



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 9 Bealtaine 2018

Wednesday, 9 May 2018

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2 p.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Further revelations are emerging in respect of the treatment of women whose smear tests by CervicalCheck - and their treatment at the hands of our health services and legal system - were wrong. We now know that three women at the centre of ten outstanding legal cases against the State relating to incorrect smear tests have died. The State Claims Agency was apparently told by CervicalCheck during the Vicky Phelan case that the women had been told. We now know of course that this was not the case.

In the context of the forthcoming cases - this came across yesterday in a fairly frank exchange at a meeting of the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach involving the director general of the State Claims Agency and others - that the State may not have a liability and that, in fact, liability may lie with the US companies involved. It seems, therefore, that no guarantees can yet be given to the women involved in those cases to the effect that they will not have to go through the same treatment as Vicky Phelan. Has the Government considered this issue? Will the Taoiseach indicate the steps the Government intends to take to prevent further trauma to women involved in such cases? The director general of the agency said that in cases where the State has liability, they would be dealt with differently. We know that in many instances we are talking about cases involving the actual screening companies. Furthermore, at yesterday's committee meeting, the director general, in response to questions from Deputy MacSharry and others, indicated that if section 32B of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 had been commenced, then the approach adopted by the State Claims Agency could have been different. The section relates to pre-action protocols designed to secure an early resolution in clinical negligence claims by ensuring there is disclosure of all medical and other records in the hopes of reducing the number of cases. Why, then, has section 32B of the 2015 Act not been commenced by the Minister for Justice and Equality? I understand it was signed into law towards the end of 2015. The State Claims Agency and other bodies get attacked all the time in the immediate aftermath of a crisis but we can hardly blame officials if an Act or a section has not been commenced and certain options the Oireachtas intended to provide them with are not, therefore, open to them. Were there consultations between health and justice officials on that issue?

The Taoiseach said yesterday in the House that there were approximately 1,600 cases. These are the 1,600 cases announced by the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, last Tuesday night which had been notified to the National Cancer Registry but which had not been notified to CervicalCheck. The Taoiseach indicated yesterday that the vast majority of those 1,600 cases would not need to be part of the audit for reasons he set out. Can the Taoiseach state categorically that there are no issues relating to those 1,600 cases? Deputy Kelly made a number of observations last evening in terms of the level of knowledge of the Department of Health on issues between the cancer registry and the CervicalCheck programme in the context of data interchange and all of that. Are the Taoiseach and the Minister aware of such issues? Has the Department been aware of such issues down through the years?

The Taoiseach: As Deputy Micheál Martin said, new information and revelations continue to become available on this issue. That is exactly why we have established this inquiry, namely, to get to the bottom of this and establish the facts in order that we can put things right to restore confidence in cancer screening. Like other Members, members of the Government are often hearing information that is new. That is why it is right for us to set up the inquiry, which will be able to get to the bottom of all these facts and give people the answers they need.

I understand there are nine outstanding court cases with perhaps one further case where a letter of claim has issued but proceedings have not yet begun. Nobody wants to see sick people or terminally ill women dragged through the courts. The public does not want that and it is in nobody's interest. It is certainly not in the interests of the taxpayer in the longer run, of confidence in our health service or of patients or citizens. I have asked the Attorney General to work with the State Claims Agency to examine the different cases with a view to settling them, albeit it takes two sides to do so, or resolving them by way of mediation as soon as possible in order that they do not have to go to court. I made that request to the Attorney General last week. It may turn out that one or more of these cases is similar or identical to that of Ms Vicky Phelan but it may also be the case that some are very different. We cannot assume that all of these cases are the same. In each case, a medical expert will have to look at the smear or slide and determine what category it falls into. Certainly, the Government's intention is to settle these cases as soon as possible or deal with them by way of mediation if possible. I have asked the Attorney General to work with the State Claims Agency to do exactly that in the short period ahead.

The best thing we can do in the longer term is to avoid these cases going to court in the first instance. That can be done in a number of ways. A whole reform programme has been initiated by the Government over the past couple of years to reduce the number of cases ending up in court or requiring lengthy legal proceedings. The House will be aware of what we have done already around open disclosure by way of putting voluntary open disclosure in the Civil Liability (Amendment) Act, which was passed last year and which will be enacted in law by June. We have also announced this week that we will put in place mandatory open disclosure through the patient safety Bill in cases of serious incidents.

There has also been a programme of law reform. For example, the Mediation Act has been enacted and is now a reality. The Act will allow mediation to occur in more circumstances. In the past couple of weeks, some cases have already been settled through mediation. We would like to see more. There are also periodic payment orders. The legislation for those has been passed in order to ensure that we do not have the same situation we have had for years in the context of very big settlements of €10 million or €13 million being made when it would be better to have settlements over a period that could be increased as needs be. Other new legislation we introduced is the Legal Services Regulation Act, which the Deputy mentioned. It provides

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for pre-action protocols to speed up cases so that they are not continually being referred. That has not been commenced yet because the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, which is the body that will deal with it, has only been established in the past few months.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What body?

The Taoiseach: The Legal Services Regulatory Authority. These are new laws.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They are not. That was in December 2015. We can keep announcing and passing laws in the Chamber and saying that we will do great things next month or the month after. When we pass such laws, however, they are not commenced and nothing changes. We need a satisfactory explanation as to why section 32B of that Act, which was designed to prevent the trauma people have experienced in taking on the State, has not been commenced. We particularly need that explanation given that the Taoiseach referred to the Act at the end of his long reply.

The Taoiseach said that he has asked the Attorney General to talk to the State Claims Agency. The agency said yesterday that in cases involving the State and in which the State has liability, it would prevent any trauma. I am referring to the majority of cases which could be against the US companies involved. How does the Taoiseach propose to prevent trauma in those cases? Has the Government considered that point? That is what I asked originally. Can the Taoiseach give a specific answer on that? Has he considered it at all?

Will the Taoiseach respond to the third question I asked regarding the level of knowledge in the Department of Health in respect of potential issues between the National Cancer Registry and the CervicalCheck programme and reconciliation of their respective numbers regarding people who have died from cancer?

The Taoiseach: There is a legislative process which must be undergone and everybody understands that. Legislation must go through the Houses, be enacted and then be commenced. Often a law is enacted and it takes a couple of months, or even longer, for it to be commenced into law.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: Three and a half years.

The Taoiseach: In this case, it was part of a major reform introduced by this Government to provide for matters such as pre-action protocols, the Mediation Act, periodic payment orders and-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is not happening.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: It is the responsibility of the Minister, not the authority.

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

The Taoiseach: With regard to that particular aspect of the reforms brought in by this Government, and I should note that it was not done by previous Governments-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: It was the previous Government actually.

The Taoiseach: -----the new body established to regulate our legal services, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, is still in its infancy.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: That has nothing to do with this.

The Taoiseach: It has to be established, a chief executive officer must be appointed and a premises needs to be found. In some cases-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: The authority is not required for the purposes of section 32B.

The Taoiseach: -----when it comes to commencing a law, guidelines have to be produced as well. When it comes to voluntary open disclosure provisions, for example, the guidelines-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Read the Bill.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The authority is not required for the purposes of section 32B.

The Taoiseach: -----have to be developed beforehand.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Mr. Tony O'Brien told a meeting of the Joint Committee on Health earlier today that he will not be standing down as director general of the HSE. While Mr. O'Brien was making that declaration, I received a call from Emma Mhic Mhathúna from Kerry. She asked me to raise her case with the Taoiseach. Emma is 37 years old and is the mother of five children aged between two and 15 years of age. She received a clear result from a smear test in 2013 but she now knows that the result was, in fact, a false negative. She received a diagnosis of cervical cancer after a routine smear test in 2016. She only learned of the false negative for the previous test as this scandal has unfolded. She wants the Taoiseach to know that she is terminally ill, that she will present on Friday for a medical assessment at which she expects she will be given an estimate of how long she is expected to live. Emma wants the Taoiseach to know that she has been told to get her affairs in order and to make provision for her five children. Emma is extremely angry. She says her faith has been shaken to its core. She tells me that her anger outweighs even her fear of dying. She wants the Taoiseach to know that she wants accountability. She has asked me to tell him that she cannot understand why he is sitting on his hands. She cannot wrap her head around why he has not done the very first thing that is needed to ensure the start of accountability. I told the Taoiseach yesterday, as I have said before, that people outside of this place see two Irelands: they see a well-paid senior public executive sitting in a committee room brazening things out and then they see a terminally ill woman in her living room who knows she does not have much time left, who knows - or at least suspects - that it could have been very different and who is left wondering how her children will cope.

I could make all the political reform arguments in the world as to why Tony O'Brien must go; I have made some of them previously. I could make all the good governance and public policy arguments as to why this man needs to go. We could go back and forth on that all day long. However, that all pales into absolute insignificance when one compares it with what a woman like Emma is feeling and articulating today. The buck must stop somewhere and accountability must start somewhere. Emma has no confidence in Tony O'Brien, the public and the women and families affected have no confidence in Tony O'Brien, the Opposition has no confidence in Tony O'Brien and three of the Taoiseach's own Cabinet members have said he should stand down, yet the Taoiseach and his Minister for Health refuse to act.

When the Taoiseach gets to his feet, I do not want him to answer me; I would like him to speak to Emma. I want him to answer Emma Mhic Mhathúna. I want him to explain to her why he is allowing Tony O'Brien to continue as usual, why he refuses to hold him to account

and why he is ignoring her voice.

The Taoiseach: The most egregious aspect of this whole affair is that important information about women's health was withheld from them, and that was absolutely wrong. We all know that the audit did not commence until these women had already been diagnosed with cancer and were being treated, so providing them with that information would not have impacted on their treatment. However, they should have been told anyway. People have a right to know information about their healthcare. Doctors, officials and anyone else involved in managing their cases or looking after them have no basis on which not to pass on that information. As Deputies will know, this has been HSE policy for all staff since 2013 and is in the Medical Council guidelines. Part of the inquiry that is now under way must get to the bottom of why this information was not passed on to women in the way it should have been as they ought to have known. This is absolutely the most inexplicable and egregious aspect of this whole affair.

As I said yesterday, people want accountability. The Government wants accountability as much as the Opposition does. People are annoyed, and I am annoyed, about the way this has been handled in recent weeks, the drip-drip of information and the misinformation from some quarters. We, as politicians, need to ensure we are never part of putting across misinformation because that does a terrible disservice to the women affected. We have seen at least a degree of personal accountability so far, the clinical director of CervicalCheck having resigned and the manager of CervicalCheck being moved aside and replaced by Damien McCallion, head of the serious incident management team. We have an inquiry that is under way and can get to the facts and assess whether more needs to be done and whether more individuals need to be held to account. As I said yesterday, more heads may well yet roll but it is important they are the right heads and that people who are dismissed are dismissed because of something they actually did wrong or failed to do, having known about it. That is something we cannot say with certainty at present. As I said yesterday, for me and for some of those affected, this is not primarily about looking for a head; it is about establishing the facts, getting to the bottom of the matter and putting it right, restoring faith in our cancer screening system and ensuring it does not happen again.

Mr. O'Brien has approximately eight weeks left before he finishes his term of office, at which point an interim HSE director will be appointed by the Minister for Health. We are already in the process of appointing a new person to take over the leadership of our health service as the chief executive officer, CEO, of the HSE. We will also put a board in place to ensure an additional layer of accountability between the Minister and the HSE.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Nobody wants accountability more than Emma or other women and families in her circumstances. I do not believe the Taoiseach's response, to be blunt. What I see is a person who leads the Government and who knows well what needs to happen and what is the right thing to do. I do not dispute the sequence of events and share the Taoiseach's view that the most egregious offence was the withholding of information. We cannot with all certainty state whether in each case the withholding of that information had a material affect in diagnosis and subsequent treatment. Let others decide on that. What Emma told me is that she sees the Taoiseach, the leader of Government, fail her. Has it occurred to the Taoiseach that women like Emma might not be around to hear the results of these inquiries? Mr. O'Brien has eight or 12 weeks left, depending on when he takes his leave, but who is to say how long Emma has? She has a very simple request of the Taoiseach, and it is a challenge to him as Head of Government because it is something that we do not do in this jurisdiction. The Tony O'Briens of this world do not stand down, and Governments here do not sack them or

tell them to clear their desks. She wants to see the start of accountability now. That means the departure of the man in charge of the HSE, the director general with whom the buck stops. It is as simple and clear cut as that.

The Taoiseach: I said yesterday that I do not believe it is right for any politician or party leader to seek to appoint him or herself as the spokesperson for all the people affected, whether it is the 209 women who are part of this audit, their families or the many hundreds of thousands of women who are concerned about the accuracy of their smear tests. I do not think it is right for any politician to appoint him or herself as the sole spokesperson for all these people. I have been in contact with some of them too. They have different views but many concerns and the main thing they want is answers. They want the truth, which is why we have established a scoping inquiry in order that we can get as many answers as quickly as possible for the women affected and their families. We will move on to a statutory commission of investigation after that to answer any unanswered questions. We have gone for a scoping inquiry in order that we can get answers quickly. I appeal to Deputy McDonald and all Members of this House to avoid saying things that may not be factually correct or putting out misinformation. It is not fair to the 209 women who were subject to this audit to have additional fears and concerns. They have enough to worry about as it is without misinformation being propagated.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Those are disgraceful remarks. The Taoiseach is dodging the question.

The Taoiseach: On the questions which Deputy Micheál Martin asked earlier, which I tried to answer between interruptions, the case against the laboratories is something that we very much have under consideration. If there is not a case against the State and the case is against the laboratory-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is the Taoiseach's answer to Emma?

The Taoiseach: -----a third party or a private body, that creates a difficulty for us, as the State cannot settle or extinguish a case against a third party.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: He does not want to answer. He is shamefaced.

The Taoiseach: That is something that we are examining now to see what options are available to us.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Today we saw Google's announcement that it would stop accepting all advertisements relating to the eighth amendment in order, as it said, to protect the integrity of the process. This follows Facebook's announcement that it will only accept advertisements from Ireland on its platform, although this will simply mean that linked organisations will be exposed in Ireland and organisations will have to register here and may then continue to advertise. There are no spending limits in respect of the referendum anyway, so it will make little real difference. However, it is imperative that we as politicians act to regulate the information included on posters and in online advertisements to ensure that the information given out to the public is based on facts and not on outright lies, myths or emotive untruths. We have all seen cases around the country where posters have been placed near schools and outside churches. These posters use imagery and information that is clearly wrong, that cannot be checked and that is not verifiable at all. We must act to ensure that the use of such posters

cannot continue. It is vitally important for both sides of the campaign, the yes side and the no side, to put out accurate images and information in order that people can make a decision based on what they feel themselves.

We have seen the posters held up outside the hospitals. We have seen all that. We have seen the fake statistics and factually incorrect responses that also have been used in respect of the campaign. This is all wrong. These are things on which we can act and make a decision. The announcements from Google and Facebook are welcome but we can also be proactive and ensure that posters carry respectful images and images which will sway the argument one way or the other rather than those which are just used as a shock tactic. That is vitally important. I know it is probably too late to do it for this campaign, but what are the Taoiseach's plans to do this in order to ensure that referendum campaigns will be carried out in a proper manner and that proper images will be used on posters? This is something which we in this House can directly control. We do not have to rely on Facebook or Google or anybody else to do it for us.

The Taoiseach: First, I join with others in welcoming the decision taken by Facebook not to allow advertisements relating to the referendum that are paid for by foreign bodies or foreign entities. That is a welcome measure on its part. While Google has gone a bit further and is not accepting advertisements to do with the referendum altogether, I think Facebook has made the right decision to not accept advertisements paid for by bodies from other countries. Whether advertisements are for a yes vote or a no vote, we all hold by the principle that foreign money should not be used to influence elections and referendums in this country. The decision Facebook has made in that regard is very welcome. Perhaps it could have come sooner but it has come and is very welcome.

I share Deputy Pringle's concerns about some of the posters we have seen around the country, some of which are extraordinarily inaccurate in the claims made on them and some of which are, frankly, quite grotesque. I have often spoken to parents on the campaign trail whose children have asked them to explain the images on the posters and what the posters mean. For people who purport to be concerned about children, putting parents in a position where they have to explain these things to children based on the images on the posters says a lot about their true motivations and hearts.

It has never been the case in Ireland that we have regulated people's posters. If we were to regulate people's posters we might also argue in favour of regulating literature because the same kind of images that appear on posters can also be put on literature put through doors. We need some consideration of the issue, perhaps on an all-party basis, but it would be a big move to give any authority to ourselves, or even to an electoral commission or referendum commission when established, to decide what sorts of posters and literature are allowed and what sorts are not. It could start from very good intentions but move on to become a restriction on democracy and freedom of speech. If we do anything like that we would need to do it on an all-party basis. Perhaps the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, which covers electoral matters, could give some consideration to the issue after this referendum.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I thank the Taoiseach for his response. I note there is already regulation of posters in certain areas in this country. For example, Dublin City Council regulates politicians' posters. They have to be submitted to Dublin City Council so that it can have a look at them. It then decides whether they can be put up or not. They cannot be offensive or anything else like that. It is possible to regulate posters and this begs the question as to why the posters in question have not been regulated. That may be a separate question. It is not enough,

however, to share the annoyance and upset of people in respect of this issue. It has to be addressed. Doing so is vital.

The matter is probably more stark in the run-up to the forthcoming referendum. It is a referendum campaign that is dividing people and generating strong opinions on both sides. That is different from what happens during most elections. In most elections, our faces are on the posters. People might find them offensive but that is a different story. We really should be capable of dealing with the images used on posters. If Facebook and Google can do it in respect online patterns, why can we not do it with postering in this country?

The Taoiseach: I was not aware that Dublin City Council had a role in regulating which posters may be put up and which may not. My local authority in Fingal requires that permission be obtained if one wants to put up a poster advertising a public meeting or such an event outside election time. I had thought it was different during election and referendum campaigns, however, and that all local authorities can do is prescribe where posters could not be located, as on roundabouts or in locations where they obscure road signs. Regulating where posters may be placed for reasons of road safety is different from regulating the content of posters, be it the words or images. This is not something we can resolve over the next couple weeks. We could definitely ask the committee to examine it, however. I will certainly ask the Minister of State with responsibility for local government and electoral reform, Deputy Phelan, to determine, after the referendum, what measures could be put in place for future contests.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: As we approach the final two weeks of the abortion referendum campaign, it is becoming absolutely clear that the Government's position is rapidly losing support among the general public. All attempts by the Taoiseach and the Government to convince the people that what he is proposing is a restrictive abortion regime are being exposed as the complete falsehoods that they are. The Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, would know that if he displayed even one ounce of political courage and responded to the numerous requests made to him, by the Save the Eighth campaign and others, to conduct an open debate on this matter. Unfortunately, he is in hiding on this issue.

Despite that fact, we have a health service that is almost in total paralysis. It is in total paralysis as far as I am concerned, yet the Minister takes no responsibility. He is the head appointed to office by the Taoiseach to deal with these issues but he lacks courage and will not take responsibility in this area. Instead, he chooses to spend his time campaigning with individuals and organisations that are in open defiance of Irish electoral law. I raised this matter with the Taoiseach some time ago and he said he had no issue with this. I find that staggering. The Taoiseach has no issue with the fact that the Minister campaigns with people operating outside the law. Where are the Taoiseach standards? A senior Minister in the Government is championing a group that made clear and illegal use of €120,000 but the Taoiseach believes that is perfectly fine. No wonder there is no accountability in the HSE or anywhere else. Not only has the Taoiseach undermined the integrity of his own campaign, he has also insulted the independence and integrity of the Standards in Public Office Commission, which made the judgment against Amnesty Ireland.

That said, I ask the Taoiseach to clarify some issues that have arisen following comments made by the Minister in *The Sunday Times* last weekend. The Minister mentioned that the general scheme of the Bill, which I have to hand, provides for early delivery and specifically prohibits the possibility of late-term abortions. Where in the heads of the Bill is the prohibition on late-term abortion to be found? I ask the Taoiseach to explain. I have read the Bill, as have

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others, and we cannot see it anywhere. I ask the Taoiseach to take some accountability for his Ministers. He has appointed them, under seal from the President, yet they can campaign with people who have acted outside the law and blatantly told everyone that they would keep the money and would not pay it back. Everybody in here operates under the Standards in Public Office Commission, and rightly so, and every elected official throughout the country must do so. Will Amnesty Ireland get away with this? Is it okay for the Taoiseach's Ministers to champion this organisation on the streets?

The Taoiseach: I strongly disagree with the Deputy. He seems to be assuming that the referendum is over and that the proposition will be defeated. I believe that the referendum and campaign are ongoing. I was on the doors in Clonsilla in my constituency as part of a cross-party canvass, listening to people, hearing their views and answering some of their questions. I believe that this referendum will carry. The people have not spoken yet. When they have spoken, we will count the votes and determine what they have said. It is somewhat arrogant for anyone to assume the outcome of this referendum already. At the start of this campaign, I said something that I really believe, which is that this campaign should always be respectful and should never be personalised. By and large, I am glad that has been the case so far. Unlike previous abortion referendums, this campaign has largely been respectful and has rarely been personalised but I regret the extent to which some people, including Deputy Mattie McGrath, have sought to personalise this against the Minister, Deputy Harris. That is absolutely wrong. The Minister, Deputy Harris, is putting forward a proposal that the Government is making following an all-party committee, following a Citizens' Assembly. The people will have their say on that. I do not think he, or anyone on any side of this referendum, should be targeted personally in any way, whether through posters, demands for one-to-one debates, or anything of that nature. It is wrong and it is not what people want.

Amnesty International's current campaign is registered with the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO. It is above board and I do not believe anyone has produced any evidence to the contrary. The Deputy is referring to a different campaign it ran maybe a year or two ago, against which SIPO has made some negative findings. That matter is now before the courts. Its current campaign on this referendum is registered with SIPO just like any NGO campaign of this nature. It is wrong to confuse the two. Perhaps it is deliberate but it is wrong either way.

On the legislation before us, the legislation that the Government has produced allows for a woman to decide to end her pregnancy if she decides she does not want to go ahead with that pregnancy up to 12 weeks into it. That is ten weeks from conception. It allows for the termination of pregnancies after that on the grounds that there may be a serious risk to her life or health, or in the case where the baby she is carrying will not survive as a result of a fatal foetal abnormality. It does not provide for the termination of pregnancies beyond viability and that is in the heads. There is an important point that we need to make and understand, which is that if there is not a yes vote, there will be no legislation at all. If there is not a Yes vote, things will remain exactly as they are now. There will be no legislation. Women who are victims of rape, who are pregnant as a result of incest or who are just children themselves will not be able to get the help they need in this country. Those who are advocating a No vote need to explain why they would turn their backs on those women and give them the cold shoulder. That is what a No vote would mean.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I never mentioned Amnesty International.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: Yes, he did.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I said Amnesty Ireland. Excuse me, listen. I mentioned Amnesty Ireland. It is fine for the Taoiseach. The Minister wants to hide. This is not a personal attack at all but a Minister in the Government proposing this legislation will not debate it. He chose not to answer me on that and I did not assume at all that the referendum was over. While head 4 of the general scheme says that the life of the unborn child cannot be ended once it has reached viability, there is no evidence of where this will be set. To understand that, I suggest that the Taoiseach reads the definitions contained in the general scheme. Even more disturbing is the fact that, directly following head 4, provision is made in head 5 to nullify or cancel out the prohibitions contained in head 4. There is utter confusion. This clearly demonstrates that all of the claims the Taoiseach and his Ministers are making about protecting the child once it reaches viability are an absolute nonsense and are not worth the paper they are written on. The Taoiseach and the Minister, Deputy Harris, know that. The Taoiseach and I know that it is simply one more tactic that is being used by this Government to disguise the extreme nature of the proposal. Will the Taoiseach be honest with the people for once in this debate and admit that post repeal, if it happens, absolutely no guarantees can be given on prohibition of abortion in either six, seven, eight or nine months? That is the fact.

The Taoiseach: Viability, the point at which a baby is viable outside of the womb, is a clinical judgment. It is not as simple as just saying a certain number of weeks so that has to be a clinical judgement for the doctors concerned taking into account the gestation, the size of the foetus and the weight. Taking those three things into account, the two doctors - there must be two doctors, both of whom are on the specialist register, to certify a termination beyond 12 weeks - will make the judgment as to whether or not the pregnancy has reached viability. A pregnancy can only be terminated after 12 weeks if two doctors, both of whom are on the specialist register, determine that there is a serious risk to the life or health of the mother and that the pregnancy is not viable. If it has reached the point of viability, a compassionate early delivery occurs and every effort is made to save the life of the baby at that point as well as the life of the mother.

The legislation being put forward by the Government is not extreme. It is considerably more conservative than the situation in the UK or the Netherlands. It is very similar to the law in Germany. One individual I met on the doorstep last night was a woman from Germany who explained to me how it works there. It is very similar to what we have proposed where there is a cooling-off period of 72 hours, which gives the woman concerned a crucial period in which to consider other options and avail of counselling. This is a much better situation than the current one where people acquire the pills over the Internet without medical support or counselling.

Questions on Promised Legislation

Deputy Micheál Martin: I asked earlier about the commencement of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, particularly in respect of section 32B. I think the Taoiseach indicated that the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has not been established but it has been established. It was announced to have been established in 2016. Section 32B is not dependent on the authority. The section concerns how to deal with clinical negligence issues. The very heart of the Vicky Phelan case and the cases before the State Claims Agency were cases against the State. The idea around section 32B was to prevent that kind of trauma and to give tools to the State

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Claims Agency to settle early, to provide for disclosure of medical and all other records and to work towards an early resolution. The Minister is obliged to work with other Ministers and other agencies to bring about pre-action protocols. This has not happened. It was suggested yesterday at a meeting of the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach that if this section had been commenced, things might have been different. I am not saying definitively that they would have been different but they might have been different and a different approach might have been taken to these cases - from the State's perspective at any rate. We are good at empathy and rhetoric but very poor at seeing through what we have committed to in legislation. The Act was signed into law in December 2015. It is now May 2018. That key section dealing with how the State deals with people who have cases against it has not been commenced. Does that not go to the heart of the problem and cut across all the rhetoric we have heard in the past two weeks? We and the public need and are entitled to some explanation as to why that section has not been commenced. The programme for Government promised mandatory disclosure. That did not happen. I understand why people become sceptical about commitments that are made when the evidence is that the follow through leaves an awful lot to be desired even in respect of legislation passed by the Oireachtas.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I do not accept what the Deputy has said. This is part of a major reform of our civil liability law in respect of personal injuries. The Legal Services Regulation Act is coming into force on a progressive basis. The section to which the Deputy referred is Part 15 of that Act. I accept that it has not yet been commenced but it is one of a number of reforms that are being progressively rolled out. It will involve a major change in the manner in which these actions are dealt with. It will be incumbent upon the parties to sit down pre-action or pre-trial. From speaking to the recently established authority that appointed a chief executive officer last year, my understanding is that the commencement order will be made prior to the summer recess. These new reforming protocols can take place at the earliest opportunity and this year.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The programme for Government contains a range of commitments to young people, their schools and their communities. The collapse of Carillion has had a negative effect on these commitments on two fronts. First, schools building projects awarded to the Carillion consortium face indefinite delay, despite some work being near completion. These are not the only projects stalled as a result of the company's collapse. Projects awarded to Sammon are also in jeopardy. In my constituency our local GAA club, Naomh Fionnbarra, was directly affected with subcontractors walking off site in January due to non-payment. There is less than two weeks' work left to complete with just a pitch to be laid - a pitch which is sitting in the subcontractor's warehouse - and minor fencing and lighting work to be completed. It was hoped that with Sammon, the main contractor, now in examinership a speedy resolution could be found. However, I learned yesterday that the Minister for Education and Skills has, in effect, fired Sammon and now intends to retender for this minor work, delaying its completion for at least another four months. That work would take literally days to complete. I ask the Taoiseach if the Minister for Education and Skills can reconsider this decision to retender and instead find a more reasonable, more proportionate and timelier solution.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): One of these companies has gone into liquidation and the other has gone into examinership. My Department is working with all the interests involved to try to secure the quickest completion of those buildings possible. In some cases, we obviously need to sit down with the examiner to see if the latter can make a commitment to complete the work. The Department will take a decision based on the

best interests of the school in dealing with the examiner and with the National Development Finance Agency, NDFA.

Carillion is involved through a public private partnership. Under the terms of that partnership, it is not the State that has the obligation to complete the works, it is the Dutch Investment Fund, DIF, the contracting party. It is for the latter to issue the tenders. It has made a call for tenders and has yet to make a decision. The State's financial position is protected. We have to work with the authorities in both cases - the examiner appointed by the courts or the remaining shareholder in Carillion - to try to secure the best interests for children. That is what we are doing.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We talked about reforming the law. I think there is consensus in the House on modernising our harassment laws, which have not been updated since the era of the text message. I refer to issues such as stalking, cyberbullying and revenge porn. I understand the Cabinet discussed the matter this week and has agreed to proceed with a Bill I introduced and which passed Second Stage last year. These matters are the cause of grave concern in the broader community, particularly in respect of young victims of cyberbullying, which is a really serious issue. How is it envisaged that this Bill will be progressed? Is it intended to go to committee speedily? My office has already been in touch with the Department of Justice and Equality and we would be delighted to facilitate the early passage of the Bill.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Deputy Howlin is quite correct. It is important legislation. My Department has been progressing matters in recent months. I acknowledge the importance and the assistance of the Deputy's Private Members' Bill - one of more than 20 Private Members' Bills on my desk in the Department. Rather than engage in any action that might be seen to be doubling up, yesterday I recommended to my Government colleagues that we would accept the content of Deputy Howlin's Bill and use that as a platform for legislation. I would be very happy to engage directly with Deputy Howlin. I ask him to accept, perhaps, that his Bill is not perfect-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Of course.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: -----but it does amount to the basis for what will be an urgent and important change in legislation. I would be happy to engage bilaterally with the Deputy with a view towards advancing matters before the end of this term.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I want to raise the jailing of Irish families at the request of receiver Paul McCann of Grant Thornton. A mother was jailed on Friday last for alleged contempt of court for failing to surrender her family home. This is day six and she is refusing food. The receiver's actions came at the end of last week when, by agreement, the valuers for the vulture fund, Grant Thornton receivers and the owner were in discussions to resolve the issue. Late last Friday evening the High Court ordered the retention of the woman in the detention centre in Mountjoy Prison. This is day six and the woman is refusing food. She has two teenage children.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Promised legislation.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is promised legislation about our banking system and our courts system. European law does not allow judges to jail citizens in this way. The Supreme Court in April of this year heard an appeal on this very issue, where the human rights organisations also joined in to highlight this unlawful behaviour of the State in the manner of how

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people are jailed at the request of banks, vulture funds and the Irish State. The decision of the Supreme Court is awaited. What is going on? In the meantime, this person is still in jail. She has two teenage daughters at home, being minded by family. Will the Taoiseach make a statement on the matter?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is there promised legislation?

The Taoiseach: No legislation is promised.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: There is current legislation. It should not be happening in our country.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: It is not the practice, as I am sure the House will appreciate, to comment on individual cases, the facts of which are not particularly clear. I know that on the last occasion Deputy Mattie McGrath made a similar allegation, it turned out to be factually incorrect.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: When was that?

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I do not think it is either fair or reasonable to ask a Minister to comment on an individual case before the courts.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is not incorrect; it is factual.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are other ways of dealing with this. I call Deputy Eamon Ryan on behalf of the Green Party.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Like earlier speakers, I welcome the decision by Google and Facebook to restrict advertising. Each company is doing it a different way and, as the Taoiseach stated earlier, while it is too late, it is still welcome that it is being done. It is clear these companies are making these decisions because there is a legislative gap in that our electoral Acts do not set out in clear terms what the rules are around electronic and digital advertising in comparison to some of the other regulations we have put in place. On that basis, does the Government plan to introduce legislation which will set out what the rules could and should be? Will Fine Gael lead the way? I believe that, to date, the Government has refused to answer the question I asked a number of months ago as to what each party here spends on Facebook advertising, in a spirit of transparency and honesty regarding political advertising, of which we are all in support. Will the Government provide those figures and will it legislate to regulate online advertising in political elections and referendums?

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I thank the Deputy. We had discussed this at a previous meeting of the Government in regard to what potential new changes have to be brought in to take into account new ways of advertising and of promoting oneself in public life in regard to elections and referendums. My Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, under the Minister, Deputy Naughten, are both responsible in this area. We are looking at what future changes may be needed in advance of another general election or referendum and that work continues between our two Departments.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Last year, the Minister for Education and Skills set up a working group to conduct a review into the GMIT Mayo campus. It produced its report in December of last year and, as part of that report, an external facilitator was supposed to be appointed to over-

see the implementation of the recommendations and a head of campus was to be put in place. The head of campus position was advertised in February but that has now collapsed. We still have no head of campus and no external facilitator, and not one of the recommendations in that report has yet been implemented. When will the report be implemented, when we will have a head of campus and when will we have an external facilitator to oversee the implementation of that report?

Deputy Richard Bruton: I will have to get back to the Deputy to give her a report on that.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: As we all know, the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill is going through the Chamber at present. In the last couple of days, much ado has been made by the transport Minister and Minister of State of some public transport being put in place in rural parts of the country. It is ridiculous to think that eight routes in Kerry are supposed to meet the needs of all the rural people who will be isolated in their homes following the passage of this Bill. For example, one route is to take people from Castlegregory to Clahane once a month to play a game of cards.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot go into detail. We know what the issue is.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I want the Taoiseach to answer me honestly.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is not funny.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Does the Taoiseach stand over a remark made by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport that I am a road traffic terrorist like the rest of my gang?

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I am not sure if Deputy Danny Healy-Rae welcomes it but I know his brother has not welcomed the scheme. He did, however, welcome it on Radio Kerry. He said even if there is one route in one part of Kerry he would welcome it once a week. Now in May he is not welcoming it.

It is a very positive initiative by the Minister, Deputy Ross. It is a pilot.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: A pilot is right.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: That is why there is one route in the month to explore the further roll-out of this initiative.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Even a pilot is not safe when he drinks.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: It is a major step forward in terms of rolling out in rural Ireland----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Given the condition of the roads he would probably need a pilot.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Pontius Pilate.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: ----the type of transport services that are available in urban parts of Ireland.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Once a month is not a route.

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Deputy Brendan Griffin: It is a very progressive step. I welcome it and I look forward to the initiation of the pilot-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Pontius Pilate.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: -----and exploring how it is working and hope for its further roll-out around the country.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: When the Bill has been pushed through there will be no more pilot. That is what it will mean. It is a shame to think that once a month there will be people going to play cards and that will be classified as a route. The Minister of State is letting down the people of Kerry and rural Ireland.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: The Deputy is taking it out on the people of Kerry.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: When he was a member of the transport committee he posed very hard questions to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport but now that he is after getting a few bob and is a junior Minister he is standing behind him.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will have to suspend the House. I expect more from the Minister of State.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: The Deputy is the one letting them down.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Deputy Griffin will get the blame.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister of State should be restraining himself.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I want the Deputy to have respect for the Chair not the individual and I want the same from the Minister of State. Several other Members want to ask questions and we are not going to play the Kerry game here. It will be played in Croke Park.

In fairness to the Ministers this-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am sorry but he rose me.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sorry is too late. I want to remind Deputies-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: I think we should respect the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I am sitting next to one of the most cerebral Members from Kerry, Deputy Brassil. He never causes any difficulty.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: Whatever Kerry could be called it could not be cerebral.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Chair cannot guarantee satisfactory answers. Deputies should remember that.

Deputy Michael Creed: He cannot guarantee satisfactory questions either.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: Is it the State's intention to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Irish Defence Forces' involvement in United Nations, UN, peacekeeping missions this year? Our Defence Forces have been participating in UN-led missions since 1958. Will the

anniversary be celebrated nationally this year?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy for his brevity.

The Taoiseach: There are plans to mark 60 years of service by the Irish Defence Forces in peacekeeping operations around the world. I do not know the detail of them. It is a unique matter of great pride for Ireland that during those 60 years there was not one day on which a member of the Irish Defence Forces was not serving on a UN peacekeeping mission.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle might have to call for peacekeepers to keep Deputy Healy-Rae happy.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: That is a scandalous thing to say; it is disgraceful. He should respect the peacekeepers and what they do.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister is a longstanding Member and knows he has to avoid attracting interruptions.

I call Deputy O’Keeffe who I know will abide by the rules.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: An amendment to the nursing homes support scheme will allow the elderly to be cared for at home as long as they meet the fair deal criteria and costs are not excessive. In budget 2018 there was a promise of action in this area. What is the up to date story?

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Is the Deputy querying the fair deal scheme or the home help scheme?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Fair deal.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: I referred to an extension of the fair deal scheme.

Deputy Jim Daly: That is not happening. A statutory home help scheme is being put in place. Consultation has concluded on that and a report is due in the next week or two. It is separate to the fair deal scheme, which will continue to be implemented as it is. We will have a separate scheme to put home help on a similar statutory footing as the fair deal scheme.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: On a fair deal basis.

Deputy Jim Daly: It will be similar to the fair deal scheme but it will not be connected to the fair deal scheme, which is a stand-alone scheme.

Deputy Michael Collins: On pages 112 and 113 of A Programme for a Partnership Government, under the agriculture heading, the Government stated that farm families and rural communities must feel the effects of positive economic and social change. The reality is that many farm families are under serious financial pressure due to the fodder crisis. Some cannot pay many of their bills. The association of agricultural contractors claims that many farmers, due to the reduced cashflow, are unable to pay contractors for work carried out last year. Will the Government introduce a dedicated fund to help farmers pay outstanding debts as a result of this crisis?

While I have the floor, the Taoiseach did not answer Deputy Danny Healy-Rae’s question. We were called road traffic terrorists.

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An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae is well able to defend himself.

Deputy Michael Collins: Is the Taoiseach standing over what the Minister, Deputy Ross, called us last week?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am sure Deputy Healy-Rae is well able to defend himself.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He did not get an answer.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will find another opportunity-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: They all-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, on agriculture.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Deputy made reference to the crisis that occurred on some individual farms due to the prolonged period of bad weather and fodder shortages. The Department's response was appropriate and measured at all times, given what was a dynamic and changing situation. We have also introduced a widely availed of €150 million loan scheme at an interest rate of 2.59%. We are developing a further financial product accessible by and geared to the investment needs of farmers and fishermen. We also have to recognise the particular disadvantage of farmers eligible for the areas of natural constraint, ANC, scheme payments. We have provided an additional €25 million in 2018 for payments that will be targeted specifically at those who suffer the most disadvantage in respect of ANC classification.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I refer to new regulations on open disclosure announced by the Minister of Health, Deputy Harris. I have a copy of the letter the Taoiseach sent at the end of March thanking Mr. Tony O'Brien and his colleagues in the HSE for the work they did during Storm Emma. There is nothing wrong with that. At the bottom of the letter is a special handwritten note that the Taoiseach had sent to "Tony", thanking him for his work during a difficult period. He also stated he hoped that Mr. O'Brien would still be available to the public service after he retired from the HSE. It was signed "Leo". Is it still the Taoiseach's view that a chief executive officer who leaves his job in disgrace should be encouraged back into the public service?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Questions on promised legislation.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Does he think the women of Ireland would thank him for encouraging a man who is leaving his job-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Imelda Munster: -----in disgrace? Does the Taoiseach stand over that special handwritten note on his letter-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have got the gist.

Deputy Imelda Munster: -----and is that still his belief?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does the Taoiseach wish to respond?

The Taoiseach: I stand over my letter and remarks thanking the HSE and indeed the head of the HSE for the work done during Storm Ophelia and Storm Emma. People in the health service from top to bottom and all the way across did an exemplary job. There are no proposals for Tony O'Brien to have any public service role after he retires from his current position.

Deputy James Lawless: We have already heard today about the announcements made by Facebook and Google and the regulation of posters and printed materials has been raised. Such materials are regulated under the Electoral Act 1992. However, 1992 is a long way from 2018 in political and Internet terms. That is why I introduced the Online Advertising and Social Media (Transparency) Bill 2017 into this House last November. I suggest that were that Bill in force now, we would not need all these voluntary announcements from the technology giants two weeks before a seminal vote.

That Bill is progressing, albeit slowly. I understand it has started the process of committee scrutiny and the Government is now coming onboard with the Bill, according to various recent announcements and media reports. That is welcome. I will engage constructively with the Government, as I am sure will the committee. I look forward to progressing it but will the Minister for Justice and Equality advise on the timetable for the next stage of that Bill?

Deputy Charles Flanagan: On the Data Protection Bill 2018 that is currently before the House-----

Deputy James Lawless: No, the Online Advertising and Social Media (Transparency) Bill 2017.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: -----the Deputy will be aware that there is an international EU deadline of 24 May. We are on target for that and I wish to acknowledge the co-operation of the House on this important reforming legislation. The issue raised by Deputy Lawless is broader and I want to acknowledge his contribution, particularly his Private Members' Bill, in respect of it. An interdepartmental committee, chaired by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, has met on a number of occasions. I have stated previously that the views of Deputy Lawless would be very welcome at that group. I understand that his Bill is currently before it. I welcome his interest in this issue, which is entirely constructive and helpful.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I brought forward a Private Members' motion on behalf of Fianna Fáil regarding the Government's response to the flooding in Donegal and the promises it made to the effect that it would provide flood relief measures, particularly to the town of Burnfoot. The Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Boxer Moran, commented that following on from the catchment flood risk assessment management, CFRAM, report, funding would be available to deal with flood management issues in Burnfoot. Will the Taoiseach intervene and ensure that funding is forthcoming? In the aftermath of the CFRAM report, no funding has been allocated to Burnfoot. For the residents of those estates who lost their homes, which are still boarded up, and also for the businesses that were flooded and whose owners are living in fear that the same might happen again, it is absolutely crucial that flood relief measures are delivered for the village.

The Taoiseach: Work by the OPW on Burnfoot is ongoing. It is hoped that we can make a decision on that in the near future. Just last week, Minister of State Moran and I announced almost €250 million of investment in flood relief works over the next three years, covering 118 projects. Burnfoot is not one of those projects but it can be added to the list. I understand the

work is still ongoing.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: My question is for the Minister for Education and Skills and it relates to the survivors of historical child sex abuse at Creagh Lane national school in Limerick and other schools. These people have been denied compensation in respect of the awful abuse inflicted on them by their teacher, who has been convicted in court, due to the prior complaint requirement imposed by this Government's interpretation, or misinterpretation, of the Louise O'Keeffe judgment. Will the Government now drop that unfair requirement and allow these people to access compensation for the awful abuse they suffered while attending these schools?

Deputy Richard Bruton: In the Louise O'Keeffe case, the legal advice to the Government was that prior notice is required. We have set up an *ex gratia* payment scheme under which a number of applications have been made. Some have been paid out but we have also made provision for an appeal mechanism. Mr. Justice O'Neill is receiving those appeals and will be scrutinising them. Among those appeals are some of the issues raised by the Deputy as to the legal basis of the case being made by Government.

Deputy John Brassil: I apologise to An Leas Cheann-Comhairle for the roaring and shouting of my colleagues from Kerry. I can assure him that it is not the way all-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will deal with that issue in my own good time.

Deputy John Brassil: -----Kerry Deputies behave. In the case of the Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Griffin, it was a most uncharacteristic outburst.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State has apologised.

Deputy John Brassil: In the case of Deputy Danny Healy-Rae, what else would we expect?

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I missed that.

Deputy John Brassil: Under the programme for Government and the promise to-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The clock is ticking. The Deputy should use his time.

Deputy John Brassil: -----improve the healthcare available to our citizens, can I ask the Taoiseach, and perhaps the Minister for Health, if there are any plans to remove the *in loco parentis* clause for parents receiving private home care packages? This clause is causing great hardship and is unworkable.

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I thank Deputy Brassil for the calm manner in which he raises issues. This is an important matter and it is causing concern for many parents. The Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, is engaging with the HSE on this matter and I will ask him to provide the Deputy with an update directly.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: On the answer to the Kerry problem here, perhaps a special hour every week for the Kerry Members on their own would answer the problem.

On page 105 of the programme for Government there is a commitment to ensuring that “every young person is enabled to reach their full potential”. Juvenile arthritis is holding back up to 1,500 young Irish people from leading full and vibrant lives. I understand that the World Health Organization recommends six rheumatologists for a population of 4.7 million but in Ireland, we only have two. The Irish Children’s Arthritis Network is a volunteer charity supporting children who are living with juvenile idiopathic arthritis and their families in Ireland. The charity informs me there were 793 children waiting to see a consultant rheumatologist as 2017 drew to a close. It also revealed that the national average waiting time in 2014 was 125 days, which had increased by 2016 to 169 days. I understand that some children have had to wait for up to three years for service. By international averages we should have six rheumatologists for 4.7 million, but we only have two. We should have at least six.

The Taoiseach: There are currently two consultant rheumatologists who care for children with juvenile chronic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and similar conditions. They have been relieved of their duties to look after adult patients in order that they can now concentrate full-time on paediatric patients. The Deputy is quite correct. The international guidelines suggest that we should have six full-time consultant paediatric rheumatologists. We now only have two. It is intended as part of the HSE service plan for next year to approve the appointment of a third and then move on from there. We will not get four in a year, unfortunately.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: All in this House will agree that Ireland has a housing problem. Many constituents call to my constituency office to complain that they cannot get planning permission to build their dream house because of local needs. If one looks at the advertising in newspapers, the first thing one sees is “subject to planing permission” and then the dreaded words “local needs”. I do not think it is fair to stop people living in the countryside. People nowadays will commute to the nearby towns and cities. I live in County Louth, where a home house has to be within a certain radius of the site. In my neighbouring county, County Monaghan, they cannot wait to get people to come and live in the countryside. My questions to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, are whether we can get rid of local needs provisions and whether we are breaking European law by using the words “local needs”.

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I thank the Deputy for the question. I have no role in individual planning decisions made by local authorities. In Project Ireland 2040, we have signalled some new aspirations for the country concerning where and how we build our houses. There have been some changes and some comments at the European level that are being reflected upon by the Department at the moment but until such time as those new guidelines come into place, the current guidelines are the law.

Deputy Martin Kenny: Last week I visited Sligo University Hospital. While there, the manager told me about the recruitment of senior staff. It is an issue all over the country. It can take up to nine months for public hospitals because of the recruitment process and the various stages they have to go through with the HSE, whereas a voluntary hospital can carry out exactly the same recruitment of a senior consultant in nine weeks. There is a serious problem here. I was told of a case where a similar post was advertised by a public hospital and by a voluntary hospital. The voluntary hospital had the staff member in place in just over two months, whereas the public hospital took almost a year to do the same. The problem was not that the staff were not available, it was the process and the length of time it takes. Can the Minister for Health look at that and come up with a solution, so that when we have staff shortages in our hospitals we can actually fill them quickly?

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Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris: I thank Deputy Martin Kenny. I will indeed take a look at it. The HSE is already looking at how it can streamline its recruitment process. It is worth saying, however, that despite the recruitment challenges, we have more doctors and nurses working in the health services this year than last year and had more last year than the year before. We are always looking at ways to further streamline the process.

Deputy Tom Neville: My question relates to promised legislation concerning the high costs of motor insurance. While I welcome that there has been a decrease of approximately 20% according to the Central Statistics Office, I seek the current position regarding the legislation on the national claims information database. What point has that process reached? When do we expect to complete it, that is, as much as possible in order to put the pressure back on the industry stakeholders to solve this problem?

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Michael D'Arcy): The cost of insurance working group has been working pretty hard on this. The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel is drafting the legislation at present and we hope and expect that the Bill will be published before the end of this session.

Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputies Michael Harty, Joan Collins, Mary Butler and Frank O'Rourke - to discuss the availability of the FreeStyle Libre drug for management of type 1 diabetes; (2) Deputy Niamh Smyth - to discuss investment in the emergency department at Cavan General Hospital; (3) Deputy Dara Calleary - to discuss the reduction by the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland in services at the Mayo Alzheimer's unit in Castlebar; (4) Deputy Charlie McConalogue - the need for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to discuss his decision to introduce electronic tagging on all sheep later this year; (5) Deputy Tom Neville - to consider the upgrade of rural town and village sewerage schemes in rural Ireland and to further foster housing development; (6) Deputy Peter Burke - to discuss the practice by the HSE regarding patients in nursing homes awaiting ward of court procedures; (7) Deputy Marc MacSharry - the need for the Minister for Health to immediately address the lack of adequate personnel in physical and sensory disability services including occupational therapy in the Sligo area, which is now by the admission of management at crisis point, and if he will make a statement on the matter; (8) Deputy John Brassil - to ask the Minister for Education and Skills to reverse the decision to refuse grant aid to Scoil Naomh Erc, Glenderry, Ballyheigue, County Kerry, for the provision of additional accommodation and to ask the Minister to clarify the grounds on which the school is being refused; (9) Deputy Clare Daly - the need to conduct an independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Ann Lovett; (10) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett - to discuss the ongoing crisis in Gaza; (11) Deputy Peadar Tóibín - the investment in mental health services in community healthcare organisation, CHO, area 8; (12) Deputies Jackie Cahill and Eamon Scanlon - the need for the Minister for Finance to explain why the rules and regulations on State procurement contracts offer no protection to local subcontractors in the event of the main contractor being unable to complete the contract as agreed with the State; (13) Deputy Brian Stanley - to discuss with the Minister the plan for St. Francis school, Portlaoise, which is proposed to be situated on the site of former St. Paul's school, Borris Road, Portlaoise; (14) Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - to discuss driving test waiting times in Cork; (15) Deputy

Bríd Smith - the cervical screening scoping inquiry; (16) Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin - the reinstatement of the Coughlanstown Road, Ballymore Eustace, County Kildare; (17) Deputy Mick Wallace - to discuss disbanding the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, immediately; (18) Deputy Robert Troy - to ask the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to explain why an application for a family resource centre and childcare service for McKeown Park, Longford, was refused; (19) Deputy Eugene Murphy - the external independent review of maternity services at Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe; and (20) Deputy Catherine Connolly - the serious crisis that has emerged for Galway students due to the proposed 18% rise in rent in student accommodation, in a city that has designated rent pressure zones, leading to real fears for the students that they will be homeless for the academic year.

The matters raised by Deputies Michael Harty, Joan Collins, Mary Butler and Frank O'Rourke, Peter Burke, Dara Calleary and Richard Boyd Barrett have been selected for discussion.

Business of Dáil

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Can I make a point of order before we start Taoiseach's Questions? It is one addressed to the Leas-Cheann Comhairle or the Ceann Comhairle. It arises out of the data protection legislation that was referenced during the course of questions. We had a briefing for all the individual Members and staff in the House on the implications for Members of the House of the new data protection regime. Unfortunately, that briefing is now entirely redundant because the Bill has been substantially amended. I ask for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission to arrange for a full briefing for Members and staff on the implications once the final Bill is enacted.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will give the Minister for Justice and Equality the opportunity to reply.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I would very happy to so engage. I think it is important. My officials in the Department of Justice and Equality might be involved in an all-party briefing.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I believe it should be the commission that organises it.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I know that the Houses have engaged outside private consultants-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Yes.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: -----to engage in briefings for Members. I would have thought it appropriate that my officials and I might be involved. I would be very happy to take on board the suggestion of Deputy Howlin, if indeed I can take it as a suggestion. Maybe I will make early contact with the Leas-Cheann Comhairle's offices and we can arrange this on an all-party and independent basis.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I can assure the Deputy that I will bring it to the attention of the commission.

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Ceisteanna - Questions

International Relations

1. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach further to the reply from the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to Parliamentary Question No. 21 of 25 January 2018, the status of the proposal to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025. [19091/18]

The Taoiseach: Plans to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025 are advancing. As I have previously stated, that does not necessarily mean a doubling of agencies, embassies, staff or budget – though we are and will be expanding these where appropriate. It means taking the steps necessary to double our impact around the world. The exercise will enhance Ireland's visibility globally, extending our international influence. It will position us for trade and investment growth in new and existing markets. This is especially important as the UK leaves the European Union.

It will also benefit our citizens when travelling or living abroad and will support deeper engagement with our diaspora, including through new and creative platforms.

It will help showcase our culture to the world, and better communicate the benefits of living, working and studying in Ireland.

The Government has already taken a number of important steps to deliver this goal, including through the decision to open new embassies in Chile, Colombia, Jordan and New Zealand, as well as consulates general in Vancouver and Mumbai.

In support of a strategic approach to deepening engagement with Germany, the Tánaiste recently published a review entitled "Ireland in Germany: A Wider and Deeper Footprint", making important recommendations, including opening a new consulate in Frankfurt, the financial capital of the eurozone.

In addition, during my visit to the United States for the St. Patrick's Day period, I indicated our intention to expand and reinforce our footprint there, including through advancing our economic and other interests on the west coast. I also announced Global Ireland, an initiative to help us communicate in a more coherent, compelling and streamlined way to an international audience. The Government has also provided additional resources to our enterprise agencies, including to enhance the support they offer to Irish businesses impacted by Brexit. Work on the initiative, which involves all relevant Departments and agencies with an international presence or dimension to their work, is continuing and I expect that the Government will announce further steps towards its delivery in the coming weeks.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. Having seen close at hand the work of our diplomats and international agencies, I have always supported the significant extension of our international reach and, indeed, during more straitened times, managed to do so as Minister for Foreign Affairs. When we open new embassies and representative offices, there is a direct and continuous benefit to Ireland and our people. What is missing in the plan to increase our international reach is a strategic approach to achieving this. We must have focused priorities and be clear in setting out what we are trying to achieve. Previous expansions in China and Asia, in particular during the late 1990s when we developed the first Asia strategy,

have borne much fruit. I recall as a former Minister with responsibility for enterprise putting pressure on a reluctant IDA to set up an office in China as we have to put roots down and may not get a return for a significant period afterwards. Those expansions were accompanied by cross-governmental strategies which set out specific targets and ongoing objectives from agriculture to industry as well as political objectives.

Immediately after the Brexit referendum, we were promised a detailed study of its staffing implications for the Civil Service and public service generally. What is the status of this study? Given the fact that there must be a training and development period before new recruits can operate at a high level, the obvious question is whether current recruitment is at a high enough level to fill the positions being created in time to deal with Brexit. What specific international models is the Government seeking to follow? Is it a case of expanding what we do or is there an intention to try new models, for example the way Scandinavian states frequently share facilities to reduce the cost of consular activities and support services? Has an assessment been undertaken on staff in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Taoiseach who are now required to work on Brexit? Have staff numbers already been increased and is the Taoiseach satisfied that the expertise required is available? Are there plans to increase staff in the Brexit area in the near future?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach announced the global Ireland 2025 plan in Toronto last August and said at the time that it would be published by the end of 2017. That did not happen. The Tánaiste then said in January that it would be launched over the course of the St. Patrick's Day events in the USA. That did not happen either. Nobody here will argue with the intended outcomes, which we are told are to attract greater investment to Ireland, build tourism and trade, build stronger links with the diaspora and increase cultural exchange. Those are all very good aims which Sinn Féin supports. An increased diplomatic presence around the world will no doubt increase the likelihood of delivering on those very goals. Does the Taoiseach now have a definitive timeframe in mind to put the details of the plan in place and for its rolling-out? What additional supports will agencies like the IDA and Fáilte Ireland receive? These are particularly important and appropriate in the context of Brexit. When will the planned new embassies in Chile, Colombia, Jordan and New Zealand be up and running?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We need a strategic view of what doubling Ireland's global footprint by 2025 actually means. Is it specifically looking at regions we need to invest in, beefing up existing embassies and-or establishing the embassies which have been announced? As Deputy McDonald said, the Taoiseach announced new embassies for Wellington in New Zealand, Santiago in Chile, Bogota in Colombia and Oman in Jordan, none of which has actually opened yet. When is it envisaged that they will open? The Taoiseach has indicated that a new consulate general will open in Frankfurt and that our footprint on the west coast of the USA will be increased. In the latter stages of the previous Government, of which we were both members, we increased our footprint in Asia. Looking at China, we opened a consulate general in Hong Kong to supplement the consulate already established in Shanghai and the embassy in Beijing. We also opened a new embassy in Jakarta and a consulate in Austin, Texas.

Strategically, what is the Taoiseach's intention? It would be interesting to have a view on that. Is it the general view that new and existing embassies should migrate to the "Ireland House" structure where Bord Bia, the IDA and other bespoke Irish agencies are housed in a single centre?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: President Donald Trump is very dangerously banging the

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drums of war against Iran, supported enthusiastically by Saudi Arabia, a nasty little dictatorship, and Israel.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: A big dictatorship.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: A big dictatorship, and Israel. He is seeking to isolate Iran, impose sanctions and escalate a dangerous conflict in the Middle East. Many countries which are signatories of the nuclear deal with Iran are, rightly, rejecting what President Trump is saying and contending that the deal should be maintained. It is important in this context for Ireland to nail its colours to the mast on this. One way of doing so would be to restore an Irish embassy to Iran. There have been calls to do so independently of the current situation by the Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers' Association and the Iranians are very keen on it also. They have even offered to provide the building in Tehran. All they want is diplomats to be sent over. Iran has very many questions to answer about its policies in Syria and other parts of the Middle East, but we have embassies with many questionable regimes, including, for example, the Saudis and Israel, which has refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty while Iran has. It is important, as this conflict is being escalated by Trump, that we send a message that we are not engaging in a confrontation with Iran. Reestablishing an Irish embassy in Tehran would be one way to do so and it would also have economic benefits for this country.

The Taoiseach: The intention is to do exactly what Deputy Martin advocates, namely put in place a strategic plan approved by the Government. Our new target is to publish it before the summer recess. The idea behind this is to expand our embassy and agency presence around the world according to a plan rather than in the *ad hoc* way it has happened in more recent years. Draft versions of the document exist but I am not entirely happy with them. I am happy with what has been put forward by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the different agencies, but the existing draft is a bit weak when it comes to the permanent representation. We will have to increase our presence in Brussels to a considerable extent in the absence of the support and alliance of the UK there. We will be the only common law country in the EU and will have to build up new alliances. As such, we will have to increase the permanent representation. We will also have to look at the UK itself. When it is outside the EU, we will need to find new ways to maintain the bilateral relationship. The possibility exists of opening consulates in regional cities. For example, we may reopen the consulate in Cardiff.

Having read the draft, it occurred to me that it was not strong enough on areas like culture, education and connectivity. Our culture, arts, dance, music and literature are often the window through which a lot of people see Ireland for the first time, in particular in Asia and Africa. It is an area which needs to be strengthened. We can also be more ambitious around international education to encourage more international students to study here. There is also an opportunity to build on the success we have had to date on connectivity. Only a couple of years ago, there were no direct flights to the west coast of the USA whereas we now have flights to Seattle, San Francisco and LA. Direct flights to two cities in China will also commence this summer. The draft is strong on embassies and agencies but, as already noted, perhaps it is not strong enough in the context of the other aspects relating to expanding our global footprint, namely, culture, education and connectivity. However, I believe we will get there over the next couple of weeks.

A staff census of the different agencies and Departments is done as part of the document. In terms of the models we have been examining, we have been looking at other small countries such as Denmark, which is a similar size to ours but which has many more suits and boots on the ground for what it does through its diplomats and agencies. Interestingly, Denmark is par-

ing that back whereas we are going in the other direction and expanding. We have not planned to share with other countries. I had not even thought of that but it is not part of the plan at present.

It is intended to have more Ireland House establishments but that depends on where they should be. For example, one of the potential locations for a new Ireland House would be Tokyo in Japan. However, that would not make sense in countries such as Germany where the political capital is Berlin but where the economic activity is in Frankfurt. It does not make sense to put an Ireland House in Berlin. Similarly, in Australia, the political capital is Canberra but the business, tourism and other markets are in Sydney and Melbourne. It makes sense in some countries but not in others.

On Brexit, I am satisfied that we have adequate staff in the Departments of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs and Trade and across the various agencies. However, we must keep a watching brief on that because, as matters develop, we might need to respond to Brexit in different ways.

The new embassies in Chile, New Zealand, Jordan and Colombia and the consulates in Los Angeles, Vancouver and Mumbai will all open either this year or next year. We are also going to upgrade the existing office in Liberia to embassy status and expanding in Austin from one person to two. All of this is under way. In Chile, an ambassador-designate has already been appointed.

Doubling our global footprint means doubling our impact. It is done through a combination of measures and does not mean necessarily doubling offices, budgets and staff. It means doubling our impact by a combination of increases in staff, budgets and offices and things such as education and culture.

The Government supports the Iran nuclear agreement. We believe it has helped to stabilise that region and has slowed down, if not stopped, Iran's nuclear enrichment programme. We are aligned with our EU allies, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, in their support for the agreement. The Trump Administration has made a policy mistake in resiling from the agreement. I expect we will discuss it next week in Bulgaria at the informal meeting of EU Heads of State and Government. The Tehran embassy is under consideration again. We had an embassy there for a long time but it was one of the embassies shut during the financial crisis. As it is an expanding economy with a big population and it is an expanding regional power it is definitely on the list for consideration for an embassy in the future.

Departmental Staff Data

2. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach the overall number of staff employed in his Department in 2018 compared with 2017. [19096/18]

3. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on staffing levels in his Department. [19723/18]

4. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff employed in his Department in the past 12 months. [20061/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 2 to 4, inclusive, together.

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There are currently 207.5 whole-time equivalent staff working in my Department. This compares with 203.5 whole-time equivalent staff on 31 December 2017.

My Department is structured around seven main work areas. The breakdown of posts currently in each of these areas is as follows: 29 posts in the international, EU and Northern Ireland division; 25 posts in the economic division; 27 posts in the Government secretariat, protocol and general division and the parliamentary liaison unit; 16 posts in the social policy and public service reform division; 33 posts in the corporate affairs division; nine posts in the information and records management unit; and 18 posts in the Government Information Service. The latter includes the press office and the strategic communications unit, which is currently in transition to a new arrangement. There has already been a reduction of three staff, or 14%, in this area in recent weeks.

The remainder of posts in my Department include services staff and those in the private offices, constituency offices and internal audit.

My Department uses workforce planning and succession planning to ensure there are sufficient staffing resources in place to deliver the Department's strategic goals.

With the exception of politically appointed staff such as special advisers, staff assignments, appointments and recruitment in my Department are dealt with by the Secretary General and senior management.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Micheál Martin is speaking on Deputy Michael Moynihan's question.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. Yesterday, he again refused to acknowledge, let alone answer, some direct questions put to him about major departmental initiatives since he became Taoiseach. Other Members have been accused of filibustering in respect of legislative measures but the record shows that the Taoiseach is filibustering in the context of replying to questions in order to avoid tough topics. However, that is progress from last week, when he just went on the attack to avoid the question.

Can the Taoiseach say why contracts for €2.5 million were signed in opposition to the concrete finding that the strategic communications unit activity should be set by the public, not politicians? In other words, we were told there would be public research and that would inform investment in research. That did not turn out to be the case. Can he confirm that he was not looking for savings in the communications budget of €174 million across the Government because most of that budget had been excluded from the unit's remit? Will he accept that once and for all?

The Taoiseach has been saying for some time that he is to be congratulated for reducing his Department's budget. Can he outline the policy changes that have generated these savings? Are they substantive policy changes or simply variations in the usual annual changes in allocations for tribunals, for example, and for other matters which he does not actually control? Will he outline the transfer of staff back to Iveagh House from the European Union division or has there been such a transfer? What savings are reflected in his budget as a result of that transfer?

Last July, the Taoiseach announced that he was reviewing the work of his Department and that he would make his intentions clear once this review had been completed. What is the status of this review and is it near completion?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The international, EU and Northern Ireland division of the Department of the Taoiseach is the lead section for the Brexit negotiations and for matters pertaining to the North. Can the Taoiseach provide a breakdown of how many staff are assigned to each strand of this work in the division? How many people are assigned to the EU-Brexit responsibility and how many are assigned to work on matters pertaining to the North? Will he also indicate what the division of responsibility is within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in respect of both of these areas?

We touched on issues pertaining to the institutions in the North yesterday and the Taoiseach made some remarks in that regard. I wish to raise a couple of issues with him on foot of what was said. First, Sinn Féin is absolutely committed to getting the institutions back up and running. We have met the Government and the British Government in recent weeks and emphasised that point to both. The fact remains, however, that, after 14 months of negotiation and having reaching a draft agreement or accommodation, the DUP balked at dealing with language rights, marriage equality and implementing agreements on legacy issues. It has, in effect, checked out of power-sharing. This is due to its pact with the Tories, which is now the greatest obstacle to the restoration of the Northern Ireland institutions.

The British Government fails to confront the DUP's anti-rights agenda in order to protect its own narrow interests. The British Government has a responsibility under the Good Friday Agreement to deal with the rights issues at the heart of this political impasse. These issues are not going away and they must be addressed. In that context, it is incumbent on both Governments to convene the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference to provide a framework for the resolution of these outstanding issues and for the honouring of agreements. I acknowledge the efforts of the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in requesting that this happen. The time for the British Government stalling because of its pact with the DUP is over. It must act.

What conversations has the Taoiseach had with the British Government and the Prime Minister, Mrs. May, in respect of convening the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference? That must happen as a matter of urgency. For all of us who are committed to the re-establishment of power-sharing and the institutions, I need not state the urgency and necessity for the intergovernmental conference to meet without delay.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Brendan Howlin, who is speaking in Deputy Burton's place.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle will be glad to hear that I will be very brief. I wish to ask just three questions of the Taoiseach, if I may.

The Taoiseach has been hearing a more pessimistic tone coming from me in respect of what is happening with Brexit. For my own information as much as anything, he might indicate with some clarity the structure of the Brexit team. As I understand it, the team is headed up by a very fine public servant from his Department, Mr. John Callinan, who is the sherpa dealing with these matters in Brussels and reporting directly to the Taoiseach. Will he outline the structure of the team under him and tell me how many are in it?

Economics is obviously a strategic part of the work of the Department of the Taoiseach and across all Departments. As far as I can recall, the Taoiseach does not currently have a specific economics adviser. I think he is the first Taoiseach for some time not to have one. Is it his inten-

tion to appoint such an adviser? I think it is a position that will become increasingly important.

The entire reform agenda was clearly a matter with which I grappled when in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I do not say this in any way to be critical of the current incumbent but it seems that the merger in political responsibility of the Ministries of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform means, in essence, that the reform agenda has slipped back. That is a mistake. Driving reform on a permanent basis is really important. There are big issues emerging such as, for example, Sláintecare. The latter obviously falls primarily within the remit of the Department of Health. However, the Department of the Taoiseach needs to drive the agenda in order to ensure that matters of this nature are dealt with. Is there a component part within his Department in this regard? Is it the economics division or some other part of the strands he has outlined that is seized of and driving a reform agenda to set specific goals across the Government and the public service and to measure accountability?

The Taoiseach: I again wish to place on the record the fact that I try to answer as many questions as I possibly can in the time allowed. However, I think any reasonable person would agree that it takes longer to answer a question than it does to ask it, so there is a substantial imbalance in the time allowed to ask questions and the time provided to answer them. I must admit that I do not always know the answer to the question, particularly when it comes to issues such as staffing or administration, which, in general, are not dealt with by me but by the Secretary General. However, I do endeavour to provide answers in writing to questions. One of the questions that has come up recently concerns the reduction in staff numbers as a consequence of the winding down of the strategic communications unit. As I have indicated today, three staff have already been reassigned. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the same question Deputy McDonald has just asked about the breakdown within the international section between Northern Ireland, EU, Brexit and international affairs. I gave a detailed breakdown in writing to Deputy Micheál Martin in recent days. I am not sure whether he received the reply yet but, if I remember correctly-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Yes, I have. The Taoiseach is short three in the EU division.

The Taoiseach: -----there are approximately ten or 12 in the Northern Ireland section, ten or 12 in the EU section, and a smaller number - six or seven - in the international section.

I explained the €2.5 million in contracts yesterday. There are two streams as to how Government will operate campaigns. There are those that are directed by Government, matters we think people know about such as, for example, Project Ireland 2040. I do not believe it was necessary to carry out a survey as to what people knew about it, particularly before it had been published.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is what the Taoiseach said would be done originally.

The Taoiseach: It made sense to proceed with that and other matters, such as Healthy Ireland, another cross-Government campaign to which this Administration is very committed. We do not need a survey to tell us that people need to know more about the benefits of good health or that they would benefit from good health. However, there are areas of information deficits, and part of the citizens' survey, whenever it is carried out, will be to identify where there are such deficits and where people are not aware of Government policies and programmes. If we repeat that survey every six or 12 months, we will be able to assess whether the campaigns are making a difference in increasing public awareness of these policies and programmes.

I am still very much looking for savings in cross-governmental communications. Even though the strategic communications unit is being wound down, the policy objective of seeking savings across spending on communications by Government and its agencies remains. This is, of course, a matter of different circumstances on different occasions. Semi-State agencies, for example, operate very differently from Government Departments and agencies.

Again, I would very much welcome the convening of the British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference. I have spoken to Prime Minister May about this, both by telephone and in person. I am making arrangements to meet her in Sofia in Bulgaria next week, if she attends. I do not have confirmation yet as to whether she will be in attendance but convening of the British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference is certainly one of the matters I would wish to discuss with her. The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, as the House will be aware, is one of the structures established under the Good Friday Agreement. It provides a mechanism by which the Irish and British Governments may discuss matters relating to the agreement and to Northern Ireland. However, it is wrong to suggest that the intergovernmental conference is a silver bullet. It is not a body that has any authority or executive powers. Merely convening it will not add any further dimension to it that cannot be achieved from a bilateral meeting between the Prime Minister and me, a meeting between the Tánaiste and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or other meetings that happen all the time. I think to convene in this format would be beneficial but it would be wrong to think that merely convening it will produce a result or an outcome as it does not have decision-making powers.

Regarding my advisers, I do not propose to appoint a specific economic adviser at present. I know the appointment of such an adviser has been the practice in the past, so it may be something I do into the future. However, my best economic adviser is Deputy Donohoe, the person I appointed to the roles of Minister for Finance and Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. We meet almost every week to discuss-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Taoiseach might need a second opinion on occasion.

The Taoiseach: -----financial matters and the economy.

In the context of the way I structure the work of my advisers, each holds several portfolios. For example, my chief of staff, who is also one of my policy advisers, covers areas involving the economy, finance and infrastructure. It is a case of getting the balance right. The role of the Taoiseach is to drive Government, drive the implementation of the programme for Government, bring Departments together and ensure there is a cross-Government approach to matters. However, one needs to get the balance right between driving Departments and micromanaging them. That can be difficult. I notice that the criticisms being made of me have shifted from my being too presidential and too overbearing and trying to dominate my Ministers a few months ago to now being accused of the opposite, namely, that I am not overbearing and not managing or not second-guessing them enough. I think people will appreciate why it is never quite possible to get this balance exactly right to everyone's satisfaction.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

5. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Newry on 30 April 2018. [19720/18]

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6. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Warrenpoint on 30 April 2018; and if he held meetings there. [19721/18]

7. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to a school (details supplied). [19722/18]

8. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent meetings in Newry, County Down. [19856/18]

9. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent visit to Warrenpoint port on 30 April 2018. [19914/18]

10. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he met the DUP and Sinn Féin leaders when he visited Northern Ireland on 30 April 2018; and the issues they discussed. [19987/18]

11. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Northern Ireland on 30 April 2018. [20057/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 5 to 11, inclusive, together.

On the afternoon of 30 April, I travelled to Northern Ireland following my attendance at the fourth plenary meeting of the all-island civic dialogue in Dundalk.

I had a number of different engagements during my visit, which was part of my efforts and those of the Government to stay engaged with all parts of society in Northern Ireland.

My first engagement was a visit to New-Bridge integrated college in Loughbrickland. This is one of the integrated education secondary schools in Northern Ireland. During my visit, I met staff and students, including those from both of the main communities in Northern Ireland but also from the new communities there. Often the new communities in Northern Ireland are forgotten or passed over. It was good to see so many people, including so many children, from non-traditional communities attending the school and even working there.

I also visited the Jethro Centre in Lurgan, which is run by the Shankill Parish Caring Association. The centre provides facilities and services on a cross-community basis in the Lurgan area and has received funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I met a group - including children, teachers and community workers - involved in cross-community work and I was given an overview of the work being done by the wide range of projects run from the centre. I also paid a visit to Warrenpoint Harbour where I met business people who are customers of the port and listened to their concerns about the impact and challenges and uncertainties of Brexit for their business.

Overall, my visit proved to be very informative and worthwhile. All the people that I met, from all sides of the community, were very welcoming and I was pleased to have the opportunity to engage with them.

I did not have any meetings with representatives of the political parties in Northern Ireland during my visit. The Northern Ireland Office was notified of my visit in advance, as is standard practice.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Micheál Martin on behalf of Deputy Michael Moynihan.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I welcome that yesterday, the Taoiseach accepted that the lack of working institutions in Northern Ireland is a direct threat to achieving as much as possible in the Brexit negotiations. However, what was surprising is the lack of any urgency in what he said, and there being a significant step away from the strength of calls for actions by the parties which the Taoiseach made earlier this year. Perhaps this is merely a reflection of the Taoiseach's new support base, it is important to look after one's voters.

The absence of the anti-Brexit majority in Northern Ireland from any major discussions happening between the devolved administrations and London causes damage every day. That is something that was made clear by the leaked documents which Sinn Féin published in Brussels last week. Given the scale of the threat posed by the non-functioning institutions and the British Government's refusal to establish the former consultation processes with Dublin used during previous suspensions, it was very surprising that yesterday the Taoiseach said that he has had no conversation with the Prime Minister, Mrs. Theresa May, in the past six weeks. Did he seek a conversation that was rejected by London or is it really the case that in the midst of the twin crises of Brexit and the suspended Belfast institutions, the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister see nothing wrong with failing to speak for six weeks?

I am perfectly willing to believe that a combination of chaos and disinterest in London is the cause but I do not think the Taoiseach will find a period in the past 25 years when a Taoiseach and a Prime Minister went for so long without talking, especially during such a crisis as that of the suspension of Northern institutions or of Brexit.

I note the Taoiseach's earlier comments but I think an intergovernmental conference should have been convened by now. The maximum utilisation of the agreement is imperative. Otherwise elements of the agreement can fall into abeyance. That ultimately brings the agreement itself into disrepute.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I did not know, until I heard the leader of Fianna Fáil make the point, that there had not been communication between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister for six weeks. That is remarkable. At the same time the Taoiseach was visiting communities in the North, and I welcome the details of the visit, the Oireachtas had its session in Dundalk with Michel Barnier. If one looks at what was said there and couples it with what we have seen and heard from London in the last week, it is clear that we are on course for a crash-out Brexit rather than a deal. That is my assessment of where it seems to be going, not what I would want. That is of huge consequence for everyone and should be our political focus, including communications with the British Government. It also calls into question North-South communications and our need to maintain good relations with all parties, representatives and all people on this island during what will be a difficult and bumpy period.

I have one suggestion for the Taoiseach. I understand that on the same day he visited those schools and the people in Warrenpoint, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade was meeting my colleague, the leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland, for the first time. It had proved difficult to set up that meeting. It took time. Worse still is that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland refuses to meet parties such as our own. The Taoiseach once responded to me that there are two tiers of parties in the North, there are the big five to whom the Taoiseach speaks and then the smaller parties. We must get through this incredibly difficult time in Irish history and avoid a continuation of sectarian divisive politics. One of the paths back to talking to unionist and nationalist communities and moving away from the sectarian divide is to start talking to all parties and engaging them in the process. Relying on the big two, or nationalists

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and unionists and the sectarian divide as the inevitable outcome of the Good Friday Agreement, is not clever at this time. Engaging with people such as my colleague, Steven Agnew, MLA, and others will allow us to start breaking down those sectarian barriers and start connecting with the nationalist and unionist community in the North during what could be a very rocky moment in Irish and British history.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I welcome the Taoiseach's visit to the North. I thank him for his report on the visit. I take it that Warrenpoint was chosen specifically with the Brexit dynamic in mind. The significance of the port in Warrenpoint cannot be overstated. It has a growing reputation. Its location is halfway between Dublin and Belfast, and is at the centre of growing trade on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. It is a healthy thing and it would be welcome for the Taoiseach to visit the North as regularly as he can. Unlike others, I do not believe that the Taoiseach must meet party political people all the time, it is not necessary although it is necessary that all the parties are met, including Mr. Agnew and the Green Party, and I see no reason why that should not happen. However, I should say that the reason the institutions are down is not because of a sectarian divide, *per se*, although the North is a State which was created and defined on the basis of a sectarian headcount and the Good Friday Agreement is the vehicle for moving beyond that. The reason the institutions are down is because of a failure by the DUP to really buy into and sign up for power sharing.

We have a set of issues that need to be resolved. We had them resolved in February, to be fair. The accommodation was not perfect from a nationalist perspective but we were convinced that it was enough to move on; the DUP took a different view. That is why I raise the issue of the intergovernmental conference once again. I know there is no silver bullet and nobody has a magic wand in this scenario but I also know that we need a forum, a mechanism and a momentum within which we can sort these matters out and provide a roadmap and the resources necessary for so doing. I also believe that such a mechanism must be within the architecture and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, which is why the intergovernmental conference is so important. I also believe that it should have been convened by this stage. It is very dangerous to allow this to drift. I understand there are tensions from Dublin to London, as well as an obvious and perhaps unavoidable tension, given the broader Brexit politics. I am fully *au fait* with the dynamics between the DUP and the Tories, which are most unhelpful, but we need to sort these issues out and we can. However, if the Taoiseach is not prepared to force the pace on these matters, the Tories will very happily sit back. Some of their leading lights, their hard Brexiteers, would be more than happy to put the Good Friday Agreement through the shredder and I know this because they have stated that very publicly, and when they said it, they meant it. We should take them at their word. I urge the Taoiseach to press this matter very hard with Theresa May and the British Government, namely, that we convene this intergovernmental conference without further delay.

The Taoiseach: There has not been a formal telephone call or meeting between the two of us in about six weeks, nor has there been a request for one in either direction. A meeting is under consideration for next week, if we are both able to be in Sofia at the same time. I will also travel to Romania on the way to Bulgaria to meet the Romanian President as part of the contacts we are building up in the EU on Brexit and other matters. That also will be subject to confirmation. Prime Minister May and I have each other's mobile phone numbers and it is possible for us to contact each other whenever we need to but currently the focus is on negotiations in Brussels and the various Cabinet meetings taking place in the UK to determine their position on the customs union or the customs union partnership and how that might evolve.

The most useful conversation is the one which will be had once the British Government has decided its position on the new customs arrangement. Absent that, it is very hard to make any particular progress at the moment. There are, of course, many other contacts at official level through the ambassador. In recent weeks the Minister for Finance met with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Tánaiste met with David Lidington. Of course we compare notes on what happens at those meetings and what messages are coming across from London to Dublin with regard to where things might go and what the British Cabinet might decide on the customs dilemma, which seems to be taking up a lot of its time.

On the Green Party in Northern Ireland, I certainly regret that it took so long to organise a meeting with the Tánaiste. I am very much of the view that we should engage with all parties in Northern Ireland and I welcome the fact that there are forces in Northern Ireland other than unionist and nationalist forces, including the Alliance Party, the Green Party and also some socialist groups. However, in scheduling meetings we obviously have to have regard to the respective mandate of each party and, whether we like it or not, the DUP and Sinn Féin are very much the largest parties in Northern Ireland and represent the majority of each community respectively. That is a reality of politics in the North.

I was very keen to visit Warrenpoint, particularly because of Brexit as it is, in many ways, a cross-Border port. Some 40% of its trade goes to or comes from south of the Border. It was very interesting to talk to the people who use the port about how they believe customs controls could impact on their businesses, not necessarily or even particularly in the case of a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, but in the case of customs controls between the UK and other parts of the European Union, which could also have a real impact on people's businesses. I also have a personal interest in ports given my happy period as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. I have now visited every port in Ireland bar one. That is one off the list. There is a number of reasons as to why it has not been possible-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Did the Taoiseach visit Galway port?

The Taoiseach: -----to re-establish the Executive and the Assembly in Northern Ireland. Obviously there is the DUP-Sinn Féin dynamic. There is a real trust issue there. There is mistrust between those two parties which is making it extremely difficult to come to an agreement. I am not sure what the two Governments can do to engender trust between the DUP and Sinn Féin but we will certainly do anything we can. The lack of trust is one of the fundamental problems and one of the fundamental reasons why those two parties have not been able to come to agreement, or at least not to an agreement that could stick.

There is obviously also the atmosphere of Brexit, which creates enormous difficulties. It is going to be difficult to get the Assembly and Executive back up and running until we have a clearer idea of the shape of Brexit, of the new relationship between the UK and the European Union, and of how Northern Ireland and the Executive and Assembly fit into it. It is going to be difficult to get the institutions up and running in the next couple of months for that reason. The ongoing renewable heat incentive, RHI, investigation is also part of the backdrop to this. I am, however, confident that it will be possible to have the Executive and the Assembly functioning again. It is very much in the interests of Northern Ireland. All the time when I meet people from Northern Ireland they are so frustrated and so disappointed with the political parties. It is now even a case of a plague on all your houses when talking to many people because they are so disappointed that the institutions are not up and running. As co-guarantor of the agreement, the Government will continue to strive until things are working again.

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Priority Questions

National Orchestras

19. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the findings of the independent review of orchestral services in RTÉ; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20289/18]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Since the foundation of Radio Éireann, long before RTÉ existed, the national broadcaster has had responsibility for both the symphony and concert orchestras. There seems to be some doubt about their future. What are the Minister's views on the findings of the independent review and its proposals? The proposals relate directly to her Department and would have very significant financial consequences for it if they were to be implemented.

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): RTÉ recently published the report it commissioned from independent consultants Helen Boaden and Mediatique on the RTÉ Orchestras, entitled "RTÉ Orchestras: Ensuring a Sustainable Future". The report has recommended, *inter alia*, that the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra should be a national cultural institution in its own right or within the National Concert Hall and that the RTÉ Concert Orchestra should continue to be part of RTÉ, functioning as a classic radio orchestra. This is based on researching the model of symphonic music provision around Europe and the changing environment in which public sector broadcasting now exists.

Both the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and I have welcomed the recommendations of the report and in particular that recommendation dealing with the status of the National Symphony Orchestra. The report offers the opportunity now to plan a way forward for both orchestras while ensuring that they can contribute fully to Ireland's rich cultural heritage.

We have asked officials in our Departments to advance the recommendations of the report as a matter of priority. This will require intense engagement between both our Departments, RTÉ and the National Concert Hall. The concerns of employees of the orchestras will also be to the forefront of considerations and there will need to be significant engagement with them in this regard. I expect to bring an early report to Government to chart a way forward which will include the steps needed to address the recommendations.

This is an exciting time for orchestral music in Ireland with the proposed redevelopment of the National Concert Hall and the Government's ambition under the Creative Ireland programme. Since it opened, the National Concert Hall has been the home of the National Symphony Orchestra and there is now an opportunity for it to play an even stronger role as part of these wider developments. The proposals in this report should be of long-term benefit to the musicians in both orchestras and should help address long-standing concerns about orchestral provision in Ireland.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I would not say that it is an exciting time. I would say that it is a scary time for those involved in the orchestras. They have seen the orchestras starved of cash by RTÉ. Has the Minister discussed with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the failure of RTÉ to fulfil its statutory obligations to establish and maintain orchestras, choirs and other cultural performing groups as laid down in the Broadcasting Act

2009 in recent years? Is she concerned that RTÉ has been starving the orchestras with the hope that the people would have to double-fund them? We will have to fund them through the Minister's Department while already having funded them through the licence fee. Is she concerned that RTÉ is doing this as a trick in order to increase its funding rather than for any other reason?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Aodán Ó Dubhghaill, who is the head of the RTÉ orchestras, has stated that they “have a singular place in Irish musical heritage and have nurtured, through performance and education, generations of world-class musicians.” The report confirms this view while also recognising RTÉ's overall funding position as it plans for the future. These recommendations offer a solution which protects and supports both orchestras while also recognising the balance between RTÉ's financial constraints and its public service role in promoting music, arts and culture. RTÉ is going to give the recommendations full consideration.

As the Deputy is aware, RTÉ is funded by the licence fee in addition to commercial income. Licence fee payers are members of the public, as are taxpayers, and therefore it is the public that pays for orchestral provision and our public service broadcasting. It is now proposed that the Government would fund part of the cost of the National Symphony Orchestra totalling €4 million, with RTÉ continuing to fund the balance. It is also recommended that the National Symphony Orchestra become a stand-alone entity or become part of the National Concert Hall. I am already on record as supporting these recommendations, which will ensure that orchestral music is allowed to grow and flourish once again in Ireland.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Does the Minister not believe it is totally disingenuous of the Government and RTÉ to allow a flagrant breaking of the law when they have a statutory obligation regarding the money that we, as taxpayers, give through the licence fee to maintain the orchestras? They have allowed them to become run down. Their funding has been decreased dramatically in recent years. It seems to me that the Government does not exercise any control over agencies that have statutory obligations laid down by this House.

Is the Minister telling me that, as well as paying our licence fees to fund the two orchestras, we will actually have to pay more taxes, amounting to €4 million in general taxation, to pay for them again? If RTÉ cuts its funding to the orchestra in the future, will we then have to pay again? Is this just a mechanism by RTÉ to get more funding? The Minister should remember that RTÉ will get a bonanza of cash in the next ten years when we start to provide houses for the people. Every house virtually means a television licence, and every commercial property means a television licence. We know we are very short of houses. When we eventually get around to building the houses the people need, RTÉ will see a massive increase in its income. The Minister is still letting it off the hook. Can she tell me that if she does what she is doing, she will not be asked time and again to get us to double-fund these orchestras? Is it her intention to ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to rescind the Broadcasting Act 2009?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The report envisages that RTÉ will continue to contribute substantially towards the costs of the orchestra in order to secure broadcasting rights, but €4 million from the Exchequer will be required. This issue will also be considered by officials. I do not want to prejudge, however, what proposals might be generated in this regard.

It is important that the Deputy notes that the valuation will cover the optimum model for the National Symphony Orchestra, either as a stand-alone agency or as part of the National Concert Hall. It will also examine opportunities for growth and development within any new gover-

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nance structures. It will also examine legal requirements for any new governance structure, including any changes to legislation, any issues in respect of the transfer of employment rights of employees, short and medium-term funding arrangements and governance arrangements. Following consideration of these proposals, I plan to bring a memo to the Government with a view to implementing a programme of action in this regard.

National Monuments

20. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if preservation orders will be issued for 1916 buildings (details supplied). [20438/18]

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: According to the national monuments legislation, a national monument is a national monument regardless of whether a Minister states it to be so. Therefore, the GPO is a national monument. It has never been officially declared one but, if it came under threat, it would be the moral and legal duty of the Minister to issue a preservation order to protect it. Her Department has stated clearly and officially that the Moore Street battlefield site is a national monument, yet she has refused to date to identify a large number of buildings in that space as comprising a national monument and to issue a preservation order. Is the Minister not derelict in her duty regarding these buildings, given that they are under pressure owing to a very large planning permission application, if she does not issue a preservation order?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I thank the Deputy for his question. Under section 8 of the National Monuments Act 1930, as amended, a preservation order may be made where it appears to the Minister that a monument, which in the Minister's opinion is a national monument, "is in danger of being or is actually being destroyed, injured or removed or is falling into decay through neglect". Apart from any question of whether each and every building referred to by the Deputy would appropriately be regarded as a national monument, I am not advised that they are subject to any immediate threat. On the contrary, as the Deputy is aware from his membership of the Moore Street advisory forum, the owner is advancing plans to preserve and conserve many of these buildings, and in particular those with a direct connection to the events of Easter Week 1916. Consequently, the conditions do not exist in which the making of a preservation order would be warranted in any event.

As the Deputy knows, Nos. 14 to 17 Moore Street comprise a national monument owned by the State. It forms a unique and coherent streetscape of substantially intact mid-18th-century structures. Collectively, Nos. 14 to 17 represent the most significant, original, complete, discrete and continuous section of substantially intact pre-1916 buildings on the street, most of the remainder being post-1916 buildings. Today all of these houses retain significant 18th-century elements, including staircases, partitions, plasterwork, doors, floors, fittings and fixtures.

The 18th-century building form and profiles also survive. More important, so too does the physical evidence of the presence of the insurgents in the form of the openings broken through party walls as they made their way up the street. The Deputy has been privileged to see these at first hand.

By contrast, I note that No. 25 Moore Street, in respect of which the Deputy's question is seeking to have a preservation order made on grounds that it is a 1916 building, was actually constructed entirely anew from the ground up in the mid-1990s as a dedicated facility for Dublin City Council's street-cleansing operations.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

As a member of the Moore Street advisory group, and as noted earlier, the Deputy is aware of the meeting some weeks ago where agreement was reached on the modalities of engagement between the owners of the Moore Street development site and the advisory group to secure a way forward for the revitalisation of the area in a manner that will recognise the views of all stakeholders and reflect its historical and cultural significance and its employment and economic value to the north inner city - and all in a manner consonant with the recommendations of the previous Moore Street consultative group's work "The Moore Street Report - Securing History".

The Deputy will recall that the key recommendation of this report was the establishment of the Moore Street advisory group, of which he is a member and which has the task of devising an agreed plan among the key stakeholders that will take account of the needs of the area in a way that also respects and acknowledges its importance in the context of the 1916 Rising and ultimately the foundation of the State. Fundamental to this objective is the dialogue that is now taking place with the owners of the site that extends from Moore Street to the Carlton cinema on O'Connell Street.

I was very pleased to hear from the chairperson of the advisory group of the constructive engagement between group, including the Deputy, and the owners. I believe that this is the appropriate way in which to address the issues relating to the site and its wider environs. I am pleased that a foundation and framework has now been laid for positive and fruitful co-operation, dialogue and interaction between all the key interests in Moore Street under the aegis of the Moore Street advisory group. I encourage the Deputy again to continue to engage and contribute to that process through his membership of the group, which I believe is best placed to deliver a satisfactory outcome for all stakeholders.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The O'Brien's Mineral Water Works building, Henry Place, was occupied and held by the Volunteers evacuating the GPO. The White Cottage, Henry Place, was occupied and held under fire by Michael Collins. The Bottling Stores, Moore Street, were occupied and held by Captain Frank Henderson, and were the location of the killing of Michael Mulvihill and Henry Coyle. No. 10 Moore Street was the point of entry to the terrace, the leaders' refuge, the location of the field hospital set up by Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell and Julia Grenan, and the location of the killing of Paddy Shortis. Nos. 20 and 21 were the location of the acceptance by the Volunteers of the surrender order after consultation with Clarke, Plunkett, Collins and Mac Diarmada. No. 25 Moore Street was the location of the killing of The O'Rahilly, Charles Corrigan and Francis Macken.

Does a live planning application that details the destruction of buildings and streets not constitute a danger? It is a planning application that could be proceeded with at any time. The buildings I note here are of major heritage importance. The recent court cases have made it abundantly clear that it is not up to the Judiciary to issue protective notices. The Judiciary has actually kicked the ball back into the court of the Minister and said it is her responsibility to do so.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The Deputy is correct in that, in February 2018, the Court of Appeal overturned all aspects of a High Court judgment and restored the previous understanding of what the statutory rights, powers and entitlements of the Minister – now me - were in regard to national monuments. It clarified that it is the Minister, and not the courts, who is

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charged with determining what constitutes a national monument. The Minister does not require planning permission for works to a national monument provided there is consent in place under section 14 of the National Monuments Act.

I mentioned why there is no necessity for a preservation order in the cases the Deputy mentions. It would only be a distraction from the more important objective, which is to secure a viable future for the Moore Street area. A far better approach is for all concerned to engage in meaningful discussions under the aegis of Moore Street advisory group, come up with a solution for the street that everyone can support, and do so as soon as possible.

As the Deputy knows, the main property owner on Moore Street is Hammerson, whose portfolio extends as far as the former Carlton cinema on O'Connell Street. I am pleased with the new vision Hammerson has presented, which now recognises the need to reflect history, community and culture in the way this area is to be revitalised.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I welcome the meeting between Hammerson and the ministerial forum but the forum will never agree to anything that is in any way incongruent to a national monument. The ministerial forum, therefore, is in no way negatively disposed towards the idea of the Minister issuing a preservation order.

Anyone who goes to Moore Street will see it is frozen in dereliction. It is frozen because of the hiatus the Government has created in the area. I am asking the Minister to break that hiatus with a simple decision, namely, to turn Moore Street into the vibrant cultural and historic quarter it could be. The traders on the street are prisoners of the Minister's policy. The inertia of the Government is putting them into a sterile area where it is really difficult to earn a living. I will introduce in the Oireachtas next week a Bill seeking that the Oireachtas identify Moore Street as a national monument. The responsibility is the Minister's. The planning application is live. Nothing is stopping that planning application from proceeding. I urge the Minister to do the right thing and issue a preservation order.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: As I said, I believe it would be a distraction not to try to engage with the group of which the Deputy is a member. He mentioned the trade affair. I believe that the advisory group met with Dublin City Council and discussed a range of issues. A submission was made by the group on behalf of the traders to the review currently taking place with regard to the casual trading by-laws. I believe that Dublin City Council is currently examining all submissions in this regard.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It cannot need submissions.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: There is a key position where Hammersons is the main landowner. Its input is most critical to the rejuvenation of this area. I set up and support Moore Street advisory group. Its role is to bring all relevant interests together so they can agree a suitable vision and plan for the area. I am delighted that this is happening and that key players are talking to each other. I will do everything I can to support and encourage that process. I have also given a grant of €10,000 to the school of architecture in Dublin Institute of Technology, DIT, to work with local stakeholders on the street.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

21. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad airgead atá caite ar an bpleanáil teanga sa Ghaeltacht gach bliain ó 2011; cé mhéad atá caite go dáta i mbliana; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [20205/18]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: In ainneoin go ndúirt an tAire liom ar an 24 Aibreán seo caite go raibh rud éigin ar nós €2.7 milliún ceadaithe don phleanáil teanga, is léir ó eolas atá curtha amach ag Údarás na Gaeltachta nár chaitheadh ach €644,000 ar an bpleanáil teanga idir 2011 agus 2017, agus go raibh an caiteachas ar fad eile ag baint le rudaí eile a bhí ann ariamh. An féidir leis an Aire Stáit a dheimhniú gurb é €644,000 a bhí i gceist sa bhliain 2017? Cé mhéad a chaithfear ar phleanáil teanga in 2018?

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Ar mhaithe le cabhrú tuilleadh le feidhmiú na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030, a bhfuil an próiseas pleanála teanga mar chuid lárnach de, bunaíodh ciste faoi leith in 2014. Baineadh leas as an gciste seo ó 2014 i leith chun cúram a dhéanamh d'fheidhmiú an phróisis pleanála teanga - ar cuireadh tús lena fheidhmiú ar an talamh an bhliain sin, chomh maith le maoiniú a dhéanamh ar raon de thograí, bearta agus tionscnaimh faoi leith mar thaca breise d'fheidhmiú na straitéise agus don phróiseas pleanála teanga, dá réir. Ós rud é go bhfuil an próiseas pleanála teanga mar chuid lárnach d'fheidhmiú na straitéise, ba ghá féachadh chuige, i gcomhthéacs an chúraim atá sannta dóibh faoin bpróiseas, gur cuireadh maoiniú a dhóthain ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta agus d'Fhoras na Gaeilge araon chun a chinntiú go mbeadh sé curtha ar a gcumas tacú mar ba ghá le hullmhúchán pleananna sna limistéir pleanála teanga Gaeltachta, sna bailte seirbhíse Gaeltachta agus sna líonraí Gaeilge de réir mar a bhain sé leo faoi seach thar an tréimhse. Leagtar amach sa tábla a leanas an cionnroinnt den chiste iomlán a caitheadh go sonrach ar an bpróiseas thar an tréimhse 2014 go 2017:

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Déanfaidh mé iarracht déanamh suas don am atá cailte. Tá ceist an-simplí agam don Aire Stáit. An ndeimhneoidh sé dom gur caitheadh €644,153 ar ullmhú pleananna teanga suas go deireadh na bliana 2017? Tuigim nár caitheadh oiread is cent rua amháin ar feidhmiú na bpleananna teanga sa tréimhse sin.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Ní raibh dóthain ama agam níos luaithe chun an gceist a fhreagairt ina iomláine. Tuigim an cheist atá curtha ag an Teachta. Baineann sé leis an airgead a bhí ag teacht isteach le haghaidh pleanáil teanga. Bhí ceist eile aige ag an tús maidir leis an airgead atá á chaitheamh i mbliana.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tiocfaidh mé ar ais go dtí ceist na bliana 2018 mar cheist fhorlíontach. Iarraim ar an Aire Stáit an cheist shimplí atá curtha agam a fhreagairt.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Go dtí 2017-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Níl na ceisteanna á fhreagairt, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá cumhacht agat freagraí a lorg.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá. Tabharfaimid deis don Aire Stáit ar dtús.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá freagra tugtha agam maidir leis an mhéid airgid a cuireadh ar fáil idir 2014 agus 2017 agus an leibhéal éilimh a bhí ann idir Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Foras na Gaeilge.

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Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Níor fhreagair an tAire Stáit an cheist.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá soiléireacht ann anois i dtaobh an airgid ar fad - achan pingin - a théann isteach sna ceantair Ghaeltachta. Tá reachtaíocht na bliana 2012 i gceist. I gceantar an Teachta, mar shampla-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: A Cheann Comhairle, níl an cheist á fhreagairt.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá na hionaid clúdaithe sa phleanáil teanga fosta.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: A Cheann Comhairle-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Beidh seans agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Beidh an t-am úsáidte.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Dá mbeadh an t-éileamh i gceist, bheadh airgead ann le haghaidh achan iarratas.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Níl aon éileamh-----

Deputy Joe McHugh: Bheadh an t-airgead ar fáil ó Údarás na Gaeltachta agus ó Fhoras na Gaeilge.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Sa tír seo-----

Deputy Joe McHugh: Sa bhliain 2018, beidh an t-airgead ar fáil - achan pingin - le haghaidh achan iarratas a thiocfaidh isteach ó Fhoras na Gaeilge agus ó Údarás na Gaeltachta maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na bpleananna teanga.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá deis ag an Teachta Ó Cuív a cheist a shoiléiriú.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ní hea. Is í an fhadhb atá ann ná go mbíonn an tAire Stáit ag meilt ama gach uair a bhíonn ceisteanna againn. Freagraíonn sé gach ceist ach amháin an cheist a cuirtear air. Chuir mé ceist an-simplí. Cuirfidh mé dhá cheist an-simplí anois. Tá freagraí á lorg agam. Cé mhéad a caitheadh ag ullmhú na bpleananna teanga ó 2011 go 2017?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Thug mé freagra ar an gceist sin.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An féidir leis an Aire Stáit a dheimhniú gurb é €644,153 an figiúr ceart?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Thug mé freagra don Teachta.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Mar dara chuid den cheist sin, cé mhéad a chaitheadh ar fheidhmiú na bpleananna? De réir mar a thuigim, agus tá mé ag iarraidh deimhniú a fháil ar seo, níor caitheadh aon airgead ar na pleananna a chur i bhfeidhm sa tréimhse sin. Níl le déanamh ag an Aire Stáit ach a rá go bhfuil an ceart agam nó nach bhfuil. Mar cheist fhorlíontach, cé mhéad atá leagtha amach le caitheamh ar ullmhú na bpleananna teanga sa bhliain 2018? Cé mhéad atá leagtha amach, nó curtha ar fáil, le haghaidh feidhmiú na bpleananna teanga sa bhliain 2018? Ní thógfadh sé leath-nóiméad an dá cheist an-simplí sin a fhreagairt.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá an cheist soiléir.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá sé soiléir. Tosóidh mé leis an dara cheist. Beidh €2.65 milliún ar fáil in 2018 fá choinne plean a ullmhú agus a chur i bhfeidhm. Tá an dá rud - ullmhú agus cur i bhfeidhm - i gceist anseo.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, tá rudaí eile i gceist anseo.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá airgead ar fáil ó 2014 le haghaidh pleananna a ullmhú fá choinne na bailte seirbhíse Gaeltachta, na líonraí agus na limistéir pleanála Gaeltachta. Tá Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Foras na Gaeilge freagrach as na pleananna teanga. Fuair Údarás na Gaeltachta €200,000 in 2014, €259,000 in 2015, €340,000 in 2016 agus €735,000 in 2017. Fuair Foras na Gaeilge €81 milliún in 2017.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá sé sin go breá, a Aire. Nóiméad amháin. Is í an cheist, cé mhéad a caitheadh ar ullmhúchán na bpleananna agus cé mhéad, cén ollfhiúir a caitheadh-----

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tuigim an cheist, mar tá an méid fite fuaite idir na pleananna ullmhúcháin agus na pleananna a chur i bhfeidhm agus in 2018, na dreamanna a bheidh i gceist, mar shampla, Cois Ferraige, na ceantair Ghaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste nó Gort an Choirce nó Cloich Chionnaola, beidh suas le €2.65 milliún i gceist fa choinne na rudaí ullmhúcháin agus chur i bhfeidhm. Dá mbeadh sonraí de dhíth idir an dá fhiúir, bheinn sásta iad sin a chur ar aghaidh, tiocfaídh mé ar ais leis sin, beidh mé sásta é sin a dhéanamh.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá rudaí eile i gceist, tá €2.65 milliún seachas ullmhú na bpleananna agus feidhmiú na bpleananna. Cuidíodh go maith agus thug Udarás na Gaeltachta an briseadh síos a bhí ag teastáil le gairid d'iriseoir, ach níl an tAire in ann iad a thabhairt domsa sa Dáil inniu. Is é sin mar a dúirt mé, dúirt siadsan -mar a dúirt an tAire atá ag láimhseail an t-airgead - nár caitheadh ach €644,000 agus nár caitheadh-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Gabh mo leithscéal, a Theachta tá an cheist pléite. Ma tá éinne anseo míshásta, scríobh chugam agus déanfaidh mé iarracht iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar an scéal agus rachaidh mé ar ais i dteagmháil leis an Aire. An chéad cheist eile, tagann an chéad cheist eile ón Teachta Paul Murphy, Question 22, Deputy Paul Murphy.

Arts Funding

22. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the ability of arts and culture projects to question social and political matters without a risk to funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20207/18]

Deputy Paul Murphy: Is the Minister concerned about the significant restriction on artistic expression which, in my opinion, amounted to censorship in two recent cases? The cases in question relate to the removal of the Maser mural from the Project Arts Centre under threat of the centre losing charitable status from the Charities Regulator and the withdrawal of an event entitled "The Question of the Eighth" from the International Literature Festival in Dublin under threat of the withdrawal of funding by Dublin City Council.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Through their work, artists, writers and musicians address social and political issues and shape the way that we view a particular topic. They challenge us to think outside of our comfort zone and to understand the rationale for debate or change by engaging us interactively.

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By their very nature, arts and culture organisations lead and reflect societal change. As we work together to ensure that people are heard and listened to, we will see that the stories we tell, the work we make and the society we share begin to change shape for the better. The voices of the excluded, the less powerful and the marginalised, are amplified and broadcast. This change is inherently powerful. Artistic freedom must be recognised and valued.

Historically, artists and writers around the world have played a major part in effecting societal and political change. I think particularly of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Mexico, the work of a particular favourite of mine, Maya Angelou, during the civil rights struggle in 1960s America and that of our own Seamus Heaney during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Their writings prompted debate, which ultimately brought about change.

In Ireland, the Arts Council is the primary body that allocates funding to artists and arts organisations. Although funded by my Department, the council is statutorily independent in its funding allocations and I, as Minister, cannot influence this funding.

I presume the Deputy is raising the matter in the context of the current referendum. In this instance, public bodies are also obliged to act with impartiality and are all subject to the clear guidance from the Referendum Commission that any information disseminated by Government or its agencies or bodies involving the use of public funds must be equal, fair, impartial and neutral. That is a separate obligation which falls on public bodies.

I thank the Deputy for the opportunity to demonstrate the importance of arts and culture to societal well-being. It is an opportunity to prompt debate.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I welcome the Minister's agreement about the political role of art. Toni Morrison famously said, "All of that art-for-art's-sake stuff is BS. What are these people talking about?" She also stated:

All good art is political! There is none that isn't. And the ones that try hard not to be political are political by saying, "We love the status quo."

I am not sure whether there is any good art that is not political but I certainly think that attempting to rule out or censor art on the basis of it being political is extremely troublesome. Does the Minister agree with the Charities Regulator's move to say that unless the Maser mural was removed from the Project Arts Centre, the centre could lose its charitable status? Does the Minister agree with Dublin City Council's decision to threaten the withdrawal of funding from the International Literature Festival in Dublin unless a particular event, which was about the eighth amendment and which was not a campaigning or repeal event, was removed? Does the Minister agree with the decision to threaten to withdraw funding with the result that a particular event was cancelled?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The event referred to by the Deputy was organised by Una Mullaly from *The Irish Times* for the International Literature Festival. Dublin City Council cited the guidance from the Referendum Commission, which, in turn, restates the guidance from the Attorney General that public funds, as I said earlier, should not be used to promote either side of the debate during a referendum. The mural referred to by the Deputy included the words "Repeal the Eighth" with a heart around them and was on the outside wall of the Project Arts Centre. The mural was created by Maser, an artist originally from Ireland who now lives in the US. Unfortunately, the mural ran contrary to the Charities Regulator's views on this. I know the Taoiseach made comments in the Dáil about it previously in response to a question

from Deputy Coppinger. He said:

I understand this decision was made by the Charities Regulator, not the Government, and I assume the Charities Regulator would have taken the same approach or attitude had it been a pro-life or anti-abortion mural. I have no doubt but that the mural will appear elsewhere. Someone who owns a private building may wish to make the space available for the mural to be reinstated. Perhaps even the fact that it has been removed means more people saw it than might have otherwise seen it had it not been removed. While one can paint over a mural, one certainly cannot paint over an issue. The issue is that nine women every day in Ireland are forced to travel overseas to end their pregnancies and three women in Ireland every day - the number will only rise into the future - import pills online and take them without medical supervision and guidance, often in their own homes.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not really relevant to the question.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am just quoting the comments the Taoiseach made in the Dáil.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Does the Minister not agree that there is a problem here? Censorship of art is happening under the banner that a referendum is due to take place. How far does it go? What will be censored next? Una Mullaly wrote about her event and stated:

My event was about a book. It was not a campaigning event. It was not a rally or a demonstration or a hustings. If I am said to be “taking a side”, then what does shutting down an event about a book look like?

That one cannot hold an event that touches on an issue that is being discussed in a referendum seems to be an extremely over-zealous interpretation on the part of Dublin City Council around the question of the use of public funds. Again, with regard to the Charities Regulator, the interpretation is being used in such a way that the Catholic Church, which has charitable status, can campaign fully for retention of the eighth amendment, as is its right, with no threat to its charitable status because it is said to be linked to its core purpose. Yet an arts centre cannot have a piece of art that refers to and has a slogan about the repeal of the eighth amendment on it because it does not relate to its core purpose, but it is art. It is not campaigning; it is art. The Government can have an opinion on it. It can disagree with the Charities Regulator and have different regulations and a different interpretation of the law or, if necessary, there could be an amendment to the Charities Act.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The key points from the Referendum Commission, which takes in the Attorney General’s advice, is that any information disseminated by Government or any agencies or bodies involving the use of public funds must be equal, fair, impartial and neutral and that the Government is not entitled to spend public money for the purpose of promoting a campaign for a particular outcome. The Taoiseach said in the Dáil that he did not find the mural in any way offensive but he did not think it would be murals or posters that would change people’s minds or convince them regarding this issue. What we need is proper independent information such as we are getting from the Referendum Commission, which just started its work in recent days, and those of us who wish to advocate change going out there and speaking to people one-to-one, not berating them or preaching to them, but listening to their concerns and answering their questions. I think the Deputy is aware of my views about wishing to have the eighth amendment repealed, but we still have to obey the law and the guidelines of the Referendum Commission on both sides of this debate. I also point out that the Project Arts Centre

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received €718,000 from my Department in 2018. Art has always had the potential to stimulate conversation and be a driver for social change. I hope it will continue to do so.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

23. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta soiléiriú a thabhairt maidir le feidhmiú na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, 2010-2030, agus go háirithe maidir le stádas an phlean gníomhaíochta don tréimhse 2017-2022; cén dáta a fhoilseofar an plan; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [20206/18]

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé ag lorg soiléirithe maidir le feidhmiú na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge agus go háirithe stádas an Phlean Gníomhaíochta atá geallta le fada an lá. Cén uair go cruinn a fhoilseofar an plan sin?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Ba mhaith liom ar dtús m'aitheantas a ghabháil chuig an Teachta fa choinne an tiomantas agus an iarracht ar son an ábhair seo thar na blianta.

Mar is eol don Teachta, is é ar mo Roinnse atá an fhreagracht uileghabhálach chun cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 a chomhordú agus a chur i bhfeidhm i gcomhar le réimse leathan páirtithe leasmhara. Sa chomhthéacs sin, tá clár oibre á gcur i bhfeidhm ag mo Roinn féin agus ag Ranna agus forais ábhartha eile Stáit, lena n-áirítear Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Foras na Gaeilge, chomh maith le raon leathan eagraíochtaí Gaeilge, chun cúram a dhéanamh, i gcaitheamh an ama, ar fheidhmiú na straitéise.

Mar atá ráite agam roimhe seo, ainneoin na ndúshlán ina raibh gníomhaireachtaí na Gaeilge ag feidhmiú, idir mo Roinn féin, Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na heagraíochtaí éagsúla atá á maoiniú acu, táim sásta go bhfuil dul chun cinn suntasach déanta agus á dhéanamh maidir le raon leathan gníomhaíochtaí faoin Straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm de réir a chéile ar bhealach córasach laistigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil.

Maidir leis an bPlean Gníomhaíochta don tréimhse 2018-2022 ina ndéanfar rianú ar cad atá beartaithe a dhéanamh, i gcomhar le páirtithe leasmhara, thar an tréimhse chun treisiú a dhéanamh ar fheidhmiú na straitéise, táim sásta a rá go bhfuil críoch á chur le dréachtú an Phlean faoi láthair agus foilseofar é sna seachtainí atá amach romhainn.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Níl mé ag iarraidh deacrachtaí a chothú ach tá sé ráite ag an Aire go mion minic go bhfuil sé le foilsiú sna seachtainí amach romhainn. An é go bhfuil blianta amach romhainn i gceist, b'fhéidir, seachas seachtainí? Tá sé ráite go bhfuil an Rialtas ag cur críche leis an bplean. Cén dáta go cruinn a fhoilseofar an plan más féidir leis an Aire é sin a rá, go háirithe mar go bhfuilimid ag caint faoin straitéis? Tá a fhios agam go raibh an straitéis bunaithe ar go leor oibre roimhe sin, go háirithe an Ráiteas ó Thaobh na Gaeilge in 2006 agus a lán rudaí eile. In ainneoin chomh báúil is atá daoine i leith na Gaeilge agus in ainneoin an dul chun cinn atá déanta, ní mór dom a rá go bhfuil sé thar a bheith deacair do chosmhuintir na Gaeltachta agus daoine le Gaeilge seirbhísí a fháil. Tá gá práinneach le Plean Gníomhaíochta.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Aontaím leis an tábhacht a ghabhann leis seo. Bhí mise i m'Aire Stáit in 2014 nuair a tháinig an cheist suas maidir leis an Straitéis 20 Bliain agus bhí sé i gceist

ag an am sin amharc go dtí plean cúig bliana. Tá mise sásta leis an bplean a chur i gcrích anois. Is é an chéad phróiseas eile ná é a bheith ar chlár an bhoird Rialtais agus tá dualgas orm dá réir. Beidh sé ar an gcloch is mó ar mo phaidrín thar na seachtainí atá amach romhainn agus beidh mé sásta leis an gcomhaontú a fháil ó mo chomhghleacaithe, ach is é an rud is mó ná an comhaontú idir na Ranna éagsúla. Tá dréachtphlean á chur i gcrích agus beidh mé sásta leis an gclár a chur ar an gclár Rialtais sna seachtainí amach romhainn.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Is é an port céanna é - sna seachtainí amach romhainn. Is rud dearfa é go bhfuil sé ar intinn ag an Aire é a chur ar chlár bhoird an Rialtais, ach cén uair a dtarlódh sé sin? An dtuigeann an tAire go bhfuil práinn ag teastáil? Tá daoine ag gearán chuile lá faoin Straitéis 20 Bliain, agus nach bhfuil sé curtha i bhfeidhm beag ná mór. Tá mise agus Teachtaí Dála eile ag iarraidh ar a laghad an Plean Gníomhaíochta a fheiceáil. Tá daoine ag iarraidh fáil réidh leis an bplean seo. Níl muinín beag ná mór acu sa straitéis seo. Is féidir leis an bplean gníomhaíochta muinín a thabhairt do dhaoine ar an talamh, ach níl sé le feiceáil. Agus anois arís cloisimid an sean-nath - sna seachtainí amach romhainn. An mbeidh sé ar bhord an Rialtais roimh dheireadh na míosa seo?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Déanfaidh mé mo sheacht ndícheall leis sin. Beidh bord Rialtais ag dul ar aghaidh Dé hAoine agus níl a fhios agam céard a bheidh ar an gclár, Dé hAoine, ná Dé Máirt na seachtaine amach anseo, ach déanfaidh mé mo sheacht ndícheall. Tá an dréachtphlean réidh agus tá sé comhaontaithe idir achan Roinn timpeall an Rialtais agus beidh mé sásta leis an mbrú a chur ar an gclár seo. Tá sé cóngarach do mo chroí maidir leis an gcomhaontú agus leis an gcomhordú agus leis an gceangal idir achan Roinn. Dá mbeadh an comhaontú socraithe - tá sé socraithe - beidh mé sásta leis an mbrú a ghabháil agus a leagan síos i measc mo chomhghleacaithe go gairid.

Other Questions

Scéim Áiseanna Pobail agus Teanga

24. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad é stádas phlean na Gaillimhe chun aitheantas mar Bhaile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta a bhaint amach; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [2013/18]

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Ceist shimplí dhíreach atá anseo. Cá bhfuil stádas phlean na Gaillimhe chun aitheantas mar Bhaile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta a bhaint amach?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tugann Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 feidhm reachtúil don phróiseas pleanála teanga faoina mbeidh pleananna teanga á n-ullmhú ag leibhéal an phobail i leith ceantair a bhféadfaí aitheantas a thabhairt dóibh mar Limistéir Pleanála Teanga Ghaeltachta, mar Bhailte Seirbhíse Gaeltachta nó mar Líonraí Gaeilge.

Faoi réir an fhógra a rinneadh i gcomhréir le foráil 9(2) den Acht in 2016, tugadh an deis d'eagraíochtaí a bhí cáilithe go cuí iarratas a dhéanamh le Foras na Gaeilge le bheith freagrach as plean teanga a ullmhú agus a fheidhmiú do Chathair na Gaillimhe.

De thoradh próiseas roghnúcháin a eagraíodh ina dhiaidh sin, i gcomhréir leis an Acht, roghnaíodh an eagraíocht Gaillimh le Gaeilge in 2017 don chúram, i gcomhar le Comhairle

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Cathrach na Gaillimhe. Faoi réir an Achta, tá suas le dhá bhliain ag an eagraíocht chun an plean a ullmhú agus, i gcás nach leor an tréimhse sin, is féidir breis ama a cheadú más gá.

A luaithe go gcuirfear plean faoi mo bhráid agus go gceadófar é, beidh tréimhse seacht mbliana ann chun é a chur i bhfeidhm. Tuigtear don Roinn go bhfuil Gaillimh le Gaeilge i mbun comhairle ghairmiúil a lorg faoi láthair chun cabhrú leo le hullmhú an phlean. Faoi réir na so-cruithe a bhaineann le cur i bhfeidhm an phróisis, beidh fáil ar chomhairle agus cuidiú ag an eagraíocht ó Fhoras na Gaeilge, ní hamháin mar a bhaineann sé leis an obair ullmhúcháin atá idir lámha ach mar a bhaineann sé chomh maith le feidhmiú an phlean aontaithe i ndeireadh báire.

Ar nós na mbailte eile atá mar chuid den phróiseas, tá ciste ar fiú €20,000 curtha ar fáil do Ghaillimh le Gaeilge chun an plean a ullmhú.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht stair an phróisis. Ní raibh sé sin ag teastáil uaim - tá sé agam. An rud atá ag teastáil uaim ná an staid in a bhfuil sé faoi láthair. Arís tá an freagra ceannann céanna a thabhairt: tá siad i mbun ullmhúcháin agus ag lorg duine faoi leith. Níl Gaillimh cosúil le chuile bhaile eile. Is cathair dháttheangach í, ar thairseach na Gaeltachta is mó sa tír, agus chomh maith leis sin tá aitheantas ar leith bainte amach ag Gaillimh mar Phríomhchathair Chultúrtha na hEorpa 2020. Ar chuile leibhéal tá gá leis an stádas seo a bhaint amach níos sciobtha. Tá meas faoi leith ag an eagraíocht Gaillimh le Gaeilge agus tá obair na gcapall déanta acu le fada an lá. Cén fáth a bhfuil moill ar an bpróiseas? Cá bhfuil stádas an phlean seo go díreach?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Is é an t-ábhar a bhí mé ag lua agus na sonraí a bhí agamsa ná an €20,000 atá i gceist le Gaillimh le Gaeilge agus tá meas mór agam maidir leis an dream Gaillimh le Gaeilge. Chas mé leo cúpla bliain ó shin agus tá siadsan freagrach agus rinne siad sár-jab agus sár-obair thar na blianta i gcathair na Gaillimhe agus tá an Ghaeilge le feiceáil dá bharr. Tá an Ghaeilge le feiceáil istigh sa Ghaeltacht i nGaillimh agus taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht. Tá Gaillimh le Gaeilge cosúil le mo bhaile i Leitir Ceanainn fosta. Tá Leitir Ceanainn ag déanamh a dhícheall, mar a bhfuil Daingean Uí Chúis. Tá sé ag bogadh ar aghaidh. Tá dhá bhliain caite ag ullmhú an phlean agus ina dhiaidh sin beidh seacht mbliana i gceist maidir le cur i bhfeidhm an phlean. Beidh mé sásta sonraí breise a chur ar fáil más rud é go bhfuil siad de dhíth.

Heritage Promotion

25. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the role her Department plays in the protection and promotion of heritage crafts here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20056/18]

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá an Teachta O'Dowd chun déileáil le ceist Uimh. 25.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: What is the role of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in the protection and promotion of heritage crafts and will the Minister make a statement on the matter?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Heritage crafts are just one part of the rich intangible cultural heritage of our nation. These crafts and skills are transmitted from generation to generation and constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history. They contribute to our sense of identity and continu-

ity, respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. Heritage crafts include practices from traditional building skills in thatching, stonework and boat building, to lace-making and making hurleys and musical instruments such as harps and uilleann pipes. Heritage crafts also include textile work such as spinning fleece, weaving and felting, rush and straw craft, rope making, traditional woodwork and heritage gardening.

My Department protects and promotes heritage crafts through a number of avenues. The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, provides grants for the protection and preservation of the national heritage. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports annually, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources. Grant schemes are advertised by the Heritage Council on its website.

The Heritage Council's heritage in schools scheme also promotes children's engagement with heritage crafts. This scheme makes available to primary schools a current panel of 160 heritage experts, including experts in traditional crafts who visit primary schools to work directly with the pupils. The scheme currently reaches nearly 100,000 primary school pupils over the course of 2,000 school visits each year. The value of the scheme is in the richness and depth of knowledge it makes available to children and teachers, engaging children in a direct experience of their heritage, preferably outside the classroom, where possible and appropriate. Practitioners of crafts are themselves part of the living heritage.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I welcome the Minister's reply. I agree it is hugely important to retain these crafts, which have been there since time immemorial. As generations pass on, it is very important that whatever residual information there is in regard to these crafts is protected, and I welcome that.

I point out there was a ceardlann or craft centre at the Údarás na Gaeltachta centre outside Dingle. Such places are very important, particularly as sources of employment and tourism. I urge the Minister to continue her work in this area. Perhaps she might comment on the making of craft beer, which is returning on a huge scale throughout the country. It is a renewal of old skills. If we have a plan or a model, we should try to follow it. I welcome the work the Heritage Council is doing.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am not sure that craft beer falls under the remit of heritage crafts.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: According to some, it does.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am not too familiar with it myself but I will bow to the Deputy's advice on that. I thank him for his contribution. Active practitioners of crafts throughout the country who are carrying on any type of tradition that I delineated, and who wish for it to be recognised as part of our national cultural heritage, may wish to consider submitting an expression of interest to my Department's national inventory of intangible cultural heritage, an open call for which is currently under way.

My understanding is that Deputy Heydon's wife is otherwise engaged at the moment and that is why he is not here today. We hope there will be good news over the next couple of days for them and I wish them all the best. I had some details in regard to Kildare for Deputy Heydon. Kathleen McCormick is a fantastic willow basket maker in County Kildare. She grows and harvests the willow herself and is involved in several exhibitions in Kildare, and I wanted

to mention her.

Heritage Promotion

26. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the supports that her Department can make available to towns wishing to host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. [20141/18]

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann plays a very important role in nurturing, supporting and developing Ireland's rich heritage in traditional music, dance and the Irish language. Now in its 66th year, the organisation has a growing international network and contributes significantly to our reputation abroad as a culturally rich nation. Its work in Ireland has undoubtedly sustained and grown participation and enjoyment of Irish music, dance and the Irish language. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is central to all these endeavours.

Recognising the critical role which Comhaltas plays in supporting our traditional heritage, my Department provides ongoing financial support to the organisation. In 2018, my Department has allocated €1.6 million to Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann towards operational costs and onward support of regional branches and county boards. Typically, regional branches organise their local fleadhanna cheoil and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is organised by the ard-chomhairle of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

This represents significant ongoing support in regard to all activities organised by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann at both national and local level and to the benefit of any town chosen to host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. As we will see this year in Drogheda, and in recent years in towns including Sligo, Ennis and Derry in Northern Ireland, the scale of the fleadh requires significant engagement and support from the relevant local authority. I know this is willingly given by local authorities as they are aware of the prestige and other benefits which hosting the fleadh brings to the local area. In this regard, I see the role of my Department, in addition to the major funding provided to Comhaltas itself, as supporting local authority capacity to develop cultural engagement and creativity locally. This is in keeping with pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland programme, Enabling Creativity in Every Community, in which all local authorities are important partners.

Deputy Robert Troy: As the Minister knows, Comhaltas was founded in 1951 in my home town of Mullingar and it has gone from strength to strength over the last decades. The Minister is right that the work it does internationally in promoting our rich heritage and culture of music, dance and the Irish language is second to none. When it comes to a town, the national fleadh is magnificent. It attracts 400,000 attendees and brings some €40 million to the region. Of the 400,000 attendees, 25% are international visitors coming to our island. It is second after St. Patrick's weekend in terms of the level of festivities involved.

The Minister confirmed that the Department funds Comhaltas annually. Given the huge significance of the fleadh to Ireland nationally and on the international stage, will she consider making specific departmental funding available to towns? Despite working in partnership with the local authority, it still involves a large cost to host the all-Ireland fleadh in any town.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I fully support Deputy Troy. The fleadh is coming to Drogheda this year and, as the Deputy rightly points out, there will be more than 400,000 visitors. The

€1.6 million for Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is very welcome.

There is a need, however, to look again at the infrastructure in any town that has to transform itself for a massive number of visitors, particularly in terms of Tidy Towns and improving shopfronts. The presentation of the towns is very important. Additional funding would be helpful and useful. The Minister might consider, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, where money might be available. It is a big burden but we in Drogheda are very proud of getting it and we tend to do a fantastic job.

An Ceann Comhairle: How are the coffers in the Department?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I hope the fleadh gives great enjoyment in Drogheda. I note what Deputy Troy says about Mullingar founding the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in 1951. Mullingar hosted the all-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in 1963. There is interest in Mullingar in applying to host the Fleadh Cheoil in the future.

This year a sum of €3 million in total, comprising €2 million from my Department and €1 million from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, was allocated to all 31 local authorities. This will enable them to implement the objectives contained in their five-year culture and creativity strategies and support an accompanying programme of activities, events and initiatives in each county, including building capacity to host local, provincial and national fleadhanna. There is also the small-scale festivals and summer schools scheme which commenced formally in 2017. The funding is reserved for appropriate festivals, summer schools and other similar events. It is designed to support local cultural festivals and those which are not in receipt of other public moneys and which may not be eligible under funding criteria for large-scale events supported by Fáilte Ireland, the Arts Council and similar bodies. These projects make a very important contribution to the development and promotion of Ireland's cultural tourism offering to the benefit of the domestic and foreign tourists which Deputy Troy mentioned, and will represent an important component of the delivery of the culture and tourism commitments in the programme for Government. The total amount available to this fund is €75,000 and the maximum amount per applicant is proposed to be in the order of €5,000. Funding is awarded on a competitive basis.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister has outlined certain streams of funding available but the national fleadh would not be able to avail of any of them. We hope in Mullingar to make a successful bid for 2020 or 2021 at the next available opportunity.

This does not affect Mullingar only. It affects any provincial town that has to host a fleadh. It is a phenomenal festival with 400,000 visitors descending on a town for a week. It is worth €40 million to the local economy. There is nothing like it. A total of 100,000 international visitors come in for it. Given the work that Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is doing to promote heritage internationally and attract people to our country, the Minister should consider funding the host town to put on the fleadh. Whether it is Drogheda, Offaly, Tullamore, Sligo or Derry, they do a good job but they could do with some additional support and, in light of the great numbers they attract to the island, they should get greater support from the Government.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Core funding from the Department to Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann was in the region of €1.6 million for 2018. In 2015 and 2016 it was €1.448 million and in 2017 it was €1.5 million. It has gone up. The funding provided in 2017 to festivals and summer schools gave thousands of euro went to assist the following: Dublin Ghost Story

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Festival; Castleblayney Community Arts Festival; AE George Russell Seminar; Larry Reynolds Irish Music; Seosamh Mac Gabhann Summer School; O'Carolan Harp and Traditional Music Festival; Carrickmacross Arts Festival; James Joyce Summer School; Festival of Light; Parnell Summer School; Aimsir Summer School-Laragh Heritage Monaghan; Ballyshannon Folk and Traditional Music Festival; Percy French Festival; Michael O'Cleirigh; Monaghan County Fleadh; Ed Reavy Traditional Irish Music Festival; Cootehill Arts Festival and Halloween Festival "Safe and Sounds". I was also happy to launch the Dublin fleadh on 23 April at the Lexicon library in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. The local group, Craobh Phiarais Uí Ghréagáin, which is based in Monkstown played beautiful music on that evening. I appreciate the value of the fleadh around the country and will continue to promote it as much as I can.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Cavan-Monaghan and Dublin South have been doing very well recently.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Have they?

Seirbhísí Aeir Fóirdheonaithe

27. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad a chaithfear ar aeriompar chuig na hoileáin i mbliana; cad iad na hoileáin atá i gceist; an dtabharfaidh sí an briseadh síos ar an gcaiteachas; an bhfuil sí sásta le caighdeán na seirbhísí atá á gcur ar fáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [19997/18]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá mé ag iarraidh a fháil amach ón Aire Stáit cé mhéad atá le chaitheamh ar aeriompar chuig na hoileáin. Caithfear tabhairt san áireamh an titim ollmhór atá ar líon na bpaisinéirí atá ag úsáid na seirbhísí go háirithe mar go bhfuil an tseirbhís i bhfad níos measa agus níos teoranta ná mar a bhíodh sé. Nuair a ghlaonn daoine ag iarraidh dul ar an eitleán, deirtear go bhfuil an t-eitleán lán.

(Deputy Joe McHugh): Tá dhá seirbhís aeriompar de ardchaighdeán fóirdheonaithe ag mo Roinn, seirbhís faoi oibleagáid, seirbhísí poiblí a fhreastalaíonn ar Oileáin Árann, Contae na Gaillimhe agus seirbhís ingearán do Thóraí, Contae Dhún na nGall le linn an gheimhridh. Maidir le seirbhís ar Oileáin Árann, meastar go gcaithfear €2.3 milliún air in 2018, comhdéanta mar seo a leanas: seirbhís aer PSO - €79,000; táillí tuirlinghe paisinéirí iníocta le hAer Arann - €450,000; bainistiú aerfort Chonamara - €507,000; bainistiú aerfoirt ar na hoileáin - €486,000; rátaí ag na haeradróim ar na hoileáin - €6,000. Sin figiúir iomlán de €2.3 milliún. Tá an tseirbhís ingearán do Thóraí comhhaoinithe le haonad na Feidhmeannachta na Seirbhíse Sláinte agus faoi láthair cuirtear maoiniú ar fáil do sheirbhísí seachtainiúil ó Mhí na Samhna go Mí an Mhárta. Is buiséad bliantúil de €150,000 atá curtha ar fáil ag mo Roinn don tseirbhís seo. Tá mo Roinn ag fiosrú i láthair na huair le Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte faoi féidearthacht an tseirbhís a leathnú amach ar feadh trí mhí eile, ach níl costas ar fáil do sin go fóill.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I gcás Oileán Thóraí, ar smaoinigh an tAire Stáit ar sheirbhís seachtainiúil a chur ar fáil i gcaitheamh na bliana ar fad? Maidir le na hOileáin Árann, an nglacadh leis nach bhfuil caighdeán na seirbhísí atá ar fáil go dtí na hoileáin leagtha amach agus a bhí nuair a tháinig Fine Gael i gcumhacht sa bhliain 2011 agus go bhfuil sé imithe ar gcúl ar fad ó thaobh na n-oileánach de?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Níl mé ábalta labhairt faoin gcomparáid mar ba é an chéad am a

chonaic mé an tseirbhís agus an ardchaighdeán ná nuair a tháinig mise isteach in 2014 mar Aire Stáit ar son na Gaeltachta. Roimhe sin agus go dtí seo, bhí mé agus tá mise i gcónaí i mbun labhartha le na daoine lonnaithe ar an oileán, mar shampla, na comharchumainn agus daoine atá freagrach agus i gceannaireacht ar na hoileáin fosta. Tá siad i gcónaí ag labhairt fadúda tábhacht an tseirbhís aeir. Tuigim an tábhacht agus bhí conspóid mhór cúpla bliain ó shin maidir leis an scéal sin, ach anois tá mé ag amharc agus ag obair agus tá tábhacht na seirbhíse le feiceáil. Táim i gcónaí ag labhairt le mo comhghleacaí, an tAire Stáit, an Teachta Kyne, fosta agus leis an Teachta Ó Cuív féin. Tá seisean freagrach as an gceantar Dála fosta. Má tá inní air nó ar aon duine maidir leis an seirbhís, beidh mé sásta suí síos le chéile leo.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ar chuala an tAire Stáit ariamh an leagan Bodhaire Uí Laoghaire? Séard atá i gceist le Bodhaire Uí Laoghaire ná nuair nach dteastaíonn ó dhuine rud a chloisteáil. An bhfuil an tAire Stáit ag rá liomsa, nár chuala sé aon ghearán ó na hoileánaigh ó a chuir sé an Conradh nua i bhfeidhm maidir leis an tarraingt siar iomlán atá i gceist ó thaobh líon na seirbhísí atá ar fáil go dtí na hOileáin Árann? An bhfuil an tAire ag rá liom anseo inniu go bhfuil sé sásta casadh liomsa agus leis an Teachta Kyne agus leis na Teachtaí eile sa Dáilcheantar agus leis na hoileánaigh chun an cheist seo a phlé go luath? An bhfuil an tAire ag rá go bhfuil? Tacaím go mór roimhe sin, mar cheap mé féin ón méid a bhí ráite ag an Aire go mbeadh ionadh an tsaoil air faoi céard a déarfadh siad leis. Fáiltím roimh an ngeallúint sin. An smaoineodh an tAire ar sheirbhís bhliantúil a chur ar fáil d'Oileán Thoraí? An bhfuil freagra ag an Aire chun críochnú ar an ábhar seo?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Ar an dara hábhar maidir leis an gcrúinniú a eagrú bheinn sásta é sin a dhéanamh, agus chomh maith leis sin, táim i gcónaí ag labhairt leis na daoine atá lonnaithe ar na hoileáin agus níl sé ceart go mbeadh inní ar na daoine agus dá mbeadh inní ar na daoine, bheinn sásta é sin a dhéanamh. An méid a bhí á rá agam inniu, cinnte gur chuala mé achan am nuair a bhí mé sa phost seo go mbeadh deacrachtaí agus rudaí mar sin. Dá mbeadh na deacrachtaí le feiceáil agus dá mbeadh sonraí breise ar fáil uait bheinn sásta é sin a dhéanamh.

Maidir leis an ábhar thuas ar Oileáin Thoraí, bhí cruinniú ar an oileán coicís ó shin, agus mar atá a fhios ag an Teachta, bhí an tUasal Pól Ó Gallchóir ag an gcrúinniú agus bhí príomhphointí ar fáil le feiceáil go soiléir maidir leis na rudaí a bhí muintir Thoraí ag iarraidh amach anseo. Rud amháin a bhí siadsan ag iarraidh ná trí mhí bhreise. Dá mbeadh airgead agus acmhainní ar fáil i dtaobh na rudaí breise a chur i bhfeidhm bheinn sásta é sin a dhéanamh. Thug an tUasal Pól Ó Gallchóir agus an Roinn gealltanais maidir na príomhspríocanna atá ag muintir Thoraí agus ag oifigigh mo Roinne.

Question No. 28 replied to with Written Answers.

Seirbhísí Aeir Fóirdheonaithe

29. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad iad na pleananna chun feabhas a chur ar ché na Reannaí ag Athphort ar oileán Árainn Mhór; an dtabharfaidh sí sonraí faoin bplean chun an togra a chur i gcrích; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [19975/18]

Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher: Táim ag iarraidh a fháil amach ón Aire caidé an dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le cé a thógáil ag Reannach, Athphort ar oileán Árainn Mhór.

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Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá deontais éagsúla ceadaithe ag mo Roinn thar na blianta don togra atá luaite ag an Teachta. Idir na blianta 2001 agus 2006, ceadaíodh deontais de luach €217,666 chun réamhthuarascáil a ullmhú maidir le forbairt na cé.

Sa bhliain 2008, cheadaigh mo Roinn deontas €240,185 chun a chumasú do Chomhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall innealtóirí comhairleacha a cheapadh don tionscadal. Bhí an dearadh, ullmhú doiciméid tairisceana agus lorg tairiscintí i measc na n-oibreacha a bhí le cur i gcrích ag an gcomhairle agus, mar chuid den togra, ba ghá ceadúnas urthrá a fháil ina leith chomh maith. Tuigtear do mo Roinn nach bhfuil an ceadúnas sin faighte go fóill ag an gcomhairle contae. Tuigtear di chomh maith go bhfuil tuilleadh suirbhéanna le déanamh mar chuid den iarratas ar an gceadúnas ach go bhfuil costas níos airde ná mar a bhíodhas ag súil leis ag baint leis na suirbhéanna sin.

Níl aon iarratas faighte ag mo Roinn ón gcomhairle chun cuidiú leo na costais bhreise sin a sheasamh ach má fhaigheann, déanfar é a mheas chomh báúil agus is féidir, ag cur san áireamh na hacmhainní atá ar fáil d'fhorbairt na n-oileán i gcoitinne agus na n-éileamh éagsúla ar na hacmhainní sin.

Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher: A Cheann Comhairle, agus mé ag éisteacht leis an bhfreagra ón Aire, ní dóigh liom go bhfuil sé sin cruinn ar chor ar bith. Ón eolas atá agamsa, chuir Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall iarratas chuig an Roinn an 22 Feabhra i mbliana, agus tá an tAire ag rá anois anseo sa Dáil nach bhfuair siad iarratas ar bith ó Chomhairle Contae Dhún na nGall. Tá a fhios agam, agus tá a fhios agam an stair fá dtaobh de seo, gur cuireadh airgead ar fáil chun go leor ullmhúcháin a dhéanamh maidir leis an gceist seo agus níl sé maith go leor nach bhfuil an t-eolas cruinn ag an Aire Gaeltachta a bhfuil freagracht aige as na hoileáin. Caithfear ceist a chur an bhfuil éinne i mBaile Átha Cliath ag caint le héinne thíos i nGaillimh fa dtaobh de seo. Ba cheart don Aire fiosrúchán a dhéanamh anois. Mar go bhfuil a fhios an Aire, mar an rud atá de dhíth ag Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall ná airgead chun cuidiú leo iarratas a chur chuig Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara fa choinne ceadúnas cladaigh. Is é sin an rud atá de dhíth agus ní féidir bogadh ar aghaidh gan é sin.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá iontas orm faoi sin, chun a bheith ionraic. Dá mbeadh iarratas istigh i mo Roinn, agus mura bhfuil na sonraí agamsa, níl sé sin i gceart. B'fhéidir go bhfuil an t-iarratas istigh sa Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara, níl a fhios agam. B'fhéidir go bhfuil na rudaí istigh i mo Roinn féin: níl sé ar mo bhord féin. Bhí mé i gcónaí ag labhairt leis na hoifigigh i gComhairle Contae Dhún na nGall agus tá siadsan ag déanamh sár-jab. Tá siadsan freagrach as na céanna. B'fhéidir go bhfuil bearna maidir leis an eolas agus na sonraí idir an Comhairle Contae agus an Roinn. Beidh mé sásta le dul chun cinn a dhéanamh maidir leis na sonraí a bhaint amach. Beidh mé ar ais chuig an Teachta maidir leis sin.

Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher: Tá sé fíorthábhachtach go bhfaighidh mo dhuine anseo sa Dáil an fhírinne. Níl mé ag cur locht ar bith ar an Aire, ní hé an tAire a d'ullmhaigh an freagra a thug sé domsa. Is é an t-eolas atá agamsa, agus tá sé dubh agus bán, gur ar an 22 Feabhra go ndearnadh iarratas. B'fhéidir go ndéanfadh an tAire fiosrúchán fa dtaobh de sin. De réir an eolais atá agamsa, ceapaim go bhfuil thart faoi €80,000 de dhíth chun dul ar aghaidh leis seo. Thug an tAire féin cuairt ar an oileán agus go háirithe agus ar ché na Reannaí ag Athphort, agus tá sé fíorthábhachtach nach féidir leis na báid teacht i dtír ansin. Caithfidh siad dul go dtí an Leadhb Gharbh agus níl sé sin maith go leor. Tá na hoileánaigh ag brath ar an iascaireacht, níl ceadúnas le bradáin a thabhairt i dtír, ach tá gliomaigh, crúbaigh agus éisc gheala agus tá sé fíorthábhachtach go leanfar ar aghaidh leis seo. Ba mhaith liomsa go ndéanfadh an tAire

fiosrúcháin fa dtaobh de seo agus go dtiocfaidh sé ar ais chugamsa. Tá a fhios agam i gceantar an oileáin, gur Aire na n-oileán chomh maith é an tAire, agus níl pingin rua le fáil do na bóithre áise. Tá na bóithre áise fíorthábhachtach agus caithfidh na treoirlínte a bheith solúbtha ionas go mbeidh siad in ann freastal orthu sin. Is iad siúd na treoirlínte maidir leis na local improvement schemes, LIS. Níl go leor solúbthachta ansin le haghaidh na n-oileán. B'shin ceist eile, agus tá súil agam go luath amach anseo go mbeidh an tAire ag cur airgead ar fáil do na bóithre contae. Ach ar a mhóille sin, ba cheart airgead a chur ar fáil do na bóithre áise.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Maidir leis an gcéad ábhar, bheinn sásta an fiosrúchán a dhéanamh, agus tiocfaidh mé ar ais gan mhoill. Maidir leis na bóithre áise, an cheist bhreise, an bhfuil an Teachta chun imeacht----

Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher: Tá an t-am thart.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Maidir leis na bóithre áise, táimse i gcónaí agus beidh mé i gceann leath uair ag labhairt le mo chuid oifigeach, agus táim ag amharc go dtí an t-am a bheidh cuidiú fa dtaobh de na bóithre áitiúla áise fosta. Chomh maith leis sin tá éileamh bearna mhór maidir leis na rudaí LIS agus na bealaí nó na bóithre neamh-phríobháideacha nó poiblí.

Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher: Na bóithre contae.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá an chéad cheist eile in ainm an Teachta Mattie McGrath ach níl sé anseo.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

31. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta ós rud é go bhfuil an tAire ag cur an locht ar gach Roinn eile faoin moill ar chur i bhfeidhm straitéis agus titim úsáid na Gaeilge i gcoitinne, an mbunódh sí coiste tras-rannach a bheadh faoina stiúir chun na fadhbanna seo a réiteach. [2013/18]

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Le fada an lá táim ag teacht isteach anseo agus ag taispeáint fianaise don Aire maidir leis an drochstaid ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge ag an mbomaite seo. Tá cainteoirí laethúla tar éis titim sa daonáireamh agus tá an tóin tite amach as an mbuiséad ag Údarás na Gaeltachta, ag Foras na Gaeilge agus ag gach ceann de na heagraíochtaí eile freisin. Tá an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge caite isteach sa bhosca bruscair ag an bpointe seo. Tá an Plean Gníomhaíochta 2017 le spriocdháta atá sáraithe le breis is bliain. Tá an tAire i gcónaí ag díriú ar na Ranna eile mar gheall ar an bhfadhb seo. Nach bhfuil an tAire cosúil le Mayor Quimby sa chlár "The Simpsons" ag rá can somebody else do it? Cén fáth nach bhfuil an tAire ag glacadh freagrachta as an drochstaid ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge sa tír?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Glacaim leis go bhfuil an Teachta ag tagairt don straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge. I dtús báire, níor mhiste liom a rá nach aontaím ar chor ar bith leis an ráiteas go bhfuil mise mar Aire Stáit ag cur an locht ar gach Roinn Stáit eile faoin mhoill ar chur i bhfeidhm na straitéise sin. Go deimhin, is a mhalairt ar fad atá fíor, is ar mo Roinn atá an fhreagracht uilig maidir leis an straitéis a chomhordú agus a chur i bhfeidhm i gcomhair le roinnt mór páirtithe leasmhara. Sa chomhthéacs sin, tá clár oibre á cur i bhfeidhm ag mo Roinn féin agus ag Ranna agus foras eagraithe eile Stáit lena n-áirítear Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Foras na Gaeilge chomh maith le rian leathan eagraíochta Gaeilge chun cúram a dhéanamh i gcaitheamh

an ama ar feidhmiú na straitéise. Tá sé ráite agam roimhe seo go n-aithním na cuinsí deacra ina raibh gníomhaireachtaí na Gaeilge ag feidhmiú idir mo Roinn féin, Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na heagraíochtaí éagsúla atá á maoiniú acu. Táim sásta go bhfuil dul chun cinn suntasach déanta agus á dhéanamh maidir le rian leathan gníomhaíochtaí faoin straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm de réir a chéile ar bhealach córasach, laistigh de na hachmhainní atá ar fáil. Maidir leis an gcoiste atá luaite ag an Teachta, is fiú a mheabhú go bhfuil struchtúr ar leith maidir leis an straitéis bunaithe cheana féin agus nach bhfuil i gceist agam cur leis na structúir sin. San áireamh sna structúir sin, tá coiste comhairleach a bunaíodh in 2014 chun comhairle agus aiseolas a chur ar fáil maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na straitéise. Is mé atá mar chathaoirleach ar an gcoiste sin agus tá ionadaíocht ag na heagraíochtaí éagsúla Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta air. Tá sé i gceist agam cruinniú den choiste sin a ghairm sna seachtainí amach romhainn. Níor mhiste liom a mheabhú don Teachta go bhfuil bailchríoch á cur ag mo Roinn faoi láthair ar phlean gníomhaíochta don tréimhse 2018 go dtí 2022 in a mbeidh spriocanna sonracha leagtha amach a bheidh aontaithe le páirtithe leasmhara a bhfuil baint acu leis an scéal agus an fhreagracht orthu go deimhin ina leith os rud é gur straitéis tras-Ranna í.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: An fhadhb atá ann i ndáiríre ná go bhfuil an cur chuige atá ag an Rialtas mar gheall ar an nGaeilge maslach. Tá an Ghaeilge in áit na leathphingine sa tír seo. Tá sin feicthe san méid titim atá tar éis teacht ar an mbuiséad. Níl aon earnáil ar chor ar bith sa Rialtas ag fáil an damáiste atá déanta don Ghaeilge. Má fheiceann duine ar aon rud a bhaineann leis an nGaeilge, níl freagracht ag an Aire Stáit. Chuir mé ceist air maidir le cé mhéad oifigigh Gaeilge atá sna húdaráis áitiúil. Ní raibh a fhios aige faoi sin ar chor ar bith: is le Roinn eile é sin. I ngach ceann de na hionaid ealaíon áitiúla, níl aon oifigeach Gaeilge ann ar chor ar bith. Níl aon oifigeach Gaeilge sa Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, BAI, atá i gceannas ar chraoltóireacht sa tír seo. Níl ach dhá uair de chláracha raidió chraolaithe ar raidió RTÉ féin sa tír seo. Uair amháin de nuacht atá aistriithe ó Bhéarla agus uair amháin athchraoladh atá ann. Sin an stáisiún is mó atá sa tír seo faoi bhráid agus tá 50 stáisiún eile sa tír agus níl siad níos fearr ar chor ar bith ach ní baineann sé sin leis an Aire Stáit: baineann sé le hAire nó le hAire Stáit eile.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Cúpla focal sciobtha. Tá comhairle iomlán de dhíth maidir leis an teanga agus tá na daoine i gcónaí ag labhairt fadúda an todhcháí agus is é sin an bealach ceart. Tá deacrachtaí ach chim na féidearthachtaí agus na deiseanna maidir leis an teanga. Mar shampla, cúpla seachtain ó shin bhí mé in Dublin Institute of Technology, DIT, ar an champas agus tá siadsan ag bogadh ar aghaidh le cúrsaí ar son na teanga. Tá athbheochan ag teacht sa tír fosta. Tá na daoine ag obair ar an gceangal idir an cultúr, an oidhreacht agus an teanga agus ní hamháin an teanga, ach trí na n-aontaithe a bhí bainte amach maidir leis an straitéis cúig-bliana agus an plean gníomhaíochtaí cúig bliana. Tá aontaithe timpeall an Rialtais anois idir achan Roinn. Tá dualgas orainn sa Teach seo agus timpeall na tíre an teanga a bhogadh chun tosaigh agus táim dóchasach don todhcháí.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Táimid i gcónaí ag féachaint ar an horizon nuair a táimid ag caint leis an Aire Stáit anseo ach tá an aimsir láithreach uafásach tábhachtach ag an mbomaite. Anois, mar gheall ar an gComhairle Ealaíon, tugann siad 0.8% dá gcuid buiséad do ealaíon na Gaeltachta. Sin an méid is lú. Tá níos mó airgid faighte ag opera sa tír seo ná atá le fáil ó earnáil iomlán ealaíon na Gaeltachta agus na Gaeilge. Táimid ag caint leis an Aire Stáit le fada an lá mar gheall ar chúrsaí oideachais. Tá 25% de thuismitheoirí sa tír seo ag éileamh go mbeadh a gcuid páistí ag dul go dtí Gaelscoil. Níl ach 5% ag fáil é sin sa tír seo ach ag an am céanna níl an tAire Oideachais agus Scileanna in ann a fhógairt go mbeidh siad ag baint amach an sprioc

sin ar chor ar bith. Tá siad fós ag fógairt go mbeidh níos lú ná 5% de na scoileanna nua ina nGaelscoileanna. Tá sé thar am anois go mbeadh freagracht ag an Aire Stáit mar gheall ar an nGaeilge agus as gach rud atá sa straitéis 20 bliain. Bailigh le chéile na Ranna eile agus bí ag obair ar an bplean céanna.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Aontaím le bheith ag dul ag obair ar an mbealach céanna. Sin an fáth a bhí cuid mhór oibre déanta maidir leis an comhobair idir na Ranna eagraithe agus na ran-nóga eagraithe fosta. Le bheith ionraic, tá rudaí difriúla ag dul ar aghaidh. Tá na daoine uilig ag labhairt fadúda an teanga, cén bealach is fearr atá ann, cén saghas caighdeán a bheith de dhíth ó na daoine a bheidh ag cruthú na fostaíochta sna réimse fostaíthe agus an tseirbhís atá ar fáil sna Gaeltachtaí agus taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht, rud atá tábhachtach. Bhí an Teachta ag labhairt faoi na rudaí áille ins na Gaeltachtaí. Dé Sathairn seo chugainn beidh mé ag seoladh Ionad Cuimhneacháin na nImirceach agus na daoine a bhí ag obair-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Rud amháin-----

Deputy Joe McHugh: Tá mé ag labhairt fadúda an athbheochan ag teacht agus bhí an Teachta ag labhairt fadúda an éileamh agus cúrsaí mar sin agus seirbhís a bheith ar fáil trí Ghaeilge sna Ranna difriúla. Sin an fáth a bhímid ag obair ar an bplean gníomhaíochta cúig-bliana.

Question No. 32 replied to with Written Answers.

Hare Coursing Regulation

33. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the exceptional circumstances under which a coursing club may apply to hold a second day's trial; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19895/18]

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Section 34 of the Wildlife Act 1976 says that an individual coursing club may hold no more than one trial session, but that in exceptional circumstances it may apply to hold a second day's trial. What are those exceptional circumstances? I am aware that in February Clonmel coursing club was given permission to hold a second day's trial. What were the exceptional circumstances pertaining to that? I have been asking a series of questions about strengthening the National Parks and Wildlife Service over the last year or so, particularly on the issue of monitoring coursing trials.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: In October 2017 my Department issued a revised licence in relation to coursing under section 34 of the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended, to the Irish Coursing Club, ICC, on behalf of its affiliated clubs, which included new and revised conditions relating to the reporting of coursing trials. One such condition stipulates that an individual coursing club may hold no more than one trial session but that in exceptional circumstances the ICC may apply to hold a second day's trial.

My Department received a request from the ICC to hold a second day's trial in relation to the three day National Coursing Meeting which was held in Clonmel on 10, 11 and 12 February last. In granting the request for a second day's trial my Department took into account the fact that the national coursing meeting in Clonmel is the largest coursing meeting held during the season with some 160 hares run during the three day meeting. I accepted the view that it would

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not have been possible to complete trails for this number of hares in one day at the time of year in February due to limited daylight. In addition, taking account of safety and welfare reasons, it was considered that a second day's trial was needed in order to promote the familiarisation of hares with the field and with the most direct route to the escape.

It is important to stress that until my Department issued a revised licence last year, it would have been possible for every single club in the country to hold trials over as many days as they wanted. Clonmel was the only application that my Department received for a second day's trail since the licence to the ICC was amended in October last year. The current 2017-18 coursing season ended on 28 February last.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I welcome the Minister's remarks about the new and revised conditions, but I do not know if in actual fact the situation she describes is truly exceptional. What safeguards are in place to ensure that hares are being rested sufficiently and what reports does the Minister have of hares allegedly being shared between courses due to shortages? I know for example that at least 36 hares died at coursing meetings in 2015-16. Some 26 died during the 2016-17 season and by the end of the 2017 a further 13 had also died.

The Minister told me that the cost of recruiting 25 additional conservation rangers for the National Parks and Wildlife Service would be less than €640,000. I welcome the fact that 11 rangers were appointed during 2017. Surely, the fact that just six hare coursing meetings were monitored during the 2014-15 season is unacceptable. I know that number rose to 17 meetings in the following year, and in the 2017-18 season 24 meetings had been monitored. Why can we not arrive at a situation where all meetings are monitored and where hares are treated humanely and protected?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I agree with Deputy Broughan that the hares must be treated humanely and I believe that they need to be monitored, as do all of these trials. In order to familiarise hares with the layout of the coursing field and the location of the escape, in advance of coursing meetings hares in the hare park, the enclosure where they are kept prior to the start of the coursing meeting, will have access to the coursing field for some time. In addition, it is normal practice for some coursing clubs to train hares in advance of coursing meetings by holding trials, which are essentially preparation runs before the hares are pursued by two dogs along the actual coursing field.

Deputy Joan Collins: It is horrendous.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It is my understanding that some 27 coursing events out of some 60 meetings were monitored by officials of my Department during the 2017-18 season, which ended on 28 February this year, including trials. During the 2016-17 season, a total of 17 coursing events were monitored by my Department.

The regional staff of my Department's National Parks and Wildlife Service attend coursing meetings as resources allow to monitor compliance with the conditions of the licences. Such staff perform a wide variety of functions relating to management of national parks, the conservation of habitats, the protection of protected species and the enforcement of national and EU law. Delivering on this work is particularly challenging at a time of constrained financial and staffing resources, but within this context, my Department prioritises its human resources to areas of most critical demand.

Dáil Éireann
Gaeltacht Policy

30. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures her Department is taking to support pop-up Gaeltachts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19805/18]

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I will indeed be brief. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a rá leis an Teachta Broughan, let the hare sit.

I want to ask the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures her Department is taking to support pop-up Gaeltachts, and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Gaeilge nó Béarla?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Either. Mixed, más é do thoil é.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Shaken, not stirred.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Sin an bealach is fearr. Gabhaim buíochas as an gceist. Maidir leis na Pop-up Gaeltachts, ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt do na daoine uilig a mbíonn páirteach iontu. Tá siad ag tabhairt spreagadh do dhaoine eile sna ceantair. Faigheann siad tacaíocht mhór ó Chonradh an Gaeilge agus ó Fhoras na Gaeilge.

I want to acknowledge the people involved in the Pop-up Gaeltachts. This is a natural revival, and it is also a testament to the work that the likes of Conradh na Gaeilge and Foras na Gaeilge are putting in. A lot of those people are supporting it on an *ad hoc* basis.

Tá imeachtaí Bliain na Gaeilge 2018 leagtha amach chun deiseanna freastail agus deiseanna úsáide na teangan a thabhairt do gach duine - daoine atá líofa, daoine le cúpla focal, pobal na Gaeltachta, an pobal atá lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, daoine nach bhfuil focal Gaeilge acu agus iad a bhí báúil don teanga, agus an diaspora. Tá na heagraíochtaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta ag teacht aníos i gcónaí le smaointe nua chun an Ghaeilge a chaomhnú agus a chur chun cinn ar fud na tíre. Tá áthas orm a chur in iúl go mbíonn an Rialtas báúil i gcónaí maidir le himeachtaí agus tionscadail a reachtáil chun cur le méadú in úsáid na Gaeilge i measc an phobail.

I want to clarify as well that the Pop-up Gaeltacht is a voluntary *ad hoc* initiative, based on a ground-up approach at community level. I understand that these social events were started as a response to articles about the Irish language in the media and that they have achieved great success since the concept was established in November 2016. As these occasions are completely informal, take place in normal social arenas and are promoted through social media, no financial support appears to be required from the State. I take this opportunity to congratulate all involved. I sometimes leave out the officials from my Department, whom I congratulate for the work they put into promoting the Irish language.

In addition to this, 2018 has been recognised as Bliain na Gaeilge, a special year for the Irish language. I encourage as many people as possible to get involved with the Pop-up Gaeltacht or with any other forum as an opportunity to re-engage with, learn or use our national language.

Maidir leis an teachtaireacht is mó, I think the biggest message in relation to Bliain na Gaeilge is go bhfuil an fheasacht a ardú, the creation of that extra awareness. It is happening all over the country agus is beag áit sa tír nach bhfuil gníomh nó ócáid nó imeacht ar siúl maidir le Bliain na Gaeilge. So there is a diverse range of groups and activities agus imeachtaí ag dul ar

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aghaidh timpeall na tíre. It is important to create awareness. I know tá croí an Teachta san áit cheart - when myself and Deputy McGrath have a chance in the corridor bíonn muid ag úsáid na teangan. At every little opportunity we are doing that. Ní bheidh sé ag stopadh ag deireadh na bliana. Bliain na Gaeilge does not stop at the end of 2018. It is all part of the plan. It is all interlinked. Tá an athbheochan ag teacht agus tá mé dóchasach go mbeidh an Pop-up Gaeltacht páirteach san athbheochan.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas Website.

Topical Issue Debate

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

Deputy Michael Harty: FreeStyle Libre is a blood glucose measuring device to help patients manage their diabetes. On 3 April this year, the device was made available to insulin-dependent diabetics between the ages of four and 21. It is a new form of technology. Our question is why there is such a restriction. The system, which is attached to the skin, gives real-time readings on blood sugar. It enables patients to individualise the management of their diabetes. It helps them to adjust their treatment, particularly in regard to diet and exercise, and it tailors their treatment to their specific needs. It also gives health professionals and patients valuable information in supervising their treatment. It is cost-effective, reducing the use of expensive blood testing strips and hospital visits, and helps to reduce the emergence of complications of diabetes such as eye disease, kidney disease and heart disease.

I want to ask why this technology is restricted to those age groups between four and 21.

Deputy Joan Collins: On 18 April, up to 50 people representing the diabetes community presented a petition with 18,000 signatures demanding access for all to new life-changing flash glucose monitoring technology that affects 20,000 people with type 1 diabetes. The petition highlighted the fact that from 3 April 2018 the HSE has made FreeStyle Libre available to children and young adults with type 1 diabetes aged between four and 21 years. They very much welcome that. However, we note that in 18 other countries this technology been allocated to all patients with type 1 diabetes. As Ms Gráinne Flynn, one of the campaign leaders, has stated:

The FreeStyle Libre provides more information than a finger prick meter about glucose levels to base our insulin dosing decisions on. This is more than just a game changer in diabetes, it empowers us to manage our diabetes better, reducing the number of dangerous low and high glucose levels.

Why was this not introduced for everyone?

Deputy Mary Butler: I welcome the HSE's decision to reimburse FreeStyle Libre for children and young adults. As the Minister of State is aware, almost 190,000 people in Ireland have diabetes, which is a chronic disease that takes a lot of management. This device, which allows blood glucose levels to be monitored without invasive finger prick testing, is an absolute game-changer for anyone suffering from diabetes. In some cases, patients must test their glucose levels up to ten times a day. While I welcome the decision to roll this out for children and young adults, it is an absolute necessity to roll it out to all type 1 diabetics to allow them

to manage their illness actively in a meaningful and continuous way on the basis of real-time information as to their glucose levels.

Deputy Frank O'Rourke: I support the call to roll out the FreeStyle Libre device to all type 1 diabetes sufferers. This is a matter we have raised on a number of occasions. While we appreciate very much the fact that it has been made available to those aged up to 21 years, it is important to remember that all type 1 diabetes sufferers suffer in the same way. They all need the same treatment and access to this good modern technology which can help them to manage and control their condition. Why would we discriminate among type 1 diabetes sufferers and allocate the device to one sufferer and not another? It does not make sense and it is unfair. The Minister of State will acknowledge that. How soon can this be made available to all type 1 diabetes sufferers and why was the measure rolled out in a manner which discriminates among people suffering from this illness?

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I thank the Deputies for the opportunity to address the issue of the management of type 1 diabetes and the FreeStyle Libre glucose monitoring device being provided by the HSE. Diabetes places a substantial burden on the individual, society and the economy. Much of this burden is attributable to short-term and long-term complications. Almost 190,000 people in Ireland have diabetes. As the prevalence of diabetes rises, diabetes-related complications represent a growing global public health and health service challenge.

Glucose monitoring allows people to self-manage diabetes by making adjustments to their diets, lifestyles and treatments to reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications. Current glucose monitoring methods include self-monitoring of blood glucose. This means finger-prick blood glucose monitoring using testing strips and electronic glucose meters, as well as continuous glucose monitoring, which needs to be calibrated with a blood sample. The FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system is intended to be used as an alternative to current methods for people who administer multiple daily injections of insulin. This innovative technology allows glucose readings to be taken non-invasively without the need to calibrate with a blood sample.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and the reimbursement of medical devices under the community drug schemes in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. In February 2017, an application by the manufacturer of the FreeStyle Libre device was submitted to the primary care reimbursement service, or PCRS, of the Health Service Executive for the reimbursement of its flash glucose monitoring system. The HSE's health technology assessment group carried out an appraisal of the evidence submitted with this application and considered the FreeStyle Libre application for addition to the reimbursement list in line with the 2013 Act. The health technology assessment group recommended that reimbursement for the device should be considered subject to certain conditions. The HSE accepted this recommendations in principle and has developed an application suite for hospital clinicians to use when proposing suitable patients for consideration of individual reimbursement support.

Continuous glucose monitoring is already available to some patients, including those whose endocrinologists have prescribed a particular type of insulin pump. The FreeStyle Libre device is now being made available under the long-term illness scheme and the criteria for approval are as follows: the patient has type 1 diabetes; the patient is aged between four and 21 years; the patient uses multiple daily injections of insulin or insulin pump therapy; the patient has increased blood glucose testing requirements; the patient has frequent episodes of diabetic ke-

toacidosis, DKA, or hypoglycaemia which have included hospital admissions; and the patient is not pregnant. Patients must be individually approved by their hospital clinicians. I understand that adults who do not fulfil the criteria are concerned that the new technology is not available to them. While the first phase of access to this product is confined to children and young adults, the application process allows a consultant to make an application in very exceptional circumstances for a type 1 diabetic patient outside this group. There will be a review after 12 months to look at the evidence of the effectiveness of the device and to ensure that costs are in line with expectations.

We have made huge strides in treating and managing diabetes and I welcome the HSE's decision to reimburse FreeStyle Libre, which is good news for young people and their parents. The Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, is aware that patients with type 1 diabetes must test their glucose levels up to ten times a day and it is his hope that this innovative device will help to minimise inconvenience and discomfort for many children and young people. The Minister must await the outcome of the review by the HSE of the effectiveness and efficiency of the FreeStyle Libre device before he is in a position to commit to its availability to all patients.

Deputy Michael Harty: The Minister of State has not really outlined why this has been restricted to the four to 21 years age cohort. That is the reason the issue was raised. This is a new type of technology and the future of diabetes management, not only in Ireland but worldwide. It should be made available to all patients who need it. There has been an explosion of diabetes in Irish society and many patients will transition from non-insulin-dependent diabetes to insulin-dependent diabetes. As such, the Minister of State must explain when he comes back in why there is a restriction based on age.

Deputy Joan Collins: I repeat that. The Minister of State has not really answered the question. Why was it restricted to those aged four to 21 years? It seems there is discrimination here. It is a question of monitoring over a 12-month period. Surely, all patients should have been provided with the device for the purposes of the 12-month review. This does not make any sense and the Minister of State should reply in more detail on it. He could go back to the monitoring committee and ask it to extend this to all patients.

Deputy Mary Butler: I request the expert group within the HSE to consider the additional roll-out to adults as a matter of urgency. I have no doubt the group will monitor closely how it affects children and young adults but we cannot have discrimination. My colleague, Deputy Frank O'Rourke, and I accepted a petition recently containing 19,005 signatures on behalf of people suffering from diabetes calling for equality for all sufferers. That is a lot of signatures. People are very concerned. I ask the Minister of State to explain the exceptional circumstances criterion. That is very important and I had not heard about it before.

Deputy Frank O'Rourke: I echo my colleagues' comments. I welcome the availability of FreeStyle Libre for children and young adults from age four to 21. It is an acknowledgement of how important this is for those who suffer from type 1 diabetes. However, I ask what "exceptional circumstances" means when everyone who suffers from type 1 diabetes needs the same help and support to manage the condition. It does not make any sense to have an age cut-off. When will this be reviewed and what can be done to fast-track the review so that all those who suffer from type 1 diabetes can access this equipment?

Deputy Jim Daly: I assure Deputies that I will make known their strong feelings on this matter to the Department and the HSE. I will have to get Deputy Butler the detail on the excep-

tional circumstances ground. I suspect it is a clinical matter but I can find out exactly what it means. While I suspect GPs are aware of what is involved, I can get her the detail on what are those exceptional circumstances.

The Deputies asked why the scheme is restricted to those aged up to 21 years. This is an era of finite not infinite resources and with any scheme like this there are two aspects. There is the affordability aspect and there is also the question of ensuring something is a good and efficient product. The decision taken has been to provide for a 12-month trial period and to review the efficacy of the device at that stage to determine whether it is an efficient treatment which, in layman's terms, does what it says on the tin. As resources allow, we will progress it. We all want to see it extended to the whole population, but we have to begin somewhere as we did with the roll-out of free GP care. It is not a question of discriminating against a cohort of people; it is a question of starting somewhere. Earlier intervention with younger people was deemed to be a priority by the group looking at this.

Deputy Joan Collins: Can the information on the exceptional circumstances be circulated to all of us?

Deputy Jim Daly: Yes.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Collins. That is a good point.

Wards of Court

Deputy Peter Burke: I thank the Minister of State for attending to take this matter. According to an article in the *Irish Examiner* by Caroline O'Doherty, 25,000 elderly patients may be held illegally in nursing homes or residential settings. The article also mentioned that a new State agency, the Decision Support Service, was being established to oversee the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act.

When I read the article, I was reminded of a case in my constituency. I will not mention any names but I brought it to the attention of the Minister of State's predecessor. In this case, a gentleman had been living with his nephew and his nephew's wife from 2011. Unfortunately, he suffered a brain bleed in February 2014. He was subsequently admitted to hospital and on 18 February 2014 was deemed to require long-term care. At that time, there was significant pressure on bed capacity in the hospitals and, on 25 February, he was transferred to a nursing home funded by the State under the special delivery programme being run by the Government at the time. On 9 September 2014, the family was informed that the HSE was going to petition the courts for wardship. The family was not asked for its input on this but simply told about it. The family wanted their loved one back home to reside with them but the HSE would not allow it. The wife of the gentleman's nephew was a healthcare professional who was qualified to care for the gentleman and his condition, but the HSE still refused. It refused to let him out for christenings with the family or for Christmas. The gentleman had resided in this house. It was his life and he lived adjacent to his family farm. It had a hugely detrimental impact on the family. I was a county councillor at the time and I made representations to the HSE, but I was stonewalled and received no answers, either oral or written.

When the gentleman was subsequently made a ward of court, the HSE, through the wardship process, initiated proceedings to sell his land. He had 50 acres of land. Again, there was

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no discussion with the family. It was on the basis of funding nursing care, even though the gentleman did not want to be there and his family did not want him to be there. Unfortunately, the gentleman passed away in October 2016. The HSE has put a charge on his property and land and is seeking to cash in on that through his estate. However, this gentleman was not allowed to be taken home by his family. The charge is driven by him being in care when there was a family that was fully capable of looking after him.

When I saw the article to which I refer, it struck a chord with me. The HSE wrote to me after a query was put to it by the Minister of State's predecessor. The HSE said that it was the understanding of its staff in the midlands area that it was not appropriate to transfer a person from a care location to another location while a wardship process was happening. Essentially, the HSE was acting illegally. It then clarified that, going forward, such a request would be considered on the basis of two criteria - the location of the person where the care would be provided and the necessary risk assessment in preparation. That is of no value to the family now. They are very distressed. I ask the Minister of State for a commitment that he will investigate this fully.

Deputy Jim Daly: I will not comment on the specifics of the case because this is the first time I have become aware of it. However, I will give the Deputy and the House some general background information on wardships.

It is the policy of the Government to support older people to remain in their own homes and communities and maintain their independence for as long as possible. However, there will always be a cohort of people for whom this is not an option, despite the level of support that might be provided to them in their homes, and full-time nursing home care is best suited to meet their care needs. The nursing homes support scheme, also known as the fair deal, is a means-tested scheme of financial assistance for those who need long-term nursing home care, whereby participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The aim of the scheme is to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. Importantly, people can choose any approved nursing home, provided that it has availability and, of course, that it can cater for their needs.

There are circumstances where people require wardship when they are unable to make key decisions relating to their life choices. If such action is required, a key occasion will be when a person needs residential care services. In supporting such decisions and clarifying and resolving the person's finances, there is often a lengthy timescale involved. The HSE endeavours to support people through this time in the context of the agreement of the ward of courts, by addressing their care needs in the most suitable environment. In this context, some people will reside in residential care settings while the wardship arrangements are being organised. In many cases, an application for the nursing homes support scheme for funding to support long-stay care will be the outcome if long-stay care is the most appropriate care to be provided. The assisted decision-making legislation will provide a new set of arrangements in such cases once commenced and implemented.

While what I have just outlined reflects current practice, the Deputy may be interested to know that the Department of Health is currently drafting legislation to provide clarity on the issue of deprivation of liberty in nursing homes and other residential facilities. The deprivation of liberty safeguards will apply in circumstances in which it is proposed that a relevant person is to live in, or is already living in, a relevant facility and he or she is or will be under continuous supervision and control; is not, or will not, be free to leave; and there is reason to believe

that the person lacks capacity to make a decision to live in the relevant facility. The Department recently carried out a public consultation on its draft legislative proposals and is currently analysing the submissions with a view to amending its draft heads of Bill as necessary. We intend to undertake this work as quickly as possible, while also ensuring that the system we are developing will work in practice and will provide sufficient safeguards in accordance with the requirements of international law, domestic law and relevant jurisprudence.

I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The Assisted Decision-Making Capacity Act 2015 will ultimately replace the current wards of court system. This will provide a new set of arrangements once implemented.

Deputy Peter Burke: I would be grateful if the Minister of State would confirm that he will investigate this issue or have the Department ask the HSE to conduct a review of the case. With regard to liberty and freedom in terms of bringing an elderly patient home, it is worrying for me to hear the HSE refer to putting the patient first when it said in correspondence to me that it was only clarified in early 2016, during pressures arising from winter pressures, that patients under the wardship process were allowed to go home. That is not really putting the patients first in an application process. Before that, debts were being run up and were being discharged against the patient, as in the case I outlined, and the family was fully capable and had the capacity to look after the individual in question. In addition, during the period in question, the HSE was not liaising with the family or giving them the key answers. It was appointing estate agents and auctioneers from the court to sell property to discharge debts when the family felt it could have this person at home. A number of files were opened up at that time. I am aware that one report was initiated through the elder abuse officer. It was fully found to be incorrect in favour of the family. Again, the family has no redress for that. It was being stonewalled by the HSE.

The article I mentioned points out that there is a fundamental issue here. We like to keep individuals in their homes but when a family has the capacity, setting and qualifications to care for an individual they should be facilitated to do that, rather than the individual being made to stay in a nursing home when a wardship process is under way.

Deputy Jim Daly: The Deputy makes a fair, valid and what appears to be a reasonable point. He articulates it very well. I will look at the details of the case and I will ask for a report from the HSE on it. I will ensure that the Department oversees this process in order to ensure that we get to the bottom of the matter. The Deputy's concerns are valid and are very relevant to the work that is ongoing. We are trying to develop the Decision Support Service. It is a huge body of work to establish that in order that we might implement the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act in full. I welcome the Deputy's input and his contribution today. I commit to undertaking the follow-up requested.

Disability Support Services Provision

Deputy Dara Calleary: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this issue. Deputy Lisa Chambers and I have been approached by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and some of the 12 clients from across County Mayo who use the Castlebar centre on a Monday-to-Friday basis for respite and other services.

From the end of May, this will become a three-day service and no transport will be provided from various parts of the county to the Castlebar centre. As the Minister of State can imagine,

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this is causing huge distress to the families of the 12 clients involved, who depend on the service and on the transport to the service, and to the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, which provides an excellent service, along with Western Alzheimers, across County Mayo. Over the years, much of the response to Alzheimer's and dementia across County Mayo has been driven by communities, not the HSE. The HSE has taken on board some of the projects but has cut funding to other projects, leading to a very bumpy service across the county. What has happened in all these instances is that the patients who were using the community services, which were subsequently cut, and their families were then forced into either primary care providers across the county or Mayo University Hospital, thereby adding pressure to an already overstretched system.

In respect of the Castlebar centre, there is a shortfall of only some €30,000 annually. The HSE has not increased funding to the centre for a number of years. The clients contribute over €13,000 a year to the five-day service and the transport, with the HSE contributing just over €34,000 and fundraising led by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland just under €33,000. For want of this relatively small amount of money, which can be found within the budget, this service, this lifeline to families, and this transport will be restricted to three days and possibly to an even greater extent. The Alzheimer Society of Ireland has endeavoured for some years to try to engage the HSE on this issue. The HSE has written to both Deputy Lisa Chambers and me to tell us it is not cutting funding this year. However, the difficulty is that it is not increasing it either and the costs of providing the service are increasing. Transport alone has seen an increase in insurance costs. In addition, three people who have a relationship with the clients involved and whose relationship with the families of these clients is absolutely essential to the clients' well-being will be laid off this project. It is beyond me how a small, community-led service which is providing such a difference will now be curtailed in this manner because of a refusal on the part of the HSE to engage in the practical realities and practical, day-to-day expenses involved. This has happened previously. There was a wonderful project called Community Action on Dementia in Mayo, a community-led response project, which was providing a fantastic service. It had its money curtailed because the HSE took a decision locally not to support it. The services it provided were phenomenal.

I ask the Minister of State to engage with the HSE. It does not seem to understand the damage it is doing or the short-sighted nature of the decision it is taking. For the want of €30,000-odd, these 12 people will be put on a three-day service, thereby adding pressure to our primary care services and to Mayo University Hospital, which cannot stand any more pressure than that which it already faces.

Minister of State at the Department of Health Deputy Jim Daly: I thank Deputy Calleary for raising this issue. Some 55,000 people in Ireland have dementia, and this number is expected to increase to 157,000 by 2046 as the number of older people in Ireland increases. The national dementia strategy emphasises that, with the right supports, people with dementia can continue to live well and participate in their own communities for a long time.

A €27.5 million national dementia strategy implementation programme is being implemented. This includes dementia-specific intensive home care packages, a dementia information and awareness campaign called Understand Together and a programme to upskill GPs and primary care teams in dementia diagnosis and management. The HSE's National Dementia Office is undertaking numerous projects to progress the implementation of other strands of the strategy, including in the areas of dementia diagnosis, post-diagnostic support and acute hospital care.

Social care services are an important component of enabling people with dementia to re-

main living at home and participating in their own homes and communities. They also provide valuable supports to carers. The HSE, the National Dementia Office and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland have undertaken a project to identify what dementia-specific services are available in communities across Ireland and the results of this have been made available through an online service finder. In addition, the National Dementia Office and the HSE are working to identify the generic services that people with dementia access.

Regarding the specific issue of the day care centre in Castlebar, the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, ASI, receives annual funding from the HSE to provide services and supports in Mayo to people with dementia, their families and carers. These services are in addition to supports provided directly by the HSE.

Since its opening in 2006, the Alzheimer's day centre in Castlebar has offered a valuable service to people with dementia and their families and carers in Castlebar and the surrounding areas. The hard work of the centre's staff and volunteers has allowed people with dementia to remain living in their own communities with dignity and respect.

The HSE and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland have been engaging on the issue of service and funding in respect of this centre. The level of funding provided by the HSE to the ASI for this service in 2018 is the same as it was in 2017. However, due to an existing financial deficit, the ASI has informed the HSE that it cannot deliver the existing level of service without additional funding.

Regrettably, the HSE is unable to provide additional allocations to this individual service as the HSE must operate within the resources available to it. While all community health organisations endeavour to support such services in their areas as much as possible, they must do so within the context of the budgetary resources that exist.

The HSE understands the disappointment of people with dementia and their families who avail of the day care centre in Castlebar. Nonetheless, the centre will continue to operate for three days per week and provide services to clients during those days. I wish to emphasise that my Department aims to implement the national dementia strategy in full and ensure the provision of services to support and meet the needs of people with dementia and their families throughout the country, including in County Mayo.

Deputy Dara Calleary: That is an incredibly cold response on the part of the HSE. I know it is not the Minister of State's response or his feeling on the matter. One cannot just dispatch people from a five-day service to a three-day service. One cannot speak about a national dementia strategy and people in communities and then cut their service in this manner, give them a pat on the head and hope they will not be affected. They will be affected. The HSE funds Alzheimer Society of Ireland services to an average of approximately 63%, but the Castlebar-based service is getting 31% funding, so there is a major gap in the funding level. As I said, it is a relatively small amount, and it is within the HSE's gift. Considering the amount of money it spends and wastes in many areas, it could find this money and deliver it to maintain the five-day service. The biggest impact of a lack of funding would be the complete exclusion of transport on the other two days. Clients will be faced with a reduction from a five-day to a three-day service but will actually not be able to get to the service because their families will not be in a position to bring them to Castlebar and back on the two other days. There is therefore the cut from the five-day to the three-day service and the complete cut in transport. The service is being undermined entirely and all the HSE can say is, "Tough. There is nothing we can do about

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it.” This is a consistent response. The Minister of State can speak about a national dementia strategy but these are community-led and community-based initiatives that are keeping people in their communities and, more importantly, at home and they face small, penurious cuts in funding. It is typical of the HSE’s approach, which is penny wise and pound foolish. This people will end up in Mayo University Hospital or at the local GP, where there are already serious pressures on services.

I know what the Minister of State has read out is not his response. I ask him, on Deputy Lisa Chambers’ behalf and mine, to intervene personally with the HSE to explore with it whether there is any way it will reverse this decision.

Deputy Jim Daly: I absolutely accept the Deputy’s invitation to take a look at this. I also accept his comment on the finite nature of the response. It could certainly have been a little more hopeful for the people who use the services. For my part, as the Minister of State with responsibility for this area, I will take the matter up with the HSE and have a look at it. The Deputy will understand how this works, that we devolve the responsibility to decide who gets what as opposed to the Minister deciding, but I know he is not suggesting that that is how it works. However, I have responsibility to ensure we do not just say the words but that we ensure people continue to live in their own homes, supported and enabled in their own communities, and that we actually back this up with action and the supports necessary. This is a responsibility I take very seriously, and I will take the matter up with the HSE locally. I do not know what the specific issues are. I am not an auditor and I will not comment on the financial situation in respect of the centre. There may be some aspect to it that I am not aware of. I will ask the HSE to come back to me with a much fuller and much more detailed brief and I will ask it to review this decision in light of the conversation we have had. I will come back directly to Deputies Lisa Chambers and Calleary, having done that with the HSE, without any delay.

Middle East Issues

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise the matter of the ongoing crisis in Gaza and for his interest in the plight of the Palestinian people generally, and for those in Gaza in particular. I am glad that the Tánaiste is present.

Many people in Gaza will watch the recording of this debate. The elected representatives of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza have specifically asked that statements be made in the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, the events in 1948 when over 1 million Palestinians were ethnically cleansed and displaced from their lands. It was an event which marked the beginning of 70 years of tragedy, displacement, exile, dispossession, occupation and oppression for the people of Palestine that continue today, and that we witnessed in all its horror with 45 unarmed protestors, many young people, some as young as 14 years - one young man on his 14th birthday - killed by Israeli snipers in what can only be described as the cold-blooded execution of unarmed protestors.

These are protestors who have been marching to vindicate their rights under international law. I refer specifically to UN resolution 194, which gives people who have been ethnically cleansed or displaced from their homes the right to return. That has been denied to them for 70 years. In the case of Gaza, it has led to an horrific humanitarian catastrophe since the imposition of a brutal siege by Israel that has been going on for 11 years. It prevents basic goods being brought into Gaza, a tiny area of land in which 2 million people live and which has been

subjected to four savage Israeli military assaults against a largely defenceless population.

It is critically important that we speak up for the Palestinians and their plight, particularly in view of what has been visited on them in recent weeks and is likely to continue in coming weeks in the lead-up to the anniversary on 15 May. We must speak out and do something; we cannot just condemn. I have heard the Tánaiste and, indeed, the Taoiseach condemn what is happening. However, we need to do something for people who are suffering intolerably and unjustly.

One thing we can do, and which we have been asked to do, is something I have raised previously with the Tánaiste. The Palestinian Legislative Council has invited representatives from the various parties in this Parliament to go to Gaza - they are not asking for the Government to send representatives, although they would be very glad if the Government were to do so officially - and meet all groups, specifically the members of the elected parliament there. As the Tánaiste knows, at the heart of what is happening in Gaza is Israel's refusal - and, tragically, that of much of the international community - to recognise the outcome of a democratic election. That is what started this and the suffering continues because of it. I ask that we do something. Sanctions should be imposed on Israel for its flagrant breaches of international law and human rights. If, however, we do not impose sanctions, can we at least send an all-party group there to witness what is happening and to meet and talk to everybody over there, specifically the elected representatives in Gaza, in order that we can point a way out of this horrific conflict? I hope to get a positive response.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue - not for the first time - and I am happy to be here to respond because it is one about which I am also greatly concerned. I have been particularly concerned in recent weeks due to the appalling number of serious injuries and deaths among people engaged in demonstrations. To date, 47 Palestinians are reported to have been killed and 1,500 injured. Some of those shot may have been trying to cross the border fence but, clearly, many - or most - were some distance inside Gaza and posing no immediate threat. There are at least some cases where the persons shot seem to have been readily identifiable as children or as journalists reporting on the events.

Every country is entitled to defend its territory but international law clearly defines the circumstances in which force, particularly deadly force, can be used against civilians. Such force must be used only in cases of real and immediate threat to life, and only as a last resort, that is, when other methods have failed. The use of force should also be proportionate to the threat posed. I am not satisfied that these limits have been respected.

Israel is fully entitled to be vigilant and cautious when there are mass demonstrations close to its border with Gaza. However, Palestinians also have a right to protest. The use of live ammunition is not a normal approach to crowd control and the resulting number and nature of casualties in recent weeks has been shocking. Many of the injuries from live ammunition have been severe and life-changing, and many people have been killed.

I made two public statements regarding these incidents on 31 March and 9 April. I called on all sides to show restraint, particularly Israel in its use of force. Everyone needs to take responsibility to ensure young people particularly are not placed in harm's way. I have also supported the calls by the EU and the UN Secretary General for an independent and transparent investigation into these events. I have expressed these concerns directly to the Israeli ambassador and

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our ambassador in Israel has conveyed my views to the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

The intensity of the clashes has decreased somewhat in recent weeks. However, with the cycle of protests in Gaza scheduled to culminate in the middle of this month, that is, next week, I am deeply concerned about the prospect of further casualties. I call on all parties, particularly Israel, to show restraint and to avoid confrontation. We should remember that next week will also see the official opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem, which will add further fuel to this fire.

I would also stress the wider context in which these events have occurred. As I have made clear in all my contacts in the region, the situation in Gaza is untenable. If the cycle of violence and depression in the Gaza Strip is not ended, we know that events of this nature will recur. The long-standing blockade cannot be accepted as normal. It is for this reason that, in my many contacts at EU and international level, I have been particularly active in trying to encourage and promote international engagement on improving life in Gaza, which I visited in January on my second journey there. I have made this a priority in my work as Minister for Foreign Affairs. It will continue to be a priority. If people have practical suggestions for how we can assist, I will listen to them.

This year, we are increasing our spend significantly towards supporting Palestinians. One project that we are supporting is a very large solar energy project to power a water purification plant in Gaza in order to try to improve the quality of life there.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: People in Gaza will appreciate much of what the Tánaiste said. They will also appreciate any additional support that can be given, including humanitarian support and support to develop and regenerate a shattered infrastructure. However, the problem is ultimately political in nature.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Yes, it is.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The question the people in Gaza, who are desperate, are asking relates to what they are supposed to do. How often have Palestinians been condemned for armed or military responses? One can say that they were right or that they were wrong but in this case, the people of Gaza have stated they would march with their hands in the air, unarmed, behind banners of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi and that they would engage in peaceful protest to assert their rights under international law. This is not some right they made up or some aspiration they demanded but the right to return to their lands, which was set down under United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194. They are asserting their right to go home. Israel's border does not trump their right to return because they were ethnically cleansed in 1948. It most certainly does not justify shooting down people on unarmed protests.

The question is, what are we going to do about it? Unless sanctions are imposed on Israel it will be indifferent. The decision by Mr. Trump to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem is a direct provocation. What are we going to do? I am making a very simple request and I would appreciate a response to it from the Minister. The representatives elected democratically in free and fair elections in Gaza, whom Israel and the Americans refuse to recognise, ask that we send an all-party delegation not to meet Hamas specifically, but to meet all groups, including the elected representatives of their parliament, in order to hear what they have to say and to look at the destruction so that we can point in the direction that will allow for peace, which is through engagement and discussion, not through the brutality displayed by Israel.

Deputy Simon Coveney: First, the Deputy asked what these people can do. I can understand protests but there is some evidence to suggest that not all of the protest has been peaceful. There is an obligation on both sides to ensure that, by and large, teenagers are not whipped up and put in harm's way by getting involved in violent conflict. That does not excuse for one minute the fact that 47 people have been killed and well over 1,000 have been injured but I am saying there is also a responsibility to ensure that protests, while absolutely understandable, are peaceful.

I will be back in the Middle East in a few weeks' time. I do not know whether an all-party delegation would get into Gaza.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Let us ask.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Quite frankly, I do not know whether it would be helpful right now but I am happy to talk to the Deputy about that. My only objective is to find a way to move forward a negotiated peace process that can provide medium to long-term solutions for people in Gaza in order that they can see some hope for the future. That could mean removing a blockade, trying to improve living conditions or making sure that in the medium term, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, UNWRA, keeps the funding it needs. Approximately 70% of the people in Gaza rely on UNWRA for some form of food support or healthcare. These are the practical day-to-day things in which I am interested as well as, obviously, the bigger political issues that need to be resolved. As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I have probably spent more time on this issue than on any other issue outside of Brexit and immediate EU issues. I intend to continue to put a lot of time into this issue. We would need to look at the practicalities of the request the Deputy has made on the floor this evening for an all-party delegation to visit Gaza before I could give him a definitive answer.

Gambling Control Bill 2018: Second Stage [Private Members]

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move:

“That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I am sharing time with Deputies Jack Chambers, O'Loughlin, Michael McGrath, Cassells and Aylward. I am speaking for five minutes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will not be interrupting.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: We have organised the time among ourselves.

I welcome the opportunity to open the Second Stage debate on the Gambling Control Bill 2018. As Members will be aware, this legislation was introduced to the House by my colleague, Deputy Rabbitte, on 21 February last. I commend Deputy Rabbitte and Deputy Jack Chambers, who have been instrumental in moving this legislation forward and bringing it to Second Stage here today.

It is instructive to note that the legislation dealing with gambling in Ireland dates back to the Betting Act 1931 and the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956. That reveals the extent to which the current laws governing gambling are archaic. I do not believe that anyone in this House believes that the laws do not need to be updated or that new regulations do not need to be in-

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troduced. Any person who travels around Ireland will know that gambling is a very substantial and significant business. Most small towns and, indeed, large towns have many bookies' shops and there is also the opportunity for people to gamble online. It is a business that has an enormous turnover and there are significant profits from it.

I wish to note at the outset that Fianna Fáil fully recognises that many people in Ireland enjoy themselves gambling. They do not have a problem in respect of gambling. They like to bet on a horse or a football match. It provides entertainment and does not have any negative consequences for them, other than losing small amounts of money. However, that ignores the fact that many people in this country have significant gambling addictions. It is important, and the responsibility of this House, to ensure that legislation is introduced to provide some assistance for those individuals.

When it comes to introducing any legislation it is important that we look at the available research dealing with the particular social area we are trying to regulate. We have done this prior to introducing this legislation. Research was conducted in June 2015 by an academic in University College Dublin, Dr. Crystal Fulton, and it indicates there is a significant problem with gambling addiction in Ireland. Research carried out by GambleAware, which was referred to in the research I just mentioned, shows that an estimated 28,000 to 40,000 people in Ireland suffer from a gambling disorder. That is a huge number of people. We also know from international research that single men under the age of 35 are particularly affected by gambling addiction. That is a cohort of individuals in our society for which we need to do something. Many individuals - men between the ages of 20 and 35 - have significant social problems, one of which is gambling. It is simply irresponsible of this House to ignore that problem and not to try to regulate the area.

We all know individuals who have suffered from gambling addictions. In many respects, gambling addiction is no different from any other addiction, such as a drug or alcohol addiction. It can and does have a devastating impact on individuals' relationships. It can have devastating impacts on marriages, on friendships and on other family relationships. It also results in people's behaviour becoming very erratic. It has all the hallmarks of a symptom which requires proper treatment. In fact, it could nearly be diagnosed as a particular condition that requires expert treatment in the future.

We need to recognise that it is unacceptable not to have tried to regulate this area for so long. The problems in respect of gambling are now even more severe because of the arrival of technology. It used to be the case that people who had gambling problems would have to go to the bookie's shop and the worst that would happen was that they would devote and spend all the money in their pockets to gambling and that they would lose that money. Now problems are much more significant. People have access to gambling online and on their mobile phones. They are not just limited to losing the money they have in the bank account. They are now exposed to the prospect of losing money that they have borrowed or that is on account - money they do not have but for which they will be responsible when their debts come in and when the bill comes in from the bookie.

I say this with no disrespect to bookies but the bookie always wins and it is the case that an individual who is devoting his or her life to gambling inevitably will suffer from severe financial loss. Therefore, what we seek to do in this legislation is to provide regulation for this area in Irish life. We want to ensure that gambling in Ireland is properly regulated, that vulnerable people are properly protected and that the business itself is fully regulated in order that ordi-

nary individuals who want to be involved in gambling can know that they are doing so in an orthodox and regulated way. We think it is very important that this legislation gets through this House as promptly as possible and that we get a regulatory system in place.

Deputy Jack Chambers: As my colleague mentioned, problem gambling has spiralled out of control. Thousands of lives have been ruined by a failure to regulate the gambling sector. I refer to families destroyed by lies, homes taken away because of massive debts and lives lost because of depression and suicide. We have 1930s-era laws for 2018 problems. When the current rules to control the gambling sector were drafted, most of the country did not even have electricity, never mind the Internet, mobile phones, instant gaming and 24-hour access to betting and gambling. This is how ludicrously far we have fallen behind. Decades of inaction and can-kicking have sowed chaos. It is a wild-west sector that has been left to regulate itself and play by its own rules.

Inaction has created a landscape whereby vulnerable people are at the mercy of multibillion euro profit-making corporations – a landscape where someone can gamble and lose €460,000 in 12 hours and where the only contact he receives in that period is a telephone call from the bookmaker to tell him the computer systems are down and to call him personally if he wants to place another bet. That is not acceptable in modern Ireland. The result of inaction has been devastating and the results are plain to see. We have the third highest rate of gambling losses in the world. Gambling losses in Ireland totalled €2.1 billion in 2016. Some €14 million is gambled every day. The sector's biggest firms predict €400 million and €500 million surpluses every year. The industry-touted figure is that there are approximately 40,000 problem gamblers in Ireland. The Institute of Public Health in Ireland puts the figure at over 100,000. Treatment centres and addiction counselling services tell us that for every one gambling addict, ten lives are affected. This means that we have allowed gambling to spiral so far out of control, it could be affecting up to 1 million people.

This legislation, if enacted, will be successful in restoring control to the sector and helping problem gamblers. The key aspect of the Bill is that it is adaptive and flexible and will be able to respond and react, as required, through an office for gambling regulation that will be fully empowered and well resourced. This is needed to stay on top of an ever-changing industry, which is moving from dimly lit betting shops to behind computer screens and mobile phones, on which the chance to win is always within touching distance, 24-7.

The Bill draws a lot of what was first proposed in heads of a Bill in 2013. It is disappointing that we have wasted the time since 2013 and that new legislation is only now being introduced. This Bill is not out of date, however, and was recently scrutinised by Dr. Crystal Fulton, who found that it is suitable, subject to minor changes. Amendments, as required, can be considered on Committee Stage, and we hope to work with the Government and all the other political parties on that. It is in keeping with what has happened in other countries. The UK, Spain, Australia, Sweden and Canada all have gambling regulatory authorities similar to the one proposed. This Bill is almost 100 pages long and contains eight sections that cover everything from licensing and codes of practice to tackling money-laundering and international co-operation. It includes the establishment of a social fund to support problem gamblers and the introduction of better staff training to identify problems. In addition, it would impose strict age restrictions.

Another very important aspect of the Bill is a new self-exclusion registrar to operate across platforms where people can affectively opt out of gambling for a time. This registrar could be overseen by the regulator's office and would be crucial to someone who self-identifies as hav-

ing a problem and is taking the extra step to get the help and support he needs.

I thank and pay tribute to my colleagues, Deputies Rabbitte and O'Callaghan, along with Mr. Kevin Dillon in the research office, for their work in drafting this Bill. I thank Mr. Barry Grant from Problem Gambling Ireland for his work in this area and the Rutland Centre and Cuan Mhuire treatment centres for their help and support. Mr. Tony O'Reilly and Mr. Davy Glennon both gave powerful testimonies in the audiovisual room last week and they deserve great credit for outlining how, having struggled, they overcame their addictions.

The experiences of those who have been victims of legislative inaction must be learned from and used for the better. The industry also has a role to play. We understand that it is largely supportive of the proposed law. It should work to see this legislation facilitated and progressed. It should not replicate the actions of some in the alcohol industry in trying to block and impede legislation. It is important that the Bill moves forward with urgency. We need to restore control in what is a wild-west sector. The Minister of State, as a former Chairman of the justice committee, is genuine about seeing gambling regulations progressed. We look forward to working with him in the interest of addicts.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I commend Deputies Rabbitte, Jack Chambers and O'Callaghan on their work in bringing forward this Bill.

The Government really has a lot to answer for. Fine Gael has been in government for seven years and there has been no decisive action. While the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, might be personally committed to this, there is a blockage somewhere, be it in the system or in strands of industry. The industry in general tells us it is supportive but nothing has happened. There has to be accountability for that. We need to have some answers as to why what is happening is the case.

As has been said already, problem gambling destroys lives. That has to be the starting point in this debate. We all need to recognise and accept that fact. The impact is not only on the person with an addiction but, as has been stated, it is also on those around that individual. The reality is that the opportunity to gamble is now in one's face constantly. One can gamble on anything. One can place a bet on which of two flies walking up the wall will win the race. Those of us who enjoy sport, watch sport on television or watch Sky Sports - this is beyond the control of the Government - are bombarded with messages about gambling on advertising hoardings and during the intervals and advertising breaks. Flagship sponsors of shows promote gambling. It is incessant and omnipresent and we really have to deal with it.

As Deputy O'Callaghan said, the whole system has changed. It is now so easy to gamble. In the past, one had to walk into a bookmaker's to place one's bet. There was some constraint on how much one could bet given how much money one had. We need a gambling authority. It has to have real teeth and powers. We have to place real emphasis on training and education. We need serious restrictions with appropriate penalties attached in respect of age, advertising, promotions and sponsorship. All of this needs to be led by a gambling authority. It has to happen and the Minister of State needs to deliver it. We have to look close to home also. We have our own national lottery regulator, yet we now have 51 lottery games, eight draw options, 24 online games and 19 scratch cards. Does our own national lottery system need 51 games? I rest my case.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I commend my colleagues Deputies Rabbitte, O'Callaghan

and Jack Chambers on introducing this Bill, which is not before its time. It is absolutely shocking that Ireland has the third highest *per capita* rate of gambling losses in the world and that gambling losses in Ireland totalled €2.1 billion in 2016, which amounts to €4 million every day. Behind the 40,000 people in Ireland known to have gambling problems are families left with unpaid bills, no jobs, empty fridges, hungry children, broken relationships and devastated partners.

That men under 35 are most at risk is no surprise. I had occasion to speak to a recently qualified counsellor who has just started working in his first job. He told me of his surprise at the number of young men his own age who are seeking help for gambling addiction. These men started gambling insignificant sums of money on gaming websites and the problem very quickly spiralled out of control, leaving them with serious financial and mental health problems.

Young people are using new online gambling facilities at a really disturbing rate, creating a whole new generation of addicts. I read a blog post by a man from Kildare on a gambling support website recently. He described how gambling took over his life, leaving him in a continuous cycle of self-destruction and self-torture. He attended a Gamblers Anonymous meeting at Cuan Mhuire in Athy and described how helpful that service was in helping him to quit gambling. What worried me about what he said was how easy it was for him to access so-called members-only gambling facilities despite not being a member. On his Twitter page, he advocates strongly for the passage of this Bill, as does Mr. Tony O'Reilly, the man behind the theft of €1.75 million from An Post to fuel his own gambling addiction. He says the "epidemic - particularly of online gambling - is happening all around us, with thousands of people suffering both directly and indirectly." One way forward, he says, is for the 2013 gambling Bill to be enacted. He states, "If this can be achieved, it could help so many who are struggling with a gambling addiction and may even stop some from falling over that cliff." After five years of delay, action must be taken immediately.

Deputy Shane Cassells: To cut to the chase, it is an accepted truth that gambling is a disease for many and that it has infiltrated and destroyed many lives in this country. No attempt is being made tonight to ban gambling but an attempt is being made to try, in some small way, to halt the terrible damage being done to the lives of people who are addicted to this scourge and to end the relentless march that bookies and the wider industry are on to further tighten their grip on the consciousness of society. The key here is how the gambling industry is gaining a tighter grip on people's minds through advertising and social media platforms. People need to stand up to those practices.

Last year, at a special night at my GAA club, Navan O'Mahonys, the executive invited GAA legend Oisín McConville to talk about his own battles with gambling addiction. As a GAA man, it was desperately sad to listen to one of our great stars talk about how he went to London for an operation and, after coming out, spent the evening in the bookies. He gambled every penny he had and could not even afford the taxi back to the airport. He had to run to Heathrow and aggravated the injury for which he had been treated. That is the stranglehold gambling can have over a person. The question is then whether it is a lost battle. I asked a good friend of mine who is an addict and who may never break the addiction - but who keeps fighting it - whether the battle is lost. He said that I should not let the industry get a further stranglehold on people. I am looking at the path they want to take. Let us not confuse what is being said this evening as an attempt to thwart the fun of people who go to the races for a for a day with their friends. I attended the Sligo races last Sunday. I enjoyed a great day at that scenic racecourse and, courtesy of Noel Meade, my local trainer, I backed a winner. There is a big difference

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between that and a bookie who is trying to get one to lump money on Swansea - via one's mobile phone - after Southampton have scored, with the advance of in-match betting and the odds flashing up on the screens around the ground. I would encourage anyone to read the feature on the Paddy Power CEO, Peter Jackson, in the *Sunday Independent* last weekend to see where these guys want to go to infiltrate society even further.

One of the great things in Irish sport is the cheer that goes up from the crowd at 1.30 p.m. on the Tuesday of Cheltenham Festival week but if one walks around the bookie shops in Navan or any other provincial town at 5.30 p.m. on the same day, it is easy to see the impact of the sport of kings on so many poor souls. The flashing television advertisements of Ruby Walsh and Paddy Power will not pay the food bills of the lads who handed all their money for the day across the counter.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: We all know that there are people who can enjoy an odd flutter at the races. However, there are others who cannot limit their betting to a day at the races or a night at the dogs. These people are classified as problem gamblers. According to a recent UCD study, there are over 40,000 people in Ireland with gambling addictions, with single men under 35 most at risk. This is very much a silent addiction which can escalate and get out of control very quickly. If one is a problem gambler with an online betting account that has no spending limit, one can literally throw away thousands of euro a day. The majority of online gambling accounts will be set up with a debit or credit card. It takes seconds to transfer money and place a bet. This is lethal for a problem gambler. The most vulnerable people we need to protect are those who sit at home alone on Saturdays and Sundays, when there is sport on all day, glued to their laptops, tablets or phones and feeding money into their accounts in order to place bets. They are not physically handing over cold hard cash as they do in the shops and at the races. This takes the sense of reality out of online gambling. They are effectively playing with Monopoly money and do not realise the gravity of their losses until it is too late.

Advertisements and sports sponsorships for cigarettes and alcohol are heavily regulated and almost non-existent these days. It is time for the sports industry to get its act together with regard to gambling. I challenge Deputies on the Government benches to take note of the television advertisements the next time they are watching a high profile sporting event. Every second or third advert is for a betting company, usually online. Sports websites and the sports editors of our print media must also take note of their moral responsibility in this regard. If I am a recovering gambling addict and I sit down to watch a match, read the sports pages of a newspaper or catch up on a sports website, I am bombarded by betting advertisements which could cause a relapse. We need effective regulation for this industry to give those who work in the sector certainty through socially responsible gambling. We are committed to working with the industry to build this new framework but the time for delays has long since passed. Legislative action is now needed. We cannot underestimate the dangers of gambling addiction for young people. I ask the Minister of State to take this on board. The sooner we do something about it before any more damage is done, the better.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I thank Fianna Fáil colleagues for giving us all the opportunity to participate in the debate on this significant issue. The Government is not opposing the Private Member's Bill sponsored by Deputies O'Callaghan, Jack Chambers and Rabbitte. However, we are debating a Government general scheme of a gambling control Bill, published in 2013, which the proposers have essentially replicated. There is nothing wrong with that. The guiding principle of the 2013 scheme is that only gambling activities which are licensed and regulated would be lawful. Only the

regulatory body might issue licences for such activities. The licensing principles would apply equally to both land-based services, such as bookmakers' premises, gaming arcades, etc., and remote services online, on mobile devices and so forth. Applicants for gambling licenses would be required to supply detailed information, including evidence of financial viability, criminal records and staff training. The Garda Síochána and local authorities would have statutory rights to comment on and to oppose where necessary any application for a licence for reasons within their competences.

The regulation of the national lottery was excluded from the scope of the 2013 Government scheme and is at present a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. I note what colleagues have said about the national lottery. This debate provides me with the opportunity to report to the Dáil on the work under way to review and enhance the original Government proposals, as set down in the 2013 scheme, and to take account of technological and other developments that have occurred in the meantime.

As colleagues have said, this is a fast-moving area. The development of modern, fit-for-purpose, gambling legislation is necessary and is a priority for Government. The objective must be to ensure the proper licensing and regulation of the many varied forms of gambling now available in the State, including traditional betting on horse and dog racing, gaming machines, casinos, lotteries and online gambling, including the increasingly popular virtual and fantasy-type activities. We need a modern regulatory approach to a complex multi-billion euro industry that operates increasingly on a global scale. This revised approach will enhance consumer protection in all forms of gambling, increase the protection of vulnerable persons and potentially increase Exchequer revenue from the gambling industry.

I have been actively engaged in efforts to develop and bring forward revised proposals in this complex and evolving area of policy based on the 2013 Government scheme. I acknowledge comments attributed to me by colleagues across the House. The establishment of a dedicated gambling policy division in the Department of Justice and Equality in January 2017 has facilitated this review. The division also asked for submissions from stakeholders and members of the public setting out their ideas for better regulation. Of significant importance is that the Government, on 10 January last, approved my proposal to review, modernise and revise the 2013 general scheme of the gambling control Bill. Many changes have taken place since 2013. The critical changes approved were to establish an independent regulatory authority for the gambling industry, rationalise the licensing approach to gambling activities, clarify the provisions concerning the licensing of gaming machines, and review all provisions to determine if they remained fit for purpose.

The key element of the Government decision of 10 January 2018 is the establishment of a new gambling regulatory authority as an independent statutory body under the auspices of the Department of Justice and Equality. This approach to independent regulation is, I believe, critical for the development of modern gambling legislation. It mirrors the situation in most EU member states and would bring Ireland into line with best international practice. An independent regulator would offer assurance that decision-making would be free from any potentially undue influence. I should also point out to Deputies that effective modern licensing, regulation and enforcement of the gambling industry will require significant additional resources, primarily for the operation of the new regulatory authority. Similar authorities in other EU member states involve significant staff numbers and IT provision. However, there is increased potential revenue for the Exchequer.

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The Government has agreed that there may be a need for the further development of an appropriate licensing, monitoring and enforcement regime for land-based gaming machines in casinos or elsewhere that may be played for monetary reward. The new authority would have the responsibility to license these machines and licensing terms and conditions would be developed with regard to locations, numbers, stakes, prize amounts, etc. Licensing conditions must be clear, fair, legitimate and transparent to all. It would not be realistic to seek to enforce prohibition on certain physical gaming machines over other types of machine. This would risk further migration to online versions, which are widely available on most operators' websites and may be difficult to monitor effectively. Any discriminatory licensing approaches to gaming machines that differ little, if at all, might attract legal challenge by operators or the regulatory attention of the European Commission. In this regard, I am investigating whether only one standard type of machine, capable of being monitored interactively, might be the ultimate solution to the reported proliferation of different types of machines, some of which are very old.

To progress the review and updating of the general scheme in all necessary aspects, a working group was established, comprising all key stakeholder Departments, relevant offices and the Office of the Attorney General, which I chair. This group had its first meeting in February 2018. It has met on a number of occasions to date and will continue to meet. This work will assist in identifying new or emerging legislative and policy issues not currently represented in the original general scheme and which may need to be addressed in new legislation. It is my expectation that the working group will submit a final report to Government in mid to late 2018.

The 2013 scheme contained provisions with regard to regulating advertising, promotions, special offers and sponsorship of events by gambling operators. In particular, activities aimed at those under 18 years of age or vulnerable persons were to be prevented. These provisions need to be revisited in the light of developments, technological and otherwise, since 2013. Gambling advertising and promotions are now increasingly individually targeted using new technology. Potential restrictions on gambling advertising and sponsorship must be carefully considered, targeted and effective. Sectors of Irish sporting activity that depend heavily on advertising and sponsorship risk being negatively impacted by very restrictive measures. For example, advertising by gambling companies is very much prevalent in TV coverage of horse racing from Irish racecourses and is a significant source of income that is not easily replaced. There is significant sponsorship of sporting events by gambling companies, for example, UK Premiership football, major races in both the UK and Ireland and the Irish soccer team's home games. The national lottery is a very prominent and significant prominent gambling advertiser and sponsor.

Our legislation must include measures to deal with aggressive promotional offers by gambling operators to entice customers to their product. However, I am anxious to ensure that unintended negative consequences do not arise in this regard and I must caution against unrealistic expectations as to what can be achieved. Imposing restrictions on out-of-State broadcasters or sporting events broadcast from abroad would be difficult, as would seeking to restrict advertising online.

Another area that will require our further attention is what conditions should attach to the licensing of casinos. Ireland will be the last EU member state to introduce formal legislation regulating casinos. In this regard, consideration of the issue of licensing casinos cannot be limited solely to land-based casinos. Many casino games are now available for play online. Technological advances now permit players to bet in virtual reality casinos online without the need to leave their homes.

I am sure that much of this evening's discussion will rightly centre on the issue of problem gambling and gambling addiction. A modern and effectively regulated gambling environment will ensure to the greatest extent possible that gambling will be an entertaining activity for the majority of those who take part in it. We must ensure that it will provide enhanced consumer protection for players while limiting the harmful effects on those who may be susceptible to addiction or other such problems and protecting young people. The safeguard proposals in the 2013 scheme will require development and continuous monitoring thereafter. In this context, the new independent regulatory authority will be the critical factor.

There are no definitive statistics available that indicate the extent of gambling addiction in Ireland. The Department of Justice and Equality is awaiting the publication of information from the 2014-15 national advisory committee on drugs and alcohol drug and gambling prevalence survey that contained a number of questions on gambling habits and prevalence. The Department will support a further, more detailed study to be conducted by the Health Research Board from 2018 to 2019. These studies will contribute to our policy debate and the development of appropriate measures to prevent and to treat gambling addiction.

Our focus must be to develop the best possible regulatory measures for the gambling industry in respect of vulnerable persons. These would include age restrictions, staff training, self-exclusion measures and controls on advertising, promotions and sponsorship. I envisage the regulatory authority undertaking public education and awareness-raising programmes to promote socially responsible gambling and assist in counteracting the ill effects for players, their families and society of irresponsible or problem gambling. A key potential of new effective regulation is that it will permit the establishment and operation of a social fund supported by industry levies. Such a fund will support those professional and expert organisations involved in addiction treatment.

As well as being concerned with protecting vulnerable persons at risk of addiction, I am also conscious from representations made to my Department that there must be enhanced consumer protection measures for persons engaging in gambling. I envisage these including ensuring licensed operators have adequate financial resources and publish clear terms and conditions of business and a new complaints and compensation procedure. A critical change proposed in 2013 is a revision of the centuries old public and statutory policy to make gambling wagers or bets contractually enforceable concerning licensed gambling activities. This has occurred in the UK and elsewhere but only for licensed gambling activities.

I would be happy to receive realistic proposals from Deputies that would contribute to the updating of the 2013 general scheme and bring about as soon as possible the development of modern and effective legislation. New modern gambling legislation, in conjunction with independent regulation, offers the best route to enhanced consumer protection, to increased Exchequer revenue from the industry and to the development of a full range of treatment and mediation methods to address problem gambling by those agencies competent in this area.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Tá seans ann go rachaidh mé ar aghaidh beagáinín níos faide ná 15 bhomaite. Níl a fhios agam faoi na daoine eile. I commend Deputies Jim O'Callaghan, Jack Chambers and Anne Rabbitte for this timely and important legislation. Our betting legislation is from the 1930s and 1950s and has been out of date for a long time. I note what the Minister of State said and it is welcome that the Bill is not being opposed. However, his speech contained the statement that the Government is debating a Government general scheme of the Gambling Control Bill published in 2013, which the proposers have essentially

replicated. It is not that we have been dealing with a succession of Governments since 2013. It has essentially been the same Government. We have seen very little progress on this issue and very little explanation even in the Minister of State's speech. The fact that there has been very little explanation as to why there has been so little progress with this legislation was raised by a number of Deputies. The former Minister, Alan Shatter, brought forward heads of Bill which broadly speaking were relatively progressive but since then, it has sat on the shelf. It is difficult to understand why this has happened. Reference has been made to whether there was opposition in the Department, the industry or sectors of the industry. Why has there been no progress on this Bill because it seems a no-brainer to me that this society should acknowledge the enormous issue surrounding gambling in this country? Deputies are all too familiar with the devastation caused to families by addiction.

As other Deputies have said, it is fair to say that there is nothing necessarily wrong with having a bet but much like alcohol, it needs to be done in moderation, if at all. We are perhaps more conscious of the harm done by alcohol and cigarettes and restrictions have been placed on alcohol and there are health warnings and legislation relating to its abuse. There is a greater attempt to tackle cultural attitudes around its abuse and misuse. We certainly have a long road to travel but there has been some progress. I do not believe this has been replicated with gambling. The impact of it is enormous and extends far beyond the individual who suffers from addiction. A person can spend everything in their bank account, overdraw and lose everything they have. In particular, the case of Tony O'Reilly is in the public consciousness at the minute. It is quite difficult to fathom for anybody who has not suffered that addiction but it is important to understand it as an addiction and affliction. That case, the scale of the problems people can get into and the devastation it can cause families are replicated throughout the country. In many cases, it is an addiction that is less visible than drug or alcohol abuse. It is fair to say that it is ever-present. It has always created problems in terms of addiction but it has never been as visible as it is now with the opportunities that exist and advertising, whether one is watching something on television or online. There are probably more teams in the UK Premiership sponsored by gambling companies than there are parties in this House and that is saying something.

The general scheme was essentially an outline of what was to be included in the Bill so I would like to hear the Minister of State tell us the explanation for the delay and the progress being made. When this was scheduled, I had a quick look at what the Government had been saying or doing on this topic over the past few years. There has been announcement after announcement in response to any issues that have arisen and always a hat tip to this general scheme. The Minister of State should outline what is the resistance.

I make one point regarding the structure of the Bill. It proposes to place what would be a very welcome office of gambling control under the auspices of the Department of Justice and Equality. I think there are views that it should be an independent Vote so that it would make the case directly to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. There is a case for that. It is important that an office is placed on an independent footing outside of political and lobbying influence enabling it to do its job independent of any lobbying or pressure.

Very often with moves to regulate not just gambling, but things such as alcohol, the regular refrain is the implication for jobs, the implication for the Exchequer and so on. That is political pressure that can be brought to bear. While I do not say they are not real considerations, it is important that the office of gambling control has as its first priority the public good and public health. Its independence is important for that.

The proposal for player protection and social funding is interesting and is certainly workable. It could have any amount of uses. In all these things it is important that the playing field is as level as possible for all different sectors. There could be standardisation of checks for physical betting outlets, casinos and so on. The social fund could be put to good use there. It could also be used for public awareness.

The Bill provides for the creation of a self-exclusion register and sets out rules for advertising promotions and sponsorship. I presume that is in response to concerns expressed in the media about the increased dangers associated with gambling in an environment that is not fully regulated. This register would be beneficial if there is common access among similar organisations if it is possible to address that. It may be a complicated matter but there may be a value in somebody self-excluding and they self-exclude from gambling generally speaking. I am not sure if that would be workable but it is worthy of consideration.

As a member of the GAA I commend that organisation on its recent mature decision not to permit teams to use gambling-related advertising. That is important and shows good leadership.

The legislation also requires service licence holders to commit resources for funding and operating a scheme for dealing with customer complaints and compensating customers, which is welcome.

The objectives of the Gambling Control Bill are outlined as ensuring fairness in the conduct of gambling; the protection of vulnerable persons, including children, from risks to their well-being arising from gambling; and the avoidance of circumstances where gambling could inadvertently or otherwise facilitate or enable criminal or illegal activity and other issues. That is welcome.

I make a point I intend to make in tomorrow's debate on the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) (Amendment) Bill. We need to be conscious that gambling may be used for money laundering and our money laundering legislation needs to take account of that.

The existing Acts of 1931 and 1953 are absolutely archaic and deal with a completely different time and completely different sector. Even in recent years the emergence of online gambling means that people can instantaneously transfer funds into a gambling account straight from a bank account at the touch of button. The current legislation does not reflect the protections we need. It is an enormous social problem creating very serious situations for individuals and families across the country, absolutely destroying some families. We have sat on this for too long. The Bill contains strong proposals and we owe it to the public to act.

Deputy David Cullinane: I commend the Bill's authors on introducing it and giving us an opportunity to have a debate on gambling and more importantly to move the legislation forward.

I wish to unpick the last two paragraphs of the Minister of State's opening speech. They are very telling and paint a picture of a Government that is not really committed to this and does not believe it will happen anytime soon. He said:

I would be happy to receive realistic proposals from Deputies that would contribute to the updating of the 2013 general scheme [for a gambling control Bill] and bring about as

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soon as possible the development of modern and effective legislation.

The Bill before us is essentially a carbon copy of a Bill that was introduced by the Government in the first place. Therefore there is no reason not to support it. Is the Minister of State saying the proposals in the Bill introduced by the former Minister, Mr. Shatter, are not realistic? Is he saying that Bill does not deliver what he called “the development of modern and effective legislation”? In any event even if he had concerns about any aspect of the Bill, which would be bizarre given that his party introduced the Bill in the first place, these issues can be dealt with on Committee Stage. That is why his saying he would be happy to receive realistic proposals almost gives the impression that the delay is not on the Government side but because it is not getting co-operation from the Opposition, which is not the case.

The Minister of State went on to say:

New modern gambling legislation, in conjunction with independent regulation, offers the best route to enhanced consumer protection, to increased Exchequer revenue from the industry and to the development of a full range of treatment and mediation methods to address problem gambling by those agencies competent in this area.

There is no quarrel from the Opposition on that. In reality this is an issue of political will. If the political will exists, we can get legislation passed. With the political will we can scrutinise this on Committee Stage to look at the areas of concern either from the Opposition or Government.

What does it mean when the Minister of State says “as soon as possible”? The previous Bill was proposed in 2013 which is five years ago. Five years is a long time for a Bill to remain, as many Bills are, in a queue waiting to be advanced by the Government.

We all know that gambling is a very serious issue. I do not need to remind the Minister or anybody else in the House of the devastation it can cause for individuals and families. Some people lose everything. Their bank accounts could be emptied. They could lose their homes. Many people have separated and have lost relationships because of gambling.

It is far too easy. With mobile apps people can bet on the same race on multiple accounts. There was a time with betting that once a horse race started, that was it. If someone did not get in, they would often talk about all the bets they did not put on and all the losses they had because they did not bet. Now it is possible to bet on a race even after it starts. The same is true of a football match or a soccer match. I watched the World Snooker Championship final over the weekend. Even the commentators were giving updates on the changing odds. Once the game got a bit closer the odds changed and people were betting frame-by-frame. The same is happening in every sport. It is far too easy to bet.

I understand that a balance needs to be struck between the public good and people’s individual rights. Some people would make the individual freedom argument that if that is what somebody wants to do, they should be allowed to do it. As legislators, we have a job to ensure that the public good is also protected. Sometimes we protect people from themselves because it is not just those individuals who suffer; other people suffer. The State can suffer if people eventually get mental health problems and need to be supported. Their families suffer and there are all sorts of consequences. It is not a victimless act and is not solely contained to the person who is the gambler. I understand about the balancing of rights here, but I do not believe we have that balance right and we need a regulator.

Recently the Regulator of the National Lottery appeared before the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach. A huge number of scratch cards costing €5, €10 or €20 are being sold. There is an issue in that we are making it far too easy to gamble even with scratch cards. I know of many people who buy multiple scratch cards. It was grand when they cost €1 or €2; it is very difficult to walk into a shop and ask for 50 scratch cards at €2. However, it is less of a problem to order five of them at €10. I have a real difficulty with that.

There is a considerable amount in this Bill, which is a very good Bill. It has given us a good opportunity to discuss the matter. Obviously we have some concerns about it, but let us address those on Committee Stage. If the will exists across the House, we can deliver a Bill within weeks or months. I am delighted the Minister of State is on board and that we have his personal support, but we need the support of the Government. This needs to be prioritised. Let us get a Bill through the House and let us put the regulations and safeguards in place. Let us make sure that people have an individual right to gamble but also that we have all the appropriate protections, oversight and regulation in place to protect all citizens in this State.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: First, I want to state our support for the Bill, on which I believe there is an emerging consensus. I acknowledge the role of the Minister of State, Deputy David Stanton, in seeking to push this agenda internally. His role has to be acknowledged, in particular his bona fides in regard to tackling the downside of gambling, and the need to regulate gambling has been well articulated.

We support the Bill. One could say that, to a certain extent, the Bill is limited but this is Second Stage and there is a long way to go before the Bill is finalised. I take on board the points made by the Minister of State and by the originators of the Bill, Deputies Jack Chambers and Anne Rabbitte, and I acknowledge their work on this. For example, there are issues around technology, in particular how the Bill will legislate for the constant movements and shifts in technology. Let us suppose there is a well-known betting outfit based in Gibraltar, or somewhere offshore, and it has a presence onshore in Ireland. If one subscribes to its app, there is evidence it can provide differential odds between different users. The use of algorithms and technology means there is such fluidity built into the system that it can prove difficult to find some sort of legislative scrutiny or regulatory scrutiny that keeps the State ahead of the curve of where movements and trends are in regard to the gambling industry. There are big challenges ahead for the legislation in that regard, although there is a clear political willingness to seek to address that. If there is proper and robust engagement with the stakeholders, I believe it can be achieved.

I have had some meetings with the Gaming and Leisure Association of Ireland - I think we have all been approached by it to some extent - and it tell us it welcomes the legislation. It states that in creating a regulated industry and requiring all operators to be licensed, the Government could establish control over who is operating gambling in Ireland. It also states that, pivotally, such a process would ensure that only those who have been deemed personally fit to operate and proven tax compliant would be permitted to engage in the provision of gambling services, driving criminality and the black market economy out of the industry. That is a wonderful aspiration and we would all agree with it, but there is a massive challenge to that.

I mentioned I had meetings with the Gaming and Leisure Association of Ireland if only to articulate the fact the gaming and leisure sector would seek to be regulated. If I was a cynic, I might say the reality is that members' clubs are in fact proprietary clubs run by owners as profitable commercial operations. We know that concerns were expressed ten years ago in a report

to Government on casinos that the provision of casino-style games in these clubs should be a matter of concern, given the provision of such games was entirely contrary to the intentions of the 1956 Act and that there was no regulation of their activities. That was ten years ago and we might argue that there is such a proliferation of them now that there is a broad acceptance of them and it is a case of just saying, “Ah well, let us do our best to regulate them”.

If the sector is calling for regulation, we accept its bona fides in that regard. The question is how the legislation will deal with the advances in technology and whether it can provide support for the people who have spoken so passionately about this, like Davy Glennon, who describes a win as “only a loan to give back to the bookies”. There are people standing up in society who are very brave and to whom we have a duty of care. The challenge is whether we can legislate in a way that ensures we support people like Davy Glennon. I do not want to patronise Mr. Glennon as I do not know the man from Adam but, given his courage in coming forward, we need to meet what he is saying with clear and robust legislation.

While we have a long way to go, at least this is a starting point. I congratulate Fianna Fáil for bringing this forward and congratulate the Government for accepting the bona fides of the Bill. I believe we will have much discourse throughout the various stages of this Bill to try to get it right, so we can speak for the type of people who Davy Glennon has spoken for, and for Davy Glennon himself, as one example, and that we endeavour to do our best on this issue.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I am delighted to contribute on the Gambling Control Bill 2018. This comprehensive Bill, brought forward by Fianna Fáil, is mainly based on the general scheme of the Gambling Control Bill 2013. At the beginning of this year, the Minister of State, Deputy David Stanton, got Cabinet approval to draft an updated general scheme. Although he may have answered this already, why is the Government drafting another general scheme when it did nothing with the 2013 Bill? Is it not just time to accept this Private Members’ Bill and allow it to be amended on Committee Stage to make it the kind of legislation we need?

A key difference seems to be whether the badly-needed regulator would be fully independent or established under the aegis of the Department of Justice and Equality. The Bill before us has the regulator within the Department and provides for the regulation of gambling in Ireland. It is long overdue, given that our current gambling legislation dates back to the Betting Act 1931 and the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956.

Under Part 1, section 2, of the Bill before us, “gambling” is defined as gaming, betting or participating in a lottery or bingo and amusements. However, I note the activities of horse racing, greyhound racing, the national lottery and financial spread betting will not be governed by this legislation, and daily fantasy sports have also been omitted, as they were omitted from the 2013 Bill. Gambling through “remote communications” is also provided for in the Bill and means that the Internet, phone, television, radio and “any other kind of electronic or other technology for facilitating communication” is open to regulation. This is a very important aspect of the Bill because access to gambling has largely moved online.

Part 2 of the Bill sets out the functions of the Minister and the provisions for the establishment of the new office for gambling control Ireland, and outlines the characteristics of this office of State, including the functions of the chief executive and staff, codes of practice and so on. The Bill provides for international co-operation under section 14 while, importantly, section 16 provides for the chief officer of the office of gambling control Ireland to attend Oireachtas committees, if so requested. This is very important, given gambling on sports such

as football and horse racing effectively operate as a single market in the UK and Ireland.

Section 78 provides for the establishment of an advisory committee on responsible gambling and that such a committee shall include a representative from the community or voluntary sector. I believe this should be amended on Committee Stage either to reduce the number of licence holder representatives down to one or increase the number of community and voluntary representatives to two or three. Part 7, section 79, provides for the establishment of a social fund within one year of the enactment of the Bill. Section 80 sets out the purposes of the fund, which will be to “promote socially responsible gambling”. I believe many people would question that phrase very strongly.

It is true that most people like an occasional flutter on the national lottery or EuroMillions, or on the Grand National, the Derby or the Gold Cup. This is a long-standing tradition for many Irish people, including in the area I originally come from, where Punchestown was a very important festival for local people, in particular farmers. Many people wonder if there is or can be such a thing as “socially responsible gambling” given the devastation that all kinds of gambling has wrought on so many Irish citizens and families. This has been greatly exacerbated by the explosion of online gambling in the past two decades. The public knows that the massive profits of companies such as Paddy Power Betfair and Ladbrokes are based not on occasional flutters but on hardcore gambling addiction which profoundly impacts many people.

The human cost of gambling addiction is real and particularly acute in Ireland. Recent statistics from the Rutland Centre have shown that there was a threefold increase in presentations with gambling addictions, up to 9% compared to 3% three years ago. Other reports have shown that one in ten people in Ireland have a serious gambling problem and *The Economist* named Ireland as having the third highest rate of gambling losses *per capita* in the world in 2017, at almost \$500 per adult. We were listed as among the highest spenders on online gambling.

This is an important Bill and I commend Fianna Fáil for bringing it forward. There were references in some of the literature and responses to the Bill to the nanny-state but that argument does not really wash when one listens to the devastating real-life testimonies from people such as Galway hurler Davy Glennon, who has publicly spoken about his struggles with gambling addiction, which began when he was 16 years of age. We have also heard recently the tragic story of Tony O’Reilly of An Post and the devastating impact of his addiction on himself and his family. I admire the incisive and witty writing of Declan Lynch of the *Sunday Independent* who has written very powerfully on the appalling impact of gambling addiction on families and individuals in our country. When we hear these stories we have to take a very clear and strong view of gambling. That is why we should have dealt with this legislation even ten or 15 years before the Gambling Control Bill 2013.

With regard to the social fund, Paddy Power’s submission urged the Government to explore the UK model of operators voluntarily contributing to the Responsible Gambling Trust, RGT, instead of basing the contribution on turnover. According to *problemgambling.ie*, however, just 63% of licence holders contributed during 2014-15. In 2013, £6.5 million was paid into the RGT while profits of £1.42 billion were posted for the industry. Last week, Paddy Power Betfair’s first quarter profit announcement showed that its earnings dropped 6% since the famous merger but it is still expecting a full year result of between £470 million and £495 million. Paddy Power Betfair reported an 18% increase over expectations during 2017 and this year is increasing its marketing spend by £20 million. Apart from the monetary and addiction problems, this website also claims US statistics show that one in five problem gamblers attempt

suicide.

In the UK the Gambling Commission comes under the remit of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Gambling Act 2005 updated its laws and it is examining updating them further because it allowed casino type development and the proliferation of online gambling without taking urgent action. The UK Government is also considering lowering the maximum stake that can be paid into fixed odds betting terminals, FOBTs, or slot machine-type betting. It is good that type of gambling has been outlawed here. At the same time, all eyes are on the potential US market because it looks as if it will repeal its very strong gambling laws.

It is estimated that approximately 6.8 million people across the European Union are gambling online and the 2015 revenue for that sector of gambling was expected to be around €13 billion. The total gambling market in the EU is worth approximately €85 billion. I welcome the Bill and section 28(3)(b) which provides for the licensed premises to provide proof of adequate insurance cover and health and safety certification and so on before being licensed. Chapter 5 and section 52(4) are also very important if we are to have a credible system of regulation. Part 4 provides for monitoring and compliance. Part 6 provides for safeguards and section 70 is very welcome where it states that credit facilities shall not be permitted. Section 72 bans the employment of young people in delivering a licensed gambling service. There are many very welcome provisions and I hope this legislation will speedily move to Committee Stage. Gambling deserves intense and ongoing scrutiny. Its negative impacts and the testimonies we have heard of people with addiction must be closely listened to. We need a strong system of regulation.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I compliment and thank Deputies Jack Chambers and O’Callaghan and the Fianna Fáil Party for bringing a very sensible and well-thought out Bill before this House. We are seeing a great change in the way gambling is carried out in our culture and society. Many years ago when we were discussing gambling I mentioned the structure of gambling, professional bookies and a very close friend of mine, Timmy O’Leary, who has since retired from owning a bookie’s shop. He was steeped in the tradition of being a good bookie, a person who took money from people when he knew they had it and did not allow people to give away or gamble money they did not have.

With the advent of the smartphone people sitting in their houses late at night might be watching two horses with only six legs between them in some part of Texas at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. on Sky or another channel might decide it is a good idea to bet money they do not have on this device. That is crazy beyond belief. The way people gambled before now was a fine respectable thing, going into an individual bookie, or even to a bigger bookie when the large conglomerates came along, because at least it was regulated. The person behind the till could see the person and was dealing with a customer. It has gone crazy now. There has to be more regulation and protection of families. It is bad enough to do something that is not good for oneself but a family person hurts their family as well and takes money that is needed to run the house and keep the family going. That is awful. Anything we can do as legislators to protect against that we should be seen to do.

Deputy Michael Harty: Not to be outdone by the Deputies Healy-Rae I will get my anecdote in first. When I was a student I worked at the dogs in Harold’s Cross and Shelbourne Park and learnt a very valuable lesson. I calculated the payout on the tote. That was my job, a very sophisticated mathematical formula. I learnt that the bookies drove in Mercedes and the punters came on bicycles or buses. The job supplemented my income as a student to forward

my studies.

I support this Bill and commend Deputies Jack Chambers, Rabbitte and O'Callaghan on bringing it forward. I support the call for an independent office to regulate the gambling industry. This means that the gambling regulator must operate outside the Department of Justice and Equality with powers to impose significant fines on gambling firms which do not comply with the new laws. Gambling addiction is a scourge in Ireland. Up to 40,000 people have gambling problems. These figures are from 2015 and I imagine the problem is much greater than that. Ireland has the third highest gambling losses in the world and the health and social costs of problem gambling are very destructive to our society. In the US gambling addiction leads to one in five attempted suicides which is double the number for the next addiction. In respect of gambling addiction services in Clare, we have Bushypark addiction treatment centre. It has identified that gambling produces strained and lost relationships, interferes with responsibility at home and at work and also leads to financial catastrophe - including the loss of jobs, businesses and homes. I support this Bill and commend it to the House. The central tenet of the legislation is to establish an independent regulatory authority that will impose fines on gambling firms and casinos that do not comply. It will also have powers to restrict online and TV advertising.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I support this Bill. I compliment Deputies Jack Chambers and Jim O'Callaghan. We can call them the Jack and Jill or Jack and Jim or whatever show but fair dues to them. We urgently need to address the expanding problem of gambling and specifically the problem of online gambling addiction. It is a plague on many families. I also salute the work carried out by many groups but especially Aiséirí in the town of Cahir - it is there now nearly 40 years - and the Aislínn Centre in Ballyragget in County Kilkenny, which I was involved in setting up. The work they have done has found that younger and younger people are being affected on a daily basis.

They have done much work to restore people on their journey into recovery from addictions of all kinds. Statistics and information from *Spunout.ie* revealed that there are 40,000 people in Ireland with a gambling addiction. In addition, over €5 billion a year is gambled - that is €10,000 per minute. That is savage money. It has also been found that Ireland has the third highest *per capita* rating in the world for losses in gambling. That is another staggering figure. Last year, Ireland's losses from gambling totalled an enormous €2.1 billion. Online gambling is the most popular method, with almost half of the gambling losses coming from that sector. The second most popular method of gambling is traditional betting. Gambling is easily accessible, especially when Ireland has approximately 1,100 bookmakers shops, 19 private members clubs and casinos, 122 licensed gaming arcades and over 10,000 gambling machines.

We had a proposal for a massive casino in Tipperary but, thankfully, the Minister at the time, Deputy Alan Shatter, did not grant it a licence. We have to deal with this issue and, as other people have referred to, especially the online aspect available on phones, at work, at home, in the bed and everywhere. It is too easy for people to gamble. There are unscrupulous bookies, although there are a lot of good ones as well who gave much employment over the years. Regulation is badly needed. I am supporting Jack and Jim's Bill as I think it is very important. I hope it will not be languishing too long-----

Deputy Jack Chambers: And Deputy Anne Rabbitte as well.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I thank Deputy Chambers.

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Deputy Mattie McGrath: -----before it is put in place. Agus Deputy Áine Rabbitte freisin.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank Deputies Jack Chambers, Anne Rabbitte and Jim O'Callaghan for this worthwhile Bill. I thank the Minister also, as I understand he is supportive of this Bill. Each and every one of us here needs to work together to do something to help people with gambling problems. It develops into a sickness and has wide-ranging implications for wives and children. Tables are left empty, the light is not paid for and cannot be turned on and families break up. Very capable people get stuck in this rut and it takes everything from them. They lose their job, their business and everything that is worthwhile. It is too easy now with the phone, the computer and gambling online. Something has to be done. Regulation will have to be put in place. We will all have to work together to ensure that something is done.

I know of a lovely couple that had everything, including lovely children. Their house is gone and they are practically out on the road. The poor little children had a future in front of them. We do not know where they will finish up now or what will happen to them. That is what is happening and it is widespread. There are different addictions - including drug addiction and alcohol addiction - but this is a serious problem as well. It is taking everything from people and causing depression and suicide. It is one of the major upsets happening in our community, near us and all around us. We cannot understand it. Something needs to be done to regulate this business because it is having devastating effects.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): The Deputy was a bit short on time and I hope he realises I was extra generous with him and gave him an extra minute.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: What did the Chair say?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I gave Deputy Healy-Rae an extra minute. I was very generous.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: That was because the rest of them are always picking on me.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Deputy Danny Healy-Rae might need to have a meeting. We move to the next group, Fianna Fáil, and Deputies Margaret Murphy O'Mahony, Lisa Chambers, Éamon Ó Cuív and Eamon Scanlon. Is that correct?

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Yes, that is fine.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): We have might have some time to let in Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe if that is agreed by the House? Agreed. The Deputies have about two and a half minutes each.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Fianna Fáil is committed to socially responsible gambling. We need effective regulation for this industry to give those who work in the sector certainty through socially responsible gambling. I thank my colleagues, Deputies Chambers, O'Callaghan and Rabbitte for bringing this Bill back into the domain. It is shocking that €14 million is gambled in Ireland in any one day. This leads to Ireland having the third highest rate *per capita* of gambling losses in the world. If this does not raise red flags in respect of the impact on vulnerable adults, then I do not know what would.

The gambling industry has clearly advanced so much that existing regulation is no longer adequate. The Minister will be aware that the Cork addiction facility, Tabor Lodge, is working in conjunction with the GAA to highlight concerns related to gambling. This correlation has

been highlighted by numerous GAA players speaking out in respect of their addictions. They need to be applauded for doing this. The aim of this partnership is to educate young people on the risks associated with gambling. They advise, however, that the clientele currently contacting them have one feature in common - they are presenting at a very late stage simply because their addiction is so well hidden. By the time they seek help, the problem has spiralled out of control. Whole families have been destroyed, both emotionally and financially.

The protections set out in this Bill would go a long way towards helping those people. The establishment of a social gambling fund to assist with treatment services would be welcomed by all addiction services. This Bill needs to be enacted immediately. There is no need for re-drafting or procrastinating. Such an exercise would be completely unnecessary and a waste of valuable time.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: Ireland has one of the highest *per capita* rates of gambling losses in the world. We lose about €470 per adult per year in different forms of gambling. The latest figures from 2016 show that losses in Ireland are €2.1 billion, with over €5 billion gambled. That is a profit of €2.9 billion for the gambling industry. Over 40,000 people in Ireland are known to have a gambling addiction, with single men under 35 years of age most at risk. We are aware of a number of high profile cases. In one case an individual gambled as much as €10 million. In other cases, individuals gambled hundreds of thousands of euro.

Then we hear there is regulation. There is absolutely no regulation. The industry should be made to react when an individual gambles more than €10,000 a year. If an individual gambles more than that, the alarm bells should be ringing and those betting companies should be forced to make contact with that individual or with the family. I am aware of the destruction that is caused by gambling. I know families who have lost their homes. Nobody realises the problem exists until it is too late. The families of those individuals do not have a notion of what is happening until it is too late.

An amendment should be inserted into this Bill to provide that if an individual gambles more than a certain amount in any particular period of time there should be an onus on the gambling companies to discuss the situation with that individual or a member of his or her family. There may be an issue with data protection and that baloney, but we must address this; it is too important, and we will be putting down an amendment to that effect.

The Bill sets out two aims of regulation through a new gambling authority and protection via a social fund. There must be age restriction and staff training. These measures will be financed by way of a levy on the industry.

The growing size and intensity of the gambling sector makes this Bill a priority. It has been hanging around for five years, and it is time something is done about it. The issue of how people gamble, night and day, in this day and age must be addressed very quickly.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I welcome this Bill. Anyone who has dealt with those suffering from a gambling addiction, which is fundamentally a disease, knows the utter destruction it can cause. I know of people who have been caught in this web, and the effect it has on family homes, farms and family life is devastating. Gambling needs to be controlled.

An option paper was prepared as far back as 2010. A Bill appeared in 2013, and we are now in 2018 and are no further forward. Unfortunately, during that time the sophistication of the gambling companies has increased dramatically. The introduction of online gambling means

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that people can gamble in private. When the only option was to gamble in public by going into a bookie shop it involved the physical act of purposely going to do it. Now it can be done in the privacy of one's own home.

I had a friend who regularly said that when one goes into a bookie shop he or she should look at the floor. I am not someone who ever frequented bookie shops so I did not understand what he meant. He was referring to all the little tickets thrown away in disgust by people who had lost money but continued to gamble and lose more.

I do not believe that commentators on sports events continually speaking about the odds for a goal within five minutes or for winning by a particular score is a good idea. It normalises gambling, which is hugely destructive and does very little good for anybody.

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: I thank the Minister of State for accepting this Bill. The Government initiated the process a number of years ago, and the Minister of State has indicated that he is open to further consultations. We have to acknowledge the employment opportunities created by this industry, but we also have to ask it to be more responsible. One of the main suggestions is that a regulator be put in place. Another suggestion is that the industry might fund counselling services.

Thirty years ago everybody aspired to be a J.P. McManus at the racetrack. That kind of behaviour drives people into compulsive gambling, which we must eliminate. When a person applies for a mortgage, if a bank manager or a loan processor sees that an applicant has an account with one of the bookie shops the mortgage is put on hold, showing that banks acknowledge that it is a major problem for people.

I commend this legislation. The law as it stands is archaic and out of touch. Regulation of the whole industry must include online companies and offshore companies. They must be held accountable.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate. As my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, pointed out earlier, the Government is not opposing the Private Members' Bill sponsored by Deputies Jim O'Callaghan, Jack Chambers and Anne Rabbitte. The proposed Bill is a replication of the general scheme of the Gambling Control Bill 2013. That scheme was an ambitious effort to introduce comprehensive reform of our antiquated gambling legislation. It was intended to replace all current gaming and betting legislation and to bring licensing and regulatory functions together in one place. The Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, who has special responsibility in the area of gambling policy and regulation, set out in some detail the work under way in the Department of justice to review and enhance the original Government proposals in the general scheme of the 2013 Bill.

I admit that progress has been somewhat slower than any of us would wish in advancing the Government's legislative proposals. Now, due to the passage of time and the rapid evolution of the gambling sector, there is a consequent need to ensure that proposed measures to ensure effective regulation and protection of the consumer and vulnerable persons are fit for purpose now and into the future. It is in this context that the Government, on 10 January, agreed to review the general scheme of the 2013 Bill and to make significant changes. By contrast, the Bill proposed this evening is simply a replication of the Government's earlier proposals, with no new elements or recognition of how fast the gambling industry has evolved over that period of

time. However, I accept it as being an important contribution to the debate, and I thank Deputy Rabbitte and others for this positive and constructive contribution.

The critical element of the Government decision of 10 January is for the establishment of a gambling regulatory authority as an independent statutory body under the auspices of the Department of Justice and Equality. This approach is somewhat different to the original proposal to establish an office for gambling control, which would have featured more direct involvement from the Minister. Independent regulation is the normal situation in most EU member states. An independent regulator would offer assurance that decision making would be free from any potential undue influence. It would also provide greater assurance for both consumers and potential investors in gaming related activities that could bring employment and revenue benefits.

The Government has agreed that there is a need for the development of an appropriate licensing, monitoring, inspection, supervision and enforcement regime for land-based gaming machines, either in casinos or located elsewhere, that may be played for monetary reward. The general scheme of the 2013 Bill requires further development with regard to issues such as numbers, locations for machines and stake or prize amounts. The new regulatory authority would have the responsibility to develop the necessary terms and conditions. These conditions must be clear, fair, legitimate and transparent to all. There is evidence that the gambling industry is moving away from land-based gaming machines in favour of online versions. Any discriminatory licensing approaches to gaming machines might attract legal challenge by operators.

Another area that will require our further attention is the conditions that will attach to the licensing of casinos. We must introduce formal legislation to regulate casinos. In that context, there are almost 40 private members' clubs providing gaming facilities and services of the type that would be available in licensed casinos as proposed under the 2013 scheme. The current regulatory requirement on these clubs is that they register with my Department under the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 and to pay appropriate taxes to the Revenue Commissioners.

I have heard contributions from Deputies this evening which highlighted the issue of problem gambling and of gambling addiction. The media sometimes features the sad and unfortunate experiences of a number of persons whose addiction has led them into dark places, with risks to their liberty, health and survival and which causes ongoing suffering for themselves and their families. As public representatives, we have all heard very sad and disturbing stories. The Minister of State outlined earlier the efforts by various arms of Government to obtain reliable information and statistics in this regard.

What should be our response as legislators? The 2013 scheme contained a number of proposed responses. It enhanced consumer protection for participants in gambling activities. We will insist on fair play from the gambling companies in the shape of clear and reasonable terms and conditions and no hidden conditions regarding payouts and acceptance of bets from successful participants. I am very much of the view that our normal consumer protections must apply in this area. The very ancient prohibition on enforcement of gambling debts will be removed in respect of licensed activities.

Enhanced consumer protection can contribute to our attempts to better protect vulnerable persons who may be prone to problem gambling, but we will do more. The Minister of State and I will insist on a workable self-exclusion process with gambling operators. While I am conscious of possible data protection issues, we must ensure this protective measure as far as

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we can. I appreciate that it will be easier to apply to online accounts, but we will study what can be done in our traditional bookies' shops and other gambling establishments.

The final element has to be the development of a social fund. In this context, a new independent regulatory authority will be the critical factor in the operation of such a fund. I would envisage that this fund would operate with the support of those professional and expert organisations involved in the treatment of addicts. Levies on gambling operators will provide the appropriate resources for this fund. To progress the review and updating of the 2013 general scheme, the Government agreed that the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, should chair a working group comprising all stakeholder Departments, appropriate officers and the Office of the Attorney General.

The group has considered new developments, not only in Ireland but also in other states in its work. In addition to our focus on developing the 2013 general scheme, my Department has been working to bring forward early proposals to update the antiquated Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 in a number of areas. These proposals were agreed by the Government on 11 July last year for inclusion in the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. They will now be contained in a separate Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill. This is currently under preparation by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. I am expecting publication of the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill during the autumns session of the Dáil. It will include setting the minimum age limit for participating in such activities at 18 years; procedures for the better promotion of minor local lotteries; streamlining the application process for permits and licences for the promotion of minor gaming and lotteries; and raising the current, unrealistic monetary limits on stakes and prizes for gaming machines licensed in relevant local authority areas. These amounts are set at currently 3 cent and 50 cent. It is proposed to raise the stake amount to €10 and the prize amounts to €750. There is a need for immediate reform in this area.

I need not remind members of this House how important locally run lotteries are to the financial well-being of many sports clubs and community groups throughout the country. Deputies will thus appreciate how important it is to update the law regarding the promotion of fundraising lottery activities at local level for charitable and philanthropic purposes, and to streamline the application process for permits and for licences.

The guiding principle of the 2013 scheme was that only gambling activities which were licensed and regulated would be lawful. Only the regulatory body might issue licences for such activities. The licensing principles would apply equally to both land-based and online services. I can assure the Deputies that this principle remains. New, modern gambling legislation, in conjunction with independent regulation, offers the best route to enhanced consumer protection, increased Exchequer revenue from the industry and development of a full range of treatments and mediation methods to address the problems of gambling, assisted by agencies competent in this field.

The Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, said earlier that he would be happy to receive realistic proposals from Deputies that can contribute to updating the 2013 general scheme. I very much support that position. It would be very useful to receive wisdom from all sides so that we can progress the development of modern and effective legislation. In this regard, I again acknowledge the contribution of Deputies Chambers and Rabbitte and others opposite.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the Minister of State's work within Government, across Departments and within my own Department. I acknowledge his commitment to introducing an

ambitious package of legislation. The Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, takes a very collegiate and open approach to policy development. I would urge all Deputies to work with him to bring forward the best possible new laws as soon as possible.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I thank the Minister. He has impeccable timing.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I wish to correct the record of the Dáil. When I was thanking the Fianna Fáil Members, I inadvertently omitted Deputy Anne Rabbitte. I wish to compliment her also. It was just an error on my behalf.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): She is smiling broadly on the bench.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Well, I apologise. I want to acknowledge everybody's work.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Well done.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): We come now to the final speakers from Fianna Fáil - Deputies Mary Butler, James Browne and Anne Rabbitte. I understand there are two three-minute speeches and one four-minute speech summing up.

Deputy Mary Butler: Fianna Fáil is committed to socially responsible gambling. This legislation has the double objective of effectively regulating the expanding gambling sector that has emerged in recent years, while also protecting vulnerable adults and young people. The legislation updates the previous heads of Bill published in 2013 but never moved by the then Government. After half a decade, the time is now. This problem is silently destroying lives. We need effective regulation for this industry to give those who work in the sector certainty through socially responsible gambling. We are committed to working with the industry to build this new framework, but the time for action has long since passed. Legislative action is now needed.

More than anything else, an inability to control one's behaviour characterises an addiction problem. In a very real sense, gambling becomes an obsession in a person's life, taking on greater and greater importance the longer the addiction persists. More than 40,000 people in Ireland are known to have a gambling addiction, with single men under 35 most at risk according to a UCD study. Problem gamblers spend more time gambling or thinking about gambling, and it can become extremely difficult to maintain a normal family life. This creates stress and has a negative impact on relationships and family life. Families usually have more arguments over money, and they can be hounded by debt collectors.

The availability of online gambling now makes gambling available to all, at any time, day or night, anywhere a person can go online. It also means that in a lot of cases gambling can be secret, and huge debts can be incurred very quickly. The growing size and intensity of the gambling sector makes this Bill a priority. Protecting vulnerable gamblers and individuals is a key component of this legislation, and I would also like to commend my colleagues, the three Deputies who brought the Bill forward. Deputies Anne Rabbitte, Jack Chambers and Jim O'Callaghan are all stationed on the corridor beside me, so I have been listening to conversations about this gambling Bill for a long time. I would also like to commend Deputy Anne Rabbitte for holding several public meetings on this.

Deputy James Browne: I thank Deputies Anne Rabbitte, Jim O'Callaghan and Jack Cham-

bers for bringing forward this very important Bill. I welcome this Fianna Fáil Bill, which seeks to effectively regulate the expanding gambling sector which has emerged in recent years. This legislation updates the previous heads of a Bill published in 2013 by a Fine Gael-led Government but never acted upon. Effective regulation of this industry is long overdue. Similar to so many other areas of policy, it is disappointing that once again it is the Opposition that has to do the Government's work for it.

People take up gambling for diverse reasons. Some are amused by it while others enjoy the feeling of excitement or sense of power that risk-taking gives them. For others it is a social outlet, a way to avoid isolation. For some, especially those in difficult financial circumstances, it gives them a false sense of hope that they can win.

However, we know that gambling causes great harm. Addictive gambling is linked to numerous social problems that devastate the gambler's life, such as effects on their physical and mental health, criminal acts such as theft, bankruptcy and separation. Gambling addiction has been associated with serious mental health conditions. Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, social phobias and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD, often co-occur.

This complex situation can mean that another mental health illness may make a person more vulnerable to developing an addiction. In other words, the addiction may be symptomatic of the illness or cause another illness. In such cases, the other disorders must also be treated in order to treat the addiction itself. There is hope for those with co-occurring mental health illness and gambling addiction, but all of a person's co-occurring disorders must be identified. How each condition affects the others must be understood and they must be treated together. Gambling addiction is an insidious one because there are often no outward signs that something is wrong until it is too late and they face financial ruin. With over 40,000 people in Ireland known to have a gambling addiction, with that number increasing and with the known effects being so devastating, the time for delay is long over. The time for action is now.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I thank my colleagues, Deputies Jack Chambers and Jim O'Callaghan, for bringing forward the Bill. I thank the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, and the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, for accepting it and assisting its progress on Committee Stage. That is very welcome. I started on this as a particular crusade because of the social need within society. Every Member, including the Minister and Minister of State, acknowledges that there is an appetite for change and a view that the archaic regulation which is currently in place is not fit for purpose any longer. While I acknowledge that the Minister and Minister of State are also working on their own amendments, the appetite is to have this Bill progress on Committee Stage. If we can have a race to the top to see which Bill comes out most quickly, it would be best for everyone. Unfortunately, the Minister of State did not provide a timeframe in his statement. I would like to think that we have the will to let this Bill come before the justice committee. I want to get it in there. I am not saying people cannot table amendments. I want amendments and for everyone to come forward with their proposals. Deputies Harty and Ó Laoghaire put forward very valid objections this evening and proposals as to how best to enhance the Bill.

The Bill is about a few key drivers which would make a difference, in particular through a gambling regulator, on which we all agree. Another driver is a social fund to support the likes of Cuan Mhuire, the Rutland Centre and various other facilities which provide great support to individuals and their families. Another is advertising, which everyone has discussed this evening. As spokesperson for children and youth affairs, I note that any child who sits down

to watch a Premiership game is targeted inadvertently and shown that gambling is where it is at. There is no shut off from it. I understand that we cannot control everything, but we can put procedures in place to legislate. They are doing it in the UK. They are doing it in Canada and they are doing it in Australia. We could do it here also. I cannot see why not.

There are vulnerable people and young people. There are people in our society who need protection. Industry is not against any of this. Not one person in industry has told me he or she does not support the Gambling Control Bill 2018. They have all said they would openly welcome a regulator and they acknowledge the idea of social exclusion. The reason we are having so open a conversation is that certain people have stood up. We have to talk about my own constituent, Davy Glennon, who is now an ambassador for the GAA. He stepped forward and told his story. Tony O'Brien stepped forward and told his story. Behind all of these stories are affected families and lives which have been destroyed. Davy and Tony are fortunate because they were able to get support and to engage with people who could help them through. Regrettably, there are many who do not get that support. How difficult that is. That is where the social fund would be well spent. We could put it back into communities to provide the support they need.

Training and education are important and some of the social fund could be invested there. The online world is in children's hands morning, noon and night in the apps they use. I spoke at the AV presentation last week about the Conor McGregor fight. I tried to stream it online that night but I could not watch it due to the proliferation of pop-up screens. I could not get in to see the fight because too many people were offering me the chance to place a bet. That is what young people were experiencing on the night too. I did not have a bookie's account but I was being targeted. If I had an account, it would have been difficult with the intensity of the marketing that was taking place.

I acknowledge the role the GAA has played in this context in the last number of months. The GAA has stepped forward without any legislation and taken ownership of the issue. It is going into every parish and community. One thinks of the Oisín McConville story and how he has been an ambassador to various clubs. The GAA has acknowledged that there is a huge issue in communities and it is trying to support its membership. We have to acknowledge what it is doing. It would be wonderful if we could allow the Bill to go to the justice committee. While the Government is facilitating this, we all know how the system works. I do not want it stalled and would like to see it emerge from the lottery along the way.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Do not interfere with the lottery.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: One should not mention the lottery.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: What I mean is that we do not want to wait another three, four or five years to bring forward this legislative change. There might be a money message there. Perhaps, in that case, the Government could bring forward its own amendments. I thank the Acting Chairman for allowing me to go over my time a little. I thank everyone in the Gallery who has sat there for the last two hours to listen to the debate. They have provided a great deal of support on this for the last number of months.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): It was appropriate to give that few minutes extra as this is such an important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

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Gambling Control Bill 2018: Referral to Select Committee [Private Members]

Deputy Jack Chambers: I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Justice and Equality pursuant to Standing Orders 84A(3)(a) and 141.

Question put and agreed to.

Message from Select Committee

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): The Select Committee on Business, Enterprise and Innovation has completed its consideration of the Industrial Development (Amendment) Bill 2018 and has made no amendments thereto.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Excellent.

Future of the European Union: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Helen McEntee): At a time when the European Union faces serious challenges, it is appropriate that we mark Europe Day by turning our attention to the future of the Union while reminding ourselves of its fundamental purpose. It is 68 years since plans for the European Coal and Steel Community were announced. It was a bold plan in a post-war context which envisaged the close interlinking of European economies to ensure, as Robert Schumann himself claimed, that war between historic rivals would not only be “merely unthinkable, but materially impossible”. Since then, the European Union has developed into an area in which citizens enjoy the highest living standards, the highest levels of social protection, the highest level of labour rights and the highest protections for human rights in history.

As we celebrate 45 years as a member state of the EU, it is timely to reflect on our relationship with the Union over the past number of decades. Ireland has benefited enormously from membership of the European Union. With EU support, it has transformed into a modern, outward-looking country and an excellent place to do business where the standard of living matches that of the most prosperous of our European partners. EU membership has helped to improve almost every aspect of life in Ireland from how we work, travel and shop to the quality of our environment, opportunities for learning and the way in which our businesses buy and sell goods and services. EU membership has enabled our transformation from a mainly rural economy to a modern economy driven by high technology industry and global exports, while membership of the eurozone has facilitated exports and international travel. We have reduced our reliance on the United Kingdom in trade and there is now a much wider market for Irish goods and services across the Union. Furthermore, the EU provided the context through which we succeeded in forging strong bonds of co-operation and solidarity not only across the EU but also across these islands and on our own island, after many years of conflict. That has been highlighted even more by the challenges we are facing with Brexit.

Successive Irish Governments have recognised over the past 45 years, and no less so today, that Ireland’s place in the EU is in our best interests. Irish people are consistently among the most supportive of engagement at EU level. A RED C poll commissioned on behalf of Euro-

pean Movement Ireland and published this morning shows that 92% of Irish people support Ireland's continued membership of the EU. More interestingly, 97% of 18 to 24 year olds showed support. This is a level we have never seen previously. More Irish students than ever are participating in the ERASMUS+ programme and are finding jobs and careers in other member states, while Irish business continues to grow and expand across the EU. A priority of this Government is to maintain and increase the number of Irish people working in the EU institutions, and we have been very active in promoting these career options and offering support to those searching for an international career in the EU. I have travelled to the various universities and engaged with the students to show them the opportunities that are available to them in Europe.

This is not to say that from Ireland's perspective all is as it should be in the EU. However, while reforms in some areas may be necessary, the fact that the vast majority of people believe that our membership of the Union is a positive factor for Ireland is a valuable starting point. Most people understand that the EU is not perfect, and never will be. However, it is the best mechanism to deal with the challenges we face each day. Every year on 9 May we celebrate Schuman's vision for Europe in 1950. This year is arguably even more significant as we face into an uncertain future as 27 members, following the decision of the UK to leave the Union. Of course, conversations must be held about the future direction of the EU, what we want from it and how it can work for us. This is all in the context of the difficult issues we have faced over the past number of years, such as the financial crisis, the migration crisis, the recent terror attacks on EU soil that have tested member states and the steady growth of Euroscepticism in some member states. Furthermore, the aftermath of Brexit and the new upcoming budget cycle, as well as political developments in other parts of the EU, have underlined the need for these discussions to take place.

Working closely with a range of EU partners has always been important for Ireland, but strengthening and diversifying these relationships have assumed renewed importance in light of Brexit. I thank our partners across Europe for the unwavering solidarity they have shown to Ireland on issues relating to Brexit and also in setting out our negotiating objectives. It is also essential for us to understand their perspective on other issues and to discuss our shared priorities for the future of Europe. For example, in many key economic and institutional policy areas we share a common approach with the Nordic and Baltic member states and with the Netherlands. Our engagement stretches across the Government, with the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Minister for Finance engaging in meetings in advance of EU Council meetings with their counterparts. I will participate in a similar meeting organised by Latvia to discuss the multiannual financial framework, MFF, later this week. The Taoiseach and Ministers also engage in an intensive programme of bilateral exchanges with our partners, which allows us to seek common ground, agree key priorities or, at the very least, better inform each other of where we are coming from and of other issues where we might seem to diverge. Understanding each other better goes to the heart of what the EU is about.

We live in a changing world, with major shifts brought about by globalisation, migration, climate change and threats to our security as well as political challenges to the current international order. We, the member states and citizens of the EU, must ask ourselves if the EU is fit for purpose to address the many challenges we will face in the coming years. On 15 November last, the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and I launched a national citizens' dialogue on the future of Europe. Over the past number of months we have been engaging with people of all ages and from all sectors to hear their views about the Union and its future direction. We held regional events in Galway, Cork, Maynooth, Letterkenny, Navan and

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Dublin, to name a few, where we heard from citizens and from representatives of civic society, as well as community and voluntary organisations. The events were structured around discussions on key thematic areas, which included security, social policy, education, equal opportunities, the environment, competitiveness and investment. The key driver of these dialogues was the engagement and involvement of as many people as possible. The slogan we chose for this campaign is straightforward and simple: “It’s your future; your Europe; get involved”. I am pleased that many people did get involved.

These events culminated earlier today at our Europe Day event in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, where our discussions brought these key themes together. I am grateful to all of the people, including Members of this House and of the Seanad, who attended and contributed so much to this process over the past six months. Irish people have a deep and informed interest in Europe. We heard a wide range of views in what has been an open, inclusive and participative process. People have embraced it and got involved. I believe we have a real sense of how Irish people are engaging about Europe and the issues of interest to them. Broadly, the overwhelming majority of Irish citizens who participated in these events see opportunity in the EU and value Ireland’s continued role in it. Ireland’s future in Europe goes way beyond the Brexit issue, and we can look towards a shared future with our EU partners with real optimism.

Areas such as education and training, research and innovation, environmental protection, rural development and competitiveness were among the stand out issues where participants in our consultations felt more EU action is required. Specifically, the areas of education and training came up continually at each event and were in each question that was asked. We have to take all this information and bring everything we have learned through this process together. We have to make sure it informs the Government’s analysis and our contribution to the Europe-wide debate that is taking place.

A clear difference between today and when we joined what was then the EEC in 1973 is that we now live in a much more interconnected and globalised world. We face growing competition from emerging economies such as China, India, Asia and Africa, and are challenged by a range of new issues, such as mass migration, climate change, cyber threats and international terrorism. Most Irish people agree that these issues are too big to be dealt with by one member state alone and value the co-operation and solidarity achieved through the EU to deal with them.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has increased funding to a number of organisations that are involved in communicating European issues to the public. They include European Movement Ireland and the Institute for International and European Affairs, IIEA, both of which have been active and involved in the future of Europe discussion. I also recently announced a fund of €100,000 for 15 civil society bodies, NGOs and organisations through the Communicating Europe initiative. I can give a flavour of some, which are quite wide and varied. There will be a special Blindboy Podcast on Europe live at the MindField arena at the Electric Picnic festival in September. The young innovators for Europe project will be undertaken by the Young Social Innovators and a Big Friendly Guide to the European Union will be launched for primary schools, to complement the Blue Star EU education programme. I expect that these projects will further encourage people to engage, participate and communicate with the various different bodies and outreach assistance that is available to them.

Turning to the MFF, the European Commission just last week published its proposals in advance of negotiations for the next MFF from 2021 to 2027. This will be our first budget cycle without the contribution of the United Kingdom and debates have been ongoing around the ap-

proach we should take to the next budget, whether increased contributions from member states is the best way forward, whether a smaller Union necessarily means a smaller EU budget or whether a combination of approaches is the best way forward. We have always said we would be willing to contribute more but we would need to see that there is European added value where that money is contributed. Ireland has traditionally been a significant net beneficiary of the EU budget since accession in 1973. This is first time we will enter the negotiations where that will change. We must continue to adapt to the EU's evolving priorities, particularly where we can see evidence of European added value. Ireland stands ready to engage positively on these.

However, we cannot lose sight of the value and contribution of traditional policies, including those on agriculture and cohesion. Indeed, the Common Agricultural Policy has been central to maintaining and supporting Irish farmers, who were the backbone of our economy for many years and still represent a hugely important economic sector for us. It is also vital that there be a continuation of the PEACE and INTERREG programmes post Brexit, as foreseen in the Commission's progress report from last December. Last week at our Brexit stakeholder forum I saw how important these are. We will consider the Commission's proposals in full and we look forward to engaging with them.

To conclude, it is evident that despite the many challenges we face in the coming months and years Ireland's outlook on the future of the European Union is positive. Irish people recognise the importance of EU membership. The ties we have developed and the relationships we have built will continue post Brexit. I believe it is fitting to celebrate Europe Day each year, as we look forward to a stronger and better Union into the future.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): The next slot is Fianna Fáil's. Deputies Seán Haughey, Lisa Chambers and Billy Kelleher are sharing time.

Deputy Seán Haughey: That is correct.

As we know, today is Europe Day. It is appropriate that we are having a debate on the future of Europe this evening. This morning we had the final public session of the national citizens' dialogue in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, and it was encouraging to see the active participation of so many citizens in this public consultation process. In addition, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the European Union Affairs has given serious consideration to this matter in recent months. Fianna Fáil has made a formal submission to the future of Europe consultation process.

A RED C poll just published found that 92% of the Irish population now agrees that Ireland should remain part of the EU. This finding is welcome but this public support should not be taken for granted. The EU is in need of reform, and engagement and communication with the citizens need to be constantly improved. Brexit was a wake-up call for all of us, so this evening's debate is timely and necessary.

The White Paper on the Future of Europe was published by the European Commission in March 2017. It outlined the five scenarios. In addition, there have since been significant inputs to the debate from the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron.

Fianna Fáil has always been a strong advocate of the EU. Seán Lemass began the application process and we joined the EEC in 1973, 45 years ago, under the leadership of Jack Lynch

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and Paddy Hillery. There is no doubt but that Ireland has greatly benefited from EU membership. EU Structural Funds have vastly improved our infrastructure, and access to the European Single Market has transformed how we trade, study, travel and work. Sustained investment in groundbreaking research projects, clean beaches, safer roads initiatives, cheaper air travel, more stringent regulation of banks, broader tourism links and stronger employment and consumer rights offer just a glimpse of the variety of benefits Ireland has gained. Ireland should remain at the heart of Europe and we must play a central role in the constructive debate now under way concerning reform of the EU.

The EU certainly faces many challenges, including Brexit, international terrorism, the recent economic crisis, immigration, youth unemployment and the rise of far-right, illiberal tendencies and populism generally. Ireland can and will play its part in resolving these ongoing challenges. With the UK leaving the EU, there will be a shift in the balance of power in the European Union. The Franco-German alliance is now reasserting itself. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the EU must be a Union of equals in which smaller member states willing to play their part are fully included and respected. The EU must not be allowed to become a Europe that is dominated by larger countries which only serve the interests of a few, to the detriment of all others.

All of us who believe in the EU subscribe to European values and ideals, but these values and ideals are under threat in some countries, Hungary and Poland in particular, and it is very important we deal with these threats. Independent state institutions in Hungary and Poland are being curtailed. This threat to the rule of law undermines democracy and freedom, which are core EU values. The EU must take a strong and united stand and take appropriate measures against member states that undermine EU law. We are willing to play a full and active role in this debate, and I look forward to hearing the remaining contributions.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Fianna Fáil has always been a strong advocate of the European Union and we remain so. As my colleague has said, we joined the European Union under the leadership of Fianna Fáil in 1973. Since then, we have seen many positive impacts on and changes to our country as a result of our membership of the European Union. The ability to trade, study, travel and work in other member states is something we as EU citizens value very much, and the improvements in our infrastructure, waterways and environment are evident in every part of our country as a result of EU Structural Funds, policies and laws. Ireland is a proud and active member of the European Union and has been transformed in many ways with the help of progressive social policies from the European Union. We have seen a long period of peace and stability across the EU, and this is down to us working as a Union for the betterment of all citizens, something we should never take for granted.

As a party, we remain committed to the European Union. However, we need to see reform, and I believe citizens are demanding that reform. One need only consider Brexit to see there is a lot of unrest and disquiet among citizens across the European Union with the direction in which the Union is going. When one sees the advance of the far right and parties across different countries advocating an anti-European stance, that is quite worrying and something that we should not ignore but tackle head on. This is why I am glad to have an opportunity to participate in this debate on the future of Europe. Europe has faced many challenges, the most notable now being the one we are dealing with at present, namely, Brexit, which will test the Union and every member state, not just Ireland. However, I believe this is an opportune time for the European Union institutions and all member states to reflect on the EU project as a whole: what it is, what our shared objectives are and the direction in which we wish to move. Brexit presents

us with a unique opportunity to have this debate both nationally and across the EU.

Brexit is undoubtedly the most significant event in the history of the European project and is a setback for the entire EU. We have concerns about the fact that the UK has stated it is leaving the customs union and the Single Market and concerns about the challenges this poses for us on the island of Ireland in respect of our Border with Northern Ireland and the communities North and South, but also for our business communities, which do a lot of trade with the UK. We know the European Union will be down approximately 12% of its budget with the UK leaving and we are also losing an ally in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy. The Minister of State mentioned the MFF and the next budget for the European Union. We are concerned that we will see a significant reduction in the CAP for our country and this will mean that hard-hit families across the farming sector will see a reduction in their incomes.

While there are many challenges, we need to see a Union that is strong and effective, a Union characterised by strong and stable democracies, balanced economic growth, sustainable employment, fair wages and a welfare system that protects against poverty and provides a floor below which no one should be expected to live. These are challenges that we must face head on as a State, as a Parliament and as citizens.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue in the little time I have. The European Union, the project itself, has been exceptionally positive in the impact it has had both in Ireland and across the broader European continent. This is clearly evident in increased living standards across all European countries in recent years. Considering the impact the European Union has had on employment law, equality legislation, social policy and the development of infrastructure across the European Union, it has all been positive.

National governments and political parties across Europe use the European Union as a battering ram from time to time. They blame the European Union for some of the policies that may be unpopular in the short term but probably positive in the longer term. At times, national governments fray away at the confidence of the European project for their own domestic purposes, and this issue must be addressed. The core message, however, is that Ireland has played a very active role in the European Union over many years. The European Union should remain a community of nations rather than moving towards a federal Europe, whereby it becomes a nation of communities. This is an issue we must look at long and hard.

Brexit, in the context of the economic impact it will have on Ireland and the broader European Union, is of huge significance. However, the question that must be asked is why did this happen in the first place? We see anti-European sentiment and agitation from extremes on the left and the right across Europe fraying away at this concept, so it is important to ensure that the political centre advocates all that is positive about the European Union. We see parties trying to undermine this, particularly on the left and the extreme right. Even some of the left, however, are now becoming pro-European, so we welcome Deputy Cullinane's party to the family of European parties.

Deputy David Cullinane: Thank you, Billy.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The European project is not something we should just mention once a year, on Europe Day, and move on. The European project is significant, important and cannot be taken for granted, and we should be willing to improve on it consistently. However, Brexit resulted in a huge nation leaving the European Union. We have to ask why that hap-

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pened and could it potentially happen again in other countries in no longer looking at Europe positively but negatively. That is primarily because political choices might be made in smaller nations that might elect governments on the extreme left or right, as has been the case in some countries. It is something about which we should remain constantly concerned.

Deputy David Cullinane: I welcome the opportunity to have a discussion on the future of Europe. It is timely and important that we take stock of where Europe is at. Ireland and smaller countries have to play their role, have their place and are central to what should be a reform agenda within the European Union. My party believes the entire island of Ireland should stay in the European Union, that the European Union has been good for Ireland and that there is much we can celebrate in being a member of it. Equally, my party has a critical engagement with the European Union, rightly so when one considers that many citizens across the Union are becoming more concerned about the centralisation of power and, as Deputy Billy Kelleher said, a drift towards a more federal Europe and the building, not of a social Europe but a more undemocratic Europe where the big institutions have far too much power and people who are not elected to positions are making decisions that affect the lives of others and cannot be held to account. We all know what happens when that happens. In this State we can point to many examples and the most recent scandals to see that it does not work. However, the thing Deputy Billy Kelleher left out in his contribution is that the creeping federalisation of Europe did not happen by chance. It did not happen overnight, it happened with the passing of every single treaty that his party supported and championed. All of the treaties that gave the big institutions the powers they have, that created the undemocratic Europe we have and the federal Europe the Deputy now decries are treaties his party went out and sold with gusto.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: The Deputy's party would just vote "No".

Deputy David Cullinane: At least my party and others had the courage to have a critical engagement and state that while, yes, we wanted to be part of the European Union, we wanted a European Union that was democratic, one in which smaller states did have powers.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We all do.

Deputy David Cullinane: I noticed that when other Deputies made their contributions, there were no interruptions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Deputy David Cullinane to speak, without interruption, please.

Deputy David Cullinane: I assume I will be given the same opportunity-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Yes, the Deputy should try to address the issue.

Deputy David Cullinane: -----as difficult as it might be for some of the representatives of those parties that were part of the problem that led to the creation of what is becoming a federal Europe. They do not like to hear the truth.

It is interesting that almost every party is becoming more critical of the European Union. For example, the Government is robustly challenging the Apple judgment of the European Commission. Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are, rightly, exercised by a consolidated tax coming from the European Union. Everybody has a right to be critical and should be critical

of measures that emerge from the European Union, but that does not make us anti-European, it makes us alert to others having agendas, including other bigger member states, and the fact that we must look out for our interests. We must be confident and able to assert our own identity and vision for the type of European Union we want to build. I want to see a European Union that is about workers' rights, social solidarity and investing in public services and which is not about stripping countries of social services and the neo-liberalism that has seen more privatisation and outsourcing to the private sector of what the public sector did in the past. Much of this has been driven by European directives and the European Union. There are some areas where the European Union has been good and others where it has not. It is important that we have an honest engagement and discussion about what the European Union is and what it has done for Ireland.

The biggest challenge facing the European Union is Brexit. That should not define the European Union, but it is obviously huge in the impact it will have on citizens in Europe and this state, in particular. There was a political agreement in December. The Government came back and hailed it as a breakthrough, that we had a cast iron guarantee that the Irish issues were protected, that we had a backstop arrangement that was bulletproof, as the Taoiseach put it, that the Border issue was safe, that there would be no hardening of the Border and that the Good Friday Agreement would be protected in all of its parts and that the rights of EU citizens living in the North who were Irish citizens would be fully protected. It has all begun to unravel since. It began to unravel because it was only a political agreement. The key words in it, that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed, were exactly that. We now see a civil war in the Tory Party playing out before us, with multiple wings, and nobody knows who is in charge, or from day to day what the British Government's position is, yet we are at a defining moment in the talks between the European Union and the British Government on trade and we are nowhere near knowing what it will all mean for Ireland. The European Commission tried to translate the political text into a legal format which was rejected out of hand by Mrs. Theresa May who said no British Prime Minister could countenance a border in the Irish Sea, which is precisely what she did when she signed up to the backstop arrangement. At this point, people living on either side of the Border have no idea about what will be put in place. The British Government has resiled from the political agreement made in December, which is unacceptable.

We have to hope the European Union can reach an agreement with Britain on some customs partnership or free trade agreement. That is where we are. It is a long way from bulletproof, being cast iron, and all of the certainties that we were guaranteed. We face an uncertain period. The Taoiseach and the Tánaiste are saying the right things and presenting an image of wearing the green jersey, that they were out representing Ireland's interests. We said we would support the Government in achieving the best outcome for the State, but both the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste said we needed an agreement with the British Government by June. We accepted this. We need to see the colour of Mrs. Theresa May's money and the British Government's proposals in June. Now we hear from the Tánaiste that what he actually meant was if there was sufficient progress. What does "sufficient progress" mean? There is no benchmark that sets out what it is. I can imagine that when we arrive in June, the can will be kicked down the road, that there will be further uncertainty and that we will still not know what has been agreed to. There is a fear that if the British Government puts its proposals on the North of Ireland on the table they will also be the proposals that it wants for the rest of Britain. That will end its hand in the ongoing negotiations. All of us in this House were deeply conscious of the potential for the Irish issues to be used as a pawn in the negotiation between the European Union and Britain and that is how it has worked out. We all agreed that we would move from phase 1 to phase 2 if we there was real progress on the Irish issues. We moved to phase 2, but we do not have real

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progress. The Government has a big job of work to do and I wish it well because we want the best deal. The problem is that there is so much uncertainty.

I refer to the potential for a European army. Last December the Dáil voted by 75 to 42 in favour of Ireland joining the PESCO agreement on greater European co-operation on military missions. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael coalesced on the issue. As they are in government together, it is no surprise that they did so, but we, in Sinn Féin, opposed it.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Sinn Féin was aligned with ETA for years.

Deputy David Cullinane: Other parties which are fearful of an emerging European super-state were also against it. Some of us in this House do not wish to see a European army. I am not sure about the Deputy-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: PESCO is not a European army.

Deputy David Cullinane: -----but I do not want to see my taxes-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Will the Deputies, please, address the Chair?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Sinn Féin was aligned with ETA for years. That was a military alliance.

Deputy David Cullinane: Perhaps I should address the Chair as there is a lot of heckling from the Fianna Fáil benches; they obviously do not like what is being said.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Yes, Deputies should address the Chair.

Deputy David Cullinane: I put it to the Acting Chairman who is impartial that there is absolutely no doubt that both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael agreed to support greater militarisation of the European Union. What will that mean? It means that at a time when there is a housing crisis, a health crisis and people are living in real poverty these guys think it is good that we should spend more money in developing a European army. I do not believe it is. This is a neutral state and that is how it should remain. We can see what is happening in the world with President Donald Trump causing trouble in Iran and elsewhere. I see no benefit in this State being part of any alliance that involves NATO or any large power. We should be proud of our neutrality and we should remain a neutral state. We should not be party to the PESCO agreement or to an increased militarisation of the European Union. I do not believe that the 75 Deputies who supported that measure are actually in tune with the vast majority of people in this State who, like me, value our neutrality. I do not mind paying taxes, but I want those taxes spent on public services and for good, rather than taxpayers' money being spent on increasing the militarisation of the European Union.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: As we mark Europe Day we celebrate the most successful peace process in our continental history. Since Ireland joined what was then the European Economic Community on 1 January 1973 our country has literally been transformed. The events of the last decade, however, have challenged the institutions which decades of work have assembled and have led to fresh questions about the future of our Union and about where we are going. The wrenching economic crisis sparked an existential crisis, the consequences of which are still playing out. New institutions and mechanisms were established and fiscal and economic powers concentrated in the Commission and in the ECB. Ireland has recovered economically

but socially the scars remain. Political instability in Italy and Spain continues and Greece still struggles to recover from its economic woes. The rise of right-wing populism in France and Germany shows that even the heartlands of the Union are in difficulty, while in the east the undermining of democratic institutions in Poland and Hungary poses a threat that we simply cannot ignore.

However, the greatest test for us is Brexit. The exit of a member state was contemplated in the Lisbon treaty but few of the crafters of that treaty believed it would ever be tested. The vote of the UK to leave the Union nearly two years ago continues to reverberate and the unthinkable will become reality next March when the UK actually leaves. The challenges I have highlighted are all of deep concern, but it only shows how far we have come that 28, soon to be 27, individual countries on this continent continue to participate in the greatest concentration of sovereignty in European history. The clear message is that together we are stronger and together we can solve problems that have beset this continent for centuries. Together Europe is able to find solutions to the difficulties we currently face.

Encouragingly, as others have pointed out, the results of the most recent European Movement poll show that 92% of Irish people want to stay part of the European Union. It also found that despite the lack of real public debate about the decision of Ireland to join PESCO, which was referenced by the previous speaker, 59% of people supported Irish engagement in military and defence structures. To my mind that is a surprising figure. I regret the rushed decision of the Government last year to sign up to PESCO without proper debate here. We need to give people confidence in the decisions we take. The approach of Malta, which believes that certain operations may breach its neutrality, would have been a good model for us to follow. The move towards enhanced military and defence co-operation poses risks for Europe and presents a domestic challenge for our foreign policy if military strategies become part of European Council decision-making.

The successes of the Union have been many. It has fostered peace on our own island and been instrumental in supporting and negotiating the Good Friday Agreement. The shared EU membership of Ireland and the UK formed the essential bedrock to the Good Friday Agreement and provided the platform for ever-closer alignment and integration of the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The dismantling of customs posts and the creation of cross-Border bodies, often generously funded by the European Union itself, have laid the foundation for peace and strengthened the all-island economy, as a common set of regulatory standards enabled the free movement of goods, services and people on the island. It also provided a route for the vindication of rights and for the tens of thousands of Irish citizens in Northern Ireland an uncertain future lies ahead. The irony of Northern Ireland unionists who advocated for an EU exit signing up for Irish passports to maintain EU citizenship rights, including the freedom of travel, was lost on no one.

The solidarity shown to Ireland since Brexit has been evidence of the power of membership for a small country like us, as fellow members have committed to our objective of resisting the reimposition of anything like a strengthened or hardened border on the island of Ireland. A further example of that solidarity was when the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, sought the support of the EU Council after the chemical weapons attack in Salisbury. That again was a clear demonstration that by pooling sovereignty we have actually strengthened our position as a country. This is an option that will be denied to the United Kingdom after next March.

Even as one member leaves, the prospect of growing the Union remains. There are six pos-

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sible future members in the western Balkans, including Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. The EU has been an invaluable partner to peace in Ireland and, with our experience, can play a similar role in the Balkans, an area that has been ravaged, settling down ethnic challenges that have scarred this continent in recent decades. Ireland must also play its role in fostering the path to peace of those potential new member states.

Speaking to the Institute of International and European Affairs, IIEA, just over a year ago I said that once again winning the citizens of Europe to the European project and giving people enthusiasm for a vision of the potential of Europe requires a genuine recommitment to a framework for a Europe based on equality, personal freedom and prosperity. It requires EU institutions and leaders to address the problems pressing heaviest on their citizens, in particular stagnant or, in some cases, absent growth and spiralling youth unemployment. They must once again rekindle the potential of hope for our people. In other words, I believe we need to reinvigorate the notion of a social Europe. A Europe that does not recognise the dangers of economic under-achievement throughout this continent will not and cannot win the support of the European people.

Economic under-achievement has fostered a splintering of our politics and a rush to the extremes which repeatedly offer simplistic solutions to real challenges. We need to debate this and to act upon it. Prolonged EU austerity has done great damage to the political and social fabric of our Union.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: As Jean Monnet once argued:

Europe has never existed. One must genuinely create Europe.

When visionary leaders such as Monnet spoke about a Europe of the future, they spoke about an idea of tremendous power. The social Europe we created allowed nations to take risks on other nations knowing that the power of the idea of membership of a common European project was such that it could be used to bed down democracy, to maintain peace after centuries of war, and to promote stability and the common good and prosperity of all our peoples. Since the European project began, the integration has occurred. We have begun to create Monnet's vision of Europe. However, without revisiting the concept of social Europe, which was once a dominant idea, we will surely face a disintegration of that great value and the vision of Monnet.

Europe needs to rediscover its spirit and its purpose, that is, to serve its people not to dictate their futures. The Union will survive and prosper if it shows it can meet the needs of its people. Right now, that means growth, jobs and improved living standards. Social democrats across Europe have led this agenda. During 2016, the Commission began consulting on the pillar of social rights. Last January, the European Parliament endorsed the proposals of its Socialists and Democrats group. At Gothenburg last November, the first summit in 20 years, the European pillar of social rights was jointly proclaimed by the Council, Commission and Parliament. The important document proposed a foundation of minimum social rights. Ireland must now lead on that social agenda.

I leave with one message to the Government tonight: put meat on the bones of this debate, commit to the implementation of the European pillar of social rights, and create the vision of a Europe that can be supported and embraced by all its people.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I am delighted on Europe Day to have the opportunity to contribute briefly to this important debate. Clearly the EU is facing major challenges over the next few years, and the decision of the British people to opt for Brexit has offered an existential challenge to its very existence. In virtually every EU country, of course, there have been ongoing and long-standing concerns over the levels of democracy, accountability and transparency in the EU's quasi-federal structures. These concerns have often been too easily dismissed as populism by commentators who, of course, are devoted to the EU project. The conduct of the bailouts of euro members like Ireland, Greece and Portugal since 2010 has greatly exacerbated these misgivings and reservations among the European electorates. The great Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance Minister, is now forming his own Europe-wide political party, which we may see in Ireland.

Brexit was a striking response to these concerns, but wide sectors of EU opinion have had similar worries and concerns and even felt revulsion over the treatment of the smaller euro member states. Rather than deeply examining how these concerns may be addressed in future revisions of the EU treaties, many analysts and journalists simply condemn the fears of the European peoples and label representatives as populist, including those who genuinely want a much more democratic EU. I am one of those.

At a recent meeting of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight involving Members of the European Parliament, Deputies tried hard to show our European parliamentarians how close the relationship is between Ireland and the UK on personal, cultural, social, economic and political grounds. Above all, we emphasised the critical joint responsibility of the Irish and British states for the Good Friday Agreement. At that meeting, we also discussed the proposals for the EU's multi-annual financial framework budget and the likely consequences for Ireland's EU contribution, which is set to reach €3 billion per annum in 2019.

Many other EU countries are also grappling with challenges produced by issues such as the migration crisis, slow economic growth and climate change, to which other speakers have referred. Ireland has to contend not only with working hard to achieve the least damaging result on Brexit but also with how to respond to the proposals of the French President, Mr. Emmanuel Macron. President Macron's vision on the future of the EU is clearly a programme for a federal structure, a federation. In his book *Revolution* and his Sorbonne speech of September 2017, he outlined how he wishes to transfer the sovereignty of the historic French Republic of 1789 to a new republic of Europe, led especially by France and Germany. He writes:

Faced with the current serious challenges, it would simply be an illusion, and a mistake, to propose to rebuild everything at the national level. Faced with an influx of migrants, the international terrorist threat, climate change, the digital transition, as well as the economic supremacy of the Americans and the Chinese, Europe is the most appropriate level at which to take action.

Therefore, Macron envisages the end of European nations holding their own sovereignty. In practical terms, Macron's new European constitution will include an EU finance Minister and a shared EU national debt. Perhaps we will start calling it continental debt. Many felt the launching of the euro without an all-Europe debt structure was crazy economics. Macron's model will certainly involve a common consolidated taxation, CCT, base, including clearly pan-European rules on corporation tax and the Europe-wide digital tax. Macron also envisages a great deepening of the current PESCO arrangements, which the Dáil recently approved, although 45 of us voted against them, and the creation of a European defence force, a European

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army. The President of France seems to want these new structures put in place and a clear path to European sovereignty by 2024, the date of the European Parliament elections after next. Obviously, Macron's vision depends on German support to go even remotely down this pathway to a federal state. He seems to accept, however, that an inevitable consequence of this federalist programme will be a multi-speed EU. A number of states, perhaps including Germany, may join France on a federalist road but other states, although continuing in the EU, will remain outside this core group. Macron's anti-worker initiatives in France do much to undermine his federalist vision since his domestic policy seems clearly to undermine further the "social Europe" programme, about which Deputy Howlin spoke powerfully. Social Europe was such an attractive feature of the EU for the first 30 years of Ireland's membership.

It may well be, therefore, that we are heading for a multi-speed EU, with member states in different orbits around states that want a federal structure. There has always been the issue of deepening or widening. Deputy Howlin referred to the waiting list of states, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, from the former Yugoslavia, Georgia, Armenia and the Ukraine, and perhaps at some stage Turkey and Russia. The very best outcome for Ireland in the wake of Brexit would be that the UK would also be one of those outer states. It would still be orbiting in the European system. Clearly, the UK will continue to be deeply involved with the EU in areas such as security, policing and scientific research. Despite the appalling performance of the current Tory Prime Minister and her appalling Government, as evidenced again this morning during Prime Minister's questions, which I glanced at before coming into the House, it is likely that the UK will end up in the customs union, or at least a customs union as proposed by the distinguished representative Keir Starmer of UK Labour Party, whether before or after the next UK general election. These matters may have to be resolved by a UK general election.

Ireland's critical economic needs and the issue of preventing any border returning in our country make an ongoing close relationship between Ireland and the UK imperative. Thus, when our own people may have to decide on whether to belong to President Macron's core, if the programme is to go ahead, or to be a close confederal member of the future EU, along the present lines, it will be in our interest to support a multi-speed EU constitution. In any case, Europe's greatness lies in the differences and unique cultures, wonderful languages and traditions of all its people, or its 40 or 50 nations. The EU's future evolution should always reflect that essential reality.

I agree with commentators such as Stephen Collins that the Irish Government should engage in a constructive way with President Macron but, given our historical experience, most of our people find his federal vision anathema. We spent so long as part of the British empire. Many people would not be attracted to joining a new Carolingian empire, or seeing a restoration of that empire, which, as the Acting Chairman will know, encompassed France, Germany and Italy.

The most pressing realisation now is the growing size of Ireland's EU budget contribution. We are now one of only nine net contributors to the EU budget and are entering our fifth year as a net contributor. The 2021-27 EU budget is being set at €1.27 trillion for the 27 remaining EU states and this will now represent 1.11% of the EU GNI. Commissioner Hogan, a former Deputy, seemed to be seeking 1.2% or even 1.3%. This type of figure was sought by some of the parliamentarians we met. While the Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, has signalled willingness to support this budgetary programme, many countries such as Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark are opposed to Jean-Claude Juncker's proposal to breach the previously agreed EU

budgetary cap of 1% of GNI. While the British are expected to go on paying into the EU budget past 2021 for critical issues like passporting rights for their financial sector and the EU open skies policy, the additional funding is needed to make up a deficit of up to €12 billion that will be caused by the UK's departure in March 2019. In 2018, Ireland is making an EU contribution of €2.7 billion and will pay almost €2.9 billion in 2019, a doubling of what we paid just five years ago, when we became a net contributor. Therefore, we are now a very significant and important pillar of the EU, certainly in financial terms.

This includes a cut of 5% in Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, spending which will profoundly negatively impact on our farming sector. I think the Minister, Deputy Creed, met his French counterpart earlier this week about this matter because France has a similar view to us. Ireland's contribution and growing net contribution to the EU budget must be kept under very close scrutiny in the coming years, given that it is now becoming a bigger budget than the budget of many of our Departments. The MEPs we met on the budget committee recently told us how the EU's future budget deficit - at least two thirds - will be financed. It will not be by cuts but new moneys. Some of the new money will be additional funding, such as the customs duty that we will be asked to supply. Our Committee on Budgetary Oversight and the whole Dáil need to keep these financial matters under close observation as well as being supportive of the EU budget. I believe, despite the awful Tories who are in government in the UK, and hope that there will be a soft Brexit and that there will not be a Border here. We need to engage with the deep and profound thinking that has been done by people like President Macron about how the European Union will evolve.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: The Minister of State had a long day with it being Europe Day. I acknowledge the importance of today, now more than ever before because of the challenges we are facing with Brexit. We are concentrating more on the new Europe, what we want from it and how we will achieve the goals, aims and aspirations that we as a country have on behalf of the people in different sectors, whether agriculture or tourism, and all of the other problems that we have. We had a useful exchange this morning which I thought was beneficial and which went down well. There were maybe 200 or 300 people at that conference event but it was seen and heard around the country and was well reported on. There was a positive reaction to that. I and my fellow members of the committee are dealing with issues like this and the future possible expansion of the EU. Last week, we met with people from the Balkan states. Today, we had the ambassador from Kosovo. We had an interesting and useful exchange with him. We remember the time when Ireland was rightly very welcoming of people in difficult situations. I recounted a story where my late father insisted on being on the runway in Kerry airport to shake hands with every person who came off the plane from Kosovo. They got a special clap on the back and he was very welcoming of them. The ambassador was delighted to hear that story today.

I am glad and heartened to see the results of a recent RED C report which clearly states that 92% of people in Ireland are deeply committed to the EU model and to continuing to be members of the EU. We are willing to put our shoulders to the wheel to make the new Europe work. That is what it is all about. We want it to be a better place for our citizens to live in, for our citizens to move around in and for our young people. At the end of the day, it is about our young people. They are the future. It is important and I encourage every Deputy to get the report, which is county by county. There is valuable information in it which outlines how each county benefited from being members of the EU over the years. It is a good synopsis and is beneficial. I recommend that Deputies who have not seen it get their hands on it and distribute

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it to their constituents to show that we are benefiting. We have been good to Europe, Europe has been good to us and we want that to continue.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am glad to be able to speak on the future of the European Union about which I have had concerns, as have many others, for some time. I have been a campaigner since 1973 when we joined Europe. The ideas and views, as Deputy Haughey mentioned earlier, went back to the late Seán Lemass and many other political leaders here aspired to this, worked for this and helped to bring it about. We have benefited hugely from Europe for a number of decades but the shoe is on the other foot now with the situation with the evolving Europe and the pull. Certain countries have taken a huge amount of power, and have neglected and have not listened to ordinary people. Surveys have shown that. The most recent European Parliament analysis found that, in the context of the renewed debate on the future of Europe, only 47% of European citizens feel that their voice counts in the EU. It is the best result since the 2009 European elections. That is concerning. Less than half are committed and feel that their voice counts. We must be ag éisteacht i gcónaí. I should wish everybody a happy Europe Day. Happy days is right but people are dissatisfied. If they are not happy and feel they are not listened to, there will be unease and there will be shifts. There could be seismic shifts in European elections. We have seen that in many nations. There have been major shifts because people feel disenfranchised, feel a huge disconnect and are concerned about that. Over half of the EU's population, of more than 500 million, feel that their voice is not heard. That is a frightening statistic. I do not know about the poll but I assume the report is reputable. It is very concerning that over half feel that, which is more than 250 million people, because 47% are satisfied.

Last year, the European Commission presented a communication outlining ideas on the future of food and farming. The communication proposes a number of changes to the CAP, which is important. The CAP has a major impact on Irish farmers, from the farm to the fork, right down to housewives and the consumers. The changes to CAP focus primarily on making it simpler and ensuring best value for money. It is anything but simple, as far as I am concerned, and it is hard to see where the value for money is. The new CAP wants to establish a system allowing EU countries and regions to fulfil EU goals with their own tailor-made policies. That is a nice and aspirational paragraph. That has not been happening. How will we get the 53% who said they were unhappy and disconnected? What kind of a tailor will we need to make the suits to fit them to make them think that they are being listened to? There is much food for thought here. It is important that we listen or get out to these people. We do not have the heavy gang who, even after Brexit, went off on a tangent of threatening, even when a sovereign country had a vote to leave the EU. The same communication gave no details of how much money would be available and if the budget would be affected by the UK's withdrawal. It is fine to go into the tailor and order a suit but if one does not have money to pay for it, one is in trouble. We want to have a tailor-made system to establish our own tailor-made design yet we have no idea of what is in the budget. There are cuts in the budget so we need to be honest with ourselves. This is very strange.

The multi-annual financial framework revision will also have an impact on the post-2020 CAP. We know that and are unsure of where that is leading us. The future CAP will therefore face several financial challenges while having to deliver for farmers. Several instruments are already available to farmers, such as loan funds. These can often be very hard for smaller farmers. We see that with single farm payments. The smaller farmer often comes out worse after these things. We have a lot of work to do and the Minister of State has a lot of work to do. It

is very important that we bring the people with us and that the people are listened to, as they are not. A total of 55% of people in that survey felt disenchanted while only 47% of European citizens feel that their voice counts in the EU. The British people got lectured from on high after they voted for Brexit. They got lecture after lecture on how they were not good Europeans. They had made a sovereign decision. It has had and will have a huge impact on us so we need to be very conscious of that and support them. One of the reasons was that they were paying in as well - in fact paying more. If President Macron gets his way, he will have a Europe that he and a few more will be in charge of, including finances, and the smaller countries will be left out in the cold. We know that Ireland is now a net contributor, which is a big difference from the early days of the EEC, so it is a big change. There is a lot of work to be done. The Taoiseach came back here last December and told us he had cast-iron guarantees - practically bulletproof - that there would be no Border and this, that and the other. It has evaporated like the snow over St. Patrick's weekend. We have no guarantees and we are left wondering where it will take us. I am asking the Minister of State for European affairs to be a strong voice for Ireland. Above all, we need to listen to concerns unless the Government wants a seismic shift in the next European elections, which are only around the corner. Make haste slowly but bí ag éisteacht leis na daoine.

Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017: Report Stage (Resumed) Bill recommitted in respect of amendments Nos. 4 to 21, inclusive, and amendment No. 28.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 4:

In page 3, to delete line 10 and substitute the following:

“1. (1) The Road Traffic Act 2010 is amended in section 4 by the substitution of the following for subsection (5):

“(5) A person who contravenes this section commits an offence and is liable on indictable conviction to a fine not exceeding €10,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.”.

(2) The Road Traffic Act 2010 is amended in section 29—”.

- (Deputy Robert Troy)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As Members will be aware, there was a recommittal. I call on Deputy Mattie McGrath who was still in possession. Before the Deputy commences, I plead with him and any others who may be offering to ensure they are not repetitive. This is a recommittal so one can speak as often or as long as one wishes but I ask Members to observe the only rule that is there, which is they should not be repetitive.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Nuair a dúirt mé aréir, it is an tAire who recommitted the Bill. I said last night it was the Minister-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy should also say that he is aware of the amendments. Please adhere to those.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course I will. I am speaking to amendment No. 4. They go from amendment No. 4 to amendment No. 21. As I said, it was the Minister who recommitted

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the Bill. We are blamed in certain quarters for delaying it but when Deputy Healy-Rae and I attended a committee on a few occasions to try to discuss the amendments, including our amendments, they were not ready, there was no discussion and we did not get great clarity from the Chairman of the committee either. That is part of the reason for the delay.

Last night, when I was in possession, I was talking about speed cameras, the huge cost, the lucrative contracts that were given out at enormous cost to the State and the poor returns. I quoted figures and if the Leas-Cheann Comhairle does not mind, I will quote them again for the record. The State paid out €88 million to the firms behind these speed cameras and collected €32.7 million from fines paid by motorists. That is certainly a lot but it is a lot of negative equity for the cost of running the system. The figures, which were from 2010 to 22 July 2017, were provided to me in a reply to a Parliamentary Question I put to the Minister.

I note that the speed cameras have a positive effect on reducing the number of road deaths but I also think it is time for a re-examination of the contract if we are spending €88 million and only taking in €32.7 million. One cannot, of course, put a value on a life and I sympathise with anyone who has lost their life on the road for a myriad of reasons. It is very traumatic and upsetting. We all strive to change this but not all of it will or can happen in this Bill. There are many other areas at which we must look. There is no doubt about the impact of the camera regime on reducing road fatalities and accidents, particularly in areas that have been blighted by accidents over the years. I am not suggesting that they be removed but we need a reassessment or audit of the cost, value for money and whether they are working other than impacting on motorists. I feel that where they are located, particularly in a 100 km/h to 80 km/h area, an 80 km/h to 60 km/h area or a 60 km/h to 50 km/h area, it is very hard for a motorist to adjust. It could all take place within less than 2 km of road. It is very hard, particularly in some areas where a motorist is driving down a hill. Cars are faster and quieter and gears are better calibrated to do speeds without any revving of the engine or anything else.

I and several constituents of mine have asked, begged and pleaded for these cameras to be located in accident black spots. We used to have the black spot sign, which was a black sign with a yellow surround. Those signs were banished. They have no bona fides anymore. We cannot get them up. They are not relevant. In some areas, when I was a member of the county council, I am sure my colleagues from the Rural Independent Group like Deputies Danny and Michael Healy-Rae, Deputy Michael Collins and others have had many motions down-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Where is the pilot? I hope he is not on the roads. I have lost my train of thought. I am questioning the pilot to see how we got into aviation here. Signs have now been put up but they are black. We have a limit but they are on a black background. Again, they have no authority. They are there as a kind of a warning, which is great, but they have no authority. It is not a direction. A motorist does not need to abide by those signs because they have no standing in regulation. Those black spots are still there, numerous accidents take place but these vans refuse to place themselves in the middle of these areas or immediately adjacent to them for whatever reason. Sometimes it is said that it is too dangerous to locate them there but I am sure the county council could set up a bay for Garda cars or these vans to be located at accident spots, as it has done on many motorways. We all know the tragic results of these accident black spots in our counties over decades, possibly nearly 40 years in some areas.

I am questioning the enormous cost associated with operating the Garda safety contract each

year. From 2012 to 2015, it cost the State over €17 million to maintain the contract with a cost of almost €16 million in 2011. From 2010 to date, revenue generated by the safety contract has totalled €32 million so something is radically wrong there. Taxpayers' money is being used and paid out but we are not getting a good system. While people who drive at excessive speed are being punished, and we cannot fight against that, on the outskirts of a town where the limit changes from 100 km/h to 80 km/h, 80 km/h to 60 km/h, and 60 km/h to 50 km/h in a short space of road, it is like shooting fish in a barrel because a motorist could be a couple of kilometres over it with different incremental speed signs that change so often.

As I said, the black spots are being ignored - those cameras and those signs. There is a lot of work for the Minister to do in that area and I am surprised it has not been tackled. I am not blaming the Minister, Deputy Ross, for it all; his predecessors could have tackled those incremental signs. The black-spot signs were good warning signs. I grew up seeing them and inquiring what they were. A black spot is a dangerous spot and now they will not put them up anymore. They tell us that the signs are irrelevant. They have put up signs with a black background, but that sign has no legal standing. That is very disquieting and pretty unnecessary.

The Minister is predicating many aspects of the Bill on figures from the RSA, figures from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and figures compiled and supplied back and forward between the Garda divisions and the RSA. Last week on RTÉ an RSA spokesperson said it had been denied recent figures. What is going on? I know the Minister, Deputy Ross, is not the Minister for Justice and Equality, but surely the RSA should not have to be begging for statistics; it should be getting them freely and working in unison to try to tackle this issue. It is easy to blame learner drivers and others when there are many issues. Without the figures, people do not have trust. As I said before, if people do not have trust in the legislation, it will be much harder to police it. It gives me no joy.

On the vans, as I said, I would prefer to see that money put into rebuilding the traffic corps, whose numbers have been cut by 50% or more. Funding for their cars and other specialist equipment has been cut over the years since the recession, but it is now time to beef them up. I salute the members of the Garda traffic corps in the Tipperary division who do such Trojan work. However, if they are stopped in an area for any reason - they can stop anywhere they like and they are enforcing the laws of the land - and if there is a robbery or an accident up the road or whatever, they can leave immediately on getting a radio signal and attend to that. They are there quite fast.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: On a point of order, I have listened to discussion of signage and Garda divisions, and they are all valid points in their own right. To what amendments is the Deputy speaking? I am hearing a great deal of repetition. I have been here for about six hours. What is a filibuster?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not for me to say that. The Deputy has been here for a lot of the debate. I have been here for all the debate and I have kept warning the Deputies. I have to say - I want the House to take note - that this is a recommittal. Therefore, we are on Committee Stage. Deputy Catherine Murphy can come in again and speak for as long as she wishes as long as it is not repetition.

I keep pleading with the Deputy. I do not have the blacks from last night or the previous night to be able to compare. I am depending on the goodwill of Deputies to have respect for the House. Deputy Mattie McGrath does not have to repeat himself all the time. We have given

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this a fair hearing. I ask him, please, not to repeat himself and perhaps - it is a matter for him - bring his remarks to conclusion.

I call Deputy Broughan.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: We know various positions off by heart by now. I could recite what I have heard on perhaps three or four occasions at this stage from people who are opposed to some of the amendments.

The Leas-Cheann Comhairle has vast parliamentary experience at Irish and European level. In order to get some guidance from this debate, is it not now time for the Minister to respond to the amendments Nos. 4 to 21, inclusive, so that we can start to make some definitive progress on the Bill? The main positions have been set out by the proposers; it is now time for the Minister to respond and guide the debate.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are other ways to bring it to a conclusion, but it is not a matter for the Chair to guide anybody. Members of this House are very familiar with the Standing Orders. I ask Deputy Mattie McGrath to bring his remarks to a conclusion. I know the Minister was asked numerous questions and I am quite sure he would want sufficient time to be able to respond. I ask the House to respect that. Deputy McGrath, would you-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am not quite finished yet, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, with respect.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is finished with repetition so it has to be something new.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes. We have asked the Minister on numerous occasions - indeed I appealed to him on the last two occasions-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: He must be given an opportunity to respond.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes, I hope he will and I look forward to it, but he has not responded to any of the issues we have raised on any of the Stages.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on, now. The Minister did not have an opportunity to respond-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He did have an opportunity.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: -----because of the nature of the debate.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I look forward to his response and, as I said last night, I look forward to him withdrawing the scurrilous allegations he made about Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and our colleagues as a gang of road traffic terrorists.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not relevant to this.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course, it is relevant.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Why would it not be relevant? If you recall-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Speaking on the amendments-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes, but I am just saying until the Minister responds, I am just allowing him-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If I have heard it once-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: -----the good grace-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I do not know whether the Minister will respond.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes. I am just offering the opportunity for a third time - I know he did not make it in the House - to respond.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The debate has to be structured.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister cannot immediately respond. If he wishes at a later stage, he may respond, but that is a matter for him.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I did not say that, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I just said I asked him three times and gave him three chances that he might reconsider because it is a very hurtful allegation to make against anyone, never mind elected Members.

I was making the point that the figures, on which the Minister has predicated the Bill, are totally false, erroneous and spurious - one can call them whatever one likes. It is impossible to expect people to support that because they are totally erroneous. It gives me no pleasure to say that in my county the breath tests were exaggerated by 380%. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle cannot say I am not allowed to be concerned about that in discussing a road traffic Bill which is making changes in amendments Nos. 4 to 7. That is not right and we should be conscious of that when we are making legislation. We will be accused in later years of rushing legislation. Bad legislation is worse than even rushed legislation. No explanation has been given for this from the assistant commissioner or anybody else. I am not blaming the ordinary gardaí on the road or the traffic corps; I am blaming senior people, including the most senior person in Tipperary. The breath tests were exaggerated by 380%, which is staggering. The Minister and others expect that we should change the legislation to criminalise people for a lower offence on foot of the appalling vista that is going on up and down the country.

Tipperary is a very proud county and I am very proud of the members of An Garda Síochána in Tipperary. We badly need them and need more of them. We need the traffic corps to be boosted and put back to near its original strength and to give it the tools of the trade to implement the present legislation and then go forward from there. However, we must have honesty and integrity in respect of the figures on which the Minister has built the Bill. I do not believe he investigated or even gave a cursory look at those figures because if he did we would not be where we are at present without a full explanation. While it applies up and down the country, as I said, Tipperary was the worst with figures exaggerated by 380%. We have to be able to deal with that. That is what I am concerned about. I am asking the Minister to withdraw this legislation until he gets explanations about that. The citizens in Tipperary-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind Deputy McGrath that most of the amendments, particularly those in his name and the names of his colleagues, are about penalty points.

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Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes, but to get the penalty points the people in this case with a particular blood-alcohol level must be breathalysed and brought to a Garda station and go on the special machine. Of course, that is the case and we must have trust and faith in that system, but we have no faith in the system. The people with the responsibility to stop drivers on the road are members of the Garda, and they are doing their job. Somewhere in that office in Thurles, however, the figures grew like wild mushrooms. A grow house would not expand them as fast. It would be hilarious if it was not so serious. We have to have respect, understanding and fairness. Justice has to be done and be seen to be done. How can we have the increased penalties for the blood alcohol limit which the Minister is talking about when we have 380% exaggeration? How can we have any faith in this? We heard the RSA again at the weekend saying it cannot get figures from the Garda Síochána, which had been giving the RSA those figures for a while but which now does not give it any figures. Something is badly wrong in the system and I have to express my concerns on behalf of the people I represent in Tipperary.

There are many other areas of road safety. During the recent storm three people were killed. A friend of mine - cara liom - was killed by a falling tree, Michael Pyke from Ardfinnan, and two others also died. We have been pleading for years that every one of the trees on the roadside boundary should be cut back and no new planting should be done on motorways or anywhere else, and they should be required to be planted a fair distance back. If there is planning for a mast or other obstruction, for safety reasons it should be so many metres back from the road.

Deputies Danny Healy-Rae and Michael Collins have been in the committee in recent days trying to extend the hedge-cutting season because the roads are so dangerous, with restricted view and poor visibility. There are amendments in regard to cycling and the safety of cyclists. No one can cycle the roads in rural Ireland, and the Leas-Cheann Comhairle knows that as well as I. The briars grow out during the heat of June and July and the roads are almost closed in - dúnta. I am a member of Farm Contractors Ireland. Most tractors today have implements which might be 1.6 m or 1.8 m in front of the bonnet of the tractor, ag teacht amach ar an mbóthar, and trying to get out-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy. What has that to do with penalty points?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: If a person has an accident and kills someone, all the penalty points in the world will not matter. I am talking about road safety.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: On a point of order, I think the Deputy is not correct in this regard. Is it not the responsibility of landowners to maintain these areas? We are discussing a wider area which has nothing to do with these 20 amendments.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is not a point of order. I ask Deputy Mattie McGrath to concentrate on the amendments.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am well aware of the laws of the land on hedge cutting. The county council can give a felling notice to the landowner but the county council has primary responsibility for the verges and the sides of the roads, and it will not cut them. Worse than that, it is not allowed cut them because of the Wildlife Act. I am talking about the safety of motorists and, above all, the safety of cyclists and passengers. This is not just about penalty points because everybody has to be looked after. We have to look after the cyclists, the motorists and the farmers and contractors trying to exit from their land or businesses. They have huge insurance costs. If there is no visibility, nobody is wrong, but somebody could be killed, maimed or

seriously injured.

This is very important to rural people, as the Minister knows. The school buses cannot get up and down the roads. We also see the state of the roads, with drivers driving on the wrong side of the road to avoid potholes and to keep some semblance of their chassis and the undercarriage of their car together-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath, you have said it all about penalty points and the amendments. I appeal to you to bring your remarks to a conclusion. If no other Member is offering, I would like to call upon the Minister to respond to the debate.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am not finished at all. With respect, these are all issues I have to deal with and the Minister will not deal with. I do not want any sideshow from the benches on my right.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You must show respect.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I want to deal with the motorways, some of which go through my county, but in particular the 2+1 roads, which are lethal. I thank the Minister for coming down past my county to the Piltown bypass. He knows the number of road deaths there in recent years due to a wrongly designed, dysfunctional roadway. It was pointed out to officials from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the county engineer and the engineering executive of Kilkenny County Council, as Deputy Aylward is well aware. The Minister met very concerned people in the hall at Piltown, some of whom had lost loved ones. Although the Minister took it upon himself to do a bit of bowling in a lovely facility in south Kilkenny-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath, you have embarked tonight and other nights on a Second Stage speech.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I have not mentioned this before. These are all issues-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not relevant to penalty points.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course, it is relevant to penalty points. It is relevant to deaths. What is more important - penalty points or road deaths?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You cannot ask me to decipher that.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am not.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am asking you to bring your remarks to a conclusion.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: These road deaths are a slaughter. They have crosses on the roadsides with the number of people killed, but we have no sign of any funding. I do not know what the motorcyclists call the 2+1 road but it is lethal, with a steel wire stretched up the road, and if anyone hits it at any kind of speed, they are cut in two halves. The Minister saw it was the wrong design and that there should have been two underpasses and overpasses. The locals at the time had hired engineering expertise to design the road properly but it is now going to cost tens of millions to correct it. I do not mind spending tens of millions if it saves one life or a number of lives, but the design is very dangerous. The Minister saw it and was given the presentation. It is a long stretch of road from the outside of Carrick-on-Suir, County Kilkenny, and on to Fiddown. There are other such roads at Clontibret in Monaghan and when coming off

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the M8 at Cloghabreeda, going south, where the last 3 km is a 2+1 road. They are terribly dangerous roads and I wonder how some body like the RSA has not insisted they be discontinued. We have motorways with proper concrete barriers, which have such a grade of concrete that the cars will hop off them if they hit. The steel wire, however, is lethal, and God help us if it breaks or snaps, as no one knows where it will end up because of the tension in the wire. People have lost their lives due to those steel ropes without ever being on a road. In the past-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have now discussed 2+1 roads for a number of roads in the country. Irrespective of the roads, it is still the same principle. You do not have to repeat yourself.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The principle is wrong. I did not mention it until now. If it is wrong, it is wrong, and the concept should be taken away. As I said, that is little solace given the number of people killed on the N24 bypass that was widened and where the junctions were supposed to be made safe. People would not listen. I am just making the point that the RSA and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport are not ag éisteacht. They are not listening to anyone. They just bulldoze through their plans and to hell with the consequences.

We must be fair and balanced. We cannot have one piece of legislation that penalises rural dwellers. Rural dwellers pay their taxes, rates, VAT, NCT charges and everything else and they are entitled to be let live like anybody else, not be persecuted and literally - I hate using the word - terrorised. They are being put into a cave mentality so that they stay at home unless the Minister, Deputy Ross, gets his €460,000 for a bus to bring them from wherever.

The M7 road to Limerick, which is a much newer construct, has huge issues. We see at the moment they are widening the strip from Dublin to Kildare and there are long delays, although it is very welcome and badly needed-----

Deputy Catherine Murphy: On a point of order, I ask that we consider Standing Order 62 in regard to bringing this particular section of the debate to a conclusion. I think there is a great deal of disrespect for the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and, indeed, the House in regard to the degree of repetition. I am a member of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport. We sat through pre-legislative scrutiny and had a Committee Stage debate. Deputy Danny Healy-Rae participated in the Committee Stage debate but the others did not although they had the possibility of doing that.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: That is not a point of order.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is a point.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: They were accommodated.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: To which standing order is the Deputy referring?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Standing Order 62.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not 62.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is not 62, excuse me.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath should hold on. I will decide what it is. There is a Standing Order which I think the Deputy is referring to, which is Standing Order 68.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Right.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If that is the Standing Order it means that any Member once the question has been proposed calls for the question to be put. In other words it is a guillotine or calling for an end to the debate. Is the Deputy proposing that we deal with it under Standing Order 68?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I am. I am proposing that we do that.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy must hold on. We are at a very serious juncture here. Deputy Murphy is proposing under Standing Order 68 that the question be now put. Is that her proposal?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: That is my proposal.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am obliged to put that to the House.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am sorry we are at this juncture.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: No I mean-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: On a point of clarification-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Surely to God we can get a point of clarification. I am in possession. First of all the knowledgeable Deputy did not even know what Standing Order it was. Since when did the Chair come along-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Once the-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Since when did the Chair have to tell the Deputy what Standing Order to use? I hope if I am lost in a Standing Order after a while he will tell me what-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I did not tell anybody-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle did.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I clarified it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I would expect the Deputy would have known the Standing Order coming in. I want to continue speaking on amendment No. 4.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot continue once-----

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Can I-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no debate after the question is put. I am putting the question.

Question put: "That the question on amendment No. 4 be now put."

Deputies: Vótáil.

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An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The question is, “That the question on amendment No. 4 be now put.” To be clear, it is not on amendment No. 4 itself. The question has been challenged. Will the Deputies claiming a division please rise?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: As a point of clarification before we stand, I thought this was a vote on section 68.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No. Let me be very clear-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Please do.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: -----so that there is no ambiguity. We have been here all evening, both myself and the Deputies who have been in the House, so I ask those who have come in for the vote to offer the courtesy of listening, please. Deputy Catherine Murphy made a proposal under Standing Order 68. Standing Order 68 gives the right to any Deputy to propose that the question be put. After that, there is no debate. This is exactly what I am doing. The question is, “That the question on amendment No. 4 be now put.” A division on that question has been claimed. I have asked the Deputies who have claimed the division to stand in their places.

Deputies Michael Collins, Michael Fitzmaurice, Danny Healy-Rae, Michael Healy-Rae, Mattie McGrath and Kevin O’Keefe rose.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As fewer than-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Can I-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot ask any questions. He cannot even stand while the Chair is on his feet.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies cannot challenge the Chair in that manner.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: On the recommittal-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This is very clear. I am clear in my mind, and I put it to the Deputies that when the Chair is on his feet, no one should challenge.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Chair already said that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I cannot make it any simpler. As fewer than ten Members have risen, I declare the question carried. In accordance with Standing Order 72, the names of the Deputies dissenting will be recorded in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Dáil.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: On a point of order-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, there is no point. We are not debating-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: There were half a dozen points of order earlier that were not

points of order at all.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Listen-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: No-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is in the House long enough to understand that on the recommittal we were debating amendments Nos. 4 to 21, inclusive, and No. 28. We debated them all together. We move on to the question on amendment No. 4.

Deputy Robert Troy: I withdraw amendment No. 4.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I move amendment No. 5:

In page 3, line 10, to delete “in section 29”.

Amendment put.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Vótáil.

10 o'clock

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Will the Deputies claiming a division, please, rise?

Deputies Michael Collins, Michael Fitzmaurice, Danny Healy-Rae, Michael-Healy Rae and Mattie McGrath rose.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As fewer than ten Members have risen, I declare the question carried. In accordance with Standing Order 72, the names of the Deputies dissenting will be recorded in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Dáil.

Amendment declared carried.

Deputy Shane Ross: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 3, between lines 10 and 11, to insert the following:

“(a) in section 13A, by the substitution of “11(6)” for “11(5)” in subsection (1),

(b) in section 13B, by the substitution of “11(6)” for “11(5)” in subsection (1), and

(c) in section 29—”.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: As I am opposed to the amendment, we might as well call a vote on it also.

Amendment put.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Vótáil.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Will the Deputies claiming a division, please, rise?

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Deputies Michael Collins, Michael Fitzmaurice, Danny Healy-Rae, Michael-Healy Rae and Mattie McGrath rose.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As fewer than ten Members have risen, I declare the question carried. In accordance with Standing Order 72, the names of the Deputies dissenting will be recorded in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Dáil.

Amendment declared carried.

Deputy Robert Troy: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 3, to delete lines 11 to 32, and in page 4, to delete lines 1 to 14 and substitute the following:

“(a) by the substitution of the following for subsection (7):

(7) The fixed charge is—

(a) €500 in the case of a concentration of alcohol referred to in subsection (1)(a) or subsection (2),

(b) €500 in the case of a concentration of alcohol referred to in subsection (1)(b), or such other amount that, for the time being, stands prescribed in lieu of either of those amounts.”,

and

(b) in subsection (8) by the substitution of the following for paragraph (a)(i):

“(i) did not exceed 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood, 5 penalty points shall be endorsed on the entry relating to the person, or”.”.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As the amendment has already been discussed, there will be no further debate on it.

Deputy Robert Troy: Can the Minister not reply to the points I made on it?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Unfortunately, Standing Orders do not allow for that. Amendments Nos. 4 to 21, inclusive, and 28 were discussed together.

Deputy Robert Troy: On amendment No. 7, this is a-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot speak to the amendment.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: This is use of the guillotine.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is in accordance with Standing Orders. The amendment has already been discussed.

Deputy Robert Troy: I accept that I have already discussed it as part of the group of amendments that were discussed together. However, I made a number of very valid points on it and believe it would be appropriate for the Minister to reply to them.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: He will have to find another way to respond to them. It

might be appropriate, but it is not permissible.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will reply on Fifth Stage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have no choice. Deputy Murphy moved the Standing Order.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: Can we postpone it until tomorrow?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not on the Order Paper for tomorrow.

Deputy Robert Troy: We are due to finish at 10.15 p.m., and it is now 10.12 p.m.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Leas-Cheann Comhairle----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no debate.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I beg to differ. I abide by the Chair, but we were speaking on the recommittal of the Bill and amendments.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are on Committee Stage.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: A certain Teachta Dála invoked a Standing Order, although she did not even know what it was.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are on Committee Stage.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: No, we were speaking on the recommittal.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, we are on Committee Stage, not on Report Stage.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Any of the points we have asked about, and they were numerous, are not going to be answered.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister would have had an opportunity-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: When? I believe the Minister was not going to answer any question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I do not know, I cannot call that.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I do not believe he was going to answer any question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He refused to apologise to Deputy Danny Healy-Rae. I believe the Minister was delaying.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please. The Minister would have had an opportunity had Standing Order-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister would have had an opportunity, and I am sure

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he is disappointed he will not have that opportunity, had Standing Order 68 not been invoked. The Minister will have an opportunity on Fifth Stage.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is nothing further.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is about policy and good law, not rushed and stupid law. It cannot be implemented.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I see that-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I did not see any of the Deputies in the House supporting the Minister either. Where were they?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am going to adjourn.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Maria Bailey: In the interests of practicality-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am coming in here-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sorry-----

Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor: There is a woman speaking.

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

Deputy Maria Bailey: This has been reduced to-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I never hit the pillar on the gate. The two pillars coming in here-----

Deputy Maria Bailey: If Deputy Healy-Rae would like to have a bit of respect-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I never hit the pillars.

Debate adjourned.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.13 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 10 May 2018.