



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 28 Feabhra 2018

Wednesday, 28 February 2018

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Priority Questions

Project Ireland 2040

17. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén aighneacht a rinne sí maidir leis an gcreat pleanála náisiúnta, Tionscadal 2040, agus an plean forbartha náisiúnta, Tionscadal 2040, do na ceantair Ghaeltachta agus do na hoileáin; an bhfuil sí sásta leis na forálacha sa chreat agus sa phlean forbartha náisiúnta maidir leis an nGaeltacht agus na hoileáin; an bhfuil ceist curtha aici maidir leis an easpa leagan Gaeilge den dá phlean a bheith ar fáil ar an lá a foilsíodh iad; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10192/18]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ba mhaith liom fios a fháil ón Aire ar cén aighneacht a rinne sí maidir leis an gcreat pleanála náisiúnta agus an plean forbartha náisiúnta go dtí 2040. Chomh maith leis sin, an ndearna sí aon ghearán maidir leis an sárú dlí a bhí i gceist gan leagan Gaeilge a bheith ar fáil ag an am céanna leis an leagan Béarla?

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Mar is eol don Teachta, d'fhógair an Rialtas an tseachtain seo imithe thart go mbeadh €178 milliún in airgead caipitil ar fáil le caitheamh ar thograí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus oileánda as seo go ceann deich mbliana mar chuid den phlean forbartha náisiúnta. Anuas air sin, tá aitheantas láidir tugtha don phróiseas pleanála teanga atá ar bun faoi fhorálacha Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 sa chreat náisiúnta pleanála agus é mar sprioc náisiúnta pholasaí go dtacófar le cur i bhfeidhm an phróisis sin.

Leagtar amach sa phlean cuspóiri an Rialtais maidir le hinfheistíocht i gcultúr, i dteanga agus in oidhreacht na hÉireann ós rud é go n-aithnítear go bhfuil bonneagar ardchaighdeán an-tábhachtach le go mbeidh cultúr láidir, bisiúil ann a bhfuil an Ghaeilge, an Ghaeltacht agus na hoileáin mar chuid lárnach agus sainiúil de, ar ndóigh. San áireamh mar chuid den phlean, tá gealltanais go méadófar buiséad caipitil Údarás na Gaeltachta go €12 milliún in aghaidh na bliana agus go gcuirfear airgead breise isteach sa chlár tacaíochtaí pobail agus teanga atá á riar ag mo Roinn mar thaca breise don phróiseas pleanála teanga sa Ghaeltacht.

Sa chomhthéacs sin, ní miste a nótáil chomh maith go bhfuil buiséad na Roinne don phleanáil teanga méadaithe ó €1.25 milliún anuraidh go dtí €2.65 milliún i mbliana, rud a fhágann go bhfuil ardú bliain i ndiaidh bliana curtha ar fáil chun tacú le feidhmiú an phróisis ó thosaigh sé in 2014. Ina theannta sin, tugtar gealltanais sa phlean go bhforbrófar ionaid Ghaeilge agus chultúir i líonraí Gaeilge agus i mbailte seirbhíse Gaeltachta atá mar chuid thábhachtach den phróiseas pleanála teanga. Tá i gceist faoin bplean chomh maith go bhforbrófar lárionad Gaeilge agus cultúir i gcathair Bhaile Átha Cliath. Cinnteoidh an infheistíocht seo go ndéanfar tuilleadh treisithe ar an Ghaeilge ar bhonn náisiúnta agus go ndéanfar é sin tríd an bpróiseas pleanála teanga atá ag croílár na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge.

Eolas breise nár tugadh ar úrlár an Tí

Lena chois sin, tá beartaithe go ndéanfar tuilleadh forbartha ar bhonneagar oileánda, go háirithe ar Inis Oírr agus Inis Meáin chomh maith le forbairt ar an gcé ag Machaire Rabhartaigh agus ar bhád farantóireachta nua le go mbeidh freastal níos fearr déanta ar Thóraí.

Is sa bhreis ar an réimse leathan clár, scéimeanna agus tionscnamh atá idir lámha ag mo Roinn cheana féin, i gcomhar le forais ábhartha eile Stáit, a bheidh an plean infheistíochta caipitil seo á chur i bhfeidhm, ar ndóigh, ar leas phobal na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus na n-oileán araon. Táim sásta, dá réir, lena bhfuil sa phlean agus sa chreat mar a bhaineann sé leis an Ghaeilge, an Ghaeltacht agus na hoileáin.

Is ceist don Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil í foilsiú an dá cháipéis seo. É sin ráite, tuigfidh an Teachta go bhfuil Bille á dhréachtú faoi láthair agus a bheidh á fhoilsiú le linn an téarma seo, a dhéanfaidh treisiú ar fhorálacha Acht na dTeanga Oifigiúla 2003.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Sa mbliain 2008 bhí ollcaiteachas vótála ag an Stát de bheagnach €62 billiún. Sa mbliain 2018 beidh an ollcaiteachas mórán mar a chéile agus é beagnach €62 billiún. An difríocht atá ann ná an difríocht ó thaobh caiteachas caipitil ar an nGaeltacht, ar na hoileáin agus ar Údarás na Gaeltachta. Chaith an Rialtas €71 milliún sa mbliain 2008. I mbliana, áfach, caithfidh an Rialtas €10 milliún - an seachtú cuid. Tá an tAire Stáit ag déanamh gaisce inniu as €107 milliún a chaitheamh as seo go dtí 2027. Nach gceapann an tAire Stáit gur laghdú ollmhór caiteachais é sin ar an nGaeltacht? An bhfuil casadh déanta ag an Aire Stáit leis an Aire Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe maidir leis an easpa tacaíochta agus tosaíochta atá á thabhairt don Ghaeltacht, do na hoileáin agus don Ghaeilge ó thaobh chaiteachas an Rialtais de?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tabharfaidh mé freagra sciobtha. Bhí laghdú ollmhór thar na blianta a chuaigh thart ó 2008 go 2014 maidir leis an airgead a bhí ar fáil fá choinne na rudaí caipitil i Roinn na Gaeltachta. Tháinig suas go €10 milliún isteach i mbliana agus beimid ag dul ó chéim go céim le linn na deich mbliana go dtí €17 milliún fá choinne an caipiteal amach anseo. Tá difear mór ann anois ach an rud is mó maidir leis an bplean deich mbliana ná go bhfuil mé

ag cur ar fáil airgid agus tacaíochta fá choinne staidéar féidearthachtaí i gceantair Ghaeltachta éagsúla i gContae na Gaillimhe, i gContae Dhún na nGall agus i gContae Chiarraí, mar shampla. B'fhéidir go bhfuil togra ar intinn an Teachta féin maidir leis na ceantair agus beidh ról lárnach ag na daoine a bheidh ag obair ar an bpleanáil teanga maidir le tograí a bhaint amach. Beidh seans ansin. An difear is mó ná an plean a chur le chéile. Bhí cruinniú dearfa ag an Aire sinsearach, an Teachta Josepha Madigan, agus mo chuid oifigigh an tseachtain a chuaigh thart maidir leis an phlean a chur le chéile amach anseo agus laistigh de cúig bliana nó deich mbliana. Beidh sé níos fearr dá réir.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An ndearna an tAire Stáit gearán nár foilsíodh an leagan Gaeilge den phlean ag an am céanna leis an leagan Béarla? An bhféadfadh an tAire Stáit a mhíniú cén fáth nach bhfuil aon tagairt ar chor ar bith sa gcreat pleanála náisiúnta maidir le pleanáil fisiciúil sa Ghaeltach. Cad faoin dochar a dhéanfaidh na pleananna atá i gceist maidir le tithíocht aonair agus an srian a chuirfear air sin ar fhorbairt agus ar fhás na Gaeltachta? Chomh maith leis sin, cén fáth nach bhfuil aon phlean le cosaint a thabhairt don Ghaeltacht is láidre sa tír - an ceann i nGaillimh - de bharr an brú a thiocfaidh air mar gheall ar mhéadú cathair na Gaillimhe? Níl tagairt ar bith don chontúirt a bhaineann leis sin. An bhféadfadh an tAire Stáit, atá freagrach as an nGaeltacht, cén fáth nach ndearna sé cosaint níos fearr ar an nGaeilge agus ar an nGaeltacht sa gcás seo?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Bhí cúpla ceist ansin. Bhain ceann amháin dóibh leis an leagan Gaeilge ag an línseáil cúpla seachtain ó shin. Is ceist don Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil í foilsiú an cháipéis seo. É sin ráite, tuigfidh an Teachta go bhfuil Bille á dhréachtú faoi láthair agus a bheidh á fhoilsiú le linn an téarma seo a dhéanfaidh treisiú ar fhorálacha Acht na dTeanga Oifigiúla 2003. Tuigim go mbeidh línseáil na Roinne Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta amárach curtha ar ceal ach beidh an leagan Béarla ar fáil.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An leagan Béarla-----

Deputy Joe McHugh: Bhain an dara ceist leis an ngealltanas don teanga agus do na dreanna a bheidh lonnaithe sna Gaeltachtaí is láidre sa tír, cibé é sin an Ghaeltacht i nGaillimh nó i dTír Chonaill. An cloch is mó ar mo phaidrín an chéad lá a tháinig mé isteach sa phost seo ná an pleanáil teanga. Cibé Cois Farraige, Machaire Rabhartaigh, Gaoth Dobhair nó Rann na Feirste atá ag déanamh an phlean fá dtaobh den obair chaipitil sa cheantar, beidh an t-airgead agus an tacaíocht ar fáil.

Cistiúchán Roinne

18. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sí sásta leis an méid maoinithe a fuair sí don Ghaeilge sa bhuiséad deireanach; cén próiseas a bhí i gceist chun an maoiniú sin a éileamh; an bhfuil sí sásta go bhfuil an Rialtas ag éisteacht le mianta phobal na Gaeilge; an bhfuil sí chun breis maoinithe a iarraidh más rud é nach bhfuarthas ach leath dá bhfuil ag teastáil dar lena Roinn féin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10379/18]

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Is iontach an rud é gur tháinig an tAire Stáit ar sledge ó Dhún na nGall inniu. Tá sneachta anseo ach is lá breá earraigh é i nDún na nGall. Sa ghéarchéim, ní raibh gearradh siar níos mó ar aon earnáil eile sa tír ná an gearradh siar a tharla san earnáil Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta agus é seo in ainneoin go bhfuil an Ghaeilge faoi bhrú uafásach sa tír

seo. Cén fáth nach bhfuil an tAire in ann seasamh suas dá cúinne agus dá buiséad ag bord an Rialtais?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Mar Aire Stáit dár dteanga dhúchais, dár gceantair Ghaeltachta agus dár n-oileáin, chuir mé fáilte roimh an maoiniú breise de thart ar €2 milliún a cuireadh ar fáil dom i gcáinainéis 2018. San áireamh san allúntas a fuarthas don bhliain seo tá €1.4 milliún breise chun tacú leis an phróiseas pleanála teanga faoin Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, €400,000 de mhaoiniú breise d'Údarás na Gaeltachta chun infheistiú ina chlár caipitil agus chun tacaí a mhéadú do chomharchumainn agus d'eagraíochtaí forbartha pobail na Gaeltachta, rud a fhágann go bhfuil an maoiniú caipitil don Údarás méadaithe go €7 milliún, agus leithdháileadh breise de €687,000 do scéimeanna tacaíochta teanga na Roinne lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht.

San áireamh i mbuiséad na bliana seo fosta, tá suim shuntasach de €14.028 milliún le cur ar fáil don Fhoras Teanga, a chuimsíonn Foras na Gaeilge agus Gníomhaireacht na hUltaise, agus maoiniú €450,000 do Bhliain na Gaeilge 2018 san áireamh.

Ar ndóigh, ar nós achan Roinn agus achan Aire, bím ag lorg níos mó acmhainní chun cur leis an obair fhiúntach atá ar bun againn sa Roinn. Déantar é seo trí plé agus comhráití leanúnach leis an Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe agus is mar sin a bheidh sé arís i mbliana agus muid ag obair i dtreo bhuiséad 2019.

Níor mhiste a nótáil gur fhógair an Rialtas an tseachtain seo caite go mbeadh €178 milliún in airgead caipitil ar fáil le caitheamh ar thograí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus oileánda as seo go ceann 10 mbliana. Sin €78 milliún in airgead úr anuas ar an suim de níos mó ná €10 milliún atá á chaitheamh ar na nithe céanna in 2018. San áireamh sa phlean forbartha náisiúnta, tá gealltanas go méadófar buiséad caipitil Údarás na Gaeltachta go €12 milliún in aghaidh na bliana agus go gcuirfear airgead breise isteach sna scéimeanna caipitil Ghaeltachta atá á riar ag an Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta chomh maith, cur chuige a thacóidh le pobail Ghaeltachta a gcuid pleananna teanga a chur i bhfeidhm.

Eolas breise nár tugadh ar úrlár an Tí

Sa chomhthéacs sin, ní mór a nótáil chomh maith go bhfuil buiséad reatha na Roinne don phleanáil teanga méadaithe ó €1.25 milliún anuraidh go dtí €2.65 milliún i mbliana. Tá maoiniú bliantúil curtha ar fáil ag an Rialtas don phróiseas pleanála teanga gach bliain ón mbliain 2014, agus tá ardú tagtha ar leibhéil an mhaoinithe sin gach bliain.

Is léir uaidh seo uile go bhfuil na figiúirí ag dul sa treo ceart agus iad ag méadú anois gach uile bhliain.

Deputy Peadar Kirby: Is í an fhadhb atá agam ná gur chuir an tAire Stáit fáilte arís roimh an méid airgid a fuair sé sa cháinainéis in ainneoin go bhfuair an Roinn níos lú ná leath den mhéid mhaoinithe a bhí á lorg. I mí Dheireadh Fómhair, dúirt an tAire Stáit go raibh an Rialtas dírithe ar theacht leis an tiomantas dár gcultúr atá le feiceáil i mórán de na heagraíochtaí díograiseacha atá ar fud an Stáit. Dúirt sé go raibh aitheantas tugtha don obair chruaidh seo sa cháinainéis ach leath-aitheantais atá ann, ar ndóigh, de réir critéir an Aire Stáit féin. D'aithin an Roinn go raibh €5 milliún de dhíth leis na spriocanna ó thaobh na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta a bhaint amach. Ní bhfuair an Roinn ach €1.9 milliún ag an deireadh. Cé a rinne an cinneadh seo? Is léir nach bhfuil an tAire Stáit nó an tAire sinsearach ag fáil éisteacht ar chor ar bith ag bord an Rialtais maidir leis seo. Conas is féidir leis an tAire Stáit teacht isteach anseo inniu agus fáilte a chur roimh an méid airgid sin nuair nach bhfuil ann ach 40% den mhéid airgid a

bhí ag teastáil ón Roinn?

Deputy Joe McHugh: I gcónaí bíonn ceisteanna sa Teach seo maidir le hairgead breise, maidir le deontais bhreise agus maidir le tacaíocht ón Rialtas. Tá an díospóireacht sin tábhachtach maidir le brú a chur ar an Rialtas ó thaobh infheistíochta de agus aontaím leis. É sin ráite, ní bheidh seans agam sa Teach seo labhairt faoi aon phlean nó faoi aon ghníomhaíocht sa bhealach a bheidh ag Teachtaí eile chun labhairt fúthu. Tóg, mar shampla, an ceangal idir na bailte seirbhísí, na comharchumainn atá ag obair ar an bpleanáil teanga sna ceantair Ghaeltachta nó na líonraí Gaeltachta. D'fhéadfadh an díospóireacht a bhíonn ag dul ar aghaidh sa Teach seo a bheith ag dul ar aghaidh taobh amuigh den Teach. Tá athbheochan ollmhór ag dul ar aghaidh maidir leis an teanga. Mar is eol don Teachta, bhí lainseáil agus ócáid thar a bheith dearfach i bPáirc Uí Chrócaigh an tseachtain a chuaigh thart maidir leis na líonraí Gaeltachta i nGallimh, i gCluain Dolcáin agus sa Tuaisceart. Tá seans againn aitheantas a thabhairt do na dreamanna a bheidh ag bogadh ar aghaidh leis an teanga. Tá an Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta fite fuaite ann. Ní teanga cumarsáide amháin í an Ghaeilge. Is croílár na hoidhreacht agus an chultúir í fosta.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Leis an fhirinne a rá, is í an Ghaeilge an col ceathrar bocht ó thaobh an Rialtais de. Tá an Ghaeilge agus an tAire Stáit, Teachta McHugh, ag bun an dréimire gach uair. Tá sé dochreidte. Tá an tAire Stáit cosúil le Comical Ali mar gheall ar an Ghaeilge. Tá titim 11% tar éis teacht ar an méid daoine atá ag labhairt an Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht. Sin an slat tomhais is tábhachtaí mar gheall ar dhul chun cinn chur chuige an Rialtais. Tharla titim 11% agus tá an tAire Stáit ag teacht isteach anseo ag rá go bhfuil athbheochan ag teacht ar an rud. Tá an Ghaeilge ag dul i léig sna Gaeltachtaí - an áit is tábhachtaí.

Ba chóir don Aire Stáit breathnú ar rud éigin eile. Dúirt an Rialtas freisin go mbeidh príomhthosaíocht ag Roinn an Aire Stáit mar gheall ar an straitéis 20 bliain. Dúirt sé go mbeidh an plan foilsithe ag deireadh mhí Feabhra. Tá mí Feabhra imithe. Cá bhfuil an plan sin? Táimid ag fanacht beagán níos mó ná bliain ar an phlean seo. Thosaigh an comhairliúchán le haghaidh an plan seo in 2015. Cá bhfuil sé? Tá an t-am ag sleamhnú thart.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Ní aontaím leis an ráiteas faoin chol ceathrar bocht. Níl an teanga ina col ceathrar bocht. Caithfidh an Teachta bheith ciallmhar maidir leis sin. Níor thug an Teachta aitheantas don ról atá ag an cheangal agus an nasc idir an Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta agus an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna. I mí Mheán Fómhair i mbliana, beidh tacaíocht breise ag dul chuig achan bhunscoil sna ceantair Ghaeltachta. Seo an áit a bheidh an teanga ag fás sa tír - istigh sna bunscoileanna.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Níl siad in ann teacht ar mhúinteoirí.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Táimid ag tabhairt tacaíochta agus ní bhfuair muid aon aitheantas fadúda an ról seo. Bhí an tAire, Teachta Richard Bruton, i gcontae an Teachta Tóibín féin cúpla mí ó shin. D'fhógair sé scéim chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do na bunscoileanna.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Sa Ghaeltacht amháin.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá ról agus dualgais orainn uilig maidir leis an teanga. Ní bheidh an Roinn amháin freagrach as an Ghaeilge. Tá an ról is mó maidir leis ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna. Ní bhfuair mise aon----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Ach níl aon phlean ag an Roinn.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Níor thug an Teachta aon aitheantas don ról ollmhór atá ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna maidir leis an teanga faoi choinne na ndaoine óga, na daoine atá ag foghlaim, agus tacaíocht do na tuismitheoirí. Sin an áit ina mbeidh an gealltanas is mó.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: D’admhaigh an tAire nach bhfuil plean ar bith do cheantair taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht mar gheall ar chúrsaí oideachais. D’admhaigh sé é sin.

Capital Expenditure Programme

19. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of the way in which the €725 million allocated in the capital plan will be spent on cultural infrastructure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10375/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Government recently launched Project Ireland 2040, which is a comprehensive national planning framework and associated ten year national development plan. Project Ireland 2040 explicitly recognises that our culture, language and heritage are an essential part of the sustainable development of the country. It was anticipated that I would launch this element of the plan with An Taoiseach, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Paschal Donohoe and Minister of State, Deputy Joe McHugh. This launch has been postponed due to the sneachta.

The plan acknowledges the centrality of culture and creativity to our national development. It is unprecedented in this type of statutory planning framework, as is the commitment to investment in excess of €1 billion in our culture and heritage over the next ten years. Of this investment some €725 million will be invested directly in our cultural infrastructure, in our creative industries and in enhancing cultural experience for our citizens.

As outlined in Project Ireland 2040, €460 million will be spent on the national cultural institutions investment programme. Over the ten years of the plan, this will see: the renovation of the National Library of Ireland; significant enhancements at the National Archives of Ireland; investment at a number of sites of the National Museum of Ireland commencing with the Natural History Museum; the renovation of the National Concert Hall and Crawford Art Gallery; the completion of the National Gallery of Ireland master development plan; the redevelopment of the National Theatre and projects at the Irish Museum of Modern Art and at the Chester Beatty Library. These projects will be sequenced and prioritised having regard to the outcome of the evaluation and planning processes in line with the public spending code.

A further €265 million has been made available under the national development plan for a culture and creativity investment programme. This investment programme will be closely aligned with the Creative Ireland programme. Key areas for investment under this programme will be a programme of investments in regional arts and culture facilities to enhance opportunities for communities to participate in Irish cultural life; investment in our creative industries with a particular focus on the audio-visual sector which represents an important economic opportunity for Ireland; a programme for the digitisation of our national collections; and investment in Galway 2020 for its year as an EU Capital of Culture. I look forward to launching this element of the plan.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: We look forward to the Minister’s announcement on this over the coming days. Project Ireland 2040 states that “the aggregate level of investment in Ireland’s

cultural infrastructure over ten years is estimated at €725 million”. This represents a mere 0.625% of the €116 billion plan. It is not clear how much of this money is new and how much is already accounted for in existing spending allocations to projects already in hand. The plan indicates, for example, that €15 million is being spent on the Natural History Museum. This project is described as being in development. Will the Minister indicate if this €15 million was previously announced and allocated? Will the Minister identify how much of the money announced in the plan is new money and not previously announced money?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The breakdown of allocations for culture, heritage and the Irish language over the next five years is as follows: €54 million in 2018, €75 million in 2019, €76 million in 2020, €80 million in 2021 and €110 million in 2022. It is important to say that the infrastructure project steering group, which will be set up shortly by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, will include senior officials from all Departments. This will be a primary vehicle for cross-sectoral dialogue for implementation and will provide essential reports of progress under the plan within the Department. The Deputy referred to value for money. All investments under project 2040 will be subject to rigorous appraisal and evaluation in line with the public spending code. All options will be looked at prior to committing any funding on the project. There will be robust project management throughout the implementation phase and regular reports on expenditure and delivery against clear targets and milestones.

In particular, 2018 will see us focus on the appraisal, planning and design of many of the flagship projects with a view to moving to the delivery phase in the following years.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: The national cultural institutions are to undertake a €460 million phased investment programme over ten years, as the Minister has outlined. The plan gives concrete budgets and completion dates for just three of those projects: the Crawford Gallery, the National Library of Ireland and the Natural History Museum. Combined, these projects are to cost €31 million. Rather than giving any detail as to how the remaining €411 million is to be spent on the national cultural institutions we have simply been provided with a list of those institutions. This mirrors the vagueness of the capital investment plan 2016-2021 wherein it was stated “there will also be investment in cultural infrastructure, including the National Cultural Institutions and Regional Arts and Cultural Centres”. Will the Minister outline how exactly she plans on investing in the national cultural institutions?

Many of the projects referred to by the Minister are some of our most important cultural institutions but I urge the Minister to not forget about the regional arts and cultural centres that can be the lifeblood of communities outside the main cities. I hope the focus does not remain on our urban city centres and that the Minister remembers rural Ireland and the more isolated regional arts centres that do phenomenal work in our communities in keeping rural Ireland going.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Deputy Smyth is correct that regional arts must be to the forefront in the national development plan and in our particular sector investment.

It will be part of the €725 million about which the Deputy asked. That €265 million in effect implements pillar 3 of Creative Ireland in relation to a culture and creativity investment programme. One of the key areas for investment is a programme of investment in regional arts and cultural facilities to enhance opportunities for communities to participate in Irish cultural life. There will also be investment in creative industries with an emphasis on audio-visual and also digitisation of our national collections. For example, the National Archives welcomed about 12,000 visitor during 2015, when there was 1.4 million hits

11 o'clock

online. It is necessary that we bring services up to the 21st century and we will do that. The list will be added to once we have got past the appraisal, planning and design phase to implementation phase over the next five years. Understandably, what most of the cultural institutions will be doing now is setting out master plans as to how they will use the money in the future. The main ones we will start with are the National Archives of Ireland, the National Museum of Ireland, the National History Museum, the renovation of the National Concert Hall, the Crawford Gallery, the National Gallery of Ireland, the National Theatre and projects with the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Chester Beattie Library.

Heritage Sites

20. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to acquire a site (details supplied) in view of its cultural and historic importance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10193/18]

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I thank the office of the Ceann Comhairle for what it described as the procedural fluidity for allowing me to take Deputy Gino Kenny's question this morning.

The Luggala House and estate are a jewel in a truly breath-taking location in the spectacular setting of the Wicklow mountains. The thought that this location, which should be enjoyed by walkers, tourists, locals and others, might be bought by some international property investor sends shivers down my spine. My stomach curdled at the thought that Denis O'Brien had expressed an interest in it. It should be something that is available to everybody. The question of whether the State will acquire this estate in order to ensure its availability to the public has been raised several times.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am aware that this site, comprising a historic house and estate of some 5,000 acres, has been offered for sale, with a reported asking price in the region of €28 million.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department has no direct role in this sales process as it is a commercial matter between the owners of the property in question and the parties interested in the purchase.

Through the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht manages a property portfolio in respect of national parks and reserves of approximately 87,000 hectares. These important biodiversity areas are located all around the country. Given the limited resources available for capital investment within the national parks and nature reserves, I recognise the need to focus on the core responsibilities relating to the management of the existing parks and reserves' lands. The estate at Luggala would be a significant addition to our stock of publicly owned heritage properties and lands. It provides a central connection between disparate parts of our Wicklow mountains' national park.

My Department could only consider acquiring this property if the price fell to within a certain range, or in the context of a donation or bequest. This is known to the vendors. In this context, I also remind the House that in late 2016 my Department negotiated the extension of Wicklow mountains national park by purchasing almost 4,900 acres of Dublin uplands at Glenasmole in 2016 at a cost of just €800,000.

Wicklow mountains national park and Glendalough are amongst our most beloved and popular heritage jewels. The Luggala Estate has allowed a permissive access to a hugely popular walking route down to Lough Dan for many decades and I hope this would continue under any new ownership arrangements. Furthermore, the estate has been an excellent neighbour to the national park, working closely with it on habitat management and the promotion of our stunning Wicklow mountains for tourism, film-making and amenity. It is my wish that this close co-operation would continue too in future.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Hoping is not the same as achieving. The idea that this beautiful walk which people currently are able to enjoy because Garech Browne of the Guinness family has allowed the public access to Lough Dan through the estate could be ended if some property investor or private interest takes the estate over and no longer allows access. That is why we want more than expressions of concern or hope. We think the Government should actively acquire the estate. Given that the Minister says the Government is willing to consider acquiring the estate if the price is right, what direct negotiations has the State initiated with the vendors to see if we can acquire it? The answer which the Minister just gave is exactly the same as we heard from the previous Minister of State when this question was raised last summer. Has there been any progress?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: There were discussions, which for reasons of confidentiality the details of which I am not allowed to give the House. We are open to further discussions on this. As I said, there is a permissive right of way in the estate. The price has to be right. The door is open for negotiations in the future. As well as the location, the estate is of architectural and cultural significance. The estate is in the target area of where acquisition could be considered but it also falls within the core of the parks target area and encompasses some of the most iconic views of Wicklow outside Glendalough. It would not have the same strategic significance to the national parks and wildlife service. We did acquire lands in 2006 which were in close proximity but these were two unconnected pieces of land. There are scarce resources in our Department and we are mindful of the need to focus on core responsibilities. We could consider acquiring this property if it fell within a certain price range. The vendors are aware of discussions which have taken place. There may be further discussions in the future. It is up to the vendors to discuss it again with the Department.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: A very passive approach is being taken here. We should be setting out with determination to acquire this estate. The Minister says it is not strategically important or a priority. I do not understand that. Has the Minister ever been up there? It is absolutely spectacular. Currently we can just walk past the estate to Lough Dan. If we had access to the full estate, the investment that the State would put in in its purchase would be repaid many times over in future years. Anybody going to Wicklow or considering travelling through that landscape would want to go down to Luggala. It would easily pay for itself over the medium to long term. There has been all this fanfare over Project Ireland 2040 and the investment in our cultural infrastructure but, God almighty, one could not get a more important piece of cultural, architectural or natural heritage infrastructure than the Luggala Estate which is important for its oak trees, deer, architecture and landscape. It is absolutely spectacular and would be a tragedy if some property developer or private interest got hold of the estate.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I do not know if the Deputy heard my response.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I did hear it.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: What I said was there have been previous discussions in relation to this estate but that there are obvious financial constraints. Unless the property is in a price range that is acceptable to the Department, it will not be in a position to purchase it. We are leaving the door open in terms of further negotiations and hopefully we will be in a position to proceed. I agree that the estate is of high scenic value and the combination of the mountains, the lake and the woodland are particularly attractive. Its wild aspect so close to a major city also adds to its significance. It is an important example of a hunting and fishing lodge where the emphasis was more on short term accommodation rather than formal reception rooms. It is a particularly striking house for its 20th century cultural connections which are both tangible and intangible. Many noted artists, writers and musicians have stayed as guests and have contributed to a wealth of high quality artifacts. These collectively give the property a quality that would be considerably lessened without them. I accept all those facts. At the same time, we have to allow reasonability in terms of spending taxpayers' money. We are open to discussions if the Deputy wants to consider it further.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

21. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cathain go díreach a fhoilseofar an plean gníomhaíochta maidir le feidhmiú na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge don tréimhse 2018-2022; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh.. [10210/18]

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Tá ceist dhíreach, shimplí agam. Cén dáta a fhoilseofar an plean gníomhaíochta maidir le feidhmiú na straitéise, straitéise 20 bliain don Ghaeilge, don tréimhse 2018-22?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Dírím aird an Teachta ar na freagraí atá tugtha agam ar Cheisteanna Dála eile faoin ábhar seo cheana féin. Mar atá ráite agam roimhe seo, ós rud é go bhfuil freagracht thras-Rannach i gceist maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na straitéise 20 bliain don Ghaeilge, ba ghá go leor plé a dhéanamh le Ranna Stáit agus páirtithe leasmhara eile maidir le hullmhú an Phlean Gníomhaíochta.

Mar atá mínithe agam go minic roimhe seo chomh maith, is é nádúr na hoibre seo go dtógann sé am chun nithe a aontú le páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla a bheidh freagrach i ndeireadh báire as pé beart a aontaítear a fheidhmiú agus mar go bhfuil sé mar chuspóir a chinntiú, oiread agus is féidir, go mbeidh fiúntas leis an gclár bearta a bheidh sa phlean críochnúil.

Tá an obair sin ag teacht chun críche anois agus, dá réir, tá bailchríoch á cur ag mo Roinnse faoi láthair ar an bplean a ndéanfar a fhoilsiú sna seachtainí amach romhainn.

Ní call a rá ar ndóigh go bhfuil cláir oibre á gcur i bhfeidhm ag mo Roinn féin agus ag Ranna agus forais ábhartha eile stáit, chomh maith le raon leathan eagraíochtaí Gaeilge chun cúram a dhéanamh, i gcaitheamh an ama, ar fheidhmiú na Straitéise.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Go raibh maith agat. Tá a fhios agam nach bhfuil sé éasca agus go bhfuil obair thras-rannach i gceist. Ach is í seo Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge. Foilsíodh an straitéis in 2010. Bhí sé bunaithe ar a lán oibre roimhe sin, mar shampla an Ráiteas Gaeilge ó 2006. Tá fhios againn go bhfuil gá práinneach le plean gníomhaíochta. Tá sé thar am é a fhoilsiú agus an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn. Tá sé de phribhléid agam a bheith i mo Chathao-

irleach ar an gcoiste Gaeilge agus tá a fhios againn ó na cruinnithe in aghaidh na coicíse chomh leochaileach is atá an Ghaeilge agus an phráinn atá ag teastáil maidir le plean gníomhaíochta. An mbeidh sé foilsithe roimh dheireadh na míosa, nó an foilseofar é i mí Aibreáin? Cathain a foilseofar é?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Aontaím le tuairim an Teachta. Is é sin an fáth a chur mé an bealach seo chun cinn in 2015. Bhí mé ag labhairt faoin straitéise 20 bliain don Ghaeilge, agus níos leithne ag an am, agus mise an duine, mar Aire Stáit, a thosaigh an aistear maidir leis sin. Táimid ag fanacht chun an cheist a bheith freagartha. Tá mé thar a bheith muiníneach agus dóchasach go mbeidh muid in ann é a fhoilsiú taobh istigh de choicís nó thrí seachtaine.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Is dea-scéal é sin. Gabhaim buíochas as sin. Táimid ag tnúth leis é a fheiceáil agus é a léamh. Ach táimid go léir inníoch ar son na Gaeilge. Mar is eol don Aire, tá Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge ann, agus tá dualgais faoi leith ar an Rialtas agus ar Ranna éagsúla. Le déanaí chualamar nuacht ó RTÉ go raibh sé ar intinn acu “Nuacht” a réamhthairfeadh roimh an am. Luaim an méid sin mar shampla den easpa tuisceana atá le feiceáil i RTÉ maidir leis na freagrachtaí atá orthu. Chomh maith leis sin tá a fhios againn ar leibhéal eile nach bhfuil na scéimeanna teanga ag feidhmiú ar chur ar bith agus dúirt an Coimisinéir Teanga an méid sin go soiléir. Is iad seo cuid de na rudaí atá luaite sa straitéis. Mar sin, tá gá le hathbhreithniú agus le plean gníomhaíochta a bheith ann go práinneach.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Maidir leis na moltaí, aontaím leis an dualgas atá orainn uilig agus atá ag achan Roinn. Tá dualgais mhóra ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna. Táimid ag siúl go mór leis na moltaí a fháil ón Roinn sin maidir leis an bplean gníomhaíochta. Maidir le RTÉ, beidh dualgais ar an Roinn Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe ar son na hAeráide agus Comhshaoil. Dá mbeadh aon fhadhb nó aon inní ar an Teachta san am atá romhainn, tá mé ar a taobh agus ar son na teanga agus tá cuidiú ar fáil anseo maidir le haon bhealach atá de dhíth.

Other Questions

Bullying in the Workplace

22. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to new allegations that have been made regarding abuse and bullying in the National Museum of Ireland. [10093/18]

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Over the past number of years the National Museum of Ireland has been racked with allegations of bullying and sexual harassment. Millions of euro have been spent so far on consultants, reports, sexual abuse experts and High Court payoffs. This, of course, does not include the very real damage that has been done to the lives of a large number of people who simply wanted to work in the premier heritage location in Ireland. Is the Minister aware of any new allegations of sexual harassment and bullying in the National Museum of Ireland?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: My Department has been informed of new allegations of bullying and harassment in the National Museum. The Deputy will appreciate that I cannot discuss individual cases. The Deputy will also be aware that the National Museum of Ireland is a statu-

tory body under the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 and I have no responsibility for the day to day operations of the museum.

While I cannot get involved in human resource matters, which are a matter for the executive and the board of the museum, my Department has provided additional support, including sanction for three specific HR positions and two temporary positions for the corporate services area of the museum.

The chair and the new board were appointed in July 2016 and are implementing change in the museum, as well as preparing new plans to improve the museum's services to the public over the coming years. My Department and I are supportive of these plans.

Separately, in light of allegations of abuse of power and sexual harassment elsewhere in the arts sector, my Department has identified a number of actions to be taken in relation to bodies reporting directly to my Department, including our national cultural institutions. These include arranging dedicated workshops for board members and senior staff of bodies reporting to the Department dealing with governance. There will be a particular emphasis on issues relating to bullying, abuse of power and sexual harassment in the workplace.

I consider that the support for the board, which I have outlined, is the most appropriate way for my Department to deal with issues of bullying and harassment.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Minister's response is very unsatisfactory in a number of ways. Obviously she is new to the Department and she may not be aware of the deep and ongoing crisis that has engulfed the National Museum. Significant damage has been done to a large number of women who have worked in a building 100 yards from where we sit. These women were in the care of the State because the State had a role during that time as the Department was involved in those particular HR issues. These women could not receive justice. The only way they could do so was to go to the front pages of the national newspapers and tell their stories. The most frustrating thing about this is that I have been told that at the start of these allegations a senior person in the National Museum of Ireland gave a report of what happened to the Department, and the Department did not carry out anything. The report does not exist at present. If that initial report had been acted upon none of the subsequent allegations made by those women would have happened. Sitting on hands so far has only meant more people have had to suffer. I urge the Minister to take a hands-on approach to resolving this issue.

Deputy Joan Burton: I have tabled a question on the matter to which the Minister referred, regarding a report on harassment and bullying in another institution. In the context of this being a matter in a number of institutions, and we have had reports recently on The Gate Theatre, will the Minister publish and advise what she proposes to do to empower workers, particularly young workers, whether women or men, to be able to be in a safe work environment? If they encounter harassment and bullying what can they do to ensure they can stop it?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I do not accept the fact that no steps have been taken to try to eradicate harassment in this particular area. I have the utmost sympathy for women and men who go through any bullying or harassment in the museum or any other cultural institution. There is positive engagement with the National Museum of Ireland and a head of human resources was put in place, on an 18 month contract, on 26 February. There are also two temporary HR staff in place. In my role as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht I am in a position to support the National Museum of Ireland in ensuring these issues will not arise into

the future. A complaint made on 22 February has been submitted to the State Claims Agency which notified me by letter yesterday that as the National Museum of Ireland was the employer, not me, as Minister, it would be dealing with the matter internally. Obviously, I cannot go into the detail of the case.

As I mentioned, workshops for directors and boards are being held by my Department and the natural cultural institutions have been issued with reminders of their responsibility to follow through on their obligations under employers' legislation. The Department also supports the provision of training for staff of the national cultural institutions and it is very important that that be done.

Deputy Peadar Táibín: Adrienne Corless, a former staff member of the National Museum of Ireland, stated about her experience that she would rather vomit slugs than name the truths of her experience in working at the National Museum of Ireland but that if she did not do so, she would spend the rest of her life living with slug-like lodgers from her past working life eating her up from inside. The deep ramifications of what happened in the National Museum of Ireland are still surfacing. The Minister will be aware of the recently listed third third High Court case of bullying at the National Museum of Ireland. There are still questions about a large number of secondments, one of which has been ongoing for the past four years at a cost of €100,000 per annum. I believe that what happened was, in part, the result of a *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the Department and previous Ministers. Will the Minister continue that process or will she bring it to an end?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I can assure the Deputy that there is no *laissez-faire* attitude on my part or within the Department in this area. In 2017 a staff forum, consisting of representatives of management and the staff, was set up to promote and foster good relations within the National Museum of Ireland. There was also a review of departmental documentation in 2017 which set out a number of recommendations, one of which was that we continue to support the chairperson and the board of the National Museum of Ireland in the introduction and implementation of measures to achieve enhanced HR capacity in the museum, which we have done. The National Museum of Ireland is also adhering to the code of practice, which is important. Also, an internal audit conducted in 2017 recommended the establishment of a dedicated HR unit at the museum. The HR policy was reviewed and updated and there is continual HR training for line managers across all areas of the museum. It is also proposed to develop a museum development plan setting out a long-term direction of travel for the museum.

I accept that there should never be a workplace in which people have to suffer the indignity of harassment or abuse in any form. I will be taking any step I can in that regard.

On Deputy Joan Burton's point about the Gate Theatre, I am working with it and the signatories to find solutions to all of the issues. There is an initiative taking place on 21 March, of which the Deputy may be aware, through which we hope to move matters forward and ensure this culture will not continue into the future.

National Orchestras

23. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her policy on the National Concert Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9975/18]

Deputy Joan Burton: As the person with responsibility for culture, what does the Minister propose to do to defend the National Symphony Orchestra and the National Concert Orchestra? Is she aware that player number in the National Symphony Orchestra is in the low 60s, whereas the proper strength of an international orchestra which the National Symphony Orchestra is in the mid-90s? What does she propose to do about this important element of our culture?

(Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Deputy will appreciate that there are existing legislative obligations on RTÉ in the provision of music. It has traditionally included the provision by RTÉ of orchestral music through the National Symphony Orchestra, as well as the National Concert Orchestra. Responsibility for RTÉ, in the first instance, rests with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. However, as Minister with responsibility for culture and oversight of the National Concert Hall, it is important that there be strong provision of orchestral music in Ireland. I am conscious that the National Concert Hall which does come within my remit has always been proud to call it the home of the National Symphony Orchestra. The National Symphony Orchestra, in turn, provides the backbone of the National Concert Hall's orchestral music programme through its weekly concerts. My Department and the Arts Council provide support for orchestral music in Ireland and I am fully aware of the premier role the National Symphony Orchestra plays in that regard.

With regard to the review, I understand it is an internal review which is being carried out by RTÉ. My Department has not been directly involved in it. However, officials from my Department have met officials from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to discuss the matter. They have been informed that the review is to make recommendations on the best configuration of the orchestras. They were also informed that RTÉ had acknowledged that the orchestras were integral to its arts and cultural programming and formed a key part of its arts and culture strategy.

My Department will maintain close contact with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on this matter and both Departments will consider the outcome of the RTÉ review when it is complete. I understand a final report will be delivered to RTÉ shortly.

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank the Minister for her reply and acknowledgement that, as Minister with responsibility for culture, she has a role when it comes to our national orchestras. I have in my hand a copy of the very expensive national development plan, strategy No. 7 of which references enhanced amenity and heritage and the value of cultural heritage but nothing more in this area. Given that the Government is spending at least €1.5 million in promoting the plan, I thought that by now Ministers would know off by heart what is included in it. The RTÉ orchestras are being slowly and steadily eviscerated by reducing player numbers. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra. In 1948 the strength of the orchestra was 62, which figure rose eventually to a height of 93 in the late 1980s. As I said earlier, its membership now stands at 68. I am sure that in her role the Minister attends the National Concert Hall and that as such she will be aware that 68 players do not constitute a full strength orchestra. Our young musicians are working around the world because they cannot find jobs at home. Many of them would love to come home.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Dee Forbes has stated the RTÉ internal review should be completed by the end of this month. RTÉ announced the review via a press release in November 2017. Its overall funding position is well known. It is incumbent on RTÉ to consider and assess its role in the provision of orchestral music into the future. In that context, the review

will consider what current and future audiences want, how they will engage with us and how RTÉ's orchestral music will be heard in venues, on screens and radio across the country. There is a difference between the National Symphony Orchestra and the National Concert Orchestra in terms of size and audiences. It is a matter for RTÉ to decide whether it will maintain both orchestras. Officials of my Department met officials of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on 12 January to discuss the issue. The Deputy will be aware that RTÉ has a statutory requirement to establish and maintain orchestras, choirs and other cultural performing groups. I look forward to reading the report. While I cannot anticipate what the outcome will be, I look forward to discussing matters further with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Deputy Joan Burton: One can kill something outright or one can have a slow strangulation and wearing down of a really important institution like the National Symphony Orchestra. Lots of small countries in Europe have four or five major symphony orchestras but the strength of our national orchestra has fallen to 68 players. A number of people have retired, others have left and a complete hold has been placed on recruiting new players. It is not that we lack musical talent in Ireland because we have many fantastic young musicians, qualified up to PhD level and beyond, who are now playing in orchestras and ensembles all over the world. It is not possible for them to come back home because the RTÉ symphony orchestra is not recruiting. That orchestra is a major source of employment for musicians and is vital to the musical heritage of this country.

I am delighted that the Minister has met the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Denis Naughten, to discuss this matter. However, the Government has just launched a major report, part of which is about enhanced amenities and heritage. How come the word "culture" does not feature in the new national development plan? How come one of its objectives is not enhancing, maintaining, enabling and empowering our culture?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Deputy Burton mentioned the National Concert Hall, NCH, earlier and it is important to point out that the NCH is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. It held a celebratory event on 16 February last. The concert hall is home to RTÉ's National Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Choir Ireland, the Irish Baroque Orchestra, the Music Network and Music Generation and hosts approximately 1,000 events per annum. Its mission is to foster and celebrate the appreciation, knowledge, enjoyment and love of music as an integral part of Irish life.

I would also add that my Department provides funding to many different orchestras. In terms of music and ensuring that it is a vital part of cultural life in Ireland, my Department provides funding for the Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland and the Peace Proms, while Culture Ireland also funds music-----

Deputy Joan Burton: What does Culture Ireland fund?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: -----through its capital scheme-----

Deputy Joan Burton: Culture Ireland is a propaganda outfit.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: -----which saw a €245,000 increase this year.

RTÉ itself said in a press release that it is the primary custodian of symphonic and orchestral music in this country. It is the biggest employer of musicians and, ultimately, we hope that we

will be able to work this out.

Traveller Culture

24. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps she will take to highlight Traveller culture in a positive and meaningful way in view of the fact that Travellers are a distinct ethnic minority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10100/18]

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On March 1 last year there was an historic, if belated, acknowledgement of Traveller ethnicity and culture. Beyond the symbolic importance of the recognition of Traveller ethnicity and culture, what practical steps and policies is the Minister with responsibility in the area of culture going to take to practically celebrate, acknowledge and promote Traveller culture as a crucial part of Ireland's historic identity and culture?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: As I advised the House in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 267 of 6 December 2017, my Department's commitment to supporting diversity and inclusion is reflected in its policies and operations and in those of the bodies under its aegis.

One of the stated aims of Culture 2025, which is my Department's national cultural policy document, is to create opportunities for increased citizen participation, especially for those currently excluded or at risk of exclusion, with a key value being the right of everyone to participate in the cultural life of the nation. This right runs throughout people's lives, irrespective of where they come from, where they live, their religious beliefs or their economic or social backgrounds. In line with these policy objectives, my Department's Creative Ireland programme continues to promote the Traveller mentoring programme and in 2017, through Cork City Council, funded the renovation of the Traveller culture exhibition at Cork Public Museum in 2017, with the refurbishment designed by visual artist and Traveller, Leanne McDonagh.

In 2017 the Irish Film Board and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, BAI, provided €625,000 in funding for Carmel Winters' film, "Float Like a Butterfly", which is due for release this year and is set among the Traveller community. The Arts Council supports the Traveller community under the arts participation and the artist in the community schemes. Managed by Create on the Arts Council's behalf, these schemes encourage artists to work in a culturally diverse context including among the Traveller community. The work of artists from the Traveller community has also been recognised this year with the election to Aosdána of playwright Rosaleen McDonagh and the awarding of the Arts Council's next generation bursary award for 2017 to visual artist Leanne McDonagh.

The cultural institutions are also active in this space. In 2017 the Chester Beatty Library partnered with the National Concert Hall as part of Dublin City Council's Dublin Culture Connects programme under which the poet Stephen James Smith is working with the Traveller women's group at Labre Park in Ballyfermot to look at shared stories. The National Museum is planning a major exhibition with the Traveller community to be hosted in the Museum of Country Life from June 2018. The exhibition will focus on the traditions, customs and history of the Traveller community over the years.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

My Department is also represented on the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy Steering Group, which monitors the implementation and progress of the recently published the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. I look forward to working with my Department and those bodies under its aegis in developing these important initiatives.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: All of those things are welcome and at some levels, we are moving forward. I also note that 15 March, the national Traveller day of culture will see an important event on Traveller history and ethnicity at the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham. These are all positive things but actual participation in culture starts with the basics where, quite frankly, we are not moving forward. While these are not directly within the Minister's remit, she should consider them as part of the project of making the formal acknowledgement of Traveller ethnicity a reality. Accommodation is one of the most basic elements of Traveller culture but Travellers in this country are 11 times more likely to be homeless. Against the background of disastrous homelessness generally, Travellers are disproportionately hit. Indeed, politicians, including the Minister in the past, have played fast and loose on the issue of Traveller accommodation but we need to move forward on that. In the area of education, we need to reinstate the visiting teacher for Travellers and to provide extra resource teachers in schools for Travellers. We must also include Traveller history and culture in the school curricula.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Regarding my own Department, page 6 of the Culture 2025 document specifically mentions that all people, no matter where they come from, should be included in our culture plans. Culture also has an important role to play in promoting tolerance, inclusivity and social cohesion in our increasingly diverse society. It should be accessible to everyone, irrespective of origin, place of residence, religious beliefs or economic or social background.

I was here in the Dáil when the former Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, made a statement in recognition of Traveller ethnicity on March 1 last year. The then Taoiseach also visited my constituency and met the Southside Travellers Action Group, who were absolutely delighted that their ethnicity would be formally recognised. Deputy Kenny said that Travellers told him that it took 30 years for a Government to listen to them across the table. He went on to say:

The representatives spoke passionately about how this strong message from the State would be a very important symbolic and positive step in acknowledging the uniqueness of Traveller identity. They felt it would resonate strongly among the community and help counter the stigma and shame felt by many, particularly young people, and increase feelings of respect, self-esteem and inclusion.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I acknowledge the historical importance, albeit belated, of the recognition of Traveller ethnicity last year but now we need to move to practical policies and actions. My point is that we have a long way to go. The situation for Travellers in this country is truly shocking. They are seven times more likely to commit suicide and one in 11 young Traveller men die by suicide. Traveller men live 15 years less and Traveller women live 11 years less than their settled counterparts. Infant mortality is four times higher and as I said already, Travellers are 11 times more likely to be homeless. We need to address these issues in the areas of health and accommodation. I would like to see movement on these issues and practical timelines put in place. There is no budget and no timeline for the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy; therefore, it is aspirational rather than a practical policy.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The Deputy makes valid points about members of the Travel-

ler community. They have difficulties, perhaps more than other groups, in dealing with many of the issues that confront them. The Government must do all it can to assist them in reaching their goals in life. I have attended many good events in my constituency aimed at dealing with this issue.

From a broader perspective, the National Museum of Ireland exhibition will be hosted in the Museum of Country Life from June. The idea of the Traveller journey exhibition which will run until May 2019 was originally proposed to members of the western regional Traveller health network who developed the concept at a social inclusion event co-hosted by the museum, Mayo County Council and the Mayo Traveller Support Group in October 2015. A budget of €100,000 is being allocated for the exhibition.

On other aspects of the work of my Department, the director of the National Library of Ireland will be attending a national Traveller ethnicity event this week, unless it is postponed. It might have been postponed already. It was due to take place tomorrow. The director will speak on another occasion about genealogy and other source material the National Library of Ireland has available for the study of Traveller family histories.

Heritage Sites

25. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to make provisions for various issues in the cultural and heritage area which, in turn, are likely to have a beneficial economic impact; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10153/18]

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: This question, like similar ones Deputies have pursued in the past, relates to the extent to which we should continue to encourage and generate greater interest in the wealth of our heritage and culture for the benefit of the population and internationally, with obvious beneficial economic consequences.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: As the Deputy is aware, the Government invests in culture and heritage for their intrinsic value but also recognises the valuable economic contribution the sectors can make. For example, the creative economy is now recognised as a leading sector in generating economic growth, employment and trade in many advanced economies. In 2010 it was estimated that the cultural and creative industries contributed around 2.6% of the total GDP of the European Union, providing around 5 million jobs across the 27 EU member states. In Ireland, in the same year, a report commissioned by the Arts Council estimated that the creative industries overall contributed more than €4.7 billion to the economy, equivalent to approximately 3% of GDP, while the number of jobs supported in aggregate amounted to 78,900. This underpins the importance attached to culture and heritage in the recently launched Project Ireland 2040, the comprehensive national planning framework and associated ten-year national development plan which provides for a significant investment of in excess of €1 billion in culture and heritage in the next ten years. It also provides for an additional €178 million to support the Irish language, a key element of our cultural identity, and protect our unique Gaeltacht and Island communities. The level of this investment which is unprecedented under a national development plan will inevitably have a beneficial economic impact. I will shortly launch this element of the plan. I was hoping to launch elements of it with the Taoiseach, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Pashal Donohoe, and my colleague, the Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Joe McHugh, but it has been postponed until a

later date.

The national cultural institutions investment programme worth €460 million will see economic opportunities for the construction sector in the short run but will have a long-term economic benefit to Dublin and Cork from its tourism dividend, as well as providing much needed upgrades at these important national institutions. As part of the culture and creativity investment programme under the national development plan and aligned with the Creative Ireland programme, we will be investing heavily in the audio-visual industry as a cornerstone of the creative industries and bringing an economic dividend for the sector and the areas in which audio-visual content, including films, is produced.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

On the heritage side, we will invest €285 million in a broad range of projects across the country, from enhancing visitor facilities at national parks and nature reserves and providing incentives for the restoration of the historic cores of towns, villages and cities to works to protect national monuments and inland waterways. All of these investments will yield a positive economic impact from the jobs created from the works to the long-term benefits to local economies from the improved tourism offering, particularly in the national parks which are primarily on the route of the Wild Atlantic Way and present an opportunity for enhanced tourism development, as well as conserving the beauty of natural landscapes.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive reply and congratulate her on her activity in the area and her intentions. To what degree does she intend to broaden the level of interest in cultural issues through the education system and the media generally, including international media outlets, in an effort to promote tourism and continue to encourage the creation of employment through participation from abroad as well as from home?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: My Department will be working closely with other Departments in order to ensure we will implement the plans set out in the national planning framework and the national development plan, Project Ireland 2040. There is a later question on creative youth schemes.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is the next question.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I thank the Deputy. I will speak about that issue. Suffice it to say it is a pilot project involving 150 schools. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan spoke about education. It is very important we bring forward the scheme. We are investing €460 million under the national cultural investment programme which will be really transformative in bringing many of the national cultural institutions into the 21st century. Many of the projects are at appraisal, planning and design stage, while many are flagship projects. We will be hoping to move to the delivery phase in the coming years and will be able to add to the list into the future.

On the heritage side, some €285 million has been allocated which will create employment and help us to invest in national parks and nature reserves. The number of visitors has increased from 2.5 million to 4 million in just over ten years. We need to have the infrastructure we require to ensure we can cope with the steady increase in the number of visitors. It will also help in promoting tourism.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: To what extent is it intended to use promotional means to popularise heritage sites? I once had the privilege of visiting the rock of Masada when its

importance was emphasised. We have many sites in this country that date back more than 5,000 years to the time of the pyramids. To what extent does the Minister foresee opportunities arising to merge our cultural, heritage and historical sites in a package to attract national and international interest?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The national development plan emphasises the amenity value of the natural built heritage. It is a €285 million investment plan. I have mentioned the national parks and nature reserves and how we need to be in a position to cope with the number of new visitors with better infrastructure. We want to help our invaluable natural assets and have hubs for outdoor activities and to promote tourism.

On the built heritage, to which the Deputy referred, it is the historical core of cities, towns and villages. We must protect and try to regenerate it, where possible. We must also protect castles, forts and mounds. The inland waterways are not just an engineering marvel but also an amenity within the national tourism offering. I intend to ramp up investment into the future, including in the restoration of the Ulster Canal. The plan also provides for implementation of national guidelines for the protection of our unique landscapes. We will be able to implement the national biodiversity plan into the future.

School Curriculum

26. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the way in which creative schools will put the arts and creativity at the heart of children's and young person's lives. [9871/18]

Deputy Tom Neville: I want to ask the Minister about the way in which creative schools will put the arts and creativity at the centre of the lives of children and young people.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: On 12 February I launched Scoileanna Ildánacha-Creative Schools. This pilot initiative is a vital element of the recently launched creative youth plan and a cornerstone of pillar 1 of the Government's Creative Ireland programme.

Creative Schools is being led by the Arts Council, with support from my Department and the Department of Education and Skills. Up to 150 schools across the country will participate in the pilot project and work with Creative Associates to develop their own unique programmes of arts and creative work, connecting them to the full range of local and regional cultural resources and opportunities. Creative associates are artists, creative practitioners and educators. They are recruited by the Arts Council, which will support each school in the development and implementation of its plan and forge partnerships with the wider arts and cultural community. In addition, all schools will receive a range of supports, including a once-off grant of €2,000 and training for teachers in the school. Interested schools can find information on how to register and apply on the Arts Council website. This measure is one of 18 contained in the creative youth plan, which will be progressed over the next two years in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council. At this plan's core is a firm belief that creativity and culture should be at the heart of education for all our young people. I look forward to working with all our key partners to deliver for our children and young people.

Deputy Tom Neville: I welcome the initiative and stress the need for the creative arts to

have a profile within the education system. Throughout the years arts subjects have often been seen as the Cinderella of subjects within the system. Children who have difficulties with other parts of the school curriculum may find expression through arts. I am not only talking about visual arts, but performance arts and music as well. Arts education should be broadened into as expansive a programme as possible. There are approximately 150 schools in the pilot scheme and I encourage schools to apply. We should broaden this out because, as I said in the House before, the arts allow people, who may not be able to do so academically or through psychomotor skills, which involve the more practical subjects, to express themselves. Having arts in their education also leads to the development of their emotional well-being.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I accept the points the Deputy made. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Bruton's Department and my Department did extensive work on this initiative. It is a pilot project which I hope can be rolled out. The closing date for applications is 5 March 2018. The Creative Ireland team in my Department held 39 public meetings. Both Departments felt that mainstream teaching of and learning the arts as a part of general education need to be intertwined in some way. We are hoping that schools which apply for this initiative will benefit from learning through the arts. As the Deputy said, the arts have been the Cinderella subjects in the past, although I hope that will change.

The schools are selected using the following criteria: benefits for learning and development; capacity for participation; the voice of children and young people; and the need to include a range of schools. There will be several different types of schools included.

