving the extra money to. If it is next week, we will give it to the ASTI strike fund; if it is next year and the nurses are on strike, we will give it to them and we will publish other good causes where we will put our money.

Deputy Mick Barry: An English billionaire once insulted half of the world's working population when he said, "If you pay peanuts you will get monkeys." Of course, the extremely generous wages paid to Deputies have never been a guarantee against monkey business in this House but it has guaranteed a Dáil that is out of touch with the lived experience of ordinary people. How many Deputies will get through Christmas only with the help of St. Vincent de Paul? How many had to count the pennies this year just to scrape a holiday? How many simply cannot afford private health care?

On over €87,000, Deputies are a privileged lot. Workers who perform vital work and without whom society could not properly function such as nurses, bus drivers and others, are paid only a fraction of the wage of a Deputy. Many young teachers, trusted to educate the next generation, are paid less than their workplace colleagues and, needless to say, no such sanction applies to new Deputies. The worker on the minimum wage receives four and a half times less pay than a Deputy and the person on social welfare receives nine times less. The Government, Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party, however, defend not just the *status quo* but a big wage increase, which is more than 12 times the wage increase of the minimum wage worker, ten times that of the person on social welfare and significantly more than workers in the categories I mentioned, without whom society could not properly function. It is wrong and we will support the motion this evening.

We are also tabling an amendment to insert the words, "...further acknowledges that elected representatives who truly wish to represent the interests of working class people should live on no more than the average industrial wage;..." after the words "...effect on the majority of households; and...". This amendment is not so much for the benefit of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Deputies, who represent the interests of big business, big farmers and the wealthy in society who have no interest in living on the average industrial wage. It is inserted precisely for those Deputies whose aim is to truly represent working-class people. Those Deputies must be able not just to talk the talk but to walk the walk - to walk in the shoes of the working people they seek to represent. That is why Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit Deputies live on no more than the average industrial wage. We are workers' Deputies on workers' wages. Even if this motion is defeated and the wage increases go ahead, our Deputies will not personally benefit by even one penny. Rather than hand the money back to Deputy Michael Noonan to pay bondholders and to provide tax breaks for landlords and big builders, we will donate every penny to campaigns aimed at improving life for ordinary working people. We will donate to community campaigns such as the anti-water charge movement, to progressive campaigns such as the repeal movement and to strike funds for working people.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Catherine Connolly of Independents 4 Change has eight minutes.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Níl a fhios agam an mbeidh aon duine eile ag labhairt. Cheap mé go raibh ceithre nóiméad agam.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Má thagann aon duine, déanfaimid socrú.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Since I have been elected as a Deputy I have found myself on occasion supporting motions tabled by Sinn Féin and the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit. On this occasion, however, I do not support them as I think this is the lowest type of politics. As I sat in my office preparing for tomorrow and waiting for my turn tonight, I found myself listening in agreement to some of the comments made by Deputy Anne Rabbitte.

I have spent an incredible amount of time in this Chamber since I was elected, partly because I am a new Deputy and partly because I have been watching and listening, but I find this level of politics, of split and divide, despicable. I will support Sinn Féin and the groups on the Left on other motions but not on this one. I was absolutely disgusted two weeks ago when Sinn Féin and the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit supported Deputy Micheál Martin when he decided that we should not take last week off. If one really thought about the staff in this Chamber and in the building, this was a golden opportunity for Sinn Féin and the AAA-PBP to show some bottle and stand up for them. They could have stood by what the Business Committee had agreed and brought back some honesty into politics rather than playing to the lowest common denominator in which politicians are lazy and have continuous holidays.

9 o'clock

Like most Deputies my day started today a little later than usual at 8 a.m. It is now 9 p.m. and I will continue to work until 11 p.m. I make no apologies for that and I do not seek any sympathy in that regard. I made a choice to change career and to seek election to the Dáil to represent people. It is disingenuous, if not dishonest, to say that I cannot represent working class people, middle class people and upper class people if I do not have a working wage of the type referred to by Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett. I think that is an insult and I do not think people want that type of politics. We are here to do a job. We promised a new type of politics and to stand up and be counted. I receive a salary for which I make no apology. I can adopt the high moral ground, although I do not wish to do so, because as I made known prior to the tabling of this Sinn Féin motion, I will not be taking the increase. One is not here to adopt the high moral ground; one is here to hold the system to account for a fairer country. We should be working to provide employment, housing and health services for all of our citizens. From the day I was elected to this House and until the day I leave, that is the voice I have been and will be in this Chamber.

I believe there are solutions. I also believe that this discussion tonight is beyond contempt. I rarely use such strong language, except in regard to the Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil parties. On this occasion, I find myself in agreement with them that the salary is what it is. Those who do not want it do not have to take it. The Sinn Féin, Anti-Austerity Alliance and People Before Profit Deputies take the full salary and they use it as they see fit. Instead of coming in here and taking the high moral ground, they should give it back.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Also, the type of language being used in this Chamber is unacceptable. I would have preferred if this time had been used to discuss the hospitals trolley crisis. There were 45 people on trolleys in Galway today. We have a housing crisis and only 14 houses being built this year in Galway. I do not attempt to be parochial because this is what is happening all over the country. Turning people against politicians and saying we earn too much is simply a sideshow, a distraction and an attempt to divide and conquer people. The public is not that foolish. Everybody in this country deserves a decent wage and a decent living. It is the role of us on this side of the House to hold the system to account.

I despise this type of politics. It is utterly divisive for the sake of populism.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The next slot is being shared by Deputies Mattie McGrath, Michael Collins and Michael Harty.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion. I could not agree more with Deputy Catherine Connolly that this motion is nothing more than a populist stunt. The work of the Business Committee was hijacked a couple of weeks ago by Deputy Micheál Martin but the Sinn Féin representative on that committee had also agreed the business for that week and then voted against it. That is populism at its best. During my contribution on the budget I declared that I would not be taking the €5,000 per annum increase for myself and that I intended to give it to charitable organisations in my constituency.

As I said, this motion is nothing short of naked populism. Sinn Féin Deputies may not be taking the money for themselves but they are putting it into their campaigns, as are the Anti-Austerity Alliance and all the other hard left Deputies, many of whom are so hard now they do not know what they feel. They talk about the poor and people who have nothing. We all witnessed the near riot they caused during the water protests with no regard to the costs in that regard to the Garda Síochána. Despite all their talk last week about supporting the Garda Síochána, many of them and their supporters were outside this House spitting at the Garda.

What we need is a modicum of fair play. We cannot have salaries set by Deputies. They were set by us for long enough. That was a charade and it was not right or acceptable. Now Deputies' salaries are linked to the infamous Lansdowne Road agreement and the principal officer grade. Many Deputies might be willing to give up the proposed salary increase but what about the principal officers? There are only 158 of us but there are many hundreds of principal officers and other higher officers. In an interview this morning with Sean O'Rourke, his lordship, Jack O'Connor, huffed and puffed and refused to answer any of the questions he was asked while proclaiming the Lansdowne Road agreement to be better than the kingdom come. We are told now that even though this salary increase is provided under the Lansdowne Road agreement, we should not take it. This is populism. Sinn Féin members take their salaries from the European Parliament, the Stormont Assembly and from the British Parliament, which its members do not even attend, and they put it into their campaigns.

I know of a Deputy who five years ago tried to rent an office in Deputy Cullinane's constituency in Waterford. He could not afford it but four days later it was rented by Sinn Féin. Do they expect us to believe they are paying the high rents in constituencies like Dungarvan, Tramore and so on out of their so-called industrial wage? They are not. I heard Deputy Eugene Murphy of Fianna Fáil say earlier that he had opened three offices. More power to him. Our job is to serve the public. We are Teachtaí Dála elected by the people and we should never forget it. We are not naked populists that want to jump on every bandwagon and have every type of issue hijacked and banjaxed and so on. That is the reason Sinn Féin did not make the strides in the election it expected to make. The electorate is clever enough to know that they need to elect people who will represent them. I am not speaking in this regard only about farmers. I represent every person in my constituency to the best of my ability and I will continue to do so for as long as they elect me, whether they are unemployed or working people. I will not engage in the type of populism or charade in which Sinn Féin is engaged. Its members are accepting their salaries and investing them in campaigns to repeal the eighth amendment and to have water charges abolished. Sinn Féin is anti-everything. It is not pro-anything.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is pro-choice.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is anti-everything and for that reason it will remain stuck where it is. Sinn Féin has a cheek to come in here and lecture us about what we do or do not do, which is nothing but naked hypocrisy. One of its members claimed expenses in respect of

attendance at the European Parliament despite never having attended it. I am speaking not of a current member or even the previous one but the one before that who would go to Europe on a Monday morning and come back here on Tuesday to do press conferences. That is the type of populism in which Sinn Féin engages. They are fast learners.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On a point of order, Deputy Mattie McGrath is perfectly entitled to his views on us but he should withdraw the remark about us spitting at gardaí.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I saw it myself outside the gate.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: What did the Deputy see?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is Deputy McGrath willing to withdraw the remark?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: No, because I saw it happen outside the gates of this House.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: What did the Deputy see?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I saw anti-water protesters outside the gate of this House spitting at gardaí.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is disgraceful.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I was there.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have no control.

Deputy Mick Barry: Will the Leas-Cheann Comhairle again ask Deputy McGrath to withdraw that remark?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No. I have already asked him once to do so.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Bhí mé ann an oíche sin.

Deputy Mick Barry: Will the Leas-Cheann Comhairle ask the Deputy to withdraw that remark?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, I cannot control that. I have asked once.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Shame on Deputy Mattie McGrath.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will have an opportunity to withdraw it before the end of the debate, if he so wishes.

Deputy Michael Collins: I commend Sinn Féin on bringing forth this motion, which I fully support. For Deputies to take a pay rise at this time is totally wrong and unacceptable. It is totally unjust that those on social welfare payments will be getting an extra €260 per annum while Deputies will get a €2,700 increase this year and next year. If, following the vote this Thursday, this motion is not passed, I propose to set up a trust fund and to give the money to community and voluntary organisations in west Cork. I call on other like-minded Deputies to do the same. The money allocated for the pay rise amounts to more than €1 million over the two years. I propose that this money be ring-fenced for health services, specifically home help packages and services. As we know, many elderly people are being refused home help hours and home care packages despite the promises made by the Government. How can we justify

increasing our pay when the Government has not made good on these promises? Let us stick to our promise and allocate this money to home help services and home care packages and thereby take care of some of the most vulnerable in society. This money would be an enormous boost to elder care provision and would go a long way towards helping the elderly to remain in their homes for as long as possible.

While €2,700 per annum will not make a huge difference to the standard of living of Deputies and Senators, €1 million over two years will make an enormous difference to the most vulnerable in society. I urge all Deputies to support this motion.

Deputy Michael Harty: I believe that the partial restoration of the salary reduction which is to be applied to Deputies' and Senators' salaries should be deferred until all other groups have had their salaries reinstated to pre-financial emergency measures in the public interest, FEMPI, rates. It is unacceptable that Deputies and Senators should get a partial unwinding of FEMPI pay reductions through the Lansdowne Road agreement while other groups have to threaten industrial action, take to the streets in protest and have recourse to the Labour Court or the Workplace Relations Commission to get some restoration of their pay. By all means allow higher civil servants or principal officers have some restoration of their FEMPI cuts if that is what is provided for in the Lansdowne Road agreement. However, as legislators who introduced the FEMPI legislation in the first place, we should be the last to avail of pay restoration, not among the first, if for no other reason than to give a lead in pay restoration restraint and to show an understanding of the pain which FEMPI inflicted on our society. We must show true leadership. Teachers, nurses and gardaí have had their entry level pay reduced by 20% while their senior colleagues have had FEMPI applied to them in a draconian manner. These and other groups are having to fight hard and protest to ensure partial restoration of their pay scales, yet they have no clear pathway to full restoration of pay.

Many other workers and professions have suffered severely from the application of FEMPI legislation. General practice has seen a severe and devastating application of FEMPI, not just to net income but to gross turnover. Having a 38% reduction applied to gross fees has rendered many general practices unsustainable. GPs have had to abandon their practices, emigrate, retire early or simply become insolvent. As a profession, general practice has been so undermined by FEMPI that it is difficult to see how it can recover to begin to take on the responsibility and necessity to be the bedrock of our health service. All evidence presented to the Committee on the Future of Healthcare advises that general practice-led primary care is the most apt and efficient place to provide care for chronic illness and to look after our ageing population in local communities, thus avoiding the trolley queues that are now a regular feature of our health service. However, there is no pathway for pay restoration under FEMPI legislation for independent contractors, be they GPs, dentists, pharmacists or others who supply services to the Government. Outlining a pathway for the unwinding of FEMPI for self-employed contractors should be a priority for the Government. Therefore, this unwinding of FEMPI for Deputies and Senators should be deferred until all other sectors of society have had their pay restored.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Harty for observing the time. We move to the Social Democrats-Green Party slot. Deputy Shortall is sharing her time with Deputies Seamus Healy and Eamon Ryan.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Social Democrats support the motion because we believe in the principle behind it. Much has been made by speakers tonight about the independence of the process to determine Members' pay. I support that process fully and we should stick with

it. There were many years when that was not the case and the change is an important and welcome development. That does not mean Members cannot take decisions in their own right or as parties in respect of whether now is the right time for Deputies to accept restoration of pay. I argue strongly that this is not the right time given the problems the country faces. Many people remain in dire straits and many are working desperately to keep their heads above water. There are 500,000 people on hospital waiting lists. One in nine children lives in poverty and 2,000 children are homeless and living in emergency accommodation. Many public sector workers are on pay that is so low they qualify for family income supplement.

Clearly, this is not the right time for Deputies to restore their own pay or to accept such a restoration. One of the biggest issues facing the country is the demand for wage increases, in particular in the public service. Members of the House and members of Government, in particular, can have no moral authority in talking about the need for pay restraint if we are unprepared to practise it ourselves. This is not the right time for Deputies to accept pay restoration. We must lead by example if we are to have any credibility in this area at all. On the question of independence, of course, Deputies' allowances were supposed to be addressed through an independent mechanism. That was the recommendation in 2010, but the Government, regrettably, has not accepted it.

The tone of some of the contributions tonight was regrettable. It is in no one's interest for Members of the House to show disrespect to other Members and belittle the role of Deputies. We work damn hard and should be respected for it, but that does not necessarily mean we must accept a recommendation to take pay restoration. That tone was regrettable. The Social Democrats have proposed an amendment to the motion. We propose that instead of the Government deciding it, the Dáil should. It is not up to the Government. Deputy Catherine Murphy and I will not accept the restoration of pay on this occasion and will be gifting it to the State. I urge other Members who are talking about not taking it to do likewise and not to use this sum of money as a personal slush fund to enhance their standing in their constituencies, however that is done. That is not what we are talking about here. It is about showing leadership by example. That means gifting the money back to the State.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I support the motion. There is no proposal in the motion which would allow Deputies to set their own salaries. What is being requested is that Deputies voluntarily agree not to accept these huge increases. The motion refers to a two-tier recovery but things are worse than that. The Government is supporting the rich and powerful in our society while low and middle income and poor families are being mugged daily. There is a housing crisis and people are on hospital trolleys and waiting lists. They are finding it almost impossible to make ends meet. The 2016 budget gave €120 million to the richest 5% in the country while the 2017 budget gives them another €52 million. At the same time, Social Justice Ireland has said the budget for 2017 disproportionately favours the wealthiest in our society. Even after the budget and the €5 per week increase, the basic social welfare rate is €17 per week below the line at which a person is at risk of poverty. Of our people, 750,000 live in poverty while one in every five children lives in a household which lives below the poverty line. Some 20% of children are in poverty. These are shocking statistics. Those on the minimum wage get 10 cent and our pensioners get €5. It beggars belief that the political elite in the Dáil should think they are worth an additional €100 per week. Deputies should lead by example. I have certainly advised the Oireachtas authorities that I will not accept this increase.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The Green Party believes it is right to take politics out of the pay of Deputies and Senators and to manage it within the Lansdowne Road agreement or whatever

successor agreement should follow it. We are not civil servants, but we are public servants and we would do our jobs better if we managed our pay as part of a collective agreement around pay involving other public service unions. That is in support of the Lansdowne Road agreement which is in need of support at this time of real challenge to how we manage our budget and allocate resources. It is interesting that we have seen the different arguments about it and that gardaí have effectively joined it.

This morning, I attended the ASTI picket line to talk to teachers about their resolution to the crisis. It is what my colleague Deputy Catherine Martin has been saying for some time. The key issue to resolve is equal pay for equal work. New entrants, younger teachers and nurses and other public servants need to have their starting pay rates restored to the levels their older colleagues started on. That is the key development we seek. It is for that reason that we would amend the Sinn Féin motion to say that the implementation of the Lansdowne Road agreement in relation to Deputies' pay should be contingent on agreement from the Government on how we get to that basic right of equal pay for equal work.

I listened intently to the Taoiseach today and he did not answer the question on the teachers' strike and give a clear commitment that we will restore pay. That might not happen through the Lansdowne Road agreement; there may have to be a successor agreement. There should be a clear commitment from the House that we would have basic pay restoration. That is fair and it is right to make our own pay arrangements contingent on a wider agreement with the public service, Civil Service and public servants on their pay arrangements. That is the approach we would prefer.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I wish to share time with Deputies Martin Kenny, Kathleen Funchion and Pat Buckley.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: A starting salary of €87,000 a year puts Deputies in the top 5% of earners in the State. It does not stop there. We receive an incredibly generous travel and accommodation allowance, which is unvouched and not independently set, of between €9,000 and €34,000, depending on one's distance from the Dáil. There are also excessively generous additional payments for Chairs of Oireachtas committees, Ministers of State, Ministers, An Tánaiste and An Taoiseach.

I will give an example of what that means in real terms. My Fine Gael constituency colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, has a basic take-home pay of €171,000 a year. My Fianna Fáil constituency colleague, Deputy John Curran, because he is the Chair of a committee, has a basic take-home pay of €104,000 a year.

As if these excessive rates of pay were not sufficient, nobody has mentioned the incredibly generous pension scheme of which Deputies avail. If I understand the scheme correctly, an average Deputy will get a pension contribution payment from the State of in the region of €90,000 annually. If they are lucky enough to do four terms in the House, that gives them an annual pension payment of €46,000 and a pension pot of €1.8 million. What do Deputies put into that pension contribution annually? They put in €5,000.

Nobody can say these levels of pay and pensions are not excessive. In fact, at some level no one can say they are not obscene. On a number of occasions in the past Dáil, Sinn Féin tabled legislation in the House to reform those payments substantially. Other parties, including

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, in particular, opposed them. Instead, we have the spectacle today of Deputies effectively saying they deserve a pay rise. I listened to Deputy Catherine Connolly very carefully. While I respect her opinion, this is a serious issue. At a time when people across the State are struggling to get by, the rates of pay of the people in the House is something we should debate. We do not propose to break the Independents; this is simply about saying that a pay increase is not acceptable at this time.

The idea that anybody in the House deserves, or indeed needs, an extra €5,000 a year is not only wrong, but drives a wedge between the public and politicians. That is the fault of politicians who are accepting this pay rise, not those of us who object to it. Like my party colleagues, I do not take home a full Deputy's salary. I invest the remainder in constituency services and my community, something for which I make no apology. In this instance, given the timing of this pay rise, I will simply not accept it and will instead return it to the Exchequer. The reason for this is simple. Nobody in the House deserves or needs a pay rise. If one believes and supports those very simple facts, then I urge every Deputy in the House to support the motion.

Deputy Martin Kenny: Over the past number of days, we have seen the issue of pay to the forefront with teachers, nurses and gardaí. Pay is an issue for people at the bottom who have started life on salaries of €23,000 or €24,000 and are finding it very difficult to survive. I am also very conscious that many young people who are unemployed are receiving €100 a week. It is proposed that Deputies receive an increase of €100 per week at a time when others only receive a total of €100 a week. Whatever else we are debating, this issue is about a sense of fairness in our society. If we in this Chamber stand for anything, it should be having a sense of fairness.

There has been a lot of talk, and people have debated back and forth and have thrown dirt at each other about where we are and where we stand. That is all well and good, but at the end of the day the public looking on are wondering whether the people in this Chamber live in the real world. I think in particular of the working poor, such as the families who are trying to survive, and pay for mortgages and car insurance who cannot get medical cards because their incomes are slightly over the limit but cannot afford medical insurance. They cannot afford to pay for child care and are struggling to survive. All of those people are looking on and found there was nothing in the budget for them, yet those at the very top are giving themselves an increase of €100 a week.

The motion is about establishing a sense of fairness and ensuring that we make sure that everyone has a fair crack of the whip. We have to restore a sense of fair play, rather than just talking about it. I fully respect that all Members have their views on the motion. We are all in political parties. We will throw dirt at each other and try to get the best we can for our positions. However, we all have to recognise that we have to run for election. Everyone who runs for election has to go back out and face the people, no matter what party they are in or whether they are an Independent.

Those who want to run for election again need to think seriously about whether they will be able to face the ordinary people who are struggling. Many have had to emigrate from this country because there is nothing here for them. Will Members be able to face them, knowing that they were prepared to accept an increase in pay not just for those in the House, but for others who are in receipt of very high salaries? It is simply wrong, and that is why I will support the motion.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: I am conscious of time so I will cut to the point. I want to compare our situation as Deputies to workers in the child care sector. A national demonstration and strike has been organised by hundreds of child care professionals for Tuesday of next week. This is a result of the sector's absolute frustration and exasperation with the refusal of the Government to acknowledge the worsening working conditions and right to fair pay for the hours worked.

Understandably, the announcement of pay restoration for Deputies has frustrated those working in the early years sector. The revelation regarding the restoration of pay at the time of the budget in October understandably further frustrated those in the early years sector. The prospect of Deputies getting a pay rise when early years child care professionals are being told there is not enough money in the pot for adequately improved capitation rates which could, in turn, significantly improve wages, is pushing staff to the edge. Deputies in the House are out of touch on this issue and the difficulties staff and providers are experiencing, with many being forced to leave the sector. We hear a lot of talk about child care, but that is the reality for staff working in the sector.

Let us be clear. Decisions and positions can be changed if the political will is there. Sinn Féin opposed the terms of the various FEMPI Acts and when such legislation was first brought forward we tabled amendments to reduce the pay of Deputies to €75,000. This, as we know, was rejected. What does this tell our constituents and what message does it send out from the Chamber that Deputies believe they deserve more?

With this motion, we have the opportunity to show that at the very minimum we will not take pay restoration while others continue to struggle, that pay for Deputies and Senators is not a priority and that when it comes to issues regarding pay the current concerns of other sectors are where the focus should be. I urge other Deputies to support the motion.

Deputy Pat Buckley: This will probably be my shortest speech. When the Government gives a fiver a week to a pensioner and €2.70 a week to a young person on the dole, how can we possibly justify giving ourselves an extra €100 a week on top of all we have? Rents increased by 11% in September, yet we are spending our time here increasing wages instead of introducing rent certainty. How can people trust a Government or Parliament which behaves like this? I ask the Government to stop the pay increase and instead focus on helping those who need it.

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I welcome the constructive comments from Deputies regarding public service pay priorities. We are open to engagement on these and other issues as part of the reform budgetary process. Working together, the Government and the Oireachtas need to decide what public service pay increases are affordable and sustainable on the basis of our economic growth and tax structure, with appropriate inputs from public servants and their staff representatives.

Pay restoration is a legitimate expectation of public servants, but there are many other legitimate expectations for increased Government expenditure. Housing must be balanced with health care, pensioners' needs with those of school children and public service remuneration with public service recruitment. Increases need to be sustainable not just for one budget, but on a multi-annual basis.

Risks to our economic growth and Government expenditure, including Brexit, lower EU growth rates and the result of an American election tonight, exist. These risks may be assimilat-

ed and planned for so that permanent expenditure commitments are not loaded onto an insecure base. Government expenditure needs to be targeted, proportionate and appropriate. We cannot let any one group in society appropriate all the benefits of the recovery.

It is in this context that this Government is committed to a collective approach to public service pay. Collective agreements deliver mutual benefits to the employer and the employee. They have served our country in the recent past and will continue to do so into the future. We value the work and commitment of our public servants, but we must ensure that any approach to pay restoration is within the parameters of what is available and affordable. This allows us to continue to improve services in the years ahead and to proceed along the path of using a strong economy to build a fairer society. This must be fair for everyone: those who work in our public services and those who depend on our public services.

We will work with the union interests to deliver an agreed pathway to sustainable pay restoration. The alternative is a series of disparate and costly wage deals that will undermine the economic progress that we have made and will not deliver the fairness required.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: This debate was needed. Last August, I was one of the first Deputies to say that, given people throughout the country have been struggling over recent years, it was not morally right to accept the increase. Ex-taoisigh are to get an extra €15,000 while there are those who are struggling to pay a mortgage. An increase in the salaries of 158 Deputies will not make or break the world, but it sends out the wrong signal. People throughout the country are living in tough conditions at the moment and Deputies have to ensure that the message is sent out to every constituency that we are not in it for the money.

I question the whole system. Deputies are like subbies. We are here for two, three or, perhaps, five years. If I were doing a job in the private sector, once I had it done, I would have to go and do the next one. I question what we are entitled to when it comes to pensions, etc. Can the country afford this type of system? The deals negotiated by the unions need to be questioned. We can compare those who earn €20,000 to €40,000 a year and the pay rises they are to get with the union bosses who are on €140,000 or €150,000 a year and who negotiated increases of €5,000 to €6,000 for those in the upper echelons of the Civil Service and Deputies. This motion should not apply only to Deputies. It should be extended to anyone in the public service who is earning more than €70,000 or €80,000 a year. They should not be getting pay rises, because it is middle Ireland that has suffered and been crippled in the past years.

It is good to hear in the past few minutes that the teachers' strike has been called off. Common sense needed to prevail because children needed to return to school. The upper echelons, be they ex-taoisigh or senior civil servants, are all in the mix and represented by their unions. They need to take the bull by the horns, step back and say they are not entitled to the increase. If legislation is required, it should be enacted. Whatever money is saved should be given to middle Ireland. It should be given to young nurses and teachers. We do not have a pot of gold. We cannot give out money on every side of us. We need to ensure that those who are in most need get it.

I would also like to see an end to Deputies who have public service jobs such as teaching posts straddling both sides. They should not preach that they are Deputies while they hold onto their public service job and someone else is sent in to substitute. Give up the job. Let that person have it. Be brave enough to make that decision and show a way forward. Do not try to keep two jobs going at the one time.

Deputy John Brady: No one in this Chamber this evening deserves a pay rise of any description. Let us be clear about that. While the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and some Ministers have stated that they will not take their respective increases, they have not stated the same in respect of the increase of more than €5,000 for Deputies. The increase should not be taken by any Deputy. It is outrageous that those on the average wage in the public sector, earning €30,000 to €40,000 annually, are to get pay restoration of €1,000 while Deputies are expecting to take more than €100 a week. We can then compare it with the unemployed young people in this State who are expected to live on a weekly payment of €102.70, an increase of €2.70 in this budget.

I wish to clarify the details concerning the pay of Sinn Féin Deputies. All Sinn Féin Deputies draw down the full salary and take the average industrial wage out of it. The rest goes into constituency services. We make no apology for using that money to provide a first class service for our constituents throughout the State. Our job is to serve them and we make no apologies for it. It is also worth noting that this money is also used to employ additional staff in our offices, which saves the State money by taking them off the live register. Any change in our pay situation is a matter for Sinn Féin Deputies. It will not pose any additional cost to the State.

Tonight's motion is about whether Deputies should get an increase in salary, which will be an additional cost to the State at a time of significant industrial unrest in the public sector. The Government just about managed to avoid an all out strike of the gardaí last week. This evening, the ASTI has called off its industrial action, but that issue is not yet resolved. It needs to be resolved and the Government's sole focus should be on it. It is time for all Deputies to show real leadership and to forgo this pay increase. I call on Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Independent Deputies to support this Sinn Féin motion and to oppose the gravy train and the additional €5,400 on top of what is an already huge salary.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I sincerely hope that those Deputies who will not support our motion will put their hands in their pockets and use their €100 a week to buy a bit of brasso for their brass necks. This is exactly what people will think when watching us this evening. They will see people who earn €87,000 a year and who lecture pensioners and tell them to be grateful for a fiver accept a €100 a week pay increase. I was sent to the Dáil not to make a large amount of money but to stand up for people. I did not come here to take or support a weekly pay increase of €100 for myself but to speak for those the Minister believes should be grateful for a fiver a week.

The Government has stated repeatedly that Deputies, Senators, Ministers, public servants and everybody else had their pay cut and that the proposed increase in Deputies' pay is in line with the Lansdowne Road agreement. According to the Government, teachers at the bottom of the payscale who are worried about how they will pay their rent should be grateful for the protection afforded by the agreement. The Lansdowne Road agreement is crashing down around the Minister's feet. Unlike most of the Deputies present, Deputy Funchion and I have taken cases to the Labour Court on behalf of low-income workers who had justified pay claims. We were repeatedly told by the people seated on the other side who represented the Government that these claims could not be processed during the lifetime of the Lansdowne Road agreement because they would have a cost-increasing effect. Members of An Garda Síochána have exploded that myth.

As the president of SIPTU, Jack O'Connor, stated on a radio programme this morning and as plenty of others have pointed out, the Lansdowne Road agreement is over. Those who are left clinging tightly to the agreement are the people who are set to receive a pay increase of

€100 per week. Everybody else in the public service is watching the Dáil. People know Deputies are well paid. No one disputes that we work hard but none of us works harder than a nurse working a shift in an accident and emergency department tonight or a teacher who came off the picket line today and will face his or her pupils tomorrow. If they are following this debate, I do not believe they will say that Deputies are worth this pay increase.

I am old enough to remember a time when the Labour Party had socialist members. By God, that party has changed. To be lectured by a Teachta Dála from the Labour Party who wags his finger and tells the House in no uncertain terms that he has no compunction about taking this pay increase because he is worth it is nothing short of disgraceful.

I will address the Fianna Fáil Deputies who expressed *faux* outrage about a potential loss of independence. I hope Deputy Calleary misunderstood the argument we have been making as I would like him to find it in his conscience to support the motion. Not one person on this side has suggested Deputies give up their independence. Sinn Féin is perfectly prepared to maintain the independent setting of Deputies' wages, but that does not mean we should take this pay increase.

Everyone speaks about being fair to low and middle-income workers. Fianna Fáil repeatedly says we should be fair to these workers out of one side of its mouth, while from the other side of its mouth, it says it will start being fair to low and middle-income workers by taking a €5,000 pay increase. Deputies on a salary of €87,000 will lead by example by taking a €5,000 pay increase, while shedding crocodile tears for people in the public service who tonight are worrying about how they will pay their rent and feed their children. I urge Deputies to lead by example and do the right thing by supporting the motion.

Amendment put.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 70(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time on Thursday, 10 November 2016.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.45 p.m. until 12 noon on Wednesday, 9 November 2016.