



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 9 Deireadh Fómhair 2019

Wednesday, 9 October 2019

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions

Brexit Preparations

1. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the emergency contingencies and supports in place to safeguard SMEs and export businesses here from a hard Brexit scenario if the UK leaves the EU with no deal in place; if a request will be submitted to Director General for Competition seeking changes to state aid rules in advance of the 31 October 2019 deadline; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41306/19]

Deputy Robert Troy: I ask the Minister to outline to the House the emergency contingencies and supports in place to safeguard SMEs and export businesses here from a hard Brexit scenario if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, if a request has been made to the Director General for Competition seeking changes to the state aid rules in advance of the 31 October 2019 deadline and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. While there remains significant uncertainty around the means by which the UK will leave the EU, the Government has worked to put in place a comprehensive suite of supports for business to suit all Brexit eventualities. The most immediate consequences of a hard Brexit are likely to be currency movements, supply chain constraints, delays, duties and tariffs, all of which will place strain on the working capital position of businesses. The €300 million Brexit loan scheme is designed to address working capital challenges brought about by Brexit. For businesses with fewer than ten employees, loans from Microfi-

nance Ireland will also be available to provide liquidity support.

A rescue and restructuring scheme with a state aid approved ceiling of €200 million is in place to allow us to respond rapidly to provide support for undertakings in difficulty and enterprises experiencing acute liquidity needs, if needed. This scheme was developed as it was considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that my Department can respond swiftly to changing circumstances, as necessary. These financial supports are operating alongside a suite of advisory, mentoring, training and awareness supports offered by my Department and its agencies. More recently, my Department in association with the Department of Education and Skills, and key industry partners, also launched a new support measure, Clear Customs, comprising a training programme and financial support to help customs agents, intermediaries and affected Irish businesses develop the capacity to deal with the additional customs requirements due to the UK's departure from the EU.

In relation to state aid, in November 2017, a technical working group was established comprising representatives from DG Competition, my Department, Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with the objective of scoping and designing schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with state aid rules. Through this group my officials are engaging in ongoing and open dialogue with DG Competition on Brexit issues. Earlier this year I met with the European Commissioner for Competition, Margrethe Vestager, who assured me that the Commission stands ready to act urgently in mitigation against the impacts of Brexit on Irish firms. With the deadline for the UK's withdrawal from the EU fast approaching, the ongoing uncertainty around Brexit continues to represent a significant challenge for businesses in Ireland. I want businesses, particularly those most impacted by Brexit, to know my Department and its agencies are here to help.

Deputy Robert Troy: I welcome the funding announced yesterday, but as part of that funding, the Minister immediately needs to bring greater clarity to the type of mix of funding that will be granted. What percentage will be equity and what percentage will be loans? That should be done quite quickly. I worry about the schemes because based on the previous schemes, there seems to be a very low uptake. Business groups cite extremely restrictive conditions and limits for the low uptake. We have only a 14% drawdown of the €300 million Brexit loan scheme which the Minister alluded to. She alluded to the supports being put in place by her Department but only 1% of businesses which need to go to customs preparedness workshops have done so.

One of the schemes introduced last year was the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund. More than a week ago, I received an email which I forwarded to the Minister. A recipient contacted me in relation to this scheme. The person said that almost a year later they, as a grant recipient, were still completely in the dark regarding this programme and that there was a litany of problems, some of which the person highlighted. While there are schemes, there are problems and there is a low uptake. What is the Minister going to do to reduce these problems and increase the uptake?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I want to reassure the Deputy that there is a range of schemes and that businesses are taking up those schemes. The suite of schemes announced yesterday in the budget have different aspects, being in the form of loans, grants or equity. They will enable Enterprise Ireland to provide a bespoke response to each individual company, depending on its requirements, and companies will be assessed by Enterprise Ireland on a case-by-case basis. The criteria for schemes will be made available to businesses as the Brexit picture becomes clearer. It is important to remember that the supports announced in the budget yesterday are

emergency measures, which will only kick in when it becomes clear that there will be a no-deal scenario. The bottom line is that we have a wide suite of supports ready to go in order to cater for companies of all sizes. The first thing a company needs to do is to put a business plan in place. There is support available to help them to do that through Enterprise Ireland and that is available now.

Deputy Robert Troy: I know a suite of schemes was announced yesterday. I read the Minister's press release and I was in the Dáil Chamber for the budget speech. What I want to know is what element of these proposals will be loans, what will be grants and what will be equity. My reading of the schemes is that, particularly for the smaller businesses, there will be support for microenterprise and for Microfinance Ireland of €5 million and an emergency Brexit fund for microenterprise of €5 million. Both of those are either loans or repayable grants but there are no grants for small businesses that get into trouble. Businesses out there are averse to taking on any more debt and they do not have the capacity to take on any more debt. My understanding is that there was no grant aid for these people in the Minister's announcement yesterday. I seek clarification in that regard.

The Minister talks about her Department providing support for businesses. Why is it that just 1%, or 531, businesses out of more than 90,000 that Revenue identified as having traded with the UK in 2018 have participated in the Brexit customs training? We are not prepared enough. I want to know what the Department is going to do to increase that preparedness.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: To clarify, customs training is run by Enterprise Ireland and through the local enterprise offices, LEOs. Much customs training has been carried out and 917 participants have attended customs training. What we have now is "clear customs", which is a much more in-depth training programme for the custom agents, and we also provide a grant of €6,000 per employee, up to ten employees in a company, to help companies recruit staff and train them. There are a lot of supports out there and we are saying to businesses to take up those supports. I will send the Deputy a list of all of the supports that have been taken up as I do not have time to detail them all now.

Deputy Robert Troy: There has been very poor uptake.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: In terms of the microfinance supports that I announced yesterday and the local enterprise supports, €10 million is available and that supports every business across the board.

Deputy Robert Troy: Is it grants or loans?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: It is a mixture of both. Grants are available through the enterprise offices, and some of them are repayable or part-repayable. This is taxpayers' money. If a company needs support, it gets it when it needs it. However, if it turns into profitability, I think it is only fair that it would pay the money back to the taxpayer. There is a suite of supports available to support the companies.

Local Enterprise Offices

2. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to conduct a review of local enterprise offices; her further plans to introduce reforms to

the local enterprise office network; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41217/19]

Deputy Imelda Munster: Has the Minister or her Department plans to conduct a review of local enterprise offices or plans to introduce reforms to the local enterprise office network?

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. Future Jobs Ireland is the Government's plan to meet the challenges of productivity performance and technological changes which we face as an economy and as a society. Under Future Jobs Ireland, I am committed to strengthening the capacity of the LEOs to provide a comprehensive suite of supports for indigenous Irish businesses and entrepreneurs, including addressing any gaps in such supports in order to achieve a step-change in enterprise productivity and innovation and to build resilience for the future.

Enterprise policy is a rolling agenda and requires a continuous assessment of action to be undertaken on an annual basis. The operations of our enterprise agencies are regularly reviewed and evaluated, including in regard to the effectiveness of their enterprise supports structures. Many of the actions in the Department's overarching enterprise policy agenda, Future Jobs Ireland, at both business environment and firm level, are key to driving productivity growth across all sectors, including investments in talent and in physical, digital and research infrastructures. The LEOs are also working towards these aims and ambitions.

Enterprise Ireland is responsible for the overall administration of the local enterprise offices in partnership with my Department and the local authorities, and this is a partnership which is working extremely well. The LEOs, working locally on the ground, are at the coalface of business supports for microenterprises in all their variations throughout Ireland and understand the needs of their local business community.

Under budget 2019, the local enterprise office funding has been increased by 22% through additional capital funding of €5 million and this increase is being used to assist microenterprises in becoming more competitive and better able to cope with the changing environment in which they do business. The suite of LEO Brexit supports includes tailored mentoring to address Brexit-related business challenges and targeted ongoing training on specific Brexit challenges, such as customs clearance.

In terms of plans for reviewing the operations of the LEOs, the Department has been working with the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, regions and cities on a crucial review of SME and entrepreneurship policies and issues. This review is currently nearing completion and will be launched on 23 October 2019.

Deputy Imelda Munster: As the Minister of State is aware, the State is overly reliant on a fairly small number of multinationals for a significant portion of its tax take. Last year, 45% of the total corporation tax take came from just ten companies and foreign-owned multinationals paid 77% of the corporation tax receipts for last year. This would leave our public finances very vulnerable to any sudden economic or political change and the European Commission has also raised concerns about this fact. The regime also leads to a regional imbalance, as those of us from outside of the cities know all too well. In order to develop our indigenous businesses, we need to strengthen the LEOs and increase supports. The Minister of State said the Government gave an additional €5 million but there is a lack of State support for non-FDI, non-exporting companies and in regions other than Border or Gaeltacht areas. The local enterprise offices

across the country support small businesses with grants and assist entrepreneurs. Does the Minister of State agree they need strengthening?

Deputy Pat Breen: I have to emphasise the importance of the 31 local enterprise offices around the country, which have played a significant role in our economic recovery. Some 98% of enterprises in the country are SMEs and they employ nearly 70% of the working population, a figure which is even higher for microenterprises. What is important about the regions that they drive job creation, not just in counties and regions, but in every community. We continue to support the LEOs and I believe there has been a 30% increase in their funding since I became Minister of State in 2016. That will continue and the Minister, Deputy Humphreys, has already referred to the loans announced yesterday in budget 2020 for Microfinance Ireland and a further €5 million in grants for the LEOs.

We are monitoring the situation closely. In preparation for Brexit, we have had a lot of meetings throughout the country and mentoring is going on all the time with the LEO companies. It is interesting to note the number of microenterprises that have gone from being a LEO enterprise to being an Enterprise Ireland company. The LEOs are extremely important because they create jobs in every county. Last year, they created 3,700 net jobs and I believe that with the funding in place this year through the €2.5 million LEO competitive fund, this will attract more entrepreneurship and more start-ups to compete for that funding and to build on that success.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The scale and ambition of the LEOs needs to be increased. Sinn Féin has a policy on this area. We would incorporate the existing 31 individual offices under a national headquarters and supply 100 additional staff who would co-ordinate activities within the 31 offices. We would also provide for 100 additional mobile advisers who would go out to businesses. I am sure the Minister of State has often heard many local business owners who are setting up say they do not have the time to seek advice because they are concentrating on setting up their businesses. The provision of an additional 100 mobile advisers would be particularly important also in the light of Brexit, whatever form that will take. Will the Minister of State acknowledge there is merit in the Government adopting a similar policy to strengthen the scale and the ambitions of the LEOs, particularly in light of what we could be facing?

Deputy Pat Breen: The Deputy must acknowledge the great work that has been done and the way we work with the LEOs. I referred in my reply to the collaboration between the local authorities and Enterprise Ireland. Those bodies along with the Department work with the 31 LEOs around the country. Most LEOs are located at the front of local authority buildings. They are very prominent. In terms of the work we have been doing to develop the LEOs, the student entrepreneurship awards are important. We also have the Entrepreneur of the Year award in respect of which we receive many applications and many people are entering this area. A good deal has been done in this area. The Minister and I meet the LEOs on a twice-yearly basis. This year, they celebrated their fifth birthday. They have created more than 18,000 jobs since they were established. We have new arrangements in place, together with the resources we are giving the LEOs, including human resources. Each LEO now has a graduate, a young person working in the digital and technical area, which is important. I ask the Deputy to take note of the OECD report and the report we have put together, which we hope to launch in mid-October. It sets out the shortcomings for small businesses in the country and how we can improve matters in that respect. Addressing those shortcomings will be a priority for us to ensure the LEOs and microenterprises play a very important role in the regions.

Economic Competitiveness

3. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures in budget 2020 to reduce the costs of doing business, reverse competitiveness deficiencies and create a more attractive environment for entrepreneurs here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41307/19]

Deputy Robert Troy: Will the Minister outline the measures she achieved in budget 2020 to reduce the costs of doing business, reverse competitive deficiencies and create a more attractive environment for entrepreneurs in Ireland?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. Notwithstanding our strong economic growth, addressing Ireland's cost competitiveness remains a key economic priority for Government and we continue to monitor Ireland's cost base and analyse the factors that are crucial to improving our cost competitiveness.

Our competitiveness is reflected in a range of economic metrics such as high economic growth, the performance of the labour market across sectors and regions, strong export figures and our productivity figures. For example, the labour force survey shows there was a 2% increase in employment in the year to quarter 2 2019, bringing total employment to 2.3 million, the highest number on record. In quarter 2 2019, there were 130,800 people unemployed, a decrease of 9.4% compared to the previous year. However, our strong competitiveness position, with the IMD ranking Ireland at seventh out of 63 economies, cannot be taken for granted. There is no room for complacency, which is why improving Ireland's competitiveness position is a key priority for this Government.

The Cost of Doing Business in Ireland 2019 report and the Ireland's competitiveness scorecard 2019, published by the National Competitiveness Council, NCC, found that while Ireland is a high-cost economy and the fifth most expensive in the EU, the cost base for enterprise is internationally competitive across a range of metrics, for example, the cost of starting a business, communications costs and average income taxes.

The 2020 budget, announced by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform yesterday, aims at protecting the economy's resilience in the face of Brexit and other international uncertainties. The €650 million contingency provision for a no-deal Brexit will enable me to introduce a number of specific measures to support companies to remain viable and competitive. The budget continues this Government's careful, stability-oriented approach to the management of the public finances, which is essential to preserve the economy's competitiveness. In line with Project Ireland 2040, the budget provided for significant increase in capital investment which will support the expansion of our infrastructure across key areas, thus supporting the economy's resilience and competitiveness.

Deputy Robert Troy: I thank the Minister for her reply. Small firms are the backbone of the economy and supporting them helps create and sustain jobs across the regions throughout the country. Earlier this morning, the director of the Small Firms Association said that budget 2020 is disappointing in that it did not recognise the importance of small firms by introducing ambitious measures to support entrepreneurship. Our cap on qualifying gains for capital gains tax, CGT is €1 million, which is out of sync with the UK where entrepreneurial relief is available for gains up to £10 million. We are ranked 23rd in terms of competitiveness according to the World Bank, which is quite low down the scale. Given that the NCC comes under

the Minister's remit, of the 121 recommendations published by the council in its 2018 annual report, will she update the House on the number of those that have been completed? Is there an actionable timeline for the implementation of those recommendations and is that available to Members?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: Ireland has made progress in recent years to improve its capital tax offering to entrepreneurs. The capital gains tax, CGT, entrepreneur relief was introduced in budget 2016 and provided for a reduced rate of capital gains tax of €20% for entrepreneurs - that was down from 33% - subject to a lifetime threshold of €1 million in gains and to meeting certain criteria. The relief was further enhanced in budget 2017 when the reduced CGT rate applicable was further lowered from 20% to 10%. The review carried out by Indecon economic consultants found that the relief should be retained and presented a range of options which could be considered for its enhancement. However, Indecon found to increase the lifetime limit in the manner advocated by most commentators would increase Exchequer costs but would be unlikely to be cost effective with the minimal impact on reinvestment. The Minister for Finance signalled in his Budget Statement yesterday that he had asked his Department to consider the outcome of the review with a view to determining any changes that could be made to the relief to better support entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial activity.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister cannot have it both ways, namely saying she does not think it is beneficial while, at the same time, looking for a review of it and saying that it would be beneficial to change it and that it would be amended. If a change is proposed, it will not happen under we have another budget. This budget was a wasted opportunity in this regard. We are uncompetitive when one compares the relief offered here to that offered by our neighbours across the water with whom we will be competing on the basis of our attractiveness for job creation and the retention of entrepreneurs. That is a fact and I am disappointed the Minister does not agree with me on it.

I asked about the recommendations of the NCC. It is critical that the Minister updates the House on the implementation of those recommendations and the timeline for their implementation. Has that timeline be published? I did a thorough search and I could not find a timeline for that.

The truth of the matter is Ireland remains a high cost economic and an expensive place in which to do business, to which the Minister alluded, under all economic metrics, including property, insurance, transport, energy and business. In respect of the cost of borrowing or lending, we are 65% higher than comparable countries across the EU. It is important we are updated on the NCC's recommendations. I hope the Minister will take this opportunity to do that.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: We take on board the recommendations of the NCC and I will certainly provide information on where those recommendations, many of which have been complied with, are at. I included in the Future Jobs Ireland plan a condition that the recommendations would have to be formally reported on, on a regular basis, something about which I am very conscious.

On the taxation side, budget 2020 saw the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, announce a number of measures. Changes to the research and development tax credit scheme, the employment and investment incentive scheme and the key employee engagement programme, KEEP, share options scheme will help to ensure Ireland will remain competitive and supportive as a location in which to develop ideas and base start-up businesses. Future Jobs Ireland, launched in March

this year, includes a range of specific deliverables that aim to enhance the business environment and improve competitiveness. Ireland is now seventh in the IMD rankings, whereas in 2011, just after Deputy Troy's party left government, it was 24th. While we have come a long way, we are certainly not complacent. I am very conscious that we must remain competitive.