Deputy Tom Neville: According to research, the creative arts foster the development of children's cognitive abilities. Exploring and participating in creative play triggers the use of children's imaginations, which in turn stimulates and expands their mental capacities. Given this insight and what has been recognised in schools, and coupled with the 300 hours of emotional well-being work which has been added to the education system, I ask that the arts remain a priority in the educational system. This particularly concerns funding. As we have seen in the past, if the country hits hard economic times, one of the first areas to be cut is the arts. We need to reverse that trend and change this type of psychology in looking at the arts. We need to give the arts the profile they deserve. It is often difficult to explain the benefits of the arts. Those benefits are enormous and very difficult to put into words. The momentum is building, which I welcome, and we must keep that focus.

Deputy Joan Burton: I refer to the programme of artists working in schools, which was developed by the previous Government. I cannot understand why this is not being rolled out to all schools in the country and, in particular, to DEIS schools where creative artistic work is absolutely essential to children's social and academic formation. Can the Minister explain why many DEIS schools will have to wait beyond 2020 for this initiative?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: In terms of impartiality, and this is a pilot initiative, the assessment team will seek to select a diverse range of schools. That will include primary and post-primary schools and urban and rural schools across different geographic areas, including DEIS schools. It is anticipated that every school will eventually get to participate. However, the pilot will include DEIS schools, Irish language schools, Youthreach centres and special schools. As I said earlier, the closing date is 5 March 2018.

Alluding to what Deputy Neville said earlier about the arts in schools, the creative associate will support and be the liaison between the Departments and the schools. The associate will be

key to how this pilot project actually works. The project will include many different activities. One example might be developing young people's critical thinking skills by working with a theatre critic to respond to a performance at a local theatre. It could involve a writer working with parents, teachers and children on storytelling, to improve their engagement with reading. It could involve an animator and a coder working with disengaged young people on how to create video games based on their interests. It could explore issues of transition from primary to post-primary education through the composition of music. The scheme could involve a visual artist working with teachers to improve their confidence in using visual arts in the classroom.

Maoiniú Údarás na Gaeltachta

27. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad airgid a chuir sí ar fáil d'eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe agus comharchumannn Ghaeltachta tríd Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2016 agus 2017; cé mhéad den airgead sin a chaith an t-údarás sa dá bhliain sin faoi seach; cé mhéad atá curtha ar fáil do na heagraíochtaí seo don bhliain 2018; cén ardú a bheidh i gceist do gach eagraíocht; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [9807/18]

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Táimid ag iarraidh am a shábhail chun dhá cheist i nGaeilge a ghlacadh.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Mar is eol don Teachta Ó Cuív, is tríd phróiseas na Meastachán agus na cáinainnéise a dhéantar leithdháileadh ar an soláthar airgid a chuirtear ar fáil ar bhonn bliantúil do mo Roinnse agus, go deimhin, do na Ranna Rialtais go léir. Is as an soláthar airgid a chuirtear ar fáil go bliantúil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta faoi fho-mhír C7 de Vóta mo Roinne a chuirtear cúnamh ar fáil d'eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe agus comharchumannn Ghaeltachta. Ar ndóigh, ós rud é gur eagraíocht neamhspleách reachtúil í Údarás na Gaeltachta, tuigfidh an Teachta gur faoin eagraíocht féin atá sé breithniú a dhéanamh ar chonas an chistíocht sin a chur chun fóinimh i gcomhthéacs na gcúraimí atá sainithe di, lena n-áirítear na cúraimí a bhaineann leis an bpróiseas planála teanga agus le forbairt pobail araon.

Ina thaobh sin, is €3 milliún agus €3.25 milliún a cuireadh ar fáil don údarás faoin bhfómhír áirithe seo in 2016 agus 2017 faoi seach. Ní miste a mheabhrú don Teachta go bhfuil €3.35 milliún curtha ar fáil don údarás faoin bhfómhír seo do 2018. Is ionann sin agus allúntas reatha breise de €100,000 i mbliana.

Maidir leis na comharchumannn Ghaeltachta agus na heagrais phobalbhunaithe, cuireann Údarás na Gaeltachta deontais reachtála ar fáil dóibh chun a gcláir fhorbartha a chur i bhfeidhm agus cuidiú leo a gcuid costais bainistíochta agus barrchostas a chlúdach. Seo a leanas an briseadh síos ar an gcúnamh ar fad a d'íoc Údarás na Gaeltachta leis na comharchumannn Ghaeltachta agus na heagrais phobalbhunaithe le cuidiú airgid na Roinne in 2016 agus 2017.

Ainm	2016	2017	Nótaí
	€	€	
Comharchumannn Oileán Árann Mhór Teo	84,000	87,000	

Ainm	2016	2017	Nótaí
Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair Teo	28,750	89,250	Bhain €28,750 a íocadh in 2017 le 2016.
Comharchumann Oileán Thoraí Teo	84,000	87,000	
Pobal Eascarrach Teo	33,000	36,000	
Comharchumann na nOileán Beag Teo(Ancaire)	40,000	32,000	Íocadh €8,000 in 2016 a bhain le 2015
Lár Chomhairle Pharóiste Ghleann Teo	23,865	73,874	Bhain €23,865 a íocadh in 2017 le 2016.
Céim Aniar Teo	54,000	57,000	
Iomlán Dhún na nGall	347,615	462,124	
Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla Teo	69,000	71,000	
Comhar Dún Chaocháin Teo	41,000	44,000	
Coiste Cultúr Teanga & Forbartha Tuar Mhic Éadaigh Teo	31,350	35,000	
Comharchumann Forbartha Ionad Deirbhile Teo	46,250	60,000	Íocadh €10,000 breise leo chun dul i ngleic le costais a thit ar an gcomharchumann de bharr an tragóid a bhain le hingearán R116.
Iomlán Mhaigh Eo	187,600	210,000	
Comharchumann Shailearna Teo	57,775	60,000	
Comharchumann Forbartha Árann Teo	90,750	94,000	
Comhlacht Forbartha an Spidéil CTR Teo	31,350	35,000	
Comhairle Ceantar na nOileán Teo	48,000	51,000	
Comhar Caomhán Teo	88,000	87,000	Bhí sciar i gcomhair pinsin nár íocadh in 2017.
Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo	54,000	57,000	

Dáil Éireann

Ainm	2016	2017	Nótaí
Comhar Chuigéal (Leitir Mealláin) Teo	30,000	35,000	
Forbairt Pobail Mhaigh Cuilinn Teo	23,513	42,837	Bhain €7,850 a íocadh in 2017 le 2016.
Forbairt Chonamara Láir Teo	52,000	56,000	
Comharchumann Mhic Dara Teo	52,000	56,000	
Comhlacht Forbartha Inis Meáin CTR Teo	30,000	75,000	Bunaíodh Comhlacht Forbartha Inis Meáin in 2016. Níor íocadh deontas iomlán leo sa mbliain sin.
Iomlán Ghaillimh	557,388	648,837	
Comharchumann Ráth Chairn Teo	54,000	57,000	
Iomlán na Mí	54,000	57,000	
Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne Teo	71,000	71,000	
Comharchumann An Leith Triúigh Teo	52,225	57,000	
Forbairt na Dromoda Teo	46,000	48,000	
Comhchoiste Gael-tachtaí Chiarraí Theas Teo	53,500	58,000	
Iomlán Chiarraí	222,725	234,000	
Comharchumann Chléire Teo	84,000	87,000	
Comharchumann Forbartha Mhúscraí Teo	42,200	47,000	
Iomlán Chorcaí	126,200	134,000	
Comhlucht Forbartha na nDéise Teo	50,000	52,000	
Iomlán Phort Láirge	50,000	52,000	
Móriomlán	1,545,528	1,797,961	

Tuigim ón Údarás nach bhfuil cinneadh déanta ag an mBord go fóill maidir le leithdháileadh a dhéanamh ar an soláthar méadaithe atá curtha ar fáil i mbliana.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá an tAire Stáit ag rá mar sin, gur cuireadh €100,000 breise ar fáil faoin bhfomhír sin. Tá 32 eagraíocht pobalbhunaithe agus chomharchumann ann. Is ionann sin agus €3,000 breise dóibh. An bhfuil an tAire Stáit sásta go bhfuil deontas dóthanach

acu lena ngnó a dhéanamh go héifeachtach nuair a chuirtear é i gcomparáid, mar shampla, leis an deontas a íoctar leis na community development programmes, CDPs?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá cuidiú de dhíth amach anseo. Cinnte, tá 32 eagraíocht i gceist. In 2016, bhí €347,615 ar fáil i mo chontae féin, Dún na nGall, agus in 2017, bhí €462,124 ar fáil. I Maigh Eo bhí €187,600 ar fáil in 2016, agus bhí €210,000 ar fáil in 2017. I gceantar an Teachta féin i nGaillimh, bhí €557,388 ar fáil in 2016, agus bhí €648,837 ar fáil in 2017. Sin na figiúirí faoi choinne 2016 agus 2017. Tuigim ón údarás nach bhfuil cinneadh déanta ag an mbord go fóill maidir le leithdháileadh a dhéanamh ar an tsoláthar.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá go maith. Tá an t-am istigh. Úsáidfimid an cúpla bomaite atá fágtha chun dul ar aghaidh go tapaídh go dtí Ceist Uimh. 28 in ainm an Teachta Catherine Connolly.

Scéim Éire Ildánach

28. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad iad na pleananna agus na socruithe atá eagraithe trí Éire Ildánach do Bhliain na Gaeilge. [10079/18]

Deputy Joe McHugh: D'fhógair mé ar 13 Nollaig 2017 go raibh Bliain Na Gaeilge 2018 faofa ag an Rialtas. Ag tógáil ar rath An Teanga Bheo, a bhí mar shraith faoi Éire 2016: Clár Comórtha, agus i bhfianaise go mbeidh Conradh na Gaeilge ag ceiliúradh 125 bliain *12 o'clock* d'athbheochan na Gaeilge in 2018, feictear gur togra tráthúil í Bliain na Gaeilge 2018 chun ceiliúradh a dhéanamh ar an teanga go náisiúnta agus go hidirnáisiúnta. Ag obair sa Roinn le mo chomhghleacaí, an tAire, an Teachta Madigan, tá an maoiniú a thugtar do na húdaráis áitiúla méadaithe faoi dhó againn trí chlár Éire Ildánach chun cuidiú leis na húdaráis cláracha cultúrtha agus cruthaíochta a fhorbairt go háitiúil.

Sa chomhthéacs seo, d'iarr an Roinn ar na comhordaitheoirí áitiúla imeachtaí a eagrú a bhainfeadh le Bliain na Gaeilge. Chuir foireann Bhliain na Gaeilge tuairimí faoin chaoi inar féidir tabhairt faoi seo ag cruinniú comhordaitheoirí san Ard-Mhúseam ar 22 Feabhra 2018. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil pleananna á n-eagrú cheana féin dá bharr seo. Chun tacú le gníomhaíochtaí na bliana, cheadaigh Foras na Gaeilge pacáiste airgeadais de €450,000 roimh dheireadh na bliana.

Tá meitheal oibre comhdhéanta d'ionadaíocht ó mo Roinn, Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta, RTÉ, TG4 agus Conradh na Gaeilge bunaithe ar mhaithe leis an togra a stiúradh. Anuas ar sin, tá breis agus 50 grúpa ag comhordú féilire d'imeachtaí cruthaitheacha, ealaíne agus pobail atá á n-eagrú ar fud an domhain in 2018, le roinnt tionscadal tábhachtacha a leanfaidh ar aghaidh tar éis na bliana seo. Tá sé i gceist go mbeidh cur chuige tras-Rialtais i gceist agus an bhliain á ceiliúradh. Tá clár imeachtaí Eanáir go Meitheamh foilsithe cheana féin agus is féidir imeachtaí breise a chlárú i gcónaí ar www.gaeilge2018.ie.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil an t-am istigh. Tá ceist shimplí agam. Céard iad na pleananna agus na socruithe atá déanta? Is bliain faoi leith í 2018 ós rud é gur Bliain na Gaeilge atá inti. Thug an freagra a léigh an tAire Stáit eolas dúinn faoi na rudaí atá eagraithe ag Conradh na Gaeilge agus eagraíochtaí eile, ach bhain mo cheist go díreach leis “na pleananna agus na socruithe atá eagraithe trí Éire Ildánach do Bhliain na Gaeilge”. An bhfuil

na nithe a bheidh ar siúl faoin chlár sin go speisialta leagtha amach in áit éigin?

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Tá sé soiléir go bhfuil an-fhuinneamh ag an Rialtas chun fógraíocht a dhéanamh ar an bPlean Forbartha Náisiúnta 2018-2027, ach n’fheadar an bhfuil an fuinneamh céanna acu i dtreo Bliain na Gaeilge, a thugann seans dúinn síneadh amach chuig daoine lasmuigh de phobal na Gaeilge. Dúirt an tAire Stáit go bhfuil €450,000 curtha ar fáil. An bhfuil sé sin don chlár é féin nó don fhógraíocht? Níl sé soiléir go bhfuil clár fógraíochta cinnte ann chun Bliain na Gaeilge - an scéim ar fad - a chur os comhair pobail, go háirithe pobail lasmuigh de mhuintir na Gaeilge.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá na sonraí ar fáil ar www.gaeilge2018.ie. Tá na sonraí go léir fá choinne an phlean ag Conradh na Gaeilge. Tháinig an smaoineamh maidir le Bliain na Gaeilge ó Chonradh na Gaeilge, atá ag obair go dian agus go cóngarach leis na dreamanna uilig ar an talamh, ar nós na gcomharchumann, Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na h-eagraíochtaí deonaithe. Tá siad ar fad ag obair go dian ar cúpla smaoineamh maidir leis an bplean. Tá sonraí breise agam maidir leis na himeachtaí a bheidh ann i rith na bliana. Beidh mé sásta na sonraí sin a chur ar fáil do na Teachtaí a bhfuil suim acu iontu.

An Ceann Comhairle: Míle buíochas. Sin deireadh le ceisteanna chun an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta.

Leaders’ Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Since last Sunday, we have been warned about a very severe weather event which will reach its peak over the coming days. I commend the front-line services on their work to date. In particular, I commend Seán Hogan and his team on the national co-ordination efforts. I also pay tribute to Met Éireann for the precision of its work. I thank the media for broadcasting the guidance to people throughout the country. I would like to refer to some aspects of this weather event. At moments like this, we have to be particularly conscious of older people and families in poverty. Yesterday, the Taoiseach was dismissive of calls to double the free fuel allowance for this week. He said he could not “offer a blank cheque”. I am glad the Government has undertaken a U-turn on this issue. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection has announced that the allowance will be doubled. It is worrying that the issue was not anticipated earlier in the week. We know that on occasions like this, cold weather and deep freezes can affect the elderly most of all.

I ask the Government to consider advancing additional financial supports to non-governmental organisations that are dealing with the homeless and with families in poverty. In a week the latest figures from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government show that more than 9,000 people, including 3,267 children, are homeless, which is a record number, it is incumbent on the Government to support organisations like the Peter McVerry Trust, the Simon Community and Focus Ireland that are working on the streets to bring the homeless in. Heroic efforts are being made. I have just listened to Pat Doyle of the Peter McVerry Trust saying that 81 homeless people were taken into a sports hall on the south side of Dublin yesterday to give them shelter on a very cold evening. Additional supports should be given to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other organisations to keep an eye out for families who are in particular poverty and need for various reasons and will require support.

I am surprised that decisions regarding school closures are being left to boards of manage-

ment at local level. I think there was similar indecision in relation to schools in advance of Storm Ophelia. I mean it constructively when I say I think schools should close automatically when red alert warnings are issued. It was confirmed this morning that school transport will not be operational in red alert areas. That should mean de facto that schools should close. If that happened, we would reduce the risk of accidents and traffic congestion. Above all, it would represent an optimal approach to the safety of schoolchildren. I ask the Taoiseach to consider doing that now. With regard to public transport, will he give us strong reassurances that local councils have the equipment and the wherewithal to keep the main arteries open and to keep cities going and operational? Although this is a matter for another day, it is worth reflecting that the entire country is coming to a halt, despite all the warnings, after one evening's snow so far. We need to learn from other countries that experience far worse events than this.

The Taoiseach: The national emergency co-ordination group is meeting as we speak. I cannot be there because I am here. The Government is represented at the meeting by the Minister----

Deputy Timmy Dooley: There is a better chance it will be okay, so.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please.

The Taoiseach: I was interrupted within 20 seconds that time. The interruptions are starting even quicker as the days go on. The Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and the Minister of State, Deputy English, are representing the Government at the meeting of the national emergency co-ordination group which is taking place at present. Further guidance on all of these matters will be given at the press conference which will follow that meeting. Clear advice will be given on school closures.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That did not happen today.

The Taoiseach: School transport has been suspended today for safety reasons in the areas covered by the red alert. School transport is not the main way people get to school in many parts of the country, where pupils are more likely to get to school by car or by walking. I have asked the national emergency co-ordination group to provide a clear instruction on what schools should do tomorrow and on Friday and it will do so at the press conference after its meeting.

I would like to respond to Deputy Martin's earlier comments on fuel allowance. Two distinct suggestions were made yesterday. First, it was suggested that we should instruct older people and others to run their heating 24 hours a day and that the Government should pick up the bill no matter what.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: No, that was not suggested.

The Taoiseach: I said that I would not offer a blank cheque in such circumstances and I did not do so. Second, some of the Members opposite were among those who made the constructive suggestion that we should pay a double week of the fuel allowance. I did not dismiss that. The record of the Dáil will show that I said I would endeavour to speak about the matter to the Ministers for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Public Expenditure and Reform. This was the appropriate thing to do and we spoke about it across yesterday. We confirmed with the Department that it was possible to pay a double week and we confirmed this morning that a double week is being paid for this week. In many cases, the payment will not be made until next week but a double week of €45 is being paid. This should give about 300,000 households

some assurance that they can keep the heating going during this period.

In addition, urgent needs payments may be available on a non-means tested basis. Also, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, is in touch with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, with a view to giving it additional supports to assist families who are in fuel poverty. As Deputy Micheál Martin correctly stated, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul often knows the families who are vulnerable or in fuel poverty and works with them already. Additional resources will be available for the society in that regard.

I acknowledge the Trojan and extraordinary efforts our homeless services made during the night, including people working for the Department, Dublin City Council, non-governmental organisations, NGOs, and charities. Food, shelter and heat are available for everyone who needs it. Teams were on the streets last night encouraging people to come in off the streets and I am told only about a dozen people did not do so and everyone else came in and was given food, heat and shelter. The Government is working with and funding NGOs, including Depaul and the Peter McVerry Trust to provide these services.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Micheál Martin has one minute to ask a supplementary question.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I make my remarks on schools constructively and on the basis that the Fianna Fáil Party spokesperson, Deputy Thomas Byrne, spoke to the Minister for Education and Skills before Storm Ophelia urging that schools be closed in red alert areas. School boards of management cannot be summoned in the middle of the night or at 6 a.m., as a principal said today. The Government is leaving the decision on whether to close schools up to individual principals. In my view, this is not the optimal way to protect schoolchildren and prevent traffic congestion. We all know how long it took to get to work in Dublin this morning. There are schools at which only 100 pupils turning up and many have less than full numbers. This is a serious issue. When a code red alert warning is issued surely it should automatically dictate the closure of schools. That would be the uniformly correct thing to do.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time has concluded.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will not comment on the Taoiseach's obsession with what he said about all of that yesterday.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should not comment on anything because his minute is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I would like the Government to examine the issue of schools, even for the future. Second, on public transport and roads-----

An Ceann Comhairle: No, the Deputy's time is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----will the Taoiseach indicate whether local authorities will be properly resourced in respect of those issues? Will they have the equipment to keep the main arteries open?

The Taoiseach: The way the warning system works is that warnings are issued by Met Éireann. Status yellow means people should be aware, status orange means they should be prepared and status red means they should act. It is not as simple as just saying red automatically means school closure because one could have a red alert arising from a chemical spill at an industrial

facility, which would have no impact on schools.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We are speaking about weather events.

The Taoiseach: The decision on whether schools close is either made by boards of management on an individual basis or on the advice and instruction of the national emergency co-ordination group. The group is meeting now and the Department of Education and Skills is represented at that meeting. It will issue clear guidance to schools with regard to tomorrow and Friday at its press conference after the meeting. The appropriate way to deal with the issue is for the national emergency co-ordination group, which represents all the relevant Departments and agencies, to discuss the matter, make a decision and announce its decision. It is not something that I should announce unilaterally.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The European Union has this afternoon published the draft of its Brexit withdrawal agreement. We have only had sight of the text in the past 45 minutes and we will have to study the precise detail in the coming hours. However, having scanned the draft document, I welcome that the European Union now explicitly accepts that special arrangements are required for the North. As the Taoiseach knows, since the Brexit referendum, Sinn Féin has argued consistently and vigorously for the North to be designated special status within the European Union. We stated this was the only way to avoid the imposition of a hard border on this island and ensure the all-island economy and peace agreements are protected. Special status means the North remaining inside the customs union and Single Market. We now have a draft text that recognises that the North must stay in the customs union and I welcome that recognition. I also voice concern at any prospect of the North exiting the Single Market and concerns remain for east-west trade and commerce.

As the Taoiseach knows, the British Government and Brexiteers engaged in their Brexit debate with zero regard for the impact on Ireland. They showed no concern for our economy, the rights of our people or the peace process. They now want to conclude their debate and make their exit by putting the Good Friday Agreement through the shredder. The Tory-DUP axis is satisfied to treat the welfare of the people of this island as collateral damage so long as it can achieve a little Englander Brexit. Its arrogance is best highlighted by the rejection of the vote of the people of the North to remain in the European Union and crystallised most recently in the juvenile and dangerous commentary of the British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson.

The DUP has explicitly hitched itself to the Tory wagon. It has put narrow political interests ahead of the good of the people of the North from all communities, our economic well-being and the political process. The position of the Tory-DUP Brexiteers is that they want Brexit at any cost. However, they will not foot the bill. Rather, it will be the ordinary people of this island, North and South, who foot the bill and that cannot be allowed to happen. The Tory-DUP wrecking agenda cannot prevail. As Head of Government, it is the Taoiseach's job to ensure this does not happen. There is no doubt in my mind that the British Government will attempt to undermine the text of the draft agreement in the time ahead. In the context of the DUP's collapsing of the talks in the North, I asked that the Taoiseach convene the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Today's development adds weight to the need for this to be done. Will the Taoiseach convene the intergovernmental conference?

The Taoiseach: The intergovernmental conference can be convened only at a date that is agreed by both the British and Irish Governments and such a date has not yet been agreed. That is not to say that we are not in regular contact, however. I have spoken twice on the telephone

to Prime Minister May in the past ten days and we have also met in person.

I recognise the constructive and measured approach taken by the Deputy's party to the Brexit issue in recent months. What we have seen today is the publication of the draft withdrawal agreement by the European Commission. The first thing the Government sought at the time of the Brexit referendum was a commitment from the UK Government that there would be no hard border and that eventuality would be avoided. We got such a verbal commitment some time ago under the leadership of my forebear, Deputy Enda Kenny. In December, we sought to have this commitment turned into a commitment in a political agreement and it was written down in black and white in the December text. Most reasonable people will now accept, even though others said otherwise, that it was not over-hyped or oversold. People will see the reality of that today in a legal text, a protocol to the draft withdrawal agreement, that sets out exactly in black and white how we can avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and how we can enforce that legally. That has been done and the text has been published today. A briefing will be available later today for Opposition leaders and spokespersons if they wish to have one.

It is not the case that this is the only option. This is the backstop and last resort, as Prime Minister May describes it. There are alternative solutions. The alternative solution is option A, which is our preferred option and the preferred option of the British Government, that involves us avoiding not just a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland but also a hard border between Britain and Ireland. I do not want a border between Letterkenny and Derry any more than I want a border between Larne and Stranraer or Liverpool and Dublin. We want people and trade to be able to move freely. Option A is still an option. It is now incumbent on the United Kingdom Government, in particular, to put forward detailed proposals on how it can be achieved or put forward the detail of option B. The Deputy is correct that hard line Brexiteers and some politicians in Northern Ireland will say "No" and will be angry at what they see today but just saying "No" and being angry is not enough. If people do not like what they see today, it is incumbent on them to come up with alternative solutions and to flesh out option A and option B, write it down in a legal form that can be enforced and then we can negotiate on that. We have between now and October to make those decisions.

With regard to the different messages that may be coming from UK Government, when I want to know what it thinks, I listen to Prime Minister May. I have spoken to her on three occasions in the past ten days. She tells me that her government stands by its commitment to avoid a hard border and it is steadfast in its support for the Good Friday Agreement. I trust Prime Minister May on both of those counts.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach will recognise, as I do, that the rhetoric has changed for the worst substantially since last December and that the commitment made initially to no hard border and to protecting the agreement in all its parts has come unstuck because the reality is that members of the Tory Government are openly speculating that the agreement is past its sell-by date and that a hard border is not only necessary but, indeed, desirable to achieve the kind of Brexit they require. It would be remiss of us, and it would be remiss of the Taoiseach as Head of Government, to miss those clear soundings.

The best methodology to provide a backstop to protect the island as a whole and to protect the agreement is the convening of the intergovernmental conference. The Taoiseach has stalled on his response to that. In the absence of that, how does the Taoiseach propose to engage the British Government and the British system to ensure we get back to a position of unanimity regarding no border at all on the island of Ireland, and respect and protection for the agreement?

The Taoiseach: I am happy to answer that. We engage the UK Government by meeting it all the time. In the past ten days, I have spoken twice to, and met once with, Prime Minister May. Last Monday, the Tánaiste met Mr. David Lidington who is the *de facto* deputy Prime Minister. We engage with them by meeting them face-to-face and talking to them on the phone and when we do not do that, our officials do it at official level, so there is regular contact.

When we negotiate with the UK on European matters and matters related to Brexit, we do so as part of the EU27 through the Barnier task force. It is demonstrable to everyone now that Ireland is in a much stronger position when we negotiate as one of 27 and as a Union of 27 rather than isolating ourselves and being on our own, and we will continue to do exactly that.

As Head of the Government, I stand by the primacy of the Good Friday Agreement. The Government is co-guarantor of the agreement and everyone in the House stands by it. I have heard some of the hardline Brexiteers who are not members of the British Government questioning the future of the agreement. These are the same people who say to us that we should respect the 51.8% vote in favour of their referendum for Brexit. I remind them that the Good Friday Agreement was approved by the Irish people - 94% in this State and 71% in Northern Ireland - and they should respect our vote too.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I pay tribute to our public servants who are carrying out vital work today throughout the country to help people reach their destination and to keep our emergency services in operation and I pay tribute to all those who are helping their neighbours and friends around the country.

People are battenning down the hatches across the country. The worst of Storm Emma and the Siberian wind is yet to hit. While people are out and about today and at work, it is likely that from tonight they will be confined to their homes for some days to come. That is, of course, those who have a home. The homelessness figures for January were published yesterday. Following a brief drop in December, the figures have continued to increase. There are currently 9,104 people homeless in Ireland. They comprise 5,837 adults and a record 3,267 children who are relying on emergency accommodation. It is a sad reflection of our Government that the best excuse the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government could offer was that the extent of the increase was not anticipated. Over the past week, the Government has been focused on spending €1.5 million on propaganda to promote investment in a ten-year national development plan while more than 9,000 of our citizens are without a roof over their heads to call their own. These are real people and real lives are being impacted by this crisis.

Research by Focus Ireland published last November demonstrated the impact the crisis is having on children. The deep negative effect on their emotional and mental health has been documented and the statement yesterday by the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, INMO, that babies living in hotels are not reaching their development milestones is a shocking indictment of a failed policy. The State will have to deal with the repercussions of this for a generation. Rebuilding Ireland is not delivering the homes needed. The Minister has asked the Dublin Region Homeless Executive to investigate the matter and to prepare a detailed report but that will not help a single family. The problem is not enough social housing is being built and there is no co-ordinated effort to rapidly bring vacant housing back into use while there is no security of tenure for tenants as landlords seek to raise rents, refurbish or sell their properties. Despite commitments by the then Minister to end the use of emergency accommodation by last July, it remains the first port of call. It is an outrage in a modern, developed, wealthy country, such as Ireland, that more than 3,000 of our children are homeless. Figures provided

to me yesterday show that a total of 1,517 families were using emergency accommodation during January but, that month, 700 homeless families were recorded as staying in hotels and bed and breakfasts in the Dublin region, with 385 of them having been in them for longer than six months. What new plans has the Taoiseach to address this? Will he personally ensure rigid targets are set to reduce month on month the number of homeless children?

The Taoiseach: The figures for the number of people in emergency accommodation that were published yesterday are bad and they are distressing for everyone affected by homelessness and for everyone who is working night and day to resolve the enormous social problem we face. As the Deputy correctly pointed out, they are disappointing given that they had gone down in December. Many of us hoped that was the beginning of a trend but it is certainly not possible to say that at the moment as they have gone back up again. That says to us that we must redouble our efforts to increase the supply of affordable and social housing and all other forms of housing. As the Deputy correctly pointed out, that is the fundamental solution to this problem. Following seven years of almost no houses being built, we are ramping up housing construction again - both social housing and private sector housing. People moving into new homes frees up rental properties for others. Project Ireland 2040, which was published two weeks ago, has housing all the way through it.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: And Fine Gael candidates.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: It should be called Fine Gael 2019 with a budget of €1.5 million.

The Taoiseach: It is all about housing among other things, and it contains a commitment to build 110,000 new social homes and apartments over the next ten years.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Taoiseach is starting to believe his own editorial.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: They were announced three years ago.

The Taoiseach: That is happening. There were only a few hundred social homes built in 2016 but thousands were built last year and the number is being ramped up again this year, although it will take time to get on top of this problem.

Our major concern today is rough sleepers given the bad weather people are facing. We are ensuring there is food, health and shelter for everyone who needs it. Teams were on the streets last night and they are on the streets today encouraging people to come in. I am told that only about a dozen people did not come in last night. I pay tribute to the efforts of the charity, NGO, council and departmental staff who are working hard, particularly in this bad weather, to make sure everyone who is sleeping rough is aware that shelter, food and heat are available for them. We are working closely with groups such as the McVerry Trust and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to make sure that is the case.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The Taoiseach acknowledged that the numbers are bad but I did not detect a sense of urgency to deal with the issue. For example, last week, we were able to rush through legislation to recruit a Garda Commissioner in one day. I want to see the same sense of urgency in terms of giving the Residential Tenancies Board real powers to hold landlords to account and to protect tenants from being evicted, which is actually happening, and building and renovating new homes. We know what the solutions are. However, there are thousands of children at risk today and will be at risk if there is not a sense of urgency. I want

to know if the Taoiseach will declare a state of emergency to ensure all the resources of the State are directed at addressing this once and for all. Will he set real targets and will he personally ensure they are met to reduce the number of children and families homeless and in emergency accommodation?

The Taoiseach: If we could solve homelessness in a day, we would do that. If it was a case of rushing through legislation or a piece of-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Seven years.

Deputy Robert Troy: Seven years. It is being made worse day by day.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Deputy's party crashed the economy.

The Taoiseach: -----legislation that would give everyone a house, we would of course do that. However, the Deputy was a Minister of State with responsibility for housing, sitting at the Cabinet table-----

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: Our numbers were nothing like that.

The Taoiseach: -----for three years, and she knows as well as I do how complex this problem is.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Sure, a house was not built.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is everybody else's record.

The Taoiseach: There was a period of seven years during which this country was so broke that we were not able to build social housing and during which the construction industry and the banks were on the floor and were not able to finance or build private housing during which time it would have been expected that 200,000 or 300,000 homes to be built.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I would say that record will not be surpassed by the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: However, they were not. We know the causes of that crash. I certainly do not hold the Deputy responsible for it at all or for not building more houses in those three and a half years during which she was the Minister of State with responsibility for housing.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I would say she is delighted with that absolution.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is a better record than the Taoiseach has.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. His time is up.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I am not sure the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, will get the same absolution for the few bob to the pensioners. He might not be as generous.

The Taoiseach: We are in a catch up.

An Ceann Comhairle: Order, please.

The Taoiseach: We are in a catch up scenario and we are catching up. However, it is going to take time. There is an absolute sense of urgency and emergency. We would not be providing for so many people to stay in emergency accommodation and we certainly would not have

a situation where we are avoiding families having to be on the streets by making sure there is emergency accommodation available, whether it is hotels or hubs, if we did not see this as an emergency.

Deputy Joan Collins: There has been much hand-wringing and crocodile tears shed in respect of the proposed sale by Permanent TSB of 18,000 distressed mortgages to unregulated vulture funds which the Taoiseach had control of under his watch. What Permanent TSB, Ulster Bank or potentially AIB are proposing to do is entirely in line with Fine Gael policy in government over the past five years.

Tens of billions of euros have been sold off to hedge funds, private equity giants and international banks. The biggest seller in this was the State through the medium of the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA. The liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, IBRC, facilitated the sell off of €22 billion in loans in a matter of months. This all started, appropriately enough, in Davos in 2014 when the then Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, met with representatives of American vulture fund, Lone Star. They offered to buy all of NAMA's debt and was turned down. When Deputy Noonan returned, he asked NAMA how it could tap into this international demand for distressed Irish assets. NAMA moved from managing assets to a sell off agency - the very thing which NAMA was supposed to prevent. A fire sale of distressed assets was actually initiated by NAMA under the Taoiseach's Government's watch.

Tax breaks were also introduced to further entice the vultures. Only €20,000 was paid in tax by 24 different companies despite controlling €20 billion in assets. The use of section 110 allowed huge investment entities from the United States to pay between €75 and €250 in tax. It is shameful. Fine Gael policy, without a whimper of protest from the Labour Party in government, was to save the banks. If people lost their homes or small businesses, that was just collateral damage.

There is now talk of extending Central Bank regulations to cover the vulture funds. The idea this is a solution for people with mortgage arrears will not stop repossession or evictions. It does not correspond with reality. Yesterday, in my constituency, an elderly man in poor health was due to be evicted. After our intervention the sheriff has agreed to postpone the eviction for a month. We have been trying to find alternative accommodation for him for two years. We have not been able to do it through the council. That is the reality of people's lives.

I suggest to the Taoiseach, as a key part of the solution, as per the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' charter for housing rights, that there should be no evictions without suitable alternative accommodation. There can be no evictions to nowhere. Evicting a family or an individual into homelessness must be prohibited by law. That has to be the case because we know the resolutions are only voluntary with the banks and lenders. People are facing evictions. Immediate emergency legislation is needed to amend the Housing Act 1998 to give local authorities a statutory duty in this area and the resources necessary to back them up. Will the Taoiseach do this?

The Taoiseach: I totally appreciate the considerable concern that exists around the proposed sale of mortgages by Permanent TSB. It has struck a raw nerve with the people. Many people raised it with me over the weekend. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, is examining this matter. We agreed to accept in principle legislation from Fianna Fáil to extend regulation over investment funds. We are bringing forward legislation proposed by the Minister of State, Deputy Moran, to strengthen the courts in their requirement to take into account family circumstances such as the ones the Deputy mentioned when it comes to repossession.

We are looking at other options as well. We are very much on the side of honest people who are making an honest attempt to pay their mortgage, to pay down their loans if they can and to settle their debts.

In Ireland we have strong protections for homeowners, for borrowers and for mortgage holders. If one looks at the number of repossessions relative to other countries, it is much less likely that a home will be repossessed in Ireland than in many other countries, such as Spain, the UK and many others. That is because of the strong protections we give to homeowners and borrowers in terms of property rights and the rights that apply to those individuals. The number of repossession orders is going down. We have been told on many occasions there would be a tsunami of repossessions. In fact, the numbers have been going down.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The vulture funds get their hands on them.

The Taoiseach: We do need to make a distinction here. We need to make sure that the courts are allowed to hear cases. There may be circumstances whereby somebody can pay but is refusing to pay. That is a different circumstance and we have a good court system. People go into the courts, tell their story and their case is heard. The courts generally make the right decisions and do not provide eviction orders or repossession orders without grounds for doing so.

Deputy Joan Collins: The Taoiseach's Government saved the banking system but at a huge cost to ordinary people. It might seem that everything is fine. Bank of Ireland made a profit of €1 billion last year. It is paying a dividend to shareholders for the first time since 2008. The new chief executive is doing well too on €1 million a year. The European Central Bank, ECB, does not agree. There are €34 billion in non-performing loans in the system - the reason for the ECB pressure to resolve the situation. This one size fits all European policy is not enough.

I do not believe Bank of Ireland will be as generous in compensating those on tracker mortgages from whom it stole money. On Monday night, there was an attempted eviction of a family in Balbriggan. This family was engaged with the bank and was paying the agreed amount. However, a move was still made to move the family out of its home. The main point I want to make is that the Central Bank regulations, the mortgage arrears resolution process, MARP, does not guarantee no repossessions if people engage with the lender. I have experienced that as I am sure everybody in this Chamber has. Some 10% of Members go to Mr. David Hall of the Irish Mortgage Holders Organisation looking for support. We are all engaging in these situations with the bank. I repeat the point that there is a solution and there is action that can be taken. The Taoiseach should bring in a law, amend the Housing Act 1998 and try to attempt to stop evictions and make sure people do not go into homelessness.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, to conclude on this matter.

The Taoiseach: It is always the case when a new law is debated in this House that there is the law itself and the law of unintended consequences. There is a distinction to be made between people who are making an honest attempt to pay their mortgage, settle their debts and pay as much as they can pay, and people who could do so but who are not. There is a difference in that regard and any reasonable person will recognise that.

In regard to what the Government is doing, in addition to what I have said, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, is in consultation with the Central Bank to review the code of conduct on mortgage arrears. That code of conduct already exists. We want to examine whether it can be strengthened or whether it should perhaps not be voluntary. I often hear people talking

about this Government or a previous Government saving the banking system, as if that was just about bankers. Let us not forget what the banking system is. It is millions of people's deposits and savings.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Millions of people in Anglo Irish Bank?

Deputy Joan Collins: Bring in a public banking system and give people an alternative.

The Taoiseach: It is the money companies hold on deposit to pay their staff. It is necessary to have a banking system to ensure that people can get loans, mortgages to buy homes, credit to keep their businesses going or credit to set up a business. We also must ensure that people get decent interest rates. There is a huge distinction between banks such as Anglo Irish Bank, which was bailed out by a Government of which I was not a member, and banks such as Bank of Ireland and AIB, which were bailed out by this Government and for a good reason. It was to protect people's deposits, to protect jobs and payroll and to make sure people could continue to have access to credit.

Deputy Michael McGrath: They got a lot of deposits as well - about €50 billion.

The Taoiseach: The difference when it comes to the last two banks is that we will recover that money.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They were all part of the one decision.

The Taoiseach: We have already recovered the money from Bank of Ireland and I believe we will recover it from AIB in time too.

Questions on Promised Legislation

Deputy Micheál Martin: I wish to raise the criminal law (sexual offences) Bill in the context of the Garda Inspectorate report on child sex abuse cases. It is quite appalling to read about the level of lethargy and inaction in that regard, particularly the lack of implementation of previous reports in 2012 on this serious area of crime prevention. The report showed a 64% increase in Internet-based offending yet there is no legislation to allow a garda, for example, to have the power to seek a password from an alleged offender to search his or her computer for illegal images. It is exceptionally frustrating for everybody who is concerned about child sex abuse and child pornography to learn there is still a poor relationship between Tusla and An Garda Síochána. The relationship is described as inefficient and worse. That is unacceptable. There are also recommendations on the lack of training of gardaí in such situations. In addition, sex abuse victims must travel to Dublin to be medically examined. It is six years since recommendations were made on this issue and we are still at discussion stage. I ask the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to meet urgently to respond to this report. It is a damning indictment of the State's response to vulnerable young children who are victims of sex abuse. It is incredible.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I assure the House that action is being taken. The pace of implementation of previous reports is unacceptable. Yesterday, the Cabinet agreed on the establishment at an early date of an implementation group. We have had strategies, reports and fora but we need implementation. That group is being established. It will involve people from my Department, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and

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the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and will ensure we have an action plan that is time-targeted. I spoke to the chair this morning and I assure Members that we will see a targeted focus, which will be monitored by the Government by way of quarterly reports to a Cabinet committee. I will be happy to update the House at a convenient time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I ask the Minister to do that-----

An Ceann Comhairle: You cannot. I call Deputy McDonald.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is important we have this discussed at the earliest opportunity because it is a very serious issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister himself said it is unacceptable.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, you are being disorderly.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am trying to be constructive, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will return to this matter in a few minutes. I call Deputy McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: There was only one proposal put to the Taoiseach yesterday in respect of the cold weather and our elderly and vulnerable citizens, which is that the Government would pay a double week of the fuel allowance. Nobody on this side of the House gave advice to the elderly to leave heating on 24-7. In fairness to the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, when he said that I took it that he meant it as a reassurance or an encouragement to older people to keep themselves warm. The Taoiseach is being a little disingenuous and unfair to the Minister of State in suggesting that it was a concrete proposal to have heating on 24-7. The public heard it in a different way. In any case, I am glad the Taoiseach has agreed to that measure, that measure being the double fuel allowance not the heating on 24-7. Can he clarify-----

Deputy Brendan Griffin: Has the Deputy any spare fuel herself?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Deputy is absolutely hilarious. I am sure people who are cold in their homes are only rolling around laughing at him. He really is a comic.

An Ceann Comhairle: You can have the comedy afterwards. We will have a question and answer now.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Can the Taoiseach confirm the date of the payment of the double week? That was not clear from the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty's, announcement. Is it 12 March? Will the recipients who receive the allowance in two lump sums also be included in the payment?

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The reason there is no clear date of payment is that this is not a stand-alone payment. People do not receive it in isolation. It is a top-up payment for a number of schemes. People in different schemes receive their payments on different dates. Some scheme payments to be paid next week have already gone through the banking system and the Department's IT system so those people will not get their payment until probably the week after. However, everybody will get a double week payment assigned to this week, but they will get it either next week or the week

after depending on the day on which they receive their scheme payment. The disability payments might be paid on a Tuesday and jobseeker's allowance might be paid on a Wednesday so there is no one date on which everybody will receive their payment, but everybody will receive a double week fuel payment in the coming week or two weeks. That includes people who have chosen to take their payment in two lump sums, but they will get an individual extra week.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The programme for Government includes a commitment to examine the potential of a rapid response unit under the Office of Emergency Planning led by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, which could be deployed when necessary to co-ordinate offers of help and assistance to those experiencing hardship following a severe weather event. Can the Taoiseach give us an update on that proposal? I ask that in the context of compacted snow on roads and footpaths which are quite treacherous, particularly in the eastern part of the country. Is there an intention to deploy snow ploughs on all major bus and commuter routes in Dublin? Will local authorities and, possibly, the Defence Forces be deployed to clear paths in urban areas, particularly in areas where there are shops, post offices and health care centres? While there is salting and gritting, they do not deal effectively with compacted snow. Many of the footpaths in Dublin today are like ice rinks. What is the status of the programme for Government commitment and what will be done on the footpaths and roads in Dublin?

The Taoiseach: The Defence Forces are available to be deployed at the request of local authorities. Local authorities, the Dublin Airport Authority, DAA, and many other bodies have snow ploughs and salt is stockpiled. Nobody can say whether that will be enough because we do not know the amount of snow that will fall, how long it will last or what blizzard conditions there will be. However, the equipment exists and the salt is stockpiled. It may be difficult, however, given the amount of snow we expect to fall and the conditions we expect. We must bear in mind that people's safety must come first. We are not going to send soldiers or local authority workers out in blizzards to clear snow. We must think about their safety as well.

The programme for Government commitment is being examined by the Office of Emergency Planning, but the difficulty arising is that having a rapid reaction force is not straightforward because all emergencies are different. A storm is different from a flooding event or a snow event or a chemical-related disaster. It is not as simple as just having a single rapid reaction force. One would potentially need a different one for each type of emergency.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Government reportedly will support the Fianna Fáil Private Members' Bill extending some rights to those who have their loans sold to vulture funds, a testament to the pressure they feel from the public. We support the Bill as well. However, regulation is not enough and must not be used as political cover to allow the sale of these loan books to vultures. Ultimately, a regulated vulture is still a vulture. If these vultures get their claws into people, the same aggressive behaviour that was seen at Tyrrelstown in Dublin and Leaside in Cork will be seen once again, adding to the housing crisis and people's distress. Will the Government introduce legislation to block the sale of loan books to vulture funds? Will the Taoiseach agree that the process of the privatisation of banks should be reversed and, instead, we should have a public banking system which can be utilised as a public utility with mortgage write-downs, as well as used as a lever to provide funding for public housing?

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government believes that a banking system, which in the long run is owned by the private sector, is the best way to meet the needs that the Taoiseach described earlier. It will ensure we can provide loans to families and

businesses, as well as ensuring deposits can earn a decent rate of interest. Crucially, it will make sure the kind of link which caused such a catastrophe in our country in our recent past is firmly broken, namely, where the link between the taxpayer and our banking system is gradually reduced over time.

As the Deputy knows, I do not have the legal power to intervene in the decisions made by the board of a bank. We went through a period in which our regulators either did not have enough power or the power available to them was not sufficient. All this conspired to create such difficulties for our economy and society. Fundamentally, several of our banks are now being given guidance by an independent regulator to act in a certain way to improve the quality of their balance sheets and reduce their non-performing loans.

The Government must strike the balance between improving the financial affairs of our banks to deal with potential difficulties which we could encounter in the future, while ensuring people are treated fairly and concerns are recognised. We have been successful in doing that to date. We have seen a huge reduction in mortgage arrears and non-performing loans while avoiding-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid we cannot go into great detail on this matter, Minister.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I will conclude on this point.

At the same time, we must avoid the greatest fears many have had for a while.

In addition to the measures to which the Government is committed, I have also asked the Central Bank to give me an independent assessment of the code of conduct on mortgage arrears.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: While we all support Deputy Michael McGrath's and other people's Private Members' Bills to deal with the sale of loans to the vulture funds, will the Taoiseach support the Bill submitted by Deputies McGuinness, MacSharry and myself last week, the National Housing Co-Operative and Fair Mortgage Bill, compiled by Master of the High Court, Edmund Honohan? We saw what happened in Balbriggan to the Smith family who were terrorised by people from abroad, ex-British soldiers. The Taoiseach asked me to put it in writing. I have two letters here, one for the Taoiseach and one for the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan. I will give them to the usher to hand to them.

Ex-British soldiers beat this family. We have a short memory. In September 1920, Balbriggan was sacked and looted by the Black and Tans and two people were killed that night. The local barber, James Lawless, and John Gibson were both beaten to death by the Black and Tans. They are back again and this has happened under the Government's watch. It is a shame on all of us to allow this go on last Monday morning in Balbriggan. I have the information here and I want the Government to act on same. I also want the Government to support legislation to stop the vultures getting their grisly claws on any more loans.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: We are aware of the responsibilities we have to our citizens. That is why we strengthened personal insolvency legislation over the past several years. That is why we set up the Abhaile organisation. We have put in place measures through, for example, the Central Bank, to ensure mortgage arrears are dealt with in the best way possible.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They have all failed utterly.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: While I am always aware of the concerns people have on how

this issue is dealt with, we must recognise that several years ago this country faced a major crisis in mortgage arrears and non-performing loans. In all those areas, progress has been made. A framework is in place which tries to strike the fairest balance.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: At the expense of families.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I will wait to see the Bill to which Deputy Mattie McGrath referred. The basic questions the proponents of the Bill must ask is where is the money to fund it going to come from and how can we ensure it is not at the expense of many existing arrangements which are serving our citizens well.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The independent review of the handling of critical emails in the Department of Justice and Equality, which related to the disclosures tribunal, was carried out by senior counsel, Michael Collins. It was due to be submitted to the Minister by last Friday. Will he confirm if the review has been received and when he intends to publish it?

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The consultation and interview process has now been completed. The report is at an advanced stage of drafting. I expect it within a matter of days.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: When will it be published?

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I will look at it first and then I will give the matter further attention.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Yesterday, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment sent its report on the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill, which included a recommendation that RTÉ would be given the right to set transmission fees for cable and satellite operators. It follows on the earlier Oireachtas committee report before Christmas which set out a range of measures, including that one, and to provide a pot of €50 million for Irish media, not just RTÉ, changes to the licence fee system among other measures. RTÉ is just publishing its new strategy and Irish media, local radio and newsprint, as well as other television stations, is in real crisis.

Does the Government believe it needs to change the nature of funding for public service broadcasting? Will it act on it quickly and bring the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill back into the Dáil to ensure we can include this and other measures to change the nature of public service licensing? What is the Government's commitment to that and its sense of urgency on how we fund Irish media?

The Taoiseach: The legislation is due for publication in this parliamentary session.

Deputy Michael Collins: The programme for Government stated that the Government will drive down the cost of providing new treatment drugs either through national or European initiatives. One of these treatments is Respreeza. It is a therapy which has been proved to slow down the progression of genetic emphysema in patients with severe Alpha-1. Two of the 21 people taking part in a clinical trial of Respreeza died before Christmas when the HSE stopped funding the administration of the therapy.

CSL Behring has agreed to continue to provide the drug free of charge until the new clinical trial begins in June or July 2008. All 19 patients are back on the therapy, which has been administered, as before, by Point of Care. After Marion Kelly's death, the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, met the family and committed to ensuring the negotiations would restart between CSL

Behring and the HSE.

As of today, Alpha One told me it has not yet received an update from the HSE as to when negotiations will start. This is a matter of life and death for many people. Negotiations must resume immediately between the HSE and CSL Behring to agree a mutually acceptable price for the therapy. Administration of Respreeza should not be included in the price of the drug.

Will the Taoiseach give me a commitment today that the HSE and the Government will resume talks with CSL Behring to ensure that this vulnerable group of Alpha-1 sufferers has access to Respreeza?

Deputy Michael Harty: This morning the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health published a report on orphan drugs, of which Respreeza is one drug. It is a summary of three meetings which we held on orphan drugs. Orphan drugs are different from other drugs, yet the process of looking at them is the same. They need to be treated differently. The quality process of comparing cost-benefit analysis needs to change. Undoubtedly, legislation will be required to change how orphan drugs are treated. In the meantime, I believe the quality and cost-benefit analysis needs to change for drugs such as Respreeza, Translarna and Kuvan which is forphenylketonuria.

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I thank Deputies Michael Collins and Harty for raising this important matter. To fulfil the programme for Government commitment referred to, we have taken two distinctive actions. The Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform led a process on behalf of the State where we reached a new drugs pricing agreement with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, IPHA. It will save the State a fortune in hundreds of millions of euro and it has pretty much stabilised drug prices. We spend €2 billion a year on drugs. Two weeks ago, the Government agreed to formally join the BeNeLuxA Initiative group in terms of working with four other European countries in jointly horizon scanning, sharing information and, possibly, even procuring drugs with them.

Regarding Respreeza, the Deputy is right. I had a useful and informative meeting with the family of the late Marion Kelly. I am grateful to the family members for their time. I have asked that the HSE and the company re-engage and I have been informed that will happen. I intend to meet the Alpha-1 Foundation shortly. I will continue to make the point that the way the company ended the clinical trial without any consideration for its patients was unethical, disgusting and a breach of the Helsinki agreement. The company should re-engage with the HSE and work out a way forward.

Regarding orphan drugs, the Chairman of the health committee is correct. When I spoke at the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, IPHA, dinner a few months ago, I announced a process whereby we would work with industry, patient stakeholders and our procurement people on how to put in place a better system for procuring orphan drugs.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I wish to ask about legislation relating to a capital project that has been announced by the Government every six months or so, most recently in Project Ireland 2040. When will the children's health Bill appear before the House? Pre-legislative scrutiny was completed last October. The Bill, which is meant to set up the new children's hospital, is needed, given that building works are well under way and planning for the amalgamation of the three paediatric hospitals are continuing apace. Is it intended to continue with the title that was

announced and was ridiculed in the media?

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy must be mistaking us with our predecessors. We did not just announce the national children's hospital. Rather, we are building it in the Deputy's own constituency. I welcome that fact.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: You are your predecessor.

The Taoiseach: I am his predecessor.

Deputy Simon Harris: No. The predecessor before the Taoiseach. Those ones.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Simon Harris: As to the two serious issues that Deputy Ó Snodaigh raised regarding the legislation, it will be before the House this session. It is important legislation and I look forward to getting it under way. I have decided not to proceed with the hospital's name. I do not want the name to cause confusion or controversy in what is a major infrastructural project for our citizens. I will outline a suggested process for deciding the name when I table the legislation. For the moment, "National Children's Hospital Ireland" seems apt to me.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Pages 96 and 97 of the programme for Government reads: "Building a visible and familiar policing presence is vital to...detering crime." This has been replicated all over the country, but I will raise an example of something that is happening in the Chief Whip's constituency in Donegal where a Garda station, despite being scheduled for a €2 million upgrade, which is on the never-never like so many other jobs, is going from a 24-hour station to a part-time service. That area covers Inver, Frosses, Dunkineely, Killybegs, Kilcar, Glencolmcille, Donegal town, Drimarone, Ardaghey, Barnesmore Gap, Laghy and Ballintra. This is against the backdrop of our launch of Project Ireland 2040 in Sligo, which cost €45,000. What message are we sending? It is one thing wheeling everyone down for a €45,000 Goebbels-style launch. It is another thing when in reality-----

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy should withdraw that slur.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: -----we are cutting services and-----

Deputy Simon Harris: That is a disgusting slur.

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): He should withdraw it.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Marc MacSharry: If I could finish.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes. Order, please.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was a reference to Goebbels.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: That €45,000 could have quite easily-----

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The Taoiseach: The Deputy is belittling the Holocaust.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: He may want to reflect on it.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputies.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: If I could finish.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we let the Deputy finish? Then we can respond.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: As the Ceann Comhairle knows, it was a political charge and drawing an analogy with an actual event in history is fine.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was an anti-Semitic slur on politicians.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It was not in order.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The Government might not like the fact-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy MacSharry's time is up.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The last person to make that statement apologised to the House.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: If I could just get the same level of leniency-----

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: If I could just get the same level of leniency afforded to other Members, I would be most appreciative. The reality is that it will take an awful lot of the €1.5 million that the Government will spend on these candidate promotion events-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up. Thank you.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: -----in newspapers throughout the country to undo the damage and destruction the Government is doing to rural Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, the Deputy's time is up.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: On a point of order, a comment like that previously was withdrawn.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The use of this money in this way is tantamount to theft from the people.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It is not.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time is up.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: It is stealing taxpayers' money, and Fine Gael should refund it.

Deputy Noel Rock: Your own party would know about that.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Apart from that, what is the Government's proposal for the people of south Donegal-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy MacSharry, please resume your seat.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: -----in terms of its downgrading of their Garda station?

Deputy Simon Harris: He will be on Sky News again. He wants to go international.

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

Deputy Simon Harris: It was an anti-Semitic slur.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The references to Nazis are completely and utterly out of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Minister of State resume his seat? I do not-----

Deputy Brendan Griffin: They are completely and utterly out of order.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: He should apologise.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: A former Minister used that name in the House a number of years ago-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Resume your seat.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: -----and apologised the following day. This is the second time I have heard a member of the Opposition using that name this week in reference to this Government. It is despicable.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: Resume your seat.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Deputy MacSharry should apologise and withdraw it. It was anti-Semitic.

Deputy Regina Doherty: He is just wasting time.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister for Justice and Equality will respond.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: It was a metaphor.

Deputy Regina Doherty: You are a disgrace.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was an anti-Semitic slur on Holocaust survivors.

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Deputy Regina Doherty: The only people Deputy MacSharry is letting down are the members of his own party.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was a slur on the Holocaust.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Marc MacSharry: You are stealing the people's money.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy MacSharry-----

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Deputy MacSharry is in a hole. He should put down the shovel.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It was an outrageous remark.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Pearse Doherty, please. Is it on the same matter?

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Deputy MacSharry should apologise.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was an anti-Semitic remark.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I did not say anything about that.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: It is on the same issue. I am glad to support what Deputy MacSharry said about the Garda station in Donegal town, which is going from a 24-hour service to a six-hour service. This is on the back of many Garda stations having been closed in Donegal as a result of Deputy MacSharry's party closing down the recruitment of gardaí via Templemore-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----which has devastated Garda services in our county and across the country. That being said, we are where we are.

Why is this being contemplated now? Is it the fact that the Chief Whip does not have the same clout as the Minister, Deputy Ross? Is it *quid pro quo*, with one station getting opened in one part of the country through the sacrifice of rural Ireland? The people of rural Ireland are very annoyed at the fact that one of the few 24-7 Garda stations we have is being downgraded to six hours per day. The superintendent has told us that the Garda cannot ensure that it will be open even during those limited hours because gardaí will have to attend to call-outs. This is something that we see across County Donegal and much of rural Ireland, namely-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy, but his time is up.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----a depletion of services time and again. At a time when we see record numbers of gardaí going through the training college, will the Minister ensure that the necessary number of gardaí will be provided to Donegal for us to keep our Garda stations open?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Of the 1,700 new gardaí of recent years-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, I am asking-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----only 40 have made their way to Donegal.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Deputies Pearse Doherty and MacSharry will both be well aware of the fact that these operational issues are quite rightly matters for the acting Garda Commissioner-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: And Deputy Ross.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: -----and the leaders of An Garda Síochána. I am sure-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Maybe we should put questions to the acting Commissioner instead of to the Minister.

An Ceann Comhairle: Maybe you could stay quiet, Deputy.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Maybe Deputy MacSharry would first like to apologise for the remark he made a while ago.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: It seems that the overexcited state of Deputy MacSharry from time to time has been noted in Sligo as well as here.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Hear, hear.

Deputy Simon Harris: And on Sky News. He has gone international.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I would like to inform the Deputy-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Maybe the Government could take out an advertorial.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: -----that I had the pleasure of visiting Sligo recently.

Deputy Joan Burton: We know that. We saw it.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Of all the people who were gathered on the occasion, Deputy MacSharry was noted for his absence from the announcements.

Deputy Noel Rock: Not for the first time either.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Incorrect.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I took the opportunity-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I was shoved down the back.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I was there, though.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Fine Gael candidates were put up front.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: There was no space for us.

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An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy-----

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: A Cheann Comhairle, will there be an apology for the remark?

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Definitely not.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Apparently not.

Deputy Simon Harris: He will not apologise for it.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It was an anti-Semitic slur.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: How about an answer?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, you are bringing the House-----

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It was anti-Semitic and the Deputy will not apologise.

An Ceann Comhairle: You are bringing the House into appalling disrepute.

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: Withdraw the comment.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: On a point of order-----

An Ceann Comhairle: There will be no point of order.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It is on the record that he will not apologise.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I will suspend the House if Members do not-----

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: No.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, resume-----

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is a genuine point of order.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: A Member of this House previously had to apologise when making the kind of reference-----

Deputy Simon Harris: Yes.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: -----that has been made to another Member of the House. I deem that what has been said in the House - the reference to Goebbels - is out of order and a smear-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: A Cheann Comhairle, we have yet to make it to speaker No. 4.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: -----not only on the perpetrator-----

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

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: -----but on the House in general.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Durkan's point is made.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: A Cheann Comhairle-----

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Withdraw it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Just wait a second. The Deputy-----

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I was in the course of delivering a reply.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister had sat down.

An Ceann Comhairle: You were, and I will let the Minister do that in a minute, but I will respond to Deputy Durkan's point.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I might opt not to-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Minister sat down.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: -----given the state of disrepute into which a Member has brought the House.

Deputy Robert Troy: Come off it.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The weather is bringing the country to a standstill and Deputy MacSharry will bring the Dáil to a standstill.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister should please resume his seat. I have every intention of allowing him to respond to the points raised. Regarding the point of order, which referred to the Goebbels remark that has come from Deputy MacSharry, it was not directed, as I heard it, at any individual. If it had been, I would consider that to be deeply offensive.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: It was a collective remark, which was worse.

An Ceann Comhairle: It was a political charge-----

Deputy Simon Harris: It was not.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It was not.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me. It was a broad political charge-----

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It was directed at the Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: -----using the type of phraseology-----

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Deputy Simon Harris: It was an anti-Semitic slur.

An Ceann Comhairle: -----that Deputy MacSharry uses from time to time.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It was an anti-Semitic slur directed at every-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not consider-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: It is not acceptable, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was anti-Semitic.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, I would-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: It was an anti-Semitic comment.

Deputy Simon Harris: One cannot make anti-Semitic charges in the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: It was not anti-Semitic. It was a political charge.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Resume your seat, please.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was anti-Semitic.

An Ceann Comhairle: We want to hear the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Deputy Simon Harris: It was an attack on the Jewish community in Ireland and the victims of the Holocaust, and it should be withdrawn.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Government is filibustering now and wasting time.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please. Allow the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: A Cheann Comhairle, I do not accept your ruling that the comment is not worthy of withdrawal.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It was despicable.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I ask the Ceann Comhairle as Chair and as the guardian of the rights and privileges of Members to ask Deputy MacSharry to withdraw his remark.

Deputy Simon Harris: An anti-Semitic remark.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister was answering the question.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It is an anti-Semitic remark.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not changing my ruling. My ruling has been made. If Deputy

MacSharry wants to be helpful in the circumstances-----

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am very disappointed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Well, maybe you might be.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am very disappointed.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It is shocking, actually.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am very disappointed.

Deputy Simon Harris: It is offensive.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: We are being accused of being anti-Semitic.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It is absolutely shocking.

Deputy Simon Harris: It is an anti-Semitic slur in the Dáil.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy wants to withdraw his remark he can.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy sit down?

Deputy Róisín Shortall: On a point of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: A point of order.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: My understanding is that the ruling of the Chair is final-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Exactly.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: -----and it cannot be challenged by Members so perhaps the Minister would desist.

Deputy Simon Harris: Does Deputy Shortall believe it is acceptable?

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It does not make it right.

Deputy Simon Harris: An anti-Semitic slur.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: There is another place where the Minister can challenge that.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Is Deputy Shortall supporting it?

Deputy Simon Harris: Does Deputy Shortall support that?

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

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Deputy Róisín Shortall: Will the two civil war parties please-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Simon Harris: This is not about the civil war. It is about the Holocaust.

An Ceann Comhairle: Minister, please.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The House stands suspended for five minutes.

Sitting suspended at 1.10 p.m. and resumed at 1.18 p.m.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will proceed with questions to the Taoiseach.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: A Cheann Comhairle, is-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is gone.

Deputy Mary Butler: For clarification, has the time for questions on promised legislation expired?

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, the time has expired.

Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

1. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with President Mattarella of Italy on 14 February 2018. [8394/18]

2. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the President of Italy, Mr. Sergio Mattarella. [8470/18]

3. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with President Mattarella of Italy. [8576/18]

4. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent meeting with the President of Italy. [9536/18]

5. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent engagement with the President of Italy, Mr. Sergio Mattarella on 14 February 2018. [9666/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, together.

I met the Italian President, Sergio Mattarella, during his State visit on Wednesday, 14 February. The President was accompanied by a delegation that included the Italian Minister for For-

eign Affairs, Angelino Alfano. We had a very friendly and constructive exchange which covered bilateral relations, Brexit, migration and, more broadly, the debate on the future of Europe.

Ireland and Italy have strong bilateral relations, with long-standing economic, cultural, sporting and tourism ties. President Mattarella and I exchanged views about the future strengthening of this relationship in the years ahead. We discussed the European Union's many achievements and agreed on the need for a positive, ambitious vision for the future based on our shared values and principles. I noted Ireland's ongoing commitment to membership of the European Union. I thanked President Mattarella for Italy's continued solidarity and support in our particular concerns arising from Brexit. We exchanged views on the negotiations to date and outlined our shared ambition for a close and comprehensive future relationship with the UK. I acknowledged the challenges Italy faces in migration and expressed our appreciation for the work of the Italian Government, local authorities and NGOs in dealing humanely with large numbers of migrants. I also noted the importance of solidarity here and the need to assist front-line member states. President Mattarella expressed appreciation for our support, including our decision to opt in to the EU relocation and resettlement measures agreed in 2015 and our provision of a series of fully crewed naval vessels to assist Italian authorities with search and rescue efforts in the Mediterranean.

Deputy Joan Burton: On an earlier point, I heard the Minister for Health say he has formally withdrawn the proposal about the name Phoenix Hospital for Children. I suggest to the Taoiseach that this hospital be called after Dr. Kathleen Lynn, a veteran of 1913, 1916 and also the founder of the first infants hospital, St. Ultan's in Charlemont Street. There are no women who were involved in the revolutionary period commemorated in any public buildings in the State that I am aware of. I make that suggestion because I think it would be accepted-----

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

Deputy Joan Burton: In relation to-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: In fairness-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am being helpful.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I think the Deputy wants to ask the Taoiseach whether he consulted the President of Italy on that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have just taken the Chair and I understand this question is about a meeting with the President of Italy.

Deputy Joan Burton: Well I am sure the Taoiseach was talking about culture with the President of Italy; how women participate and are named and publicly honoured is a really important part of culture.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not that relevant.

Deputy Joan Burton: As the Taoiseach is, I am sure, aware Italy has quite a good record in that respect.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Even by all stretches of the imagination-----

Deputy Joan Burton: What aspects of immigration did the Taoiseach discuss with the

President of Italy? Did he discuss in any detail the issues surrounding politics and the extremes of politics in Italy at the moment, including the far right and neo-fascist participation in the elections being fought there?

Deputy Micheál Martin: Unfortunately, I think it was the Taoiseach's decision not to have statements before or after last week's summit. Having told us last year how eager he was to have a much greater public engagement on European Union issues this reluctance to engage with the House is surprising and somewhat disappointing. It is also surprising that he is not willing to have any discussion on the European Union's budget. I have tabled a question on that for later. He was not willing to discuss institutional reform or any other issue before setting out Ireland's position at the summit. Given that he briefed the media that they were important discussions he is not in a position to say that only minor issues were on the agenda.

The budget is part of the third group of questions. On reform, it is my understanding that the majority at the summit disagreed with the Taoiseach's willingness to sign up for the Spitzenkandidat system and the introduction of transnational Members of the European Parliament, MEPs. These proposals significantly marginalise small countries and undermine the fair balance of powers and accountability within the European Union structure. We need to discuss this seriously in the House.

Can the Taoiseach confirm that he has agreed to reject the insistence of the European Parliament that the groups decide on the Commission president? This process in 2014 had close to no impact on citizens but denied a proper debate between countries about the leadership of the Commission. I note the Taoiseach has expressed his concern about the failure of the media to give enough coverage to his speech last year launching a so-called national dialogue on Europe. It is important that we have a decent debate on these issues to do with institutional reform in this House.

If the Taoiseach is going to maintain the position he adopted in Strasbourg he will at the very least seek some legitimacy and submit it to the Dáil for a vote. The Spitzenkandidat process effectively removes the ability of Ireland and other countries to have a say in deciding on critical issues. The Taoiseach should acknowledge the right of the Dáil to have its say before agreeing to such a move.

Can the Taoiseach tell me the current status of the digital taxation discussion? Will he publish any additional information or impact assessments of it before next month's summit?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I know it is tangential to the point but I want to voice my support for Deputy Burton's suggestion on the naming of the national children's hospital. I cannot think of a more appropriate figure to name this facility after than Dr. Kathleen Lynn. We could dispense with a very elaborate and long process if we could have agreement on that point. The suggestion has been made quite widely and by many figures.

Deputy Joan Burton: I have made it loads of times.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I raised the now draft withdrawal agreement earlier with the Taoiseach. The initial responses from some are perhaps predictable but they are regrettable nonetheless. It now seems that the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, and the leader of the DUP, Arlene Foster, are rejecting this draft agreement as wholly unacceptable, constitutionally dubious and something that they are not prepared to tolerate. Those are their words. There is a job of work to be done in defending the interests of this island in its totality, in insisting on

respect for the mandate of the people in the North to remain within the European Union. Will our Italian friend, Sergio Mattarella, be an ally in this regard?

If dialogue on the future of all aspects of Europe is to be successful it has to be genuine. Very often we try to dress up something to do with European affairs as a debate but the insistence of the political establishment is that there is only one orthodoxy, one correct way to approach Europe and anybody who is in any way critical or questioning is “anti-European” or a “bad European”. If there is to be any kind of fruitful dialogue and it is absolutely essential at this juncture we have to dispense with that. It is clear that we need a change of direction. The direction of travel which suits corporate interests and the political establishment is one that has been deeply alienating for citizens on the ground and for people who care about Europe and who are proud to be Europeans, as I am, that is very worrying. That has been the direction of travel for quite some time but it is brought into very sharp focus by Brexit, by developments in Europe and other member states where the far right and ultra-right has a very destructive grip on the political dynamic. We need to address this collectively and honestly.

The Taoiseach: For the information of Deputy Burton there is at least one public building in the State named after a woman involved in the Rising, 100 years ago. There may be others but there is certainly at least one, Elizabeth O’Farrell House, a new building for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. That was a decision I took as Minister for Social Protection.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am talking about a major public building, the national children’s hospital.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy should allow the Taoiseach to speak without interruption.

The Taoiseach: I took the decision to ensure that public building was named after a woman. I was honoured to have Sabina Higgins, the wife of the President, come along to open the building for us. The Minister for Health has indicated that there will be a process used to consult the public on what the new name for the children’s hospital should be. I would prefer that it not be named after a politician, whether Sinn Féin or not-----

Deputy Joan Burton: Kathleen Lynn was not a politician.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Taoiseach does not interrupt.

The Taoiseach: -----socialist or non-socialist.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We are on European issues.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes it is about Brexit.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Burton was indulged by going off topic and I think it is only fair that I should be.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I indicated-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: For goodness’ sake we either take this seriously or we do not.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Martin should not interrupt. As the Taoiseach knows well, two wrongs do not make a right.

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The Taoiseach: I know but I would hope and trust that the Chair would be consistent in his adjudication.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am fairly consistent.

The Taoiseach: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle's adjudication is that we are to stick to the topic in these questions and the topic is the visit to the President of Italy.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Taoiseach has an opinion of me, which is that I know in advance what someone is going to say. It is great he thinks that but it does not reflect reality. Let us be realistic.

The Taoiseach: I will be realistic. In the absence of clear ruling, I will speak to the topic of the questions.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will rule from here on in. The Taoiseach has three minutes.

The Taoiseach: I did not discuss party politics with the President of Italy. His role is similar to that of President Higgins and it would not be appropriate for him to speak about party politics in this country. As a result, I did not engage him on that. I am very happy to engage with Members of the House on issues. I am here for two or three hours twice a week but I do not think the way we do it is meaningful, quite frankly. I thought what we witnessed in the context of Questions on Promised Legislation was a bit of a circus. I hope the Leader of the Opposition will ask Deputy Mac Sharry to withdraw the remarks he made earlier. I am not sensitive about these things.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are not discussing that now.

The Taoiseach: I would like to discuss it at some stage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There will be an appropriate time but not now.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I asked a question and made a few points. I think it is a reasonable expectation, in terms of institutional reform-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Taoiseach should stick to the point.

The Taoiseach: I will stick to the point but I would just mention that neither Deputy Micheál Martin nor Deputy Burton stuck to the point when I-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Let us grow up and be adults for a change.

The Taoiseach: I will stick to the point in any event. In the meeting with President Mattarella, we did not discuss nationalism and the Spitzenkandidat process. However, we did discuss Brexit. President Mattarella's view was very supportive. His view was that if there was a hard border, there should no withdrawal agreement.

Departmental Communications

6. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach the information in his Department regarding contracts with marketing companies. [9652/18]

7. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the information in his Department regarding contracts with marketing companies. [9658/18]

8. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to County Sligo for the launch of Project Ireland 2040 and on the meetings he held and the groups he met. [9664/18]

9. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the twice weekly meetings his Department's strategic communications unit holds with all Departments and the persons who attend. [10143/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 6 to 9, inclusive, together.

The strategic communications unit does not hold twice weekly meetings with all Departments. The programme of work of the unit is part of the Civil Service renewal programme, which is overseen by the Civil Service Management Board. An assistant secretary delivery team has been established to lead the implementation of the unit's programme of work across all Departments. This team comprises representatives at assistant secretary level from all Government Departments.

This team met on 8 February 2018 and is due to meet on the following dates through 2018: 12 April, 14 June, 3 September and 8 November. Meetings with Departments are also held on an *ad hoc* basis as required in order to progress the work of the unit. As an example, each Department has nominated project managers to oversee the migration of the Department to *gov.ie* and also the implementation of the new Government of Ireland identity. These officials meet as required with officials from the unit to ensure progress on these activities.

A list of the tenders which were run and the successful tenderers will be circulated to Members with this reply. Contracts are now in place with these tenderers to support the work of the strategic communications unit. Procurement for five of these contracts was overseen by the Office of Government Procurement. In line with public procurement, one tender in respect of identity was managed by my Department as the estimated cost for services was under the €25,000 threshold.

Project Ireland 2040 was launched at the Institute of Technology, IT, Sligo on Friday, 16 February 2018. Events of the day included a Government meeting to approve the plan, the actual launch of the plan and a number of media engagements carried out by myself and the Cabinet. I also met Dr. Brendan McCormack, president of IT Sligo, who was our host for the event.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

Provision of research and insight.	Awarded to Behaviour & Attitudes
Provision of digital creative services.	Awarded to Radical Digital now trading as CORE
Provision of integrated creative and digital campaign services.	Awarded to TBWA
Provision of media strategy planning and buying services.	Awarded to PHD
Development of Government identity system for roll out across Government Departments.	Awarded to Zero-G

Provision of marketing pitch specialist services	Awarded to Agency Assessments
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Deputy Micheál Martin: In only nine months, the Taoiseach has become renowned for his refusal to back off a partisan position no matter what happens. There are worrying signs that he sees no difference between the State's interests and those of his own party. He said yesterday that this is not even an issue about which we should be talking. The reason this issue keeps arising is because it involves a personal initiative of the Taoiseach to radically alter established practice when it comes to the use of public money to promote Government rather than specific initiatives or basic public information. It goes to the heart of distinguishing between the State, the politicians in government and the wider political debate. In defence of himself, the Taoiseach has now adopted the incredible position that we have a new unit of 15 people in his Department initiated by him that does nothing new and is not responsible for the output for which it is paid. Incredibly, we are told that it did not sign off on X, Y or Z. The Taoiseach has continued the now weekly habit of completely misrepresenting others in his defence. Of course, he has disgracefully attacked as false the work of a journalist who has had the temerity to point to inconvenient facts. Is it the case that the Taoiseach, as the member of Government responsible for this public spending, thinks there is nothing wrong whatsoever with public funding resulting in the non-office holders and candidates of one political party being used in advertising? I have not received an answer to that question to date and I would like one. Is that acceptable? Does the Taoiseach think it okay that candidates of one political party should appear in Government advertisements paid for by the taxpayer?

Why is the Taoiseach so completely uninterested in the comments from editors and journalists to the effect that they were pressurised to present Government advertising as part of normal coverage? It was a bit late to say yesterday that it should be clearly delineated and separate. The Taoiseach should not pretend that he did not know what was going on for the past number of weeks in respect of this matter. Will he stand over the fact that newspapers were informed that there would be more to come if they did as they were told? Does he not agree that an independent review of practice should be established to ensure that proper party political boundaries and political boundaries are respected? If he does not agree with this, could he indicate why? If the Taoiseach is completely satisfied and fully confident that everything is fine, surely an independent review will simply say that.

Deputy Joan Burton: If Mediaforce was the company that placed these advertisements, who in the Department signed off - as the client of Mediaforce - on behalf of the Government? Can the Taoiseach confirm that the strategic communications unit plans to place advertisements on every local radio station throughout the country? How much money is to be spent on these?

Lots of people have told me there are advertisements in cinemas at present at the end of which the Taoiseach is featured. Could the Taoiseach indicate the number of cinemas in which the advertisements are running? People from Wexford and other counties, not just Dublin, have seen the advertisements as part of cinema advertising. Could the Taoiseach explain to us now or later in detail if he does not have the details to hand the names of the cinemas and so on?

I also want to ask the Taoiseach about section 41(3) of the Broadcasting Act 2009, which prohibits an advertisement that is directed towards a political end. This is presumably why RTE, TV3 and national radio cannot carry these advertisements. Two weeks ago and again last week, I suggested to the Taoiseach that this is essentially unethical and crosses a line for which political parties are funded as political parties. We have no problem with every Fine Gael hope-

ful and would-be candidate being funded by Fine Gael. We object to the Government of the day funding its candidates in advertorials or paid-for advertising. There is a gap in the law but I will ask the Opposition parties to have a look at the law so that in respect of the ban on political advertising, which has served the country well in a variety of contested spaces down through the decades, we would look at introducing the same measure so political funding goes to the parties and they spend it within the law as they see fit but the action of the Government is on behalf of the people of Ireland. What the Government is doing is unethical and crosses a line.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: In response to a parliamentary question from Deputy Ó Broin yesterday, the Taoiseach said that an indicative budget of €1.5 million has been allocated for publicity in respect of Project Ireland 2040 and confirmed that the launch event for this plan cost approximately €45,000. This is a ludicrous abuse of taxpayers' money, particularly given that so many elements of this development plan and capital projects had already been announced and were not new. If this was about investing money into promoting an important public policy, it would be fine. For example, with initiatives on road safety or BreastCheck, everybody can see the absolute common sense and public value in investment of that nature. What we are witnessing is not a comprehensive citizens' awareness programme, as the Taoiseach has previously described it. Effectively, it is the promotion of an election and a political manifesto and agenda in the final analysis on behalf of the Fine Gael Party.

We are now confronted with a matter of very serious public concern. I accept that much of the banter in the early days about the strategic communications unit might well have been understood to be - might well have in fact been - just party political banter and positioning.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is not.

Deputy Micheál Martin: There is no sign of that from us.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is how I heard some of it. However, it is now abundantly clear that we are dealing with something far more serious. The Taoiseach can no longer brazen this one out or shrug it off. These are significant sums of public money involved and we need a robust process and procedure to assure members of the public - not to assure Sinn Féin, the Labour Party or Fianna Fáil - that they are not being taken for a ride. I suspect - in fact, I now know - that they are.

The Taoiseach: For context, there is no election on and there is no election campaign. We may all be candidates but I am not aware of any plans for an election anytime soon unless somebody else does. I understand from the newspapers - this may or may not be correct - that Fianna Fáil has lodged a complaint with the Standards in Public Office Commission and another party has lodged a complaint with the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland. I have no doubt that those bodies will act professionally and appropriately in dealing with any such complaints. That is at least two independent bodies already examining those complaints.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They are within narrow terms of reference.

The Taoiseach: Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of Fianna Fáil, said he had no problem with advertising so long as it is identifiable. I agree with that and it has been. I see the analysis that was carried out of the regional newspaper advertorials by *The Irish Times* today, which showed that 20 out of 20 contained a strapline stating that this was done in partnership with Project Ireland 2040. On its Twitter account, Fianna Fáil has stated that it has no problem with advertorials, which have been around for 50 years. Given that Deputy Micheál

Martin featured in advertorials, I understand why he could not have a problem with them. Of course, we all agree now - this is a fact - that this is by no means the most expensive public information campaign run to date. At least three were more expensive, including the climate change campaign-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is very dishonest and the Taoiseach knows it.

The Taoiseach: -----the Transport 21 campaign and the e-voting campaign, all of which were approved by a previous Government. I note from the Deputy's comments that he does not have a difficulty with officeholders appearing in advertorials. This, indeed, was done in the NDP advertorials - in fact much more frequently than any of these advertorials. The complaint seems to be that some of the content - some of the advertorials - included people photographed who were not holders of office. This has all been done at arm's length. As I have said before and will say again, neither I, none of my advisers, none of the Civil Service staff has a role in this. It was deliberately done at arm's length. This is a Civil Service unit headed by a public servant. The ads are put in on behalf of Government and it is done on behalf of Government in accordance with Civil Service principles. I do not have any details or information about when or where ads or advertorials are placed, nor do I seek them.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Sorry-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will get an opportunity.

The Taoiseach: The whole point is that this is operating at arm's length. As my Department has confirmed, when it came to the regional newspaper advertorials, all the communications unit provided was the content of what was in the Project Ireland 2040 plan. No suggestions were made as to who should be interviewed. No people were put forward for interview. No photographs were provided. The content in those advertorials, beyond the basic facts, was determined by the media organisations and not by me, civil servants or my Department. I note from the analysis carried out by *The Irish Times* that 18 of the 20 regional newspaper advertorials contained no names and no interviews, just a factual synopsis of what was in the plan. Seventeen of the 20 have no photographs of politicians, other than those of Ministers who attended the event in Sligo.

The Leader of the Opposition has on a few occasions referenced a candidate who is not a Member of the Oireachtas. The only candidate who is not a Member of the Oireachtas and who appears in any of the advertorials is a candidate who appears in an advertorial by the *Longford Leader*. However, is it not the case that the owner-editor of the *Longford Leader* is, in fact, a Fianna Fáil candidate?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: What has that got to do with it?

Deputy Micheál Martin: What has that got to do with it?

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

Deputy Micheál Martin: What is the point?

The Taoiseach: It is relevant because editorial control of the advertorials was with the editors.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is not relevant.

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

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Taoiseach is bringing a private individual into the Dáil debate.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He is not the editor.

The Taoiseach: They were not written, designed, approved or signed off on by any civil servant, by me or by anyone in my office.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Taoiseach is casting aspersions on a person outside the House.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go raibh maith agat. Deputies, please-----

The Taoiseach: Deputy Micheál Martin quoted an anonymous newspaper editor yesterday in the Dáil. I would be interested to know who that anonymous newspaper editor was.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I got it in *The Irish Times*.

The Taoiseach: I would still be interested to know who it was.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is the same article that the Taoiseach quoted.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Journalists have their sources.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputies, the Taoiseach, without interruption.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is the same article that the Taoiseach quoted.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If Deputies want another opportunity, I will give it to them.

The Taoiseach: I would be also interested to know if Deputy Martin-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Journalists rarely reveal the Taoiseach as a source, even though he has been the source many times.

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

The Taoiseach: I would be also interested to know if Deputy Micheál Martin believes it is ethical for somebody who is a newspaper editor and who is signing off on these things to be a Fianna Fáil candidate. I would also be interested to know if he has had any contact with the editor of the newspaper in that regard.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: He just had to look at the newspaper; he did not have to contact anybody.

The Taoiseach: I do not see any reason-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is there in black and white.

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

The Taoiseach: -----why anyone should be unwilling to answer those kinds of questions.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is absolutely scurrilous.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If the other-----

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The Taoiseach: Many aspersions have been cast on people in the past couple of days.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: They can be.

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

The Taoiseach: Aspersions have been cast on the editors of regional newspapers, who have defended themselves today.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That is not true.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please. I will give them an opportunity if the House agrees.

The Taoiseach: Aspersions have been cast on me, on civil servants in my Department and on other public servants. If people are concerned about casting aspersions, they should think about what they say as well.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: The Taoiseach is doing it now.

The Taoiseach: When it comes to casting aspersions, I wish to raise something with Deputy Burton. Last week, we had a finding of defamation against RTÉ after a Labour candidate made defamatory comments about a member of Sinn Féin with regard to their alleged connections with the IRA. In the view of the courts, that was not challenged adequately by the RTÉ presenter at the time. We had a similar occurrence this week on this issue where the deputy leader of the Labour Party, Deputy Kelly, compared my Government and civil servants in my Department to the Third Reich, to Nazis and to Goebbels, which was wholly inappropriate.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I am not thin-skinned by any means, but describing the Government, civil servants or any individual as being akin to Nazis, the Third Reich or Goebbels is defamatory and beneath the level of discourse that should occur in politics and in this House. I want to put that on the record here. I want to know from Deputy Burton - who has no difficulty going off topic in many questions, as was demonstrated again today - if she stands by those comments by Deputy Kelly. Will she dissociate herself from them? Will the Labour party dissociate itself from them? I do not ask this for me because I have some sort of thin skin - I do not. I am well capable of responding to blows with blows.

Deputy Micheál Martin: On a point of order-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on.

The Taoiseach: However, this is a reference-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: This is a serious point of order.

The Taoiseach: We have seen this from Deputy MacSharry also. This is a reference to the Holocaust.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: To be fair, I am not-----

The Taoiseach: This is a reference to 6 million people who were exterminated-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is the point of order. I will deal with that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is still before the courts.

The Taoiseach: -----by the Third Reich and by the Nazis. Belittling the Holocaust and comparing an advertising campaign to the actions of the Nazis and the Third Reich is beneath contempt. I really hope-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The House has to take a decision.

The Taoiseach: I really hope that the Leader of the Opposition will dissociate himself from Deputy MacSharry's earlier remarks. I really hope Deputy Burton will take this opportunity-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on now.

The Taoiseach: -----to dissociate herself from the remarks of her party's deputy leader.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have to take a decision. The 15 minutes has expired. There seems to be great interest in this. It is a matter for the House to decide if it wants to continue.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We should go for the next 15 minutes. We have to respond to that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If Members wish, we can have three short questions and then we will only have approximately half the time for the last question, so there may not be an opportunity. I will give one minute to each Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I think we should go for the full 15 minutes now-----

Deputy Joan Burton: Yes, I think we should.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----and leave the last question. Many issues were raised there.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will be pragmatic about it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Aspersions have been cast that have to be dealt with and I need to deal with them.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the House agreed to continue? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In the first instance, I have never used any term such as "Goebbels" with regard to the Government's propaganda campaign. It is wrong for the Taoiseach to try to suggest by innuendo that I would endorse that or that I would in any way associate myself with it.

The Taoiseach: Does Deputy Martin associate himself with it?

Deputy Micheál Martin: That I would not disassociate myself with it.

The Taoiseach: Does Deputy Martin disassociate himself from it?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are not going to have bilateral discussions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach let me reply? The Taoiseach's problem is that-----

The Taoiseach: Nearly, every minute, I-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----he does not like it when hard words are said about things that he and his Government get up to. I am talking about legitimate questions that I have asked for the past three months on this issue. The Taoiseach does not like it and he then gets overly partisan and nasty. There is a bad streak there. Mr. Joe Flaherty, for example, is not a Member of this House. He is entitled to be a business owner and to own newspapers. His name should not be dragged into something when he is not here to defend himself.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is a very basic principle and tradition in this House. He is also entitled to be a candidate for a political party but Government money is not spent on him to promote him. Fianna Fáil will have to do that, as every other candidate in this country will have to do it. I have never used the term "Goebbels" and I hate anyone using Nazi terms about anyone in a current parliamentary democracy. I do not like it or endorse it and I disassociate myself from it. Any Member of the House who uses such terms should reflect on what he or she has said and withdraw any assertion that any Member of this House or any member of the Government is engaging in that matter. What we are discussing here is light years apart from what happened during the Third Reich. I have never been under any illusions about that and I want to make that crystal clear. I think, in many respects, that it was not the correct strategy for the Taoiseach to attempt to put me on a spot with regard to that.

All I would say with regard to Joe Costello is that it is still a live issue before the courts. It is not appropriate that it be discussed here because the issue is not finalised in that respect and I do not think it merited reference. On the more substantive point that I asked in my question, the bottom line is that the Government is responsible for the spending of taxpayers' money and how that money is spent. If it transpires that that money has been spent on promoting Fine Gael candidates, then there has to be a review. It is not good enough for the Government to say that it had nothing to do with it and that it is at arm's length. One cannot be at arm's length from the proper spending of taxpayers' money. That is the point. The Government cannot simply say that it put a whole lot of money over somewhere and that people can do what they like with it. Basic rules and principles should apply. It has never been the case in the Civil Service code or the utilisation of taxpayers' money that it is spent on party political candidates. That is what has happened. It is not just the *Longford Leader*. It is the *Limerick Leader* too. There were three Fine Gael candidates on those advertorials. The *Roscommon*-----

Deputy Eugene Murphy: Herald.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----*Herald*. There were Fine Gael candidates in the *Roscommon Herald*. We can argue about other strategically placed advertorials about the Luas to Finglas. We may speculate about the electoral cliffhanger in that constituency between a Fine Gael Deputy and a Fianna Fáil candidate, Paul McAuliffe. The Taoiseach and I know, while he might pretend that he does not, how tight that race is. There is a lovely double page spread about the Luas to Finglas. I might speculate and I might be wrong but let others judge-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Dead right.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----that. There is an onus on the Government to make sure that taxpayers' money is spent properly. When it turns out that it has not been properly and procedurally spent, that should be acknowledged and it should be resolved that it does not happen again. I asked the Taoiseach if he would conduct a comprehensive independent review. The Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO, will have parameters to what it can do. What does the Taoiseach have against establishing an independent review of this? He set up this unit and he appointed the head himself.

Finally, the Taoiseach referenced the change programme. That is an outrageous, dishonest comparison. That was about reducing carbon footprint in industry and a green procurement policy. It was a whole societal change. To be fair to John Gormley, the Green Party and the Fianna Fáil Government at the time, that was a five-year programme. The Taoiseach did not present it in the Dáil last night as a five-year programme. It was a substantive part of the national climate change strategy of the State.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We want to give other Deputies a chance to speak.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach came in here then to try to present a false picture just to get himself out of a political hole that he has dug for himself. I do not think that is honourable or the right course of action.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Burton. Remember that we want to give the Taoiseach an opportunity to respond.

Deputy Joan Burton: I want to reply to what the Taoiseach has just said. I do not know how much he has thought about what he said but I do not think what he said does any honour to this House or to the many people in it-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is a precedent regarding issues that are before the courts that they should not be discussed.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am talking about what the Taoiseach said here, in this House. As somebody who has been the victim of the most atrocious assault and slander on social media, for the Taoiseach to suggest to me that I would countenance, for one moment, other people from any party or none behaving in an inappropriate way in the course of debate to other people is unacceptable. I can say that I do not do that and have never done that in my political career. The Taoiseach and I have shared a constituency. He is very familiar with those subjects on which I have contributed. To throw around accusations of a general kind here is completely inappropriate and dishonours the Taoiseach's office. When one becomes Taoiseach, one is meant to meet a higher standard. The Taoiseach is clearly annoyed and irritated that something that has been, understandably for Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach, a prize project has been subject to criticism here. I would say to the Taoiseach that he is perhaps a little too thin-skinned about that in the context of his replies. Deputies Micheál Martin, Howlin, Adams, the new leader of Sinn Féin, Deputy McDonald, and I have all asked a repeated series of questions at different stages over the last month or so to which we have not received satisfactory answers. If we received satisfactory answers, we would have stopped asking the questions. Instead, the Taoiseach's answers have become more convoluted. In fact, his answer there about departmental assistant secretaries meeting twice a week in answer to the question by Deputy Michael Moynihan sounds more like a theological answer that might come from a priest, bishop or lawyer than from a Taoiseach

actually answering about the day-to-day concerns of people who are worried about the roof over their heads and the state of their health service.

The Taoiseach and his Ministers should develop a sense of proportion on this. There is a system in this country which has served us well, with direct funding from the State for political parties which allows political parties, within the rules, to spend that money on the promotion of the political purposes of their party and the promotion of their ideals. There is then Government funding and when political parties take office there are potentially great opportunities for whoever has the honour to become Taoiseach or a Minister to promote ideas in that Government. There is a strict division between party political and the Government position. The Taoiseach is honoured to be in government and needs to carry the can and take responsibility for this. What he is trying to do now is divert. I would say that references in this House to Goebbels and the propaganda unit that he had are, in my view, inappropriate and I think anyone who has been involved in that should reflect and pause because it does not help our debate. Equally, I think the Taoiseach is trying to distort what has been said. I used one term about the Taoiseach's policy.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There will be no time for the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Joan Burton: I said that it is unethical. I stand by that. The Taoiseach crossed the line of what is appropriate.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There will be no time for the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: We should beware contrived outrage on any side. In the rough and tumble of proceedings in the House things are sometimes said that are unfair or unwise, but that should not be used as a pretext for not answering direct questions. The expenditure of public moneys for political purposes is a public interest issue, with which we must get to grips. I suggest to the Taoiseach and the Government that it is not in their long-term interests to allow the matter to persist. Whatever short-term gain or investment has been made in this process has now been brought into public disrepute. This is not about the Taoiseach responding in a party political way to his opponents or reacting to language he might sincerely regard as intemperate because that would be to miss the point entirely. We are dealing with an issue of ethics in the use of public moneys, which is very serious. Can we have answers in that regard? Is there an answer to the public concerns? Can we find a methodology to assure all Members and the public that this is not a try-on? The answers we have heard so far in that regard do not give the necessary assurances.

The Taoiseach: It is welcome that Deputy Micheál Martin has unequivocally dissociated himself from the remarks made by Deputy Marc MacSharry. I am disappointed that Deputy Joan Burton did not do so also. She specifically referred to remarks made in the House. The remarks of Deputy Alan Kelly were made on the "Morning Ireland" RTÉ radio programme rather than in the House and I am sorry that she felt unable to dissociate herself from them-----

Deputy Joan Burton: As I have not listened to the interview, I am unaware of the remarks to which the Taoiseach refers.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The whole country heard it.

Deputy Joan Burton: On a point of information-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are no points of order at Question Time.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Taoiseach has made assertions about an interview I have not heard. I made my views clear on terms related to Nazism and-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If the Deputy wishes the Taoiseach to reply, she should allow him to speak.

The Taoiseach: There will be ample opportunities between now and the next Question Time for the Deputy to listen to the radio interview she claims not to have heard or to read the coverage of it which she claims she has not seen. It is to be hoped there will be time between now and next Tuesday or Wednesday for her to inform herself of what her deputy leader said, reflect on it and, it is to be hoped, do as Deputy Micheál Martin did and unequivocally dissociate herself from the comments and language of Deputy Alan Kelly, of which she seems to have no knowledge.

I have no problem with criticism. We are all in the business of politics, part of which is taking criticism, responding to it, acting on it when it is valid, sucking it up on occasion or pushing back when it is unfair or invalid. I have no difficulty with replying to questions. I do my best to do so every day I am in the House. Last night I met a person who expressed surprise that I had to answer so many questions so frankly. I always try my best to do so. However, I can only answer questions to which I know the answers. I can only account for myself and, through written replies to parliamentary questions, my Department can account for its staff. I cannot answer questions on behalf of third parties, contracted organisations or regional or national newspapers; rather I can only answer questions about myself or the actions of the civil servants employed in my Department and that is what I will continue to do. I am not in a position to answer for third or fourth parties. In terms of the-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: The third parties in question are spending taxpayers' money on behalf of the State.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to continue, without interruption.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Deputy Micheál Martin should check out the editor of the *Tuam Herald*.

The Taoiseach: On the basic rules and principles that should apply, I have made it clear that any commercial content should be clearly identifiable as having been sponsored and as commercial content.

Deputy Micheál Martin: A strapline stating the content was produced in partnership with Project Ireland 2040 does not-----

The Taoiseach: I have made that instruction clear to the staff of my Department. If it needs to be made clearer, so be it. Such content may need to state it is a sponsored advertisement or an advertorial. I have no difficulty with that. I have previously stated a person being interviewed for a commercial feature should be told that is the case.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They were not.

The Taoiseach: None of the interviews was carried out by me or the staff of my Department

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Deputy Micheál Martin: The interviewees were not told.

The Taoiseach: As a matter of general policy, that should be the case. I have no control over such issues when the interviews are not carried out by me or my staff but rather by third parties. On the content of the advertorials, as I stated, the only information provided by my Department was the factual information contained in the national development plan. No persons were put forward by us for interview. When suggestions were sought from the strategic communications unit, SCU, as to who might be interviewed, it did not make any suggestion in that regard because we thought it would be inappropriate to do so. No photographs were given for inclusion. I can only give truthful answers. No matter how many times questions are asked and assertions or innuendos are made-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is only all Fine Gael politicians-----

Deputy Joan Burton: That is the Jesuitical explanation.

The Taoiseach: -----I can only give truthful answers.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They are facts.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Deputy should deal with the facts.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach has a responsibility in the spending of taxpayers' money. He cannot wash his hands of that responsibility.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Business of Dáil

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach(Deputy Joe McHugh): It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders or the Order of the Dáil of 27 February, that the Dáil shall now adjourn until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 6 March 2018.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

The Dáil adjourned at 2.10 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 6 March 2018.