Flexible Work Practices

4. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the research undertaken on the issue of flexible working, including its impact on the welfare of employees; the number of staff assigned to the report being compiled by her Department on the issue; her plans to publish the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41103/19]

Deputy Imelda Munster: What research has the Minister's Department undertaken on the issue of flexible working, including its impact on the welfare of employees? How many staff have been assigned to the report her Department is compiling on the issue? When does she intend to publish the report?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. My Department and I understand the importance and potential of flexible working. As the nature of work and society changes, the way in which we organise work must also change. A labour market which offers flexible working solutions can result in tangible benefits for employers, employees and wider society. This is addressed under pillar 4 of the Future Jobs Ireland strategy. Pillar 4 is focused on increasing participation in the labour force as this will lead to the more equitable, balanced and sustainable development of Ireland's workforce.

Pillar 4 of Future Jobs Ireland outlines a number of key ambitions and deliverables to help to increase participation in the labour force. Specifically, ambition 4.2 of the strategy is focused on fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions. Flexible working can encompass a wide variety of practices, including part-time and compressed hours, job sharing, home working and remote working. Such solutions allow for tangible benefits for employees, including improving their work-life balance. Flexible working also assists in the development of an inclusive society. By removing some of the barriers to work for people with caring responsibilities and providing a framework for flexible retirement, increasing flexible working could improve labour market participation, particularly among people with caring responsibilities, older people and people with disabilities. For wider society, remote working has the potential to stimulate regional growth, lessen accommodation pressures and support the transition to a green economy.

There are a number of key deliverables under pillar 4 of Future Jobs Ireland, with the objective of fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions. They include deliverables such as holding a national consultation on flexible working options, the development of guidance for employers on family-friendly working options and the extension of unpaid parental leave. These deliverables are being led by the Department of Justice and Equality, with an input from my Department. A further deliverable under this pillar, on which my Department is leading, is the completion of research on remote working.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

The objective of this research is to understand the prevalence and types of remote working

arrangement within the workforce and the attitudes towards such arrangements. The research will also identify the influencing factors for both employers and employees partaking in remote working.

Deputy Imelda Munster: As we know, work practices are changing. Therefore, we need to develop a framework that will incorporate and respond to the demands of modern working and for flexible work arrangements. The social and economic benefits for both employers and workers are wide-ranging. According to the most recent census, there was a 14% increase in the number of people whose primary workplace was their home. The Minister does not need me to tell her the advantages of this for workers. They will spend less time commuting into cities and sitting in traffic and it may reduce bills, including childcare bills, while rents may be reduced, etc. I am interested in seeing the completion of the research the Minister's Department is carrying out. I say this on the basis that our European counterparts are decades ahead of us, particularly when the majority of jobs are city-focused and city-centred and we are talking about climate change, the environment, travel, infrastructure and the lack thereof.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister will have two further opportunities to respond.

Deputy Imelda Munster: One would imagine the Department would be a little further on, considering that we are so far behind other European cities and countries.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I absolutely support flexible working arrangements. That is why earlier this year the Minister, Deputy Bruton, and I held a consultation event at Cavan Digital Hub, a new hub in the town of Cavan that allows people to co-work and work remotely. It is also a landing base for companies that want to come into the region. I held the event to hear and promote the views of employers and employees on remote working. We are in a time of full employment and want more people, particularly those in caring roles, to return to the workforce. There are many benefits to be gained. There will be a better work-life balance and employees might not have to commute long distances. It will also take pressure off the cities. For example, Apple in Cork employs 1,000 people who are working remotely. It is a question of how we can work with employers and employees. We have had the consultation and carried out research. It will identify new potential data sources based on desk research and engagement with stakeholders. Two staff members in my Department are working on the report and being assisted by an interdepartmental steering group.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Minister said in her earlier response that there was a proposal for a national consultation on flexible working. Does she have any idea when it will kick off, given that we are lagging behind others and it would be a very good first step? The other worrying aspect is that there is no legislation or guidelines governing this area. What happens as a result is that there are varying standards, subject to a company's individual and specific policies. That is not the practice we want to see. When will the Government put in place a policy in order that there will be rules governing the area and that people will know where they stand and whether they can access remote working? As it would also protect workers and their rights, it is important that legislation be brought forward.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The Minister, Deputy Bruton, and I have already held a consultation event. As I said, we want to hear the views of employers and employees because it is a win-win for everybody. It is a question of how we can find the right way to do it. The findings of the consultation will feed into the research on remote working being carried out by my Department. We want to figure out through it the extent of remote working among the

workforce, the types of arrangement in place, the attitudes towards remote working and the factors that influence employers and employees in pursuing remote working. Ultimately, the research will inform new Government policy on the issue. The policy could take any one of a number of forms. It could be a Government strategy or it may be a charter to which employers could sign up. We need to take stock of the discussions. While we have to await the outcome of the research, I am satisfied that we will find the right solution.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Does the Minister have any idea how long it will take?

Regional Enterprise Plans

5. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has received a report from an organisation (details supplied) which highlights the threat to the goals of Ireland 2040 if aviation policy is not reviewed to recognise the importance of air connectivity in achieving regional balance and the sustainability of jobs; if she will ensure the policy is reviewed to support businesses in the regions to remain connected in view of the threats posed by Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41116/19]

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: The report to which I refer in my question was carried out by Copenhagen Economics at the request of Limerick Chamber in conjunction with the Shannon, Ennis and Galway chambers of commerce. It points to the threats to jobs in the Shannon region if Shannon Airport is not supported, particularly in the context of Brexit. I want the Minister to ensure aviation policy will be changed to ensure businesses in the region and others that might be affected will be protected.

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): I am aware of the Copenhagen Economics report which was commissioned by Limerick Chamber to which the Deputy referred. I must, first, point out that aviation policy, as the Deputy knows, falls within the mandate of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. She will also be aware that A National Aviation Policy for Ireland is a key policy document for both national and regional airports.

I agree that it is critical for regional development that Shannon Airport continue to exploit opportunities that support both the local economy and that of the State. It is also vital that the stakeholders in the region support the airport in order to optimise the opportunities to grow services and ensure their viability by using them. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has engaged in detail during the development and roll-out of Project Ireland 2040. More recently, it engaged with the Southern Regional Assembly in drafting its regional spatial and economic strategy, which includes the mid-west. Project Ireland 2040 sets out our national strategy to achieve the Government’s regional development objectives. It states clearly that international air connectivity through our main airports, including Shannon Airport, as well as our smaller regional airports, is key to our national development plan, NDP. The plan highlights specifically the critically important role that Shannon Airport plays in the mid-west. Enterprise policy has a key role to play in the development of Limerick and the mid-west as an attractive and vibrant location in which to live, work, invest and set up business. In February this year, the Minister, Deputy Humphreys, launched the mid-west regional enterprise plan, which covers the period up to 2020. The development of the region’s capacity to deliver economic growth is one of the core strategic objectives of the plan, which includes a collaborative regional focus on exploring opportunities for greater utilisation of capacity at Shannon Airport.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: With due respect to the Minister of State, my problem is that I was hoping for an answer from the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation because I think this matter needs to be raised at Cabinet level. All the answers we get from the Minister, Deputy Ross, and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport inform us that aviation policy does not allow the Government to invest in Shannon Airport. Under EU rules, it is permitted to make such investment. It is clear from the Copenhagen Economics report that businesses, particularly multinational businesses that employ many people in the mid-west, are in danger if the percentage of air traffic in Ireland that goes through Dublin Airport continues to increase at the current rate and Shannon Airport is not supported in any way. Private regional airports are supported, but Shannon and Cork airports are not. My fundamental question is for the Minister and I hope she is listening. Will she raise at Cabinet level the need for aviation policy to be aligned with regional policy and with Project 2040? At the moment, they are totally unaligned. Will the Minister and the Ministers of State protect the businesses in the Shannon region that are depending on international connectivity by ensuring there is connectivity with an EU hub such as Frankfurt in the event of a no-deal Brexit or some other form of Brexit? The Minister of State, Deputy Breen, knows well that such protection is needed given that Heathrow Airport will not be in the EU anymore.

Deputy John Halligan: The Deputy may be aware that the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, announced yesterday that a marketing support fund of approximately €10 million over three years is to be made available to support the regional airports outside Dublin, including Shannon Airport. In December 2017, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation provided €250,000 in funding under the regional enterprise development fund to support the development of the Emerald aero cluster in the mid-west. I believe this project is progressing well. The NDP further highlights the plans for the Shannon Group in this regard. An investment of €150 million, including €100 million for the development of the property portfolio through the delivery of high-quality advanced manufacturing, warehouse and office space solutions, has been outlined in the capital programme over the period to 2022. This programme will help IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in their drive to attract inward investment and increase employment in the region. As the Deputy will be aware, aviation policy is part of the remit of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Project Ireland 2040 makes it clear that international air connectivity through our main airports, including Shannon Airport and the smaller regional airports, is a key part of the success of the NDP. In my constituency, €5 million has been made available for the extension of the runway at Waterford Airport. All of this is part of Project Ireland 2040. Shannon Airport is mentioned in the national plan more often than any other airport.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: The Minister of State has made my point, which is that aviation policy does not support Shannon Airport. There is an insistence on regional balance in regional policy and in Project Ireland 2040. According to the Copenhagen Economics report, “Other small open economies, where a similar concentration in market shares has been seen, have implemented policy initiatives to counteract the dominance of the national airport and mitigate negative impacts on other airports.” I appeal to the Government to align its policies to ensure the completely unbalanced airport sector in Ireland does not result in the loss of jobs in the successful mid-west region. Action can be taken and I want action to be taken.

Deputy John Halligan: Tourism Ireland strongly promotes Shannon Airport as an access point. It has highlighted the issues raised by the Deputy. A large amount has been given to Tourism Ireland to ensure airports outside Dublin are part of the overall strategy, plan and agenda. I spoke to the Minister about funding for regional airports yesterday. When we get the

details of the budget, we will see that substantial funding of €10 million is being made available to airports over three years.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is not being made available to Shannon and Cork airports.

Deputy John Halligan: Market funding of €10 million is being provided to support regional airports outside Dublin.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: I am not talking about privately owned airports.

Deputy John Halligan: I believe Shannon Airport is mentioned on a number of occasions in the national plan for the period up to 2040.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is not enough to be mentioned.

Deputy John Halligan: The Government has made a commitment that it will support regional airports, particularly Shannon Airport. Waterford Airport, which is smaller than Shannon Airport, is receiving €5 million in support under the 2040 plan essentially because of the need for regional development.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is getting that money because it is a private airport.

Deputy John Halligan: The Deputy can rest assured that the Government will continue to support Shannon Airport.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: I hope the Minister of State is right.

Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions

Personal Injuries Commission

6. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeline for implementation of each of the 14 recommendations made by the Personal Injuries Commission, PIC, with regard to personal injury awards. [41110/19]

Deputy Robert Troy: The cost of insurance is crippling small businesses. It is causing some of them to close down. The response from the Government to date has been lethargic, to say the least. I ask the Minister of State, Deputy Breen, to outline to the House the level of priority that is being given to the implementation of the PIC’s 14 recommendations by the Government as a whole and, in particular, by him in light of his responsibilities. We must ensure we tackle these runaway costs in a way that results in reduced premiums and sustains the viability of businesses into the future.

Deputy Pat Breen: The Minister, Deputy Humphreys, and I are conscious of the serious impact of high insurance costs on businesses. It is important that consumers and businesses can obtain insurance cover at a reasonable and fair price. Apart from motor insurance, which falls under the remit of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, policy responsibility for insurance is a matter for the Minister for Finance. We have no direct policy responsibility for

insurance. Officials from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and other Departments and agencies, including the Personal Injuries Assessment Board, which falls under our remit, are members of the cost of insurance working group, which is chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for financial services, Deputy D'Arcy.

The work of the group is complemented by the work of the PIC. We were pleased to submit the commission's second and final report to the Government on 18 September 2018. The publication of this report concluded the commission's challenging work programme since its establishment in January 2017 on foot of a recommendation in the working group's report on motor insurance. The first report of the commission, which was published in December 2017, made four recommendations, two of which are ongoing and one of which is partially complete. The final recommendation, which relates to the Book of Quantum, has been superseded by the commission's recommendation that the Minister for Justice and Equality should ask the judicial council, when it has been established, to compile judicial guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury.

The second and final report made a further ten recommendations. While they are not time-bound, we expect they will be implemented by the relevant bodies as soon as possible. Following the publication of this report, we wrote to relevant Government colleagues and organisations to look for co-operation in advancing the implementation of the recommendations that are relevant to them. Progress on the implementation of the recommendations is reported on through the cost of insurance working group progress reports, the most recent of which was published in July 2019. Four of the commission's recommendations relate directly to recommendations in the reports. Of the remaining six, one is complete and two relate to the development of judicial guidelines. These recommendations, along with the remaining three recommendations, are under consideration by the relevant organisations. The passage of the Judicial Council Bill through the Houses of the Oireachtas in July 2019 provides for the establishment of the personal injuries guidelines committee, whose function will be to develop the relevant personal injury guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. We believe that the cumulative effects of the implementation of the recommendations from the two reports of the personal injuries commission, along with the reports of the cost of insurance working group, should bring greater consistency and predictability-----

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

-----to awards, faster resolution of claims and ultimately, a reduction in insurance premiums. This will benefit consumers, businesses and society as a whole.

Deputy Robert Troy: We all know that the cost of personal injury awards is totally out of sync in Ireland. A recent report showed that the average award for minor tissue whiplash injury is €17,338 in Ireland, whereas they are €3,798 in the UK. In Australia, one is unlikely to qualify for compensation. In Sweden, less severe whiplash and injuries do not receive compensation.

This week I was contacted by someone in the hospitality sector. The person's insurance has increased from €41,000 to €105,000. He is genuinely considering closing the doors, with the loss of 31 jobs. A report which is actionable and has no timeline for when those actions are to be taken is, quite simply, pathetic. The Government as a whole has responsibility to tackle this industry.

I have a number of questions. When will the judicial council be established by the Govern-

ment? Who will compile the guidelines for general damages relating to personal injuries? Why did it take the Government until August this year to request that the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, undertake a study on how the public liability insurance market operates? When will the findings of that study be published?

Deputy Pat Breen: I agree with Deputy Troy about the cost of insurance for businesses and drivers. The Minister, Deputy Humphreys, and I heard all of the stories from businesses around the country during our travels. It is a major issue.

Deputy Troy asked about the Judicial Council. The Act is now law and we expect the council to be established by the end of 2019. As the Deputy knows, the Bill was passed in July and will establish the Personal Injuries Commission. While the Government cannot interfere with its deliberations, I hope the Judiciary will understand the importance of the issue and prioritise it.

It is important that we bring down the cost of insurance and that there is greater consistency and predictability of awards. A faster resolution of claims and, ultimately, a reduction in insurance premiums are key for us as we drive forward. That is why this will benefit consumers and society as a whole. The work must carry on and the judicial council will be an important template for the reduction in insurance costs.

Deputy Robert Troy: Hearing stories and taking action are two different things. The Minister of State used words like “hope”, “envisage” and “anticipate”, but he has provided no clear timelines for when real and meaningful change will take place that will result in a reduction in the cost of premiums and in the number of businesses closing down. The Government has yet to establish a national claims information database, tackle insurance fraud - there are no significant penalties for fraudsters - establish the judicial council to compile guidelines for general damages, establish a publicly funded anti-fraud unit in An Garda Síochána, set up a business insurance premium index to track prices over time or take any action on stabilising personal injuries claims. I accept that not all of these matters are the responsibility of the Minister of State; in fact, they are the responsibility of other Departments. However, we need a whole-of-government response to this issue, which is killing businesses. I again ask why it took the Department until August of this year to request that the CCPC undertake a study? When will it be published? For God’s sake, please work to tighter timeframes.

Deputy Pat Breen: The study will be published as soon as possible. The CCPC has received extra resources.

On the other issues the Deputy mentioned, we have published guidelines for the reporting of allegations of fraud, including insurance crimes, for An Garda Síochána. A new insurance fraud category in the Garda PULSE system has been live since November 2018. The Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and Insurance Ireland’s anti-fraud forum meet on a regular basis to discuss and act upon current and ongoing issues. The Central Bank Act 2018 commenced on 28 January 2019. The availability of information collected under the legislation allows policymakers to have a better understanding of the factors which influence the cost of insurance. A lot is happening. There is a whole-of-government approach.

The recommendation is that if people shop around, they will find cheaper insurance is available. I am constantly speaking to people. There are significant discrepancies in the cost of insurance. It is an issue on which we are working in order to ensure that we bring down the

cost of premiums.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: Last Saturday I received a telephone call from a business person who employs 106 people in the hospitality sector, comprising a supermarket and small play area for children, in a rural town in Ireland. Last year his insurance cost €19,000, with an excess of €500 for any claim. This year it is €49,000 and the excess has increased to €20,000 for a claim. People are at their wits' end. If this continues, businesses such as this will close. We have been talking about this for the past three and half years. The time has come for the Government or someone else to step in and reduce the cost of premiums.

We have heard today of a claim taken by the parents of a young child who fell in a crèche and was awarded €32,000. The crèche concerned will be lucky to survive. The Minister of State mentioned getting quotes from other companies. If one is dealing with a broker, when it requests a quote for a company nobody else can touch it until the broker gets back to the business concerned.

Deputy Pat Breen: The study is being investigated by the CCPC. We are working extremely hard on a whole-of-government approach to ensure that the cost of insurance is reduced to affordable levels for companies. We are all aware of the stories the Deputy has told - I have heard them on a regular basis. It is very difficult for companies to survive, but we are working to address the issue. When the new Personal Injuries Commission comes into place it will make a big difference. We have advertised for people to be part of it and it will happen before the end of the year.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

7. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the most recent update on regional IDA site visits per county and vacant IDA properties nationwide; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4111/19]

Deputy Robert Troy: I ask the Minister to provide the House with the most recent update on regional IDA visits per county and the number of vacant IDA properties which are available nationwide. What actions are being taken to try to attract business into these vacant IDA properties? What concrete actions are being taken to attract businesses to regions which currently do not have foreign direct investment.?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: Regional development remains a key priority for me and my Department. We understand the importance of achieving the best possible spread of employment and investment across the country, and my Department and its agencies have been working hard towards that goal. That will remain the case in 2020 and beyond. It is, therefore, highly positive that significant progress has already been made towards that objective. For example, 58% of all IDA client-supported employment is now situated outside of Dublin. This figure represents the highest level of regional employment in the history of the agency and reflects the significant energy and resources invested into supporting regional development. We will be seeking to increase that number again in 2020.

As I have previously made clear, the availability of marketable serviced land and buildings in advance of demand is a key element in the IDA's ability to compete for mobile foreign direct investment. Not only does such a supply of properties help the agency to secure high quality

jobs but it also allows projects to begin at an earlier date by diminishing difficulties associated with land acquisition, planning and construction. It therefore remains an important means by which the IDA can encourage and attract new investors to regional Ireland. If such properties were not available to potential investors, it would decrease the likelihood that regional areas would be selected by overseas firms ahead of urban locations.

The IDA currently owns 27 properties across Ireland. Of these, 14 are occupied by agency clients with the remainder available for prospective or existing clients.

As regards site visits, they do remain an important means by which the IDA can showcase regional locations to prospective investors. At the same time, we must recognise that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the firm concerned. It is also the case, no matter what efforts we make to underline the undoubted benefits of regional locations, that certain overseas companies will only consider investing in larger urban areas for various commercial or operational reasons.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

Details on the number of site visits to individual counties, from 2018 until the second quarter of this year, are set out in the table. Information on site visits in quarter three of 2019 are not yet available.

County	2018	Q1 and Q2 2019
Carlow	8	6
Cavan	2	4
Clare	13	17
Cork	61	40
Donegal	8	2
Dublin	269	146
Galway	54	26
Kerry	10	2
Kildare	8	4
Kilkenny	5	7
Laois	10	3
Leitrim	6	1
Limerick	35	34
Longford	5	1
Louth	20	19
Mayo	10	2
Meath	6	2
Monaghan	3	2
Offaly	5	2
Roscommon	3	1
Sligo	15	17
Tipperary	5	5
Waterford	21	11

County	2018	Q1 and Q2 2019
Westmeath	22	11
Wexford	3	2
Wicklow	1	5
Total	607	372

Deputy Robert Troy: I do not doubt the Minister's personal commitment to regional development. She is from a Border county herself and understands first-hand the importance of regional development. When she talks about 58% of IDA visits being outside Dublin, she does not take out Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, along with the bigger urban areas, after which the figures are very different. IDA visits to regional areas are down to about 20%. I do not think that is good enough. I think there is still overconcentration on the larger urban areas. Being parochial, the IDA park in Marlinstown in Mullingar is a state-of-the-art business park. It is 80 km, or 50 minutes, from Dublin city, port and airport. That lies vacant. We need to accelerate our efforts to attract inward investment to the regions so that we can ensure that people have an alternative-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister.

Deputy Robert Troy: -----apart from getting into a car and spending an hour or an hour and a half commuting to work.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: IDA Ireland had a record year last year and its half-year results this year are outstanding. More than 132,000 people are employed in 681 IDA client companies located outside Dublin. Some 56% of all new foreign direct investment jobs created last year were based in regional locations. I will give Deputy Troy some data on his own county. There are 21 IDA client companies in County Westmeath, employing 3,466 people. That represents an increase of 16% over last year, with 493 new jobs added. In 2009, when Fianna Fáil was in government, there were 1,983 people employed in IDA companies in Westmeath. That figure has nearly doubled by today, due to the policies and focus this Government is putting on job creation in the regions. In July 2018, Neueda Technologies, a privately-owned IT training, development and consulting services company, headquartered in Belfast, announced plans to establish a software engineering hub in Athlone, County Westmeath, employing 200 staff over four years. There are a number of different companies involved. There are six IDA client companies based in County Longford, employing 900 people.

11 o'clock

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: County Longford has seen a 20% increase in IDA client supported job creation in 2018.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Troy. Please try to adhere to the time.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I forgot to mention Center Parcs.

Deputy Robert Troy: Oh god. The last man who claimed Center Parcs is no longer a Member of this House.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am talking about creating jobs in Center Parcs.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister has to be careful of what she tries to claim.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am not claiming anything.

Deputy Robert Troy: The fact of the matter is that attracting foreign direct investment is not just a hallmark of this Government but also of previous Governments. The 12.5% corporation tax is a unique asset for attracting foreign direct investment, but there are areas which are not benefiting. Athlone is doing quite well and we welcome that. It is lucky to have the Athlone Institute of Technology, a magnet to attract foreign direct investment towards the area. I cited the example of Mullingar Business Park, which was purchased by the IDA and predominantly lies empty. What will the Minister do for it? The IDA team does great work and no one detracts from that but there are areas which are blackspots and they need to be addressed. Some 93 out of 300 IDA properties remain vacant and that needs to be addressed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister.

Deputy Robert Troy: I want to highlight that the Minister needs to address that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy's colleagues are waiting.

Deputy Robert Troy: Every part of this island and every region deserves a fair crack of the whip.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The spokespersons and the Minister have no right to continue and to take up an extra minute every time. There are others here. Everybody has the same entitlement.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: IDA Ireland has been doing wonderful work. It certainly has a strong focus on the regions. There are of course areas where we want to see improvement. We launched the regional enterprise development plans to identify the positives and build on them, but also to identify the gaps and how to improve where we need to improve. That is why we have €60 million in the regional enterprise development fund that is currently being spent right across the country. Site visits are only one part of it but if a place does not have something to show IDA, it will struggle to get visits. IDA had the best year in 17 years for regional job creation. More people are employed in the regions than ever before. IDA works to try to get companies out of the city. The city is an attractive place for companies because there is clustering and a pool of talent. I do not agree that we have not had significant improvements in regional job creation, because we have.

Regional Enterprise Development Fund

8. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when successful projects under the 2019 regional enterprise development fund will be announced; if shovel ready projects will be prioritised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41114/19]

Deputy Martin Heydon: When does the Minister expect to be in a position to make announcements about the 2019 regional enterprise development fund? Will shovel-ready projects be prioritised? The Minister will be aware of the importance I place on the very exciting project that we are developing in Kildare, the Athy food, drinks and skills hub. The Minister came to

visit the launch at the Athy Model School. It is a co-working zone, a flagship project for the County Kildare Community Network and a very exciting project for south Kildare.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: My Department's regional enterprise development fund, REDF, is a competitive fund. It has been introduced to co-finance the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative enterprise projects that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the regions to help to sustain and add to employment at county, regional and national level. The scheme is also aimed at supporting the development of initiatives that help to strengthen the capacity of regions to adjust and cope with the potential effects of external economic changes that may impact on a region's or sector's performance. The fund, administered on my Department's behalf by Enterprise Ireland, complements in particular the work underway by regional stakeholders all around the country in the implementation of my Department's regional enterprise plans, and more generally, the objectives of Future Jobs Ireland and Project Ireland 2040.

Under the REDF to date, just less than €60 million in total funding has been approved across 42 collaborative projects over two completed calls in 2017 and 2018. Projects have been supported in every region. On 24 June 2019, I announced a further call of €45 million, which is call 3 of the regional enterprise development fund. This call continues to support the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects. The third call closed on 25 September 2019 and I intend for the successful projects to be announced before the end of the year. As part of the competitive evaluation of projects, proposals that are ready to be implemented will be prioritised. Call 3 of the REDF has sought projects under three streams: strategic change projects capable of attracting funding of up to €5 million; smaller scale regional strengthening projects that may attract from €100,000 to €500,000; and industry-led enterprise clustering initiatives that can attract funding of €50,000 to €350,000.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I thank the Minister for her reply. It is good to know that there will be a decision on the fund by the end of the year. Obviously, I will make my pitch for Athy. The Minister has been in south Kildare several times. The first time she came to see the employment challenges we face was when we had the negative news of Coca-Cola pulling out of Athy. County Kildare Community Network, with the support of Coca-Cola which wanted to leave behind a lasting legacy in Athy, have put a €500,000 commitment towards this project. It will address the employment void in the area and the lack of food incubation space in the county. The development of the Athy food skills hub has been done in collaboration with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, Maynooth University and the Institute of Technology, Carlow. We want to address issues of youth and long-term unemployment in the area, as well as supporting interns to stay and work in the area, industry employees in need of upskilling and the farming community. South Kildare has a vibrant and strong rural community, which wants to add value to its agrifood product. We have the AgTech fund for entrepreneurs, as well as Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland clients wishing to relocate to the area, along with commuters, because it is an accessible part of the country. These are key benefits of this project for the area.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I was delighted to visit Athy with the Deputy several months ago. Prior to that, I was there at the time, unfortunately, the Coca-Cola plant reduced its staff there.

I was down there recently for the launch of the Athy food hub project. I saw at first hand the plans to convert the historical old model school building into a food innovation hub. It is a great project supported by Kildare County Council. I know Coca-Cola has made a significant finan-

cial contribution towards the project. It will be a fantastic asset for Athy. It is exactly the sort of project the Government should support. It will bring a historic landmark building back into productive use. The Athy project is ready to go. As part of the scheme's criteria, I specifically asked Enterprise Ireland, which will assess these projects, to prioritise shovel-ready projects. It is a competitive process and Enterprise Ireland will assess all the applications. I plan to make announcements at the end of the year.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I am glad the Minister recognises this project is shovel-ready. We are ready to spend any money the Government can give us in south Kildare. The model school and Athy food hub project is an exciting project in that regard.

I acknowledge the role played by Kildare County Council by putting €2.5 million of its own money, as well as gifting the building of the model school. It needs much work but it is a fantastic process. Jacqui McNabb in the Kildare local enterprise office has done huge work on this application. It has identified 60 zones to be strategic economic drivers for our area.

Driver No. 1 is a skills hub with a 16-station learning and demonstration kitchen to be completed as part of a learning and nurturing environment. A key component of the mid-east regional plan is that it involves the likes of the Boyne Valley food hub for collaboration and its expertise. Driver No. 2 is the timeshare incubator kitchen for culinary entrepreneurs in the area. Driver No. 3 is high specification food production units and commercial kitchens. We have the AgTech start-up accelerator hub for entrepreneurs in the area. This draws on the good local rural area. There will be a co-working zone and a community food discovery centre employing business development managers and food specialists. This is an exciting project which I hope we can support.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: Much work is going on in Kildare County Council. Jacqui McNabb in the Kildare local enterprise office is supportive of this project and has done much work on it. What is good about this project is collaboration. That is what we are trying to encourage across the country. It is collaboration between the local enterprise office, the local education providers, the local authorities and industry. When that comes together, that strengthens these kinds of applications.

I never saw a good application yet that did not get funding. This is independently assessed by experts in Enterprise Ireland. I will be announcing them by the end of the year.

Given the record in the mid-east for funding, I am sure south Kildare will do well again. It got €3.497 million in the past two rounds, while the Boyne Valley food innovation district got €1.5 million.

Brexit Supports

9. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to introduce additional measures to assist small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, in the Border region to deal with the adverse impacts of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41084/19]

10. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to introduce specific programmes to assist small and medium-sized enterprises in the

Border region, which are heavily dependent on Britain as an export market, to deal with the adverse impacts of Brexit and help protect employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41085/19]

Deputy Brendan Smith: We have discussed previously the adverse impacts Brexit, be it no-deal or otherwise, will have on our particular economy in the Border region. As the Minister knows, our economy is interdependent with our neighbours in Northern Ireland. The sectors critically important to our local economy in Cavan and Monaghan are equally important in Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh.

I welcome the funding provided in the budget for a no-deal Brexit. As my colleague, Deputy Troy, said earlier, we want to know the details of how this will be shared between equity loans or grants. Will the Minister ensure the sectors most vulnerable to a no-deal Brexit are given particular attention and a specific scheme of grant aid?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I propose to take Questions Nos. 9 and 10 together.

Since 2016, my Department has worked with the enterprise development agencies, businesses and representative bodies to ensure we have the appropriate mix of supports for businesses to prepare and manage through whatever Brexit we may face over the coming period.

The most immediate consequences of a hard Brexit are likely to be currency movements, supply chain constraints, delays, duties and tariffs. In the first instance, this will put a strain on the working capital position of businesses. I am progressing legislation to increase the amount which Microfinance Ireland can lend from €25,000 up to €50,000, which increases support to any microenterprise employing ten workers or fewer. This is open to everyone from hairdressers to hauliers. This will support an additional 1,000 enterprises with short-term loans.

For higher working capital challenges, the €300 million Brexit loan scheme provides loans of up to €1.5 million at a rate of 4% or less and approval is valid for four months. I advise businesses to secure approval now to be ready for any scenario. The overdraft facility can be in place but will only be paid for when it is used.

For longer-term loan requirements, the future growth loan scheme is another €300 million for investment by SMEs, primary agriculture and seafood business. Both Government schemes are administered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and delivered through the banks.

The joint Skillnet and Enterprise Ireland clear customs scheme was launched on 7 August to help customs agents, intermediaries and affected Irish businesses deal with additional customs requirements. This is a free customs training programme delivered nationwide by Skillnet, coupled with €3 million funding that I allocated to Enterprise Ireland for a support payment of up to €6,000 per employee to help with extra costs to manage customs compliance. Two weeks ago, I saw first-hand one of these courses in Cavan.

The large suite of supports available also include the Brexit scorecard, grant aid, consultancy, mentoring, advisory clinics, agile innovation fund, operational excellence offer and market discovery fund. These supports help companies consider various risks such as supply chain vulnerabilities and act to mitigate against them. All of these supports are critical for businesses in the highly vulnerable Border areas and for exporters who are heavily exposed to the UK market in sectors such as construction, engineering and food.

I recently collaborated with the accountancy bodies on four Brexit briefing events between July and September, covering several counties in the Border regions that are likely to be most impacted by Brexit. The events took place in July in Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal and in September in Louth with over 500 people in attendance. These Brexit events covered a broad range of important topics to help businesses prepare for Brexit such as supply chain, cashflow and accreditation. The events provided an opportunity for me to speak directly to companies impacted by Brexit in the Border region.

I acknowledge Deputy Brendan Smith's work on Brexit as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence. I am from the Clones area and Deputy Brendan Smith's home is not far from Belturbet, Bawnboy and Ballyconnell, towns which bore the brunt of the Troubles when a hard border was in place. We do not want to go back to those days. That is why everything the Government is doing is focused on ensuring we do not have a hard border on this island. In recent months, Deputy Brendan Smith has brought delegations and parliamentarians to the Border region to highlight the impact Brexit would have. It is important to acknowledge that the joined-up approach to Brexit we have seen to date in this Parliament is in stark contrast to what we have seen at Westminster.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I welcome the Minister's commitment to ensure smaller enterprises will receive support. It is very important that these enterprises have the capacity and capability to draw down whatever support is necessary. When programmes of assistance are available, often it is the most needy who are not in a position to draw down that support. It is extremely important that we address that issue.

In the context of Mr. Johnson's proposals, Manufacturing Northern Ireland made the point recently that 99% of manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland were small and medium enterprises. Only 1% of manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland are large. As the economy of the Border counties is similar, it is extremely important that assistance be targeted at small and medium enterprises.

I mentioned, as did the Minister, the importance of the agrifood sector, the construction products sector, engineering and tourism to the Border economy. The economies are inter-dependent. The message must be got across both to the Northern Ireland and British authorities and within the agencies in this state that we need businesses, North and South, working together. The companies in Clones or Ballyconnell that export to Fermanagh, Tyrone or Armagh do not regard it as an export but as local trade. We have to factor in to all decision-making the inter-dependence of the economies, North and South.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The Deputy is absolutely right. Nobody knows better than he and I do the links between businesses north and south of the Border. That is the reason I allocated additional funding in budget 2019 to InterTradeIreland, which has planning vouchers worth up to €2,250 of which companies can avail easily to help them to employ somebody to identify and mitigate the risks presented by Brexit. As part of the €110 million Brexit package announcement yesterday, a further €2 million will be allocated to InterTradeIreland because the Deputy and I both know that people losing their jobs north of the Border can mean people losing theirs south of the Border and *vice versa*. That is the reason we need joined-up thinking and InterTradeIreland has been doing great work. Even though there is no Executive in Northern Ireland - matching funding is normally provided - once again we stepped up to the mark and are providing InterTradeIreland with the additional funding it will need to ensure all support possible will be given to businesses in the Border region because I know that we are very exposed

owing to our geographical location close to the Border with Northern Ireland.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister. The absence of the Assembly and the Executive in Northern Ireland is deplorable at this time when the North-South Ministerial Council should be meeting and preparing an all-Ireland approach to Brexit. Unfortunately, that is the position. Can the Minister give the House an assurance that there is good and active co-operation between the authorities here and Northern Ireland Departments and agencies? I am sure business people from Fermanagh and Tyrone speak to the Minister, as they do to me, about their concerns regarding a non-functioning Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland. They are anxious that there be the utmost co-operation between the authorities here and in Northern Ireland to ensure the concerns of businesses, North and South, will be addressed and that the inter-dependence of businesses will be kept on the agenda at all times.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The Deputy is absolutely right. There is contact at official level between my Department and officials in the Department in Northern Ireland on the question of how we can co-operate. We want to make sure we can assist in every way possible because Brexit will throw up many challenges. Obviously, there is co-operation on a governmental basis also. The Tánaiste, Deputy Coveney, visits the North on a regular basis. I take any opportunity I get to travel to the North, as I know the Deputy does also. I have spoken on a number of occasions to the Confederation of British Industry and outlined what we are doing here. On one of those occasions it told me that it was very pleased to hear what was happening here because it is looking to the Dublin Government to find out the next steps to be taken. Brexit will be catastrophic for businesses in Northern Ireland if they cannot have their goods exported south of the Border without tariffs and checks. We want the position to remain as it is. It is so important that the free movement of people and goods continue. In terms of the agreement, the common travel area is protected. It is important that people know that they can travel seamlessly across the Border.

An Ceann Comhairle: Question No. 11 in the name of Deputy Burke will be taken by Deputy McLoughlin.

Job Creation

11. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps the enterprise agencies are taking to support job creation in counties Westmeath and Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41007/19]

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: Unfortunately, Deputy Burke cannot be here. He has asked me to ask the Minister about the steps enterprise agencies are taking to support job creation in counties Westmeath and Longford and to make a statement on the matter. I have a similar question, No. 14, in respect of the position in County Sligo.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has to look after his home turf.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: My Department and its agencies are working towards ambitious targets to support job creation, while ensuring employment and investment are distributed as evenly as possible across the country, thus ensuring every region can achieve its potential. Counties Longford and Westmeath have experienced significant growth in both employment and investment in recent years, with 19,400 more people in employment in the midlands from

Q1 in 2015 to Q2 in 2019.

In February this year I launched a new Midlands regional enterprise plan to 2020 to cover counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. It builds on the success of the previous midlands action plan for jobs by setting out a number of strategic objectives aimed at realising the enterprise and jobs potential in the midlands region. The enterprise agencies within my remit play a key role in achieving these objectives, with a comprehensive range of supports provided for companies by Enterprise Ireland, the local enterprise offices and IDA Ireland.

In Deputy McLoughlin's region, as Minister, I have made regional enterprise development one of my key priorities. That is why I led the development of the regional enterprise plans, which are enterprise focused strategies that are the result of a refresh and refocus of the regional action plans for jobs to ensure their relevance and impact to 2020. The refreshed north-west regional enterprise plan to 2020 was launched on 25 February 2019.

In 2018 companies supported by Enterprise Ireland in Sligo employed 1,917 people, a 7% increase on the 2017 employment figure. Enterprise Ireland is actively working with companies in Sligo with global ambitions to drive competitiveness, innovation and market diversification. In 2018 there were record growth levels in employment in every region which saw 61% of employment growth occurring outside Dublin, bringing total employment in Enterprise Ireland-supported companies in the regions to 64%, another record high.

Enterprise Ireland also works with the institutes of technology, ITs, to support entrepreneurship in the regions. A total of seven new companies in IT Sligo recently participated in the Enterprise Ireland New Frontiers programme. It is expected that they will progress to either Enterprise Ireland or local enterprise offices for further support and development.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I thank the Minister. I acknowledge the reply to Deputy Burke's question, but I want to highlight the wonderful work done by IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in my area and that of the Minister who has been in Sligo on numerous occasions. The most recent occasion was to announce jobs in Sligo and surrounding areas. We have been very successful in that regard. There has been a good team effort on the part of Sligo County Council, IT Sligo - the Minister recently mentioned the work being done in it - and the chambers of commerce in the region. I also acknowledge the wonderful work being done by Mr. John Nugent, regional manager, and Carole Brennan in Enterprise Ireland. They are the people who are assisting and working extremely hard to create jobs in Sligo and surrounding areas. The Minister might like to make a statement on it.

Deputy Robert Troy: We spoke earlier about the unique position of County Westmeath in attracting foreign direct investment. Thankfully, we have the M4 and the M6 and a good educational institution. I ask the Minister to keep the black spot of Mullingar on her radar. The 68-acre IDA Ireland Business and Technology Park in Mullingar was purchased over ten years ago, yet there is still only one business located in it. There is a huge opportunity in the area owing to its proximity to Dublin and access to a quality workforce. However, the Government needs to make an extra effort to prioritise it for foreign direct investment.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am particularly familiar with that business park because Deputy Burke had me visit the site. I will make sure IDA Ireland takes the Deputy's points into consideration when arranging site visits.

I refer to Deputy McLoughlin's question. All politics is local. A landing space was opened

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in Sligo in November 2018 through a partnership between IDA Ireland, IT Sligo and Sligo County Council. An open plan, turnkey office space has been provided in Sligo for companies that wish to quickly and effectively establish operations in the north-west region. County Sligo has also benefited from IDA Ireland's regional property programme through the construction of an advanced technology building in 2017. The facility was leased to Abbott which led to the creation of valuable new jobs in the area.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: That is wonderful news, for which we are very thankful. As the Minister knows, a new site is being developed at Oakfield, where IDA Ireland has acquired quite an amount of land. New buildings, roads and everything else are being worked on. I appeal to the Minister to develop more jobs in the Sligo area because we now have the facilities and will have more in Oakfield in the near future. She has visited the site and I have highlighted the need for more jobs in the region.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am aware of the wonderful facilities in Sligo. There are some fine facilities across the country thanks to investment in recent years. The regional enterprise development plan has identified these strengths and how we can build on them, while IDA Ireland takes account of all the spaces available. It is working closely with the local authorities and local enterprise offices in attracting investment into the regions. It is developing a new strategy. I can assure the Deputy that regional development will be one of its priorities in the new strategy.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

An Ceann Comhairle: In order to compensate for what happened yesterday, six questions are being taken. I ask all party leaders to co-operate and adhere to the time limits.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The tobacco industry is one of the most evil industries that has ever existed, although it works within a legal framework. It has consigned millions of people to their deaths, destroyed millions of lives and injured and maimed millions more. It infamously targeted children to get them addicted young and secure customers for life. It suppressed for decades knowledge and research that proved how fatal tobacco smoking was. The comprehensive anti-tobacco legislation of 2002, coupled with the smoking ban of 2004, helped to de-normalise smoking and allowed for worker safety, while also preventing younger generations from engaging in a killer habit.

The tobacco industry, however, has struck back via the vaping epidemic. The vaping industry mirrors many of the strategies deployed by the tobacco industry, particularly in hooking young people and getting them addicted to nicotine. The financial muscle behind this epidemic is provided by the tobacco industry. Children are being targeted with colourful and flavoured vaping products. Pop-up shops selling vaping devices and e-cigarettes are located in the country's shopping centres and on main streets. Advertising campaigns have proliferated on nearly every Dublin bus, as well as on strategically placed billboards all over Dublin and across cities and towns. Last week the United States Center for Disease Control, CDC, produced some alarming statistics which confirmed that over 1,000 lung injuries and 19 deaths had already oc-

curred in 48 states due to vaping. The CDC has warned that the aerosols users inhale and exhale from e-cigarettes can potentially expose them and bystanders to other harmful substances such as heavy metals and volatile organic compounds. As a result, there has been a flurry of legislative activity in a variety of US states banning the use of vaping devices and advertisements to varying degrees, particularly those aimed at young people. There has been an unacceptable level of youth usage of these products. Teen e-cigarette use has risen sharply since 2017. When will the Government introduce legislation to ban the sale of vaping products to people under the age of 18 years? Will it introduce legislation to ban all advertising and sponsorship of vaping products, as we did for tobacco products? Will the Government extend the existing ban on tobacco in the workplace to vaping? One wonders how such devices ever came into being. I ask the Taoiseach to send me at a later date a comprehensive account of the regulatory framework governing the vaping sector.

The Taoiseach: We can all agree that consuming tobacco is seriously injurious to one's health. It causes many forms of cancer, as well as severe illnesses such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD, which leads to disability and other effects. I acknowledge Deputy Micheál Martin's work as Minister for Health and Children over a decade ago in banning smoking in the workplace, which saved lives. That work was followed up on by Senator James Reilly and others by bringing forward plain packaging and other measures which have made a huge difference. Fewer than 20% of people in Ireland now smoke and more people have quit tobacco than now use it.

Vaping is a relatively new phenomenon, although it has been around for a number of years. We need to look at the science and listen to doctors and public healthcare experts on such issues. Research is still under way on the impact vaping can have on the health of both adults and children. One can eat, drink, consume, or do many things that can be bad for one's health, but we do not necessarily prohibit or restrict them or ban their advertising. We need to assess the extent to which a product is damaging to someone's health and respond proportionately, having taken this into account. The Government will consider this issue and look at restricting the sale of vaping equipment to minors and prohibiting or restricting advertising, as the Deputy suggested. The question of vaping in the workplace relates mostly to second-hand effects, that is, whether somebody vaping has an impact on the person beside them. That was the basis for the workplace ban. The Government will definitely consider these policies, but we will do so based on the evidence, the scientific advice and what public health doctors and experts say. I am sure the Deputy agrees with that approach.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This epidemic developed from 2007 onwards. The fact that the tobacco industry is involved should send a warning signal to all concerned. There is terrible complacency about this issue. I do not know how these devices ever got onto the market without some controls. Young people are being targeted with the same strategies as previously, using flavoured vaping devices to get children on board and hook them on the product. There is now growing teen use of vaping devices. We had been really succeeding in terms of getting young people away from the whole idea of nicotine addiction. The whole strategy here is to get young children and young people addicted to nicotine via these vaping devices. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, has always been the leader in terms of research and work in public health generally. It is sending out alarm signals and is producing an advisory saying to people not to use vaping devices. I accept there are complications in terms of the use of THC in some of the devices in the United States, and the vitamin E acetate as well. The very fact that 1,000 people have had lung injuries, including young people of 22 and 23 years, and 19

deaths have occurred, should really send alarm signals here. This is a global epidemic fuelled by a massive, resourceful industry and we need far more urgency in our national response to it than has been evident to date.

The Taoiseach: I absolutely agree that the fact that the tobacco industry is involved in producing, marketing and selling this equipment is a cause for concern. It does appear to me as well that young people are being targeted through advertising, through flavoured devices and products and through colours. It has all the hallmarks of what we saw before with flavoured cigarettes, the type of advertising that was carried out, alcopops, all of those things. The Deputy's concerns are well placed. It is a matter that we need to examine, and I agree we need to examine it with more urgency than has been the case in the past. I will speak to the Minister for Health and the chief medical officer and ask them to look at that scientific advice and assess where we need to go from here.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Yesterday, the Minister for Finance announced an increase in carbon tax as part of budget 2020. The Government pushed ahead with a tax increase that it knows will disproportionately hit the vulnerable and low paid. The Government knows this because it has been told. The ESRI and the Department of Finance have told the Taoiseach that poorer households, rural areas and lone parents will bear the brunt of this decision. The Taoiseach should be in no doubt that his increase in carbon tax will deepen poverty and inequality. It will make life harder for those families that are just about getting by.

This is not a climate action measure. It is not about making Ireland greener or cleaner and it is certainly not about changing people's behaviour. In order for carbon taxes to influence behavioural change, they have to be supported by investment and we have all of the evidence of this fact here in Ireland. The existing carbon tax has generated €400 million every year since 2015 without changing behaviour or Government policy and, critically, emissions are not dropping. This shows that we must provide people with alternatives for them to transition to a low-carbon lifestyle. That means investing properly in order to give viable alternatives in terms of transport, fuel and heating, but the Government is not doing this. Presenting this regressive tax as a climate action measure is a hoodwink, a ruse and an attempt to dupe people into believing that the Government is taking the climate crisis seriously when nothing could be further from the truth. The carbon tax hike is not climate action. At best, it might be called tinkering or a half measure. At worst, it is another PR stunt the bill for which is passed on to workers, families and pensioners. This will not change people's behaviour but it will make people poorer. The Government plans to keep increasing this tax over a ten-year period and therefore chooses to go after ordinary households rather than the big polluters and those most able to shoulder the burden. That is classic Fine Gael. Whenever there is a cost for the damage caused by those at the top, Fine Gael likes nothing better than to send the bill to the ordinary people.

Everybody accepts that we all have to do more and that we have to do better. We all have a part to play in meeting the challenge of climate change and we only have a few short years to rise to the challenge. I want the Taoiseach to do the right thing. I want him to pursue an alternative that will actually work. I want him to fund climate action through progressive taxation and then invest in a real plan in transport, energy infrastructure and a massive home retrofitting programme. That is what the Taoiseach should have announced yesterday. The morning after the day before, I ask him to do the right thing and to drop this carbon tax increase.

The Taoiseach: I am afraid the Deputy is just wrong on this. She is out of touch with the facts and the science. She is out of touch when it comes to the enormous demand from people

across Ireland, particularly younger people, that we should take action when it comes to climate change. I do not think for a second that increasing any tax is ever going to be popular or welcomed but sometimes it is the right thing to do. On this occasion, it is the right thing to do. This is a tax which is all about the environment and climate action. That is why it is being ring-fenced. Specifically, the revenues from it are being ring-fenced to protect the most vulnerable, those at risk of fuel poverty and to take specific climate actions, paying for some of that investment that the Deputy talks about being necessary, because investment has to be funded. The Deputy might consider what we have done in respect of the fuel allowance by increasing it by €2 a week. This fully protects the 22% poorest households in Ireland.

Deputy John Brady: That is a pittance.

The Taoiseach: This is what the ESRI research says. If the Deputy does not want to believe me, he should listen to the facts, the experts and the scientists. The ESRI research indicates that an increase in carbon tax will cost the poorest households about €44 a year. The increase in the fuel allowance is €56 a year so in fact the poorest one fifth of households in Ireland are actually better off as a result of what we have done in respect of carbon tax. Deputy McDonald suggests somehow that carbon tax is only paid by households. That is not what the facts or the research show. The facts and the research show that more than half of carbon tax is paid by business and by those big polluters the Deputy mentioned. The polluter pays principle applies. It is applied across the board, those who pollute the most pay the most and that is why business is going to pick up most of the cost of the carbon tax.

In respect of rural areas, it is true that in general, people in rural areas are more affected by carbon taxes than those who are not. Again, that depends on the circumstances. Somebody living in a rural town like Kenmare in County Kerry who lives and works in that town and has a well insulated house will be no more affected by the carbon tax than somebody who lives in the city centre. People who have lifestyles that use a lot of carbon will be more affected, including people living in suburban Dublin who may have poorly insulated houses. The whole point of carbon tax is to incentivise behavioural change over time. That is why we did not go for a big increase as some recommended. We decided to go for steady, smaller increases. I would say to the Deputy that if she does not believe me, that is fine but she should listen to the 27 Nobel prizewinners who have spoken on this. She should listen to our own Climate Action Advisory Council, Friends of the Earth and all of the people who really care about our climate and improving our environment. They all say the same thing. They say that carbon tax on its own will not stop climate change but we will not stop climate change without it. It has to be part of the picture and it is part of the picture. This is being done in addition to a €22 billion investment in renewable energy, insulating our homes, and public transport. All of those things are being done.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The history of carbon taxes in this jurisdiction is that they have not had the effect of reducing emissions. That is just a fact. It has been patchy but the trajectory is going in the wrong direction. The Government has had €400 million per annum to invest to support behavioural changes and it has failed abjectly. This is a case of the Government believing its own hype and propaganda. I am well aware, by the way, of what young people expect from us. I live with two young people who are very clear what they want to see. They want to see meaningful actions. That does not mean box-ticking by the Taoiseach to make himself look good and to don his new green credentials. The hike in the carbon tax is going to hurt poorer households. It is going to hurt lower-income people who are at work and do not qualify for a fuel allowance. It is going to hurt people living in substandard accommodation

who cannot afford to retrofit their homes. The budget yesterday, the same budget that proposes this hike in carbon tax, was pathetically inadequate in terms of supports for those families in any respect but particularly in terms of retrofitting. I put it to the Taoiseach that he is a green poseur and nothing more than that. He is not serious about climate action but he is serious about hammering those families and workers who ought to have been given a break yesterday.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy and her party are not serious about climate action, and the same applies to the far left. She proposes solutions that make no difference because they are not unpopular, yet she will not support climate action that might be unpopular because it works. It is an entirely cynical and hypocritical approach to climate action to only support actions that do not make a difference because they do not inconvenience anyone and to oppose actions that do make a difference. I really hope that young people, who particularly care about climate action and the environment, see through Sinn Féin and the far left-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They see through the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----and see how left-wing and populist politics is actually anti-environment and how Sinn Féin is trying to hijack their movement to promote a philosophy that is profoundly anti-environment.

What we are doing by increasing the carbon tax and setting a trajectory to reach €80 per tonne is saying that while the tax will rise, we will ring-fence it. We have ring-fenced it to protect the poorest 20% of households, who will be better off as a result of this measure. We have research to prove that. The rest is being invested in climate actions, which is exactly the kind of investment the Deputy talks about. Investment has to be paid for. Does it not make sense when investing in the environment and climate action to raise the money by disincentivising exactly those things that damage the environment?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is really bad-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It should be no surprise to the Taoiseach - I am sure it is not - that the Labour Party and Fine Gael have very different approaches to the economy. It turns out that Labour is better at managing the public finances and protecting the most vulnerable. Several commentators who are no friends of Labour described yesterday's budget as worse austerity than anything done during the period of economic collapse. This, however, is a time of immeasurably better public finances when the Government had real choices. Even if there is a no-deal Brexit, the public finances are close to being in balance. Next year, even without a hard Brexit, inflation is expected to be of the order of 1.5%. Inflation is a factor again in our economy. It was not during the past five or six years. The cost-of-living increase yesterday means the freeze on welfare payments is an effective cut to the income of the poorest people of the land. If the Government had not needed to pay an extra €200 million for the children's hospital or rural broadband due to the mismanagement of those projects, it would have had the money to address the increase required in welfare payments. If the Government had required the banks to pay their fair share after being bailed out by the public purse in exchange for the debt they owe the people, we would have had the money to protect the most vulnerable. Fine Gael, however, has not managed the public finances prudently and it has refused to demand from the banks the full payback required for the bailout. Fine Gael now has to stand over a real reduction in the income of the most vulnerable next year.

The ESRI has warned that many common supermarket items imported from Britain will in-

crease in price if there is a no-deal Brexit, costing the average family between €892 and €1,362 per year. That will add €17 to €26 per week to the cost of the weekly shopping of a family. It is quite clear that many in society are going to have to do without if a no-deal Brexit comes about because there will be an effective reduction in their income and a rise in prices.

The Minister for Finance did not give us details of the spending measures he intends to take, if there is a no-deal Brexit to protect the most vulnerable. I have one simple and direct question for the Taoiseach: will the Government now undertake to raise social welfare rates in a supplementary budget if a no-deal Brexit comes to pass?

The Taoiseach: We have no plans for a supplementary budget or an emergency budget. The budget was framed on there being a no-deal Brexit, with the economy growing by only 0.7% next year as opposed to 5.5%, which was the rate this year. Since this is the budget that protects Ireland from the worst consequences of no deal, there will be no need for a supplementary budget or an emergency budget next year.

The Deputy is correct that the Labour Party and Fine Gael have different approaches to the economy. We decided to base this budget on there being no deal. We believe that was the right approach. Fianna Fáil, our confidence and supply agreement partners, agree. The Labour Party did something different in its alternative budget proposal, which I have to hand; it assumed there would be a deal. All its numbers and projections assume there will be a deal. The party promises welfare increases in its alternative budget but the truth is that, if there were no deal, they would have to be taken back in a few months. This is exactly the policy we wanted to avoid because we saw what happened in 2010. The then Government announced a giveaway budget, cut taxes, increased social welfare and the minimum wage and did all those things we all want to do and then took it all back again six months later after the economic shock. The Labour Party would pursue the policy of 2010, which was so wrong and mistaken. We do not want to do that. There is a serious risk of a major economic shock to our country in a few weeks. The Tánaiste and I are working harder than anyone else to avoid that shock but we had to do the right thing with this budget. The right thing was to base it on the assumption that we will not have a deal. What the Labour Party did was wrong. All its numbers assume there will be a deal. It promised increases in welfare and expenditure but it would have to take all of them back. That was the approach taken by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party in 2010. It was wrong. While Fianna Fáil seems to have learned from that mistake in 2010, the Labour Party has not. That is disappointing.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Like a headmaster in school.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach should be allowed to continue without interruption.

The Taoiseach: Let me say a final word. Deputy Howlin mentioned the term “austerity” and seemed to suggest that, in some way, the budget produced yesterday was an austerity budget. He and I know what austerity budgets are like. He and I had to bring in austerity budgets.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: So do the people, including workers.

The Taoiseach: He and I had to talk about how much we were going to take out of the health budget when he was Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I was the Minister for Health. This is not an austerity budget.

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Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Taoiseach got his way that time.

The Taoiseach: We are increasing expenditure on services and public infrastructure by €3.3 billion next year. This is more than an extra €1 billion for health services alone. This is not an austerity budget; it really is not.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Howlin, who has one minute.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: With that response and with one minute, it is very hard to know where to start. That was a-----

The Taoiseach: The Deputy should start by withdrawing the nonsense in his question.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Taoiseach is becoming more like Donald Trump every day, being detached from reality.

I want to make a few very clear points. The document the Taoiseach is holding up, Building an Equal Society: Labour's Alternative Budget 2020, which I am very glad he has read, is built on the figures presented by the Department of Finance. Unless the Taoiseach is suggesting they are completely false, they are all we can budget on. The figures were all proofed by the Department of Finance. They project a surplus next year of 0.2% of GDP, or €700 million, having provided €5 per week to every pensioner or anybody in receipt of a social welfare payment, including the disability benefit or carer's benefit. What it does do is ask the banks to pay their fair share. It is amazing that the Taoiseach believes asking the banks to pay their share in the normal times of funding the State will bring about an economic collapse and that it represents ruinous policy. It is that ruinous attitude to banks that brought us to disaster in the first place.

I question the notion that this was a Brexit budget because it ignores the most vulnerable. They are required to get no increase and meet the cost of additional price rises. Is that the Taoiseach's idea of a Brexit budget?

The Taoiseach: We introduced a measure in relation to the bank levy only last night, and I know the Deputy is supportive of it. He made a point that is worth answering, on the fact that there being no increase in weekly welfare payments and pensions in the budget means they will not keep up with inflation. That is a fair point and that is true but I have two points to make to the Deputy with respect to it. In the past three budgets, brought in by Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance, we increased the weekly welfare rates and the pension by two to three times the rate of inflation. Taking our four budgets in the round, we have kept our promise to increase the pension and the weekly welfare rates well above the rate of inflation. This budget is different because of Brexit but, taking the four budgets together, we have increased the pension and welfare rates well above the rate of inflation.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That will be a great comfort to people trying to pay their bills next year.

The Taoiseach: However, a second valid point is that the Deputy did not acknowledge that for the poorest in our society, we have increased welfare payments. There is a €5 a week increase for those living alone - 250,000 people will get that increase. They are protected from inflation. That increase will be double the rate of inflation next year. For the poorest families, we have increased the dependent child allowance. Those families will also be protected.

Deputy Joan Burton: What about working families on low pay?

The Taoiseach: For families working on low pay, we have increased the working family payment and the lone parent disregards. The poorest families, those living alone and those on welfare with children have been protected.

Deputy John Brassil: What about the cuts for pensioners?

Deputy Joan Burton: The Taoiseach is anti-republican.

The Taoiseach: I acknowledge that some have not but taking the four budgets in the round we have increased the weekly rate of the pension and the weekly rate of welfare payments by three or four times the rate of inflation. I am proud to have led a Government that did that.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Yesterday's briefing from Downing Street, presumably from Mr. Cummings, said that the Taoiseach thinks he cannot lose by refusing to compromise now and that the British will have to put the offer back on the table whatever happens after 31 October. However, the UK Government says that the deal it offers now will not be revived, that its duty of sincere co-operation would be "in the toilet" as it was put and that we do not understand the electoral dynamics over there. We are electoral nerds and we follow UK politics. We have as much understanding of the form of the various parties in the UK as we do that of Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea in the UK premier league.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: What about Wolves?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We understand their-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Mind the wolves.

An Ceann Comhairle: Would the Deputies have a bit of sense? The people of the country are observing this Parliament in action. Would Members please respect that fact and allow the Deputy to ask the question without interruption and allow the Taoiseach to respond without interruption?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I do not mind levity but this is serious stuff. This is the issue of today beyond any historic moment I can remember. I can recall 2010. We are in a similar moment because what happens here in the next few weeks is important for the people of this country. This is deadly serious. I was using an analogy to show that we know politics in the UK inside out, intimately. I have ten first cousins over there and I talk to them regularly. We follow politics there and know exactly what the game is and what is being played out in this regard.

I know we have to be careful about chasing the latest media stories but the Tánaiste was in Brussels last night and I presume he can confirm the reports today that the EU may now be willing to accept a consent approach in Northern Ireland. They say it would be based on a double majority, which I think we would have to agree to. We could not have a situation where one particular party could have a veto on proceedings. I am interested in the Taoiseach's position on this. Our party set out clearly during the summer that maybe there should be a referendum up North, not a Border poll about sovereignty or unity but one on the specifics of a deal. If that can be done instead, there is a mechanism in Stormont, for all its failed structures. Our party does not abide by this one side or the other approach; we have representation from both sides of the community up North. What is the Taoiseach's view on a double majority consent approach, if Europe has moved to accept that? Does that unblock that difficulty?

If the UK Government says the offer will not be back on the table, I presume our request

will be the same and I presume, if the consent issue can be agreed, there will not be customs arrangements on this island. That is all that holds us now from a deal. After the UK's electoral dynamics have played out, even if the Tories are returned to office, we would have the House of Congress on our side saying that any trade deal would not be acceptable unless our issues were addressed and, given the solidarity we have in Europe and the reports of Chancellor Merkel's comments yesterday, we can be reasonably confident of European support. Electoral dynamics or not, I presume our request will stay the same. It is not a unity play; it is not to demean Unionism but to recognise that there will be no customs variation come what may.

The Taoiseach: I am aware of the various anonymous briefings we are reading of in the newspapers about me, Ireland and Chancellor Merkel and I do not want to make much response to anonymous briefings of that nature. I do not think much of anonymous briefings, whether from Downing Street or from my own ranks. If people want to brief, they should do so publicly and openly. There has not been any change to the EU negotiating position. We decide our guidelines at EU Council meetings and they have not changed and they certainly cannot change until the summit next week at the very earliest. As far as the Government is concerned, we do want a deal. We are willing to work hard to get one. We will work until the last moment to get one but not at any cost. We are absolutely open to proposals that take into account the democratic wishes and views of the people of Northern Ireland on consent and democracy. We need to make sure, however, that any such arrangements are workable. It is a sad fact that the Northern Ireland Assembly has not met for three years and has met for only half of the time that it has been in existence. We have to bear that in mind in any clause on consent or democracy. We also need to bear in mind that the people of Northern Ireland voted by a clear majority to remain in the EU and when polled, they say they are in favour of the backstop that was negotiated with Prime Minister May's Government. Any solution that we come to or that I can recommend to this House has to have the support of the people of Northern Ireland and they have given their views on this - they do not want to leave the European Union, they would accept the backstop and they do not support the proposals currently on the table from the British Government.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I encourage the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste to try to get a deal in the next week. There was a very good briefing this morning in the AV room from the Border people who are opposed to Brexit and the harsh reality of what a no-deal crash out would bring, particularly in Northern Ireland and in the southern Border counties. There would be massive unemployment and all that might bring. If there is instability now when there is relatively full employment, what would the political direction be if it went that way?

The Taoiseach is correct that we should not pay too much heed to briefings. However, the UK Government says the offer will not come back and it is going to plough on. This House needs to be clear that our request respects Unionist consent and that it is not about claiming dominion in any way at all but it is intended to protect our people on both sides of the Border. Our request relates to the remaining issue of the customs arrangement and we should make clear that we are going to try to get a deal in the next week and, even if we do not get that, our request will remain the same no matter what happens in the coming month and year.

The Taoiseach: I read the article written by the Green Party leaders in Northern Ireland a few weeks ago. I thought they made a helpful and constructive suggestion and their case was well made. We do, however, need to bear in mind that referendums are unusual tools in politics and sometimes when it comes to a referendum, people do not necessarily answer the question that is being asked. One concern we must take into account were it to come to a referendum in Northern Ireland is that, even though it would not be a Border poll on the ballot paper, there

is a risk that it might become a proxy Border poll and cause division among the communities there. That is not a reason not to do it but it is something that we need to bear in mind in any of our considerations.

Part of the difficulty at the moment is that the position of the UK Government is that Northern Ireland must leave the EU customs union and be part of the UK customs union no matter what the people of Northern Ireland think. That is its position and that creates a grave difficulty for us because we want there to be a deal that respects the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland and the people in this Republic too.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will move now to the two additional questions. In accordance with the provisions of the rota, I first call Deputy Micheál Martin.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Back again.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He has not gone away, you know.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It happens once a year and I am not the author of it.

I raise the issue of the prevalence of drug abuse in our society, which is at an all-time high. We all know people in our communities who are addicted or who have lost loved ones through addiction. The latest statistics from the Health Research Board are alarming. Between 2010 and 2017, some 63,000 cases presented for treatment of drug abuse alone. Anecdotally, according to anybody in third level education, access to drugs is now the norm. There is no element of surprise. It is all-pervasive in our society. Cocaine use has risen year after year. Since 2016, in particular, it has risen dramatically. The following figure, on which I ask Deputies to reflect, is staggering. In 2016, the Garda secured 30 million seizures, whereas in 2017, that rose to 70 million seizures. The Garda is working at the limits. It seems that Fine Gael-led Governments, in particular, have dropped the ball in respect of the deeper community-based response that is required.

In the 1990s, the drug task forces were introduced. I pay tribute to the former Ministers and Ministers of State, Mr. Pat Rabbitte, Mr. Noel Ahern, Mr. Eoin Ryan, Mr. Pat Carey, Deputy Curran, Deputy Shortall and others, all of whom understood the importance of the drug task forces and the need to empower and resource communities. It is unacceptable that since 2013, the drug task forces have had no increase in core funding. Communities have been disempowered against those who peddle drugs. Alternative facilities have not been developed. The RAPID programme was additional to the drug task forces initiative, which was impactful and had a significant effect in the early years. Too many people are dying and too many people's lives are being destroyed. Access to addiction services, to counselling, to mental health services and, in particular, to child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, is poor. There is considerable anxiety and frustration among parents, for example, in respect of gaining access for adolescents to CAMHS. Overall, there is an absence of a comprehensive strategy for drugs embracing the various Departments. Given that I saw no reference to the matter in yesterday's budget, I ask the Government to reflect carefully and to ensure a significant increase in the core funding of the drug task forces this year and into the future.

The Taoiseach: I absolutely agree that the issue of drug abuse is a significant problem in our society. Drugs are ubiquitous and widely available. It is not a rural or urban problem; it is all over the country and is not just about disadvantaged areas. They are ubiquitous and available in all sectors of society, including among the very well-off. Our approach has been led by

a few policy considerations, one of which is to move away from a criminal justice-led approach to a more health-led approach. I am sure the Deputy will have read the report of the expert group on the matter, published only a few weeks ago. We want to move away from the idea that if somebody is in possession of illegal drugs, he or she is criminalised. We want to move more towards a health-led approach. We have not gone as far as decriminalisation, which the expert group did not recommend, but we are moving to a more health-led approach where we try to help people who are found to be in possession of illegal drugs, rather than giving them a criminal record, which could destroy their lives, reduce their employment prospects or make it harder for them to migrate-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is not the core of the issue.

The Taoiseach: -----and one can see where we are going in that regard.

The second policy consideration is improving addiction services, for which there has been increased funding in recent years. The naloxone project has made a big difference to a large number of people who would have overdosed and died five years ago but who now survive because of the availability of naloxone. There has been investment in CAMHS, which the Deputy mentioned. I spoke last night to the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, who told me the waiting list for CAMHS has fallen by 25% over the past few months, which is a considerable improvement but we need to do better again.

There has also been a public health-led approach on areas such as alcohol abuse. We finally got the Public Health (Alcohol) Act through the House, which will be a game changer in respect of alcohol abuse. As the Deputy will be aware, alcohol and drug abuse often go together. As far as I am aware, the drug task forces' funding has been held level for the past couple of years and there have not been reductions for quite a few years. As I mentioned earlier, there was a very considerable increase in the budget for health announced yesterday, namely, an increase of €1.15 billion, which is a pretty huge increase in the health budget. Over the course of the next few weeks, the Minister for Health, the Ministers of State with responsibility for health, and the HSE will determine where that goes. Some of it may well go to addiction services, as I hope it will. I am sure some of it will go to mental health, while some of it will potentially go to the drug task forces.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I believe that the health expenditure increase is €665 million, based on the Minister for Finance's comments yesterday when he mentioned that the €1.15 billion figure includes €335 million of a supplementary being brought into next year. We will park that for a moment.

There has always been a health-based approach. The whole idea of the drug task forces was a health-based approach. Two people per day now die because of drug addiction. That is a terrible and damning statistic. Existing policies are simply not working. Drug exchanges on our streets are now the norm, as are the selling of drugs and the utilisation of young children and teenagers to sell drugs in communities. It is everywhere but is particularly acute in some communities, where certain gangs use particular communities as the base for the distribution of their drugs. The reality is one of death and destruction. We are at an all-time high. We are not succeeding as a society in dealing with the issue, not least in respect of youth usage of drugs and alcohol. I am surprised the Taoiseach mentioned the Public Health (Alcohol) Act, given that it has not been commenced, particularly in respect of the below-cost selling provision. We had a lot of agonising debate in the Chamber over a year and a half ago. How many sections of

the Act have been commenced? It illustrates the sincerity and urgency attached to these issues.

The Taoiseach: I do not have the exact figures in front of me but I believe that the increase in the health budget is €669 million on projected outturn but €1.15 billion year on year. Either way, it is an awful lot of money. In the past two years-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: The outturn is the key.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It depends on how it is measured.

The Taoiseach: We do not yet know what the outturn-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: It depends on how it is measured.

The Taoiseach: -----will be for 2020 but we will see how it goes.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Some 500 people are waiting on trolleys in Limerick.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach should go easy on the €1.15 billion. He is giving false impressions.

The Taoiseach: Either way, it is an awful lot of money and an unprecedented increased investment in our health services over the past two or three years since I have become Taoiseach.

On the Public Health (Alcohol) Act-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: What about when the Taoiseach was Minister for Health?

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: I wish that when I was Minister for Health, I had got the increases that the current Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, is getting, quite frankly-----

Deputy Robert Troy: The Taoiseach might have stayed longer as Minister for Health if that had been the case.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: -----but we are in different times. I believe I got zero the first year and was delighted to get €350 million the second year. I am pleased to be part of a Government that is able to give the Minister, Deputy Harris, such large increases-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Minister, Deputy Harris, is wasting the money on the children's hospital.

The Taoiseach: -----in the health budget but that would not have been possible, had it not been for how well the economy has been managed by the Government in recent years.

For the Deputy's information, approximately 1.27% of the health budget next year will go on the children's hospital, with 98% on everything else.

On the Public Health (Alcohol) Act, some sections relating to promotions and advertising have been commenced. I am told that 23 sections have been commenced.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach provide a written note on the matter?

9 October 2019

The Taoiseach: I will. We are keen to address minimum unit pricing in 2020 but we have a genuine concern about cross-Border trade. It is a real concern-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Was that not the whole purpose of the Act?

The Taoiseach: -----if one lives along the Border or retails along the Border.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: It is a concern.

The Taoiseach: Little is achieved for public health if people just cross the Border and buy cheap alcohol in the North. We want everyone to do it at the same time. It has been done in Scotland, but it is not capable of being done in Northern Ireland because of the problems there.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We waited for years until it was done in Scotland and now we are not doing it.

The Taoiseach: It is a real issue.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach did not flag it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we, please, move to Deputy Howlin?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: As I have indicated previously, clearly the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection has had little influence on the budget. She said yesterday that she wanted to defer raising the minimum wage as recommended by the Low Pay Commission until late 2020 or not at all in the event of a no-deal Brexit. That is bad economics. Research from the IMF and countless other economic studies have shown that raising the wages of the lowest paid has little or no negative impact on overall employment in any economy. I can send the Taoiseach the statistics. On the contrary, any extra money in the pockets of workers is spent locally in shops and businesses. It is a sensible counter-cyclical spend which would offset any economic downturn due to a hard Brexit. There is no economic logic to any decision to postpone raising the minimum wage in the event of a hard Brexit. It is simply wrong. The only conclusion to which one can come, therefore, is that Fine Gael is seeking to undermine the principle underlying the Low Wage Commission's determination.

The Labour Party's position is clear. No one who works full time should be living in poverty. As soon as the Labour Party entered government, we restored the previous cut made to the minimum wage. That was done at a time when we had no money. Before we left government, we added a further 50 cent per hour, which was equivalent to €1,000 a year. The original minimum wage set by the then Minister, Mary Harney, was approximately 60% of the median average wage, which is what the OECD considers to be the threshold for low pay. Later increases did not match the rising cost of living. That is why the Labour Party passed the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015 which the Taoiseach will remember well. The Act provides for an evidenced-based approach to setting the national minimum wage, rather than leaving it to decisions made on a political basis. The issue is far too fundamental to the economic well-being of low paid workers to allow that to happen.

The Low Pay Commission makes an annual recommendation. Its recommendation for 2020 was that the minimum wage rise by 30 cent per hour to €10.10. Under the Act, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection must, having received a recommendation, implement it or set out in a statement the reasons she is setting it aside. Will the Taoiseach confirm that if the Minister fails to make an order to raise the minimum wage to €10.10 per hour, as rec-

commended by the Low Pay Commission, she will set out her reasons in a full statement to the Dáil? Does the Government accept the findings of the IMF and others that raising the minimum wage does not have a negative impact on employment?

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, had a huge influence on the composition of the budget, in particular in relation to her own Department, for which an increase in spending of approximately €500 million is projected next year. It is a very large increase. Albeit the package is modest and targeted, it was very much one of the Minister's design, in respect of which she had my support and that of the Government. There will be an increase in the living alone allowance to ensure the poorest pensioners and those with disabilities who live alone will receive an increase at close to three times the rate of inflation. The package focuses on the children of families on welfare payments to lift more people out of poverty. In the last year or two 20,000 children were lifted out of poverty and the budget will help more to come out of it. It focuses on lone parents, increasing the working family payment for low income working families and providing hot school meals and for returnships to encourage more women to return to the workforce. It is very much a package that was designed by the Minister with my support and that of the Government generally.

Deputy Howlin is correct that all of the research shows that modest and realistic increases in the minimum wage do not have an adverse effect on employment. The research also shows that increases in the minimum wage do not have much of an effect on poverty because of the nature of those on it. While that is not often quoted, it is what the research also shows. That is because minimum wage incomes are generally second incomes in households, not the primary wage. That is why increases tend not to have a significant effect on poverty. However, raising the minimum wage is good and the right thing to do. Anyone who gets up early in the morning for less than €10 per hour is very hard working and deserves an increase. That is why I was pleased to be part of a Government with the Labour Party when we reversed the cut in the minimum wage and then increased it. I am also glad to be part of a Government with Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance which has increased the minimum wage for three years in a row.

I encourage people to read the report of the Low Pay Commission on its recommendation. It has recommended a 30 cent increase in the minimum wage in the new year if there is a deal and an orderly Brexit. Yesterday the Cabinet accepted that recommendation. If there is a deal and an orderly Brexit, the minimum wage will increase by 30 cent per hour in the new year. If that does not happen, we will be in a different space and must consider the fact that we face rising unemployment. We do not want to do anything that will make it harder for employers to keep people on or which might cause them to cut people's hours, which would actually make them worse off. That is what we need to bear in mind. The recommendation of the commission is to increase the minimum wage by 30 cent per hour in January based on an orderly Brexit. I hope we will know by January whether that will be the case.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Taoiseach cannot argue both ways. If raising the minimum wage has no impact on employment, he cannot argue that he must not do it to protect employment. That does not make sense to me. In what he sets out in response to this and my previous question, he says the budget announced yesterday was a Brexit budget intended to Brexit-proof the nation. Rightly, significant sums of money have been provided to protect employment and support jobs and vulnerable sectors of the economy. What he has told me twice now, however, is that the Government has no protections in place for the most vulnerable people who are dependent on fixed incomes. I refer to those on welfare payments, 80% of whom the Taoiseach has acknowledged will experience a real pay deduction next year. In the event of a hard Brexit,

that reduction will be significant owing to price rises. Low paid workers are not to be Brexit-proofed either. Their modest 30 cent per hour pay increase is to be put on hold if there is a hard Brexit. Relief and supports are rightly put in place for some but not for the lowest paid workers and social welfare recipients.

The Taoiseach: In the event of a no-deal Brexit, the people who will be most vulnerable are those who will lose their jobs. That is what the budget is all about. It is about ensuring we protect Ireland from the worst effects of a no-deal Brexit. We are putting in place the fire-power to make social welfare payments to those who may need them because they lose their jobs and, more importantly, to save businesses and jobs. I would rather borrow money to save jobs than to pay the dole. That is the policy we are pursuing. That is why we need to protect our resources. The Deputy knows as well as I do that modest or even small increases in social welfare rates across the board and modest tax cuts to take account of indexation cost a great deal of money. Indexing tax credits and tax bands alone would have cost €600 million. Indexing welfare payments with inflation would probably have cost another €300 million or €400 million. That would have been €1 billion gone to take account of indexation and inflation. That is the €1 billion we need to protect Ireland in the event of a no-deal Brexit by saving businesses and jobs. That is the choice we have made.

Financial Resolutions

Financial Resolution No. 9: General (Resumed)

Debate resumed on the following Financial Resolution:

THAT it is expedient to amend the law relating to inland revenue (including value-added tax and excise) and to make further provision in connection with finance.

- (Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government)

The Taoiseach: One of the earliest recorded examples of economic strategising appears in the first book of the Bible. Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, was able to predict the trajectory of Egypt's economy. He foresaw a period of boom followed by a period of bust. Forewarned, he was forearmed and able to guide the country through the worst of the crisis, thereby saving his own people. There are many examples in our own history, including recent history, of warnings going unheeded that a period of economic growth would be followed by a period of economic collapse. Steps were not taken to prepare for what was coming and the country was left defenceless when the worst happened.

Sadly, many people have not learnt those lessons and many Opposition speakers yesterday attempted to have it both ways. They attacked the Government for being too reckless in the way money was allocated, while at the same time criticising us for not spending enough money. We had budget submissions from some Opposition parties that hoped for the best but were not prepared for the worst and which contained the kinds of optimistic promises that are only ever made when one has no intention of delivering upon them. It is notable that Sinn Féin, Labour and the Greens all based their alternative budgets on an orderly Brexit, despite everything that

is happening at present. So, they criticise us for not increasing pensions or weekly welfare payments but do not tell pensioners or people on welfare about the small print in their alternative budget plans: terms and conditions apply. Such an optimistic outlook is convenient because it allows them to increase spending and still claim to deliver a surplus. However, it is not realistic because basing economic policies on unrealistic projections is not an acceptable way of managing the economy and safeguarding people's lives — forecasts not endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, IFAC.

In contrast, the Government designed budget 2020 to give certainty to businesses and citizens, protecting the hard-won progress of recent years and avoiding a situation where budget decisions might need to be reversed in the near future.

There was not one single Brexit-related policy in the Green Party's submission, and the word "Brexit" only receives a single mention in it. The Greens' attention to the climate crisis is admirable but ignoring the crisis that might happen in three weeks' time is simply unfathomable.

Sinn Féin's budget submission resembles not a wolf but an ostrich - only the body is visible because the head is buried beneath the sand. Despite claiming that there is an overwhelming need for the world to confront climate breakdown, Sinn Féin opposed any change in carbon pricing, despite 27 Nobel Prize winners recently presenting a massive body of evidence to show that carbon taxes are essential. The same view is held by Ireland's Climate Change Advisory Council. Carbon tax on its own will not stop climate change but we will not stop climate change without it. It is sad that so many on the left are still deniers.

Despite the threat of a no-deal Brexit, Sinn Féin proposes over €1.2 billion in new taxes, a total of 18 tax increases, including on income of employees, on employers and on inheriting the average house in Dublin, without any care for how it will impact the economy. Despite claiming to want to help the economy, they propose 18 tax increases on business, on middle Ireland, on inheritance, on land and on almost anything.

I wish to quote a Belgian artist and writer but I am not sure how to pronounce his name.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach should ask whoever wrote his speech.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Taoiseach is reading someone else's speech.

The Taoiseach: Erik Pevernagie has observed that: "When politicians bury their head in the sand, ignorance rules the country."

We are now 22 days away from the possibility of a no-deal Brexit, and everyone in the country knows the dangers and challenges we face. We are forewarned and our objective in budget 2020 is to make sure we are forearmed. It is an economic vision to provide security at a time of uncertainty and because it is grounded in reality it offers real hope, not false hope.

It is our economic strategy to channel our growth and prosperity to prepare for an uncertain future while at the same time continuing to grow and prosper, albeit more cautiously. We will invest in the future by investing in infrastructure and climate action and will do what we can to make life easier for families and the elderly.

During times of certainty, the economic watchword of this Government was prudence. Now, at a time of uncertainty, action is our core aim and belief. We must act to continue our

investment in balanced regional development because we know it is the best way of ensuring that all parts of the country can grow and prosper. We must also act to protect our planet and help families.

Budget 2020 is about shielding our citizens as best we can from the worst of a no-deal Brexit, ramping up investment in our economic and social infrastructure, protecting the environment and making life a little bit easier for families, the elderly and the poorest.

Budget 2020 is explicitly designed around the risk of a no-deal Brexit, where we project 0.7% growth next year in contrast to 5.5% growth this year. That does not necessarily mean that we think a no-deal Brexit will happen but as a Government we believe it is the best thing to get ready for one. That way we will not need an emergency budget because this is the budget that will protect us from the worst of no deal.

Budget 2020 contains a €1 billion plus no-deal package. This is new money and comes on top of grants and loans for business and farmers announced in the last budget and is exclusive of any support that might come from the European Union. Some €355 million is being spent on ongoing Brexit preparedness, compliance and activation supports. Of this, €185 million will ensure compliance conditions are met and trade disruption is minimised at ports and airports, including staffing and support services, and €170 million will ensure the continuation of existing Brexit programmes already in place.

There will be €650 million for the agriculture, enterprise and tourism sectors and to assist most affected workers and regions. Of this, €220 million will be immediately deployed in the event of a no-deal Brexit, with €110 million for agriculture and fisheries and €110 million for enterprise from the start of November. Some €40 million will be available for tourism and this will target the worst affected regions. There will be new marketing initiatives and additional immediate funding of €7 million this year. There will also be funding to secure new routes to regional airports including Shannon and Cork, Brexit or no Brexit, at a cost of approximately €10 million over three years, to enable those airports to secure new routes.

Some €365 million is being provided for extra social protection expenditure for income replacement, training and activation for people who lose their jobs, while €45 million is provided to help workers in adversely affected parts of the country, especially the Border region should that prove necessary.

We are ramping up investment in our economic and social infrastructure. This is not an austerity budget. We do not need to take that journey again. In fact, spending will rise by €3.3 billion, which amounts to about 4% overall and 11% on capital. An extra €800 million will be invested in our public infrastructure, bringing total infrastructure spending to €8.1 billion per year. That will be an 11% increase in 2020, on top of a 25% increase this year. That means new schools, primary care centres, housing, roads, buses and broadband. This is part of the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, driving economic activity and jobs across the country. There is never a better time to invest in our infrastructure than when the economy is slowing down. This investment will help create new jobs all over Ireland. In housing, for example, 11,000 homes will be added to the social housing stock in 2020, more than any other year this century.

This is also a climate and environment budget. We are using budget 2020 to step up climate action. The increase in the carbon tax is modest but meaningful. It puts us on a trajectory to get it to €80 per tonne by 2030. This means people know now what the carbon tax will be in 2030,

so that when someone replaces a home heating system, he or she will see the value in moving away from home heating oil because it will be more expensive in ten years' time. It means it makes sense to invest in insulating one's home and to live close to where one works, if one can afford to do so. When someone is looking at replacing a car, as 1 million people will over the next decade, he or she will be encouraged to go with a hybrid or electric model because that is what makes long-term sense.

We know that this change will not be easy and that it cannot be done overnight or even in one year. It will take ten years. Instead of there being big hikes in the carbon tax in any one year, we have planned a series of small and planned annual increases between now and 2030. Furthermore, we are ring-fencing all new revenue raised from carbon tax to fund new climate action and just transition to protect those most exposed to higher fuel and energy costs and for whom new jobs must be found. The increase in the fuel and energy allowance ensures that the poorest 20% of households in Ireland will actually be slightly better off as a result of the carbon tax being used to fund this increase.

Between now and 2030, the carbon tax will raise an extra €6.5 billion and it is our policy to ring fence all of this for climate action and just transition. That will be on top of the €22 billion allocated towards climate action in Project Ireland 2040.

Let me give some examples of what this ring-fenced fund will be used for in 2020. There will be a €6 million just transition fund targeted at the midlands. There will be €5 million more for bog restoration and rehabilitation which will restore bogs to their natural habitat and become sinks that absorb carbon. This is on top of an existing €2 million allocation and will create over a hundred jobs. There will be €20 million to deliver a new model to group housing upgrades together as set out in the climate action plan and targeted at the midlands. It will sustain an estimated 400 jobs directly and indirectly, as well as significantly upgrading the social housing stock in the region during 2020.

While we make these changes, we must also protect the most vulnerable in our society. A total of €52.8 million is being made available to retrofit the homes of people living in or at risk of energy poverty through the warmer homes scheme.

This represents the biggest ever allocation for the scheme, more than double the initial allocation for 2019. Some €13 million of this funding is ring-fenced revenue arising from the increase in the carbon tax. The ring-fenced fund will also be used to fund climate actions such as new greenways and urban cycling paths, pilots for sustainable agricultural measures, and extra investment in the charging network and grants for electric vehicles. This is extra investment over and above investment in Project Ireland 2040 for items such as cycling, greenways and charging networks, all of which runs to many hundreds of millions of euro. Every budget from now on has to be a climate and environment budget.

Budget 2020 is also about making life easier for families, building on what we have been doing for the past three years. Last year, we reduced the monthly drugs payment scheme threshold for those who do not have medical cards the second year running and we will do it again next year. We increased all GP visit card weekly income thresholds by 10% last year, having extended them to carers the year before. We reduced prescription charges for all medical card holders over 70 years.

In the coming year, we will extend free GP care on a phased basis to all children aged

between six and 12 years, starting with the extension of free GP care to children aged six and seven, no later than September 2020. That requires primary legislation and negotiation with doctors on fees. However, as doctors will not be required to opt in, it will happen.

Budget 2020 enables us to continue the good progress made in making life easier for families, while ensuring that young people from all walks of life can have the best possible start. The cost of childcare is a significant financial burden on families. For many it is equivalent to a second mortgage payment and can act as a barrier to parents who want to return to work. The national childcare scheme will commence in November. Its primary aim is to assist parents with the cost of childcare through universal and income-linked subsidies and an improvement in quality care. Those who receive subsidies will receive increased subsidies and approximately 10,000 families who do not yet qualify for subsidies will do so for the first time. This new initiative will streamline the current mix of childcare schemes to a single, user-friendly scheme. This will improve children's outcomes, reduce child poverty, and help with the cost of quality childcare for thousands of families across Ireland. The thresholds are €60,000 net or up to €100,000 gross and an estimated extra 7,500 additional children from middle income families will benefit as a result. From September 2020, working parents will get an increase in the hours for the national childcare scheme from 40 to 45 hours. There will also be an increase in the hours available to children whose parents are not in work or study, from 15 to 20 hours per week.

The budget will also help reduce the cost of healthcare. From July, prescription charges for all medical card holders will be reduced by 50 cent per item and the monthly threshold for the drugs payment scheme for those who do not have medical cards will be reduced by a further €10 per month. Approximately 56,000 people aged over 70 will benefit from increased income limits for the medical card. Some will criticise us for favouring better off pensioners through this action but this brings the income limit to €26,000 or €27,000 for a single pensioner and €53,000 or €54,000 for a pensioner couple. That is not a significant amount but these are pensioners who do not receive a full medical card precisely because they paid taxes all their lives and because they paid into a pension fund. It is only right that we should restore medical cards to them.

We are increasing the earnings disregard for one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition by €15, from €150 to €165 per week. This will assist lone parents who are at work. We are increasing the working family payment income threshold for families with up to three children by €10. For the poorest families, the weekly rate of the qualified child increase for children under 12 years is also being increased by €2 per week to €36 per week. For children over 12 it is increased by €3 per week to €40 per week. These actions will further reduce poverty, child poverty and deprivation, which have all been falling for four years in a row. We have also broadened eligibility for the household benefits package by changing the under 70 household composition criteria to allow for an adult son or daughter to reside in the household.

The family should be at the centre of our society. Budget 2020 allows us to expand free GP care to the those aged under eight and provide free dental care to those aged under six. It provides each parent with two weeks of paid parental leave and increases childcare subsidies. It cuts prescription charges and provides more medical cards to those who need them. It extends the help-to-buy scheme for first-time buyers, which has helped more than 15,000 first-time buyers to purchase a home since it was launched. We hope that as many will benefit over the next two years.

We will honour the commitments we have made to restore and increase pay for hard-working public servants. Approximately €400 million will be set aside next year for teachers, gardaí, the Defence Forces, nurses and other civil and public servants.

Budget 2020 is also about creating safer communities. Since I became Taoiseach in 2017, more than 1,500 new gardaí have been attested, meaning our Garda strength is now in excess 14,000. The Government is committed to reaching 15,000 gardaí by 2020 and we are on course to meet this target. Budget 2020 makes a funding allocation for 700 additional gardaí.

Some are critical that there are no tax cuts, and no pension or welfare increases. I understand the criticism and take it on board but I remind the Dáil of what was done under the Fine Gael-Independent Alliance Government in the past three budgets. In all three budgets, we reduced the universal social charge, USC, and income tax and increased the pension and weekly social welfare payments at twice to three times the rate of inflation. That is worth approximately €1,500 to the average family every year. We cannot do it again this year because of Brexit but in a five-year term, we can do better again, putting even more money in people's pockets. We will put our proposal to do so to the public at the next general election.

Budget 2020 provides for demographic changes with our growing and ageing population. We are providing for increased demand for health, education and disability service. The increase for health is €1.165 billion year-on-year or 6.8%; education, €417 million or just under 4%; childcare, just under €93 million or 6.2%; gardaí, €121 million or 6.9%; and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, €384 million or 16.4%. These are all considerable increases in public spending.

The nursing home support scheme, or fair deal, will continue to provide residential care services for older people. One million additional home care hours will provide residential care services to enable older people live independently for as long as they can. The new GP contract will see additional investment in 2020 to enhance GP services and enhanced management of chronic disease. We are investing in community services to provide for additional 1,000 therapists, nurses and other professionals in the community between now and 2021. This really is Sláintecare in action.

An additional investment of €25 million for the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, will further reduce waiting times for operations and procedures. In July 2017, 57,000 people were waiting more than three months for a hospital operation or procedure such as hip or knee replacements, cataracts, angiograms, varicose veins, and tonsillectomies. We expect that number to fall to 39,000 within weeks and with more money for the NTPF, we can drive it clown further.

More than 740,000 people will benefit from the Christmas bonus in 2019, which will be paid early in December. The living alone allowance will increase by €5 per week and this will benefit more than 200,000 people. We are increasing the hours that carers can work or study outside the home from 15 to 18.5 hours per week. We also have a substantial package to help business and jobs that are viable into the future but vulnerable because of a hard Brexit, especially in sectors such as tourism and agrifood.

There were some criticisms yesterday that the Government has not been prudent in its handling of our country's finances, but the counter-evidence is here. We ran a budget surplus in 2018 and 2019 and were one of the few countries in the developed world to do so. The Irish

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Fiscal Advisory Council, IFAC, said it would not be achieved but it has been. We will do it again in 2020 if we secure a Brexit deal.

Supplementary budgets are required this year again. In 2019, we will spend approximately €500 million more than the €66.6 billion for which we budgeted. That should be put in context. It is a total overspend of approximately 0.75%. For every €100 we said we would spend this time last year, we spent €100.70. There were good reasons to do so. It has meant extra pay for nurses and our Defence Forces, essential additional Garda overtime, more home care packages and approving new expensive medicines that came on stream. It was necessary extra spending, not waste, and I stand over it.

To help unlock the entrepreneurial potential for SMEs, we have introduced several targeted initiatives. As well as loosening the rules governing the key employee engagement programme, KEEP, companies will now be able to get full income tax relief in the year of investment rather than it being spread as before through the employee incentive and investment scheme. We are also adjusting the research and development tax credit to make it easier for micro and small businesses and SMEs to undertake innovation. The research and development credit is being increased from 25% to 30% for micro and small companies, which will also now be able to claim the credit before they commence trade.

Education will also be enhanced as a result of budget 2020. More than 1,600 new posts will be funded, including an additional 1,000 additional special needs assistants, more than 150 extra teachers to meet demographic pressures and 400 additional teachers for children with special educational needs.

The standard capitation rate is being increased by 2.5% per pupil. For small schools, particularly in rural Ireland, there will be a reduction in the staffing schedule of one point in small primary schools with less than four teachers ensuring by that more of them remain viable into the future. We will also provide an enhanced school meals programme, providing hot meals for 30,000 children. A sum of €1 million will be provided for a free primary schools books scheme, a pilot for primary schools throughout the country. I look forward to working with the Minister, Deputy McHugh, on the design of this scheme for implementation in September and to make it mainstream if it works.

We are also investing in culture. Since I was elected as Taoiseach, spending on culture, heritage and the Gaeltacht has increased by 25% to about €70 million. Given the challenge of Brexit we were not able to increase the spending on culture as much as we would have liked to this year, but we have increased its budget by €15.4 million, that is, about 4.5%. We have made solid progress over the past three budgets towards the commitment of doubling the spend on culture, heritage and the Gaeltacht by 2025.

Our mission is to share our culture with the world, through our people, our music, our sport, and especially through our stories. We are investing in our artists and culture, and increasing our investment in Gaeltacht areas and our language, including Údarás na Gaeltachta, and our islands.

A Cheann Comhairle, with the real risk of a no-deal Brexit on the horizon, the Government's priority must be to shield the country from the worst of no deal and budget 2020 seeks to do that. Brexit is our focus but is not our only focus. In budget 2020, we have been able to ensure continued investment in public services and infrastructure. We have made this a priority

because we recognise that even in a no-deal Brexit scenario, we must prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead. Budget 2020 enables us to plan for the future to protect the progress and our prosperity, ramping up investing in our economic and social infrastructure, protecting the environment, and doing some small things to make life a little bit easier for families, the elderly and the poorest in our society.

I commend it to the House.

Deputy Micheál Martin: During the past three and half years, the Brexit process in Britain has degenerated into a shambles. This has been driven by the machinations of the hardline Brexiteers who are increasingly unconcerned with the damage they have inflicted and will continue to inflict on their own country and the rest of Europe. During the referendum, it was already abundantly clear that their opposition to Europe far outstripped any concern which they had for Northern Ireland. These ideologues dismissed John Major and Tony Blair when they went to Derry to point to the likely damage to communities still struggling to get over a violent conflict foisted on the people by illegitimate forces. In fact the Tory Secretary of State at the time went as far as to claim that everything would be fine and that there would be no issues with trade or customs or indeed anything at all. A governing group, distinguished by its disregard for facts and a history of being able to walk away from the consequences of their failures, is simply carrying on regardless. Brexit has marked an unprecedented and far-from-finished radicalisation of British governance. With this has come the reality of damage to others and a threat of much more to come.

For Ireland, Brexit represents an historic threat to hard-won economic, social, political and cultural progress. The reality is that Ireland cannot get through Brexit by carrying on with politics as usual. This is the unmistakable and fundamental background to both the overall parameters for this budget and the fact that this Government has not yet been replaced.

To get through Brexit, Ireland needs to be focused on meeting the most urgent challenges. We need to be present in key discussions, to speak with a clear voice, to help businesses and communities and to respond quickly to close gaps in legislation. None of this would be possible without a functioning Parliament and Government.

In this debate we have already heard entirely predictable and repetitive attacks on Fianna Fáil for the fact that we have enabled the introduction of this budget. However, the clear evidence is more and more obvious every day. Our decision to postpone the holding of an election because of Brexit uncertainty was the correct one. This time last year we looked at the impending Brexit deadlines and the obvious lack of a majority in the House of Commons for a reasonable withdrawal agreement. As we said then, the growing instability in London was a direct threat to Ireland and, far more importantly, by every available indicator Ireland was completely unready for Brexit. Consequently, despite the goading of other parties, including absurd speeches from Fine Gael Ministers about having printers oiled and the manifesto ready, we took our unilateral decision to guarantee parliamentary and governing stability for Ireland through this year. Bizarrely, there are people in this House who continue to claim that we should have pulled everything down, leaving Ireland with a weakened position and no way of expressing the national unity which exists on a key issue.

Sinn Féin, Ireland's most consistently anti-European Union party, has been the loudest of these voices, both throughout the year and in this debate. That party's lack of basic self-awareness is not new, but it is becoming even more extreme than it was in the past. Their decision

to collapse the political institutions of Northern Ireland over a heating scheme nearly three years ago is almost on the level of the Tory European Research Group's work in terms of the damage it has caused to Ireland. A functioning Assembly would have long since asserted the will of the majority to support permanent special arrangements for Northern Ireland and at a stroke, much of the bluster about democratic legitimacy would have been destroyed. Northern Ireland's schools and hospitals would also have been protected from crude across-the-board cuts imposed by civil servants with no democratic mandate. Sinn Féin decided that Northern Ireland did not need a voice during critical phases of this Brexit mess and thank God it was not in its power to inflict the same damage in Dublin.

We have also been attacked in this debate by the far left for not pulling down the Government and Dáil. I can only congratulate the People Before Profit Deputies for the sheer creativity of their position. Having campaigned in favour of Brexit in Northern Ireland, they have since then loudly demanded that we stop any damage of Brexit on this island.

We stand by our decision as the right one for our country. It is because of this decision that the essential Brexit mitigation measures implemented in recent months have been able to proceed and the new measures announced yesterday have been prepared.

Even the Government's most sycophantic backbenchers have to admit that Ireland was manifestly not ready for Brexit in March, when we came within days of a chaotic Brexit happening. Less than 5% of key Brexit funding had been allocated, staff were not in place and critical facilities were not ready. Since then, vital information and training has been provided and there has been a significant increase in funding.

The House must also understand that Brexit has been hitting key communities and sectors for three years already. The Government's own Brexit research in 2017 and 2018 showed that the biggest hit would come not from restrictions on trade but from sterling devaluation and volatility. The massive devaluation since 2016 has inflicted real pain on smaller businesses, farmers and the agrifood sector. Added to this is the prospect of long-term volatility, something which undermines the ability to develop stability in trading relations. Ireland remains far behind certain other countries in key Brexit preparations and there has been zero information available about important facilities and procedures. The mitigation measures contained in this budget should have been in place long before now. I would remind the Government that its stated policy last year was that there would be no need for additional budgetary measures to cope with a no-deal Brexit in March. Thankfully it is finally taking action.

This said, there are critical Brexit challenges that have not yet been addressed. Many of the investment measures announced repeatedly in the past three years have not been implemented properly, with unreasonable restrictions and delays a common feature. Farmers have spent most of this year listening to Ministers claim that help is on the way but it has not come yet. The core challenge of diversifying markets and products has not received the scale or urgency of attention it needs. This budget has been constrained by two overall forces; by the challenge of Brexit and by the limited room for action left by Government policies characterised by escalating costs and a failure to implement urgent policy.

The Minister was correct when he said yesterday that the scope for significant action is limited. The Fine Gael policy of making big announcements but loading the financing into future years was always going to mean that there was little space in this year's budget. When one adds

major overspending and uncertain revenues it was clear from some time ago that the threat of a chaotic Brexit had to take precedence.

We should all realise, however, that this budget is based on very unsure foundations in several areas. It is in no way clear that the Government's spending figures are reliable. So far, the Government has racked up €6.3 billion in unanticipated spending. In recent months, weeks and even days there have been very significant changes in the figures provided to us about the likely outturn of spending this year and the figures for maintaining existing services next year. It is also not clear whether this Government's projected revenue figures are correct. In recent years the Government has repeatedly failed to anticipate or explain the origins of revenue buoyancy, but of course this has not stopped the Taoiseach from trying to claim credit for it. The publication of a new study of corporation tax revenue is welcome. It does not, however, address the fact that revenue and spending projections on budget day have, for many reasons including the actions of Ministers, been inaccurate in recent years.

The final reason for uncertainty in relation to this budget's figures is that many of the underlying projections for the short-term impact of Brexit are little more than educated guesses. It may well be that we have a sudden and dramatic fall in trade and economic sentiment. Equally, it may be that it takes time before the impact of Brexit is felt. If one reads the different independent assessments of Brexit's impact the one consensus is that its principal impact will be medium to long term and it will have a significant negative impact on Ireland's growth. Having tried for much of 2018 to cause a Brexit election the Taoiseach has announced that he wants to campaign with the claim that he got Ireland "through" Brexit. This ignores the reality that Ireland will be nowhere near through Brexit anytime soon.

Given the lack of resources due to the need to fund announcements made in previous years and due to overspending by Ministers, the allocation for Brexit is limited and is certainly nowhere near meeting the scale of the projected impact of Brexit. The entire budget for mitigating the impact of Brexit is only a fraction of the economic hit predicted by the Minister yesterday. With regard to gross national product, the Minister said that a chaotic Brexit will push Ireland from 3.1% growth down to a 0.1% contraction. This is more than €6 billion and will rise every year from next year onwards. It is very clear that the €1 billion Brexit funding, which is overwhelmingly a one-off and mostly a reannouncement of established plans, will not be the reason Ireland gets through Brexit.

In the coming weeks we will be pushing for much greater urgency in the actual implementation of Brexit supports. Over the past three years there have been literally hundreds of occasions where Ministers have announced and re-announced the same funding. Ministers seem to believe that a problem is solved by breaking out the Government's new branding and sending up a drone to film a video of the Cliffs of Moher. Every indication now is that at some point in the coming months, and perhaps even in three weeks' time, we will be faced with the full reality of a destructive Tory Brexit. We dodged a bullet in March and its long past time that the chronic delivery deficit on Brexit schemes was tackled.

Deputies will remember the six months during last year when the nation was subjected to a near permanent campaign concerning the national development plan. Ministers and backbenchers toured the country announcing projects that in nearly all cases would not begin in any meaningful way for nearly a decade. Since then the reality has dawned on how much of a sham that marketing campaign was and just how unreliable the specific promises on projects. When massive overspending was exposed the Government informed the Dáil that nothing would be

cut or delayed. Billions more euro would be spent but this would have no impact. In recent days it has emerged that many projects are in fact being “re-profiled” which is a new word for “delayed”. We need a bit more honesty from the Government and the publication of a full and updated list of the projects that will be funded by this Government, not those that may be given the go-ahead by a Government in six or ten years’ time.

The specific measures Fianna Fáil has been able to secure in this and previous budgets have been limited, but there have been important measures that took the edges off Fine Gael’s regressive instincts. During the last Government every budget was regressive due to the dominance of Fine Gael’s preferences. The unfairness of those budgets was reflected in increasing inequality, neglect of social housing and socially damaging policies in education. Fine Gael capped this off with campaigning in the last general election with the most regressive tax platform ever proposed for an election. Under the confidence and supply arrangement, which underpinned recent budgets, a decisive shift in favour of social supports and public services was secured. The Taoiseach gets particularly annoyed when this is mentioned. He regularly goes out of his way to deny the idea that Fine Gael has implemented anything because it was forced to. Perhaps the Taoiseach should reflect on one comment made on the night of the budget in 2016 concerning the move away from regressive incomes policies. A senior commentator, known for his close connection with the media, addressed a press conference after five Fine Gael budgets and stated, “for the first time in many years we have a fair Budget”. Those were the words of one Deputy Leo Varadkar. In recent months the Taoiseach stated in public that this budget would include a number of specific provisions that have not subsequently been announced. These include cuts in the higher rate of tax and changes to the help to buy scheme. It was the Taoiseach’s preference that less funding be allocated to public services and he wanted to begin a down payment on his massive and regressive tax cut promise. Our demand was for a more progressive approach and we stand by this.

The differences in the approaches of the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, and the Taoiseach have been hard to miss. Since May the Taoiseach has become a born-again advocate for action on climate change, though of course the proposed action comes nowhere near the rhetoric. In fairness it is hard not to admire the sheer neck involved in solemnly announcing to the nations of the world that Ireland will stop drilling for oil without mentioning that we have failed to find any after nearly fifty years’ of trying. Fianna Fáil welcomes the Taoiseach’s conversion to action on climate change. We are not prepared, however, to accept the Fine Gael claim that he is leading on this topic. The fact is that Ireland’s laggard status is significantly linked to the decision of Fine Gael in 2012, in which EU Commissioner Phil Hogan was a leader of the charge, to abandon the climate action legislation proposed by the Green Party and Fianna Fáil. The Taoiseach and his colleagues said then that the plan was too ambitious. Their preferred approach was to do nothing. Seven years later when the Government has finally come around to proposing a plan I think we have every right to question the strength of the commitment behind it.

In our negotiations on this budget the establishment of a just transition fund was a core priority, as was the principle of ring fencing the fund. The House will remember that earlier this year the Taoiseach announced his preference to distribute the carbon tax receipts through general payments. The Taoiseach said in the House that he wanted to give the tax back in an individual dividend to every household. I watched the RTÉ news last night and I admire the Taoiseach’s brass neck in almost claiming that it was he who had decided to ring-fence the fund, which was completely not the case. In the all-party committee and in the budget negotiations

Fianna Fáil opposed the Taoiseach's approach and insisted on a ring-fenced fund that would address the reality that to achieve critical reductions the communities reliant on traditional technology methods had to be helped to have a secure future and to transition to a low-carbon economy. Ring-fencing was a core part of Fianna Fáil's policy on that committee, along with other parties.

Deputy Cowen's work on this matter has been ongoing for some time. The fund announced yesterday substantially reflected the proposals that he made on our behalf. It is important that carbon taxes be focused on more than disincentivising consumption. We must be more ambitious and responsive in helping industries and communities to transition and we must develop a connectedness between the revenue raised from the tax and initiatives dealing with climate change on the ground and in communities.

The just transition fund will help hundreds of families in economically hard-pressed communities. In order to prevent the cynical politicisation of grant making, which has become a hallmark of the Government in the past three years, we have insisted that an independent chairperson be appointed. We have also received assurances that the fund will not be used to support yet more Government marketing launches and that Ministers will not be involved in allocations. We hope that this model will not only work for the communities involved but will be capable of being expanded in future to provide tangible and non-political proof to the public that a socially just transition to a low-carbon economy is possible.

I find the approach of Sinn Féin and the rest of the hard left in opposing the carbon proposals to be remarkable. Their position is that they are in favour of using tax to alter most types of behaviour except environmental damage. They are more focused on trying to find a reason to don yellow jackets and march to the barricades. The carbon proposals are reasonable and proportionate and will enable concrete steps to protect jobs and the environment. This is only one part of a much-needed and more urgent agenda, but it is an important part nonetheless.

The housing emergency that Fine Gael has presided over is having a deep and damaging impact on society. Indeed, it is changing basic expectations that have long defined how Irish people see themselves. For the first time in our history, home ownership has fallen below the EU average. The age at which people can buy any form of home is rising steadily. The dream of living in one's home community is becoming unattainable for large parts of our society. Most scandalously, five years after the Government admitted that there were issues in housing, there are 10,700 people homeless, with 70 children becoming homeless for the first time last month alone.

The Government's response to this has been a mixture of ignoring the problems, failing to deliver on commitments and blaming others for everything. Last weekend, the Taoiseach delivered a speech to his party that showed that, when it came to housing, he was living in another world to most Irish people. He claimed that Fine Gael had had nothing to do with housing until the last few years, that the problems were historical and, most remarkably, that everything now was going great. Clearly, the Taoiseach hopes that no one bothers to look at the facts. The record shows that it was Fine Gael Ministers who decided to implement savage cuts to social housing in 2012 and abolished the affordable housing scheme. In the confidence and supply negotiations, they were forced to increase spending on social housing and to reintroduce a meaningful affordable housing scheme. Many of the additional measures are now having an impact, but the chronic delivery deficit in housing means that we are nowhere near turning the corner on the housing emergency. The policy of hoping that the Taoiseach and the Minister,

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Deputy Eoghan Murphy, putting on hard hats and having their photos taken will sort out the housing emergency has comprehensively failed.

No area has caused as many problems in this budget as health. It became increasingly clear in recent weeks that the Government had little understanding of what was going on and was focused on trying to get through to the election rather than having any real impact. I believe that the Government has given up on health. The Minister, Deputy Harris, has become renowned for the fact that he is available to have his picture taken at any event so long as he is not asked about the funding or operation of the core health service.

A deeply cynical strategy has developed of trying to present health budgeting as an endemic problem that has been with us forever. This is not true. A detailed study of health budgets by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, IFAC, showed that the HSE took over from the failing health board financial management approach and succeeded in delivering a string of annual budgets without unanticipated supplementaries. Before Fine Gael got its hands on it, the health sector was delivering its plans on budget. Since then, a series of dramatic overspends have been announced. What changed was what the former chief executive of the HSE has termed “administrative vandalism” by Senator Reilly and the Taoiseach, former health Ministers. They removed the HSE board and took its financial oversight role into their own offices. Every year when the HSE produced its service plan, the then Ministers and their Government colleagues demanded that services be promised without providing the estimated costs. As the IFAC has said, the failure in budgeting has come from the very top. In this light, the decision of the Minister for Finance yesterday to highlight the re-establishment of the HSE board as critical to better budgeting was a remarkable cap on eight years of damage to health planning and service delivery by Fine Gael Ministers.

It is important to note that the figure announced for health yesterday does not match estimates for maintaining existing levels of service next year even though the Minister claimed that services would be maintained. It appears that, yet again, the health sector is being denied the opportunity to plan services based on an open and transparent budget. I predict that the situation will be very serious for our health services in 2020.

The opposite forces are at play in the near systematic refusal of the Government to implement urgently needed mental health services. Each year, we have insisted on the inclusion of mental health funding in the budget. Each year, the Minister for Health has failed to spend the money. This year, an incredible €25 million out of an allocation of €55 million has not been spent. There is no other area where there is such complete agreement about the need for extra services and the nature of the services that should be expanded, yet the Minister continues to use mental health funding to balance out his overall spending. This is a scandal and one for which the Government will be held to account. The same applies to the failure to employ therapists, including physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, which were budgeted for last year and provided for under the confidence and supply agreement, but the Government breached the agreement and reneged on its implementation.

The abolition of the National Treatment Purchase Fund by Fine Gael is another example of its failed health policies. In the face of strong opposition from the Taoiseach, who was then the Minister, we secured its re-establishment and now its further expansion under the confidence and supply agreement. It is remarkable that, at a time of record waiting lists, the only positive initiative in helping people to get assessed and treated is one that was forced on the Government.

The expansion of home help hours by 1 million is an important move that we are pleased to have secured and that we will be closely monitoring.

In education, the budget marks no overall change, reflective of the approach of a Government that refuses to have an overall strategy and neglects key sectors. Provision for demographic changes in our schools is little more than the Government fulfilling its constitutional duties. There is no sense of a vision for the future of our schools.

Fianna Fáil will always be proud of the fact that we provided the first ever comprehensive recognition of special educational needs in our schools and began a dramatic development in critical support services. In recent years, there have again had to be many campaigns to gain access to these services for children in all parts of the country. The expansion of special needs supports announced yesterday was a core priority for us and was a welcome, though not yet sufficient, step forward.

The House will be aware that we have also insisted on reversing the deeply regressive decision to remove dedicated funding for guidance and counselling in schools. This decision was especially damaging in disadvantaged communities. We have been informed that the Minister for Education and Skills has failed to implement the agreement in full and that approximately 100 guidance posts remain outstanding because he decided that they were not a priority. This is unfortunate, short-sighted and a breach and will have to be reversed.

For a number of years, the higher education sector has been falling into an unprecedented funding crisis. With the exception of the extra funding that we secured for the sector last year, the Government's policy has been to reduce radically support for each student and to concentrate new funding in new superficial competitions. The Government was at it again yesterday when the Minister talked about funding for reform. The reality is that this is a way of making cash-starved institutions fight among themselves for the few scraps that the Government has thrown on the table. At the same time, critical research funding has been funnelled into narrower schemes and Ireland has, in a few short years, gone from being one of the most dynamic and growing forces in research to an also-ran in many areas. The complacency and lack of interest of the Government for anything in research other than cutting ribbons has caused real harm. The damage being inflicted on higher education and research is a direct threat to our economic future. As we outlined in detail earlier this year, there is an urgent need to take a different approach. As the budget has confirmed yet again, Fine Gael does not understand the problem in this as in so many other areas and has no intention of doing anything.

The Taoiseach referenced investment in the arts and culture and an increase in the Arts Council's funding. I will alert him to something that we heard of yesterday and was not revealed during the talks. I spoke to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform this morning, but he was not aware of it either. The Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is proposing to move the funding of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann under the Arts Council, an arrangement that was dismantled 20 years ago. The two do not go together. There will be uproar in the Comhaltas community if the Minister proceeds. I ask the Taoiseach to speak to the Minister, Deputy Madigan, and to ask her to cease from proceeding with the measure, as it will do huge damage to Comhaltas and the extraordinary work it has been doing for the country. We all know about the success of the Fleadh Cheoil in Drogheda and what it did for Drogheda, Cavan and other locations. That is masking an increase for arts funding when one shoves the budget of Comhaltas in under the Arts Council budget, but more importantly, how the two work together is the real issue in the long term. It will be very damaging to the work Comhaltas is doing. It

is unnecessary and I am not aware of anyone pushing for it or asking for it.

Rural Ireland is today confronted with two major challenges. The first is the Government's ongoing policy of withdrawing services and neglecting community issues, something demonstrated at great volume by marginal funding of the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Minister, Deputy Ring, and the move to politicise even the smallest announcement.

The second is of course Brexit. The rural economy is more exposed than any other and both farmers and the wider agrifood sector have been suffering from the impact of Brexit since 2016. For all of the warm words and pre-election announcements of funding, little or nothing has actually happened. The supports announced in May as part of a co-ordinated attempt to try to save Fine Gael councillors were re-announced yesterday. It appears that the policy now is to allow the damage to be done before offering to help. In this and so many areas, this is a Government which is complacent and which has continually failed to turn promises into action. A chronic delivery deficit has resulted in massive overspending and under-delivery in area after area. The room for manoeuvre in the budget was so narrow directly because of the failure in recent years to get on top of consistent problems with control and delivery in many Departments. The approach of putting politics first has put the emphasis on launching documents, not on managing their implementation. Having dodged a bullet in March, where the lack of essential preparation by the Government had left Ireland badly exposed to a no-deal Brexit, we are in a better situation today. However, the key Brexit challenge remains a long-term one and that is where the Government has long since run out of ideas. It has presided over a growing emergency in key public policy areas, most especially health and housing. It has shown a near-systematic failure to deliver on commitments. At each stage, its first instinct is to try to return to its regressive instincts on tax and services and most of all, it is incapable of self-reflection. In area after area it has looked at its record and decided that it has been wonderful and, to quote the Taoiseach, "the worst thing we could do is change policy". This is a fundamental divide which will be at the heart of the next election when it is held.

This budget has been shaped by many factors, of which the need for Ireland to have basic stability at a moment of crisis in the Brexit process is the most important. The room for action has been limited by ministerial failures, overspending and the delay of Brexit action which should have been taken long before now. However, it is the responsibility of everyone here to respond to the situation as it is and not how we would wish it to be. The time will come when we can have the debate our country so badly needs about tackling urgent problems and restoring belief in the idea that progress is possible.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Budget 2020 has come at a time when change is happening all around us. The withdrawal of Britain from the European Union presents many challenges for Ireland, social, political and economic. Budget 2020 also comes at a time when workers and families are looking for a break: a break from wages that do not go far enough, a break from high bills and a break from rip-off costs. People are looking for solutions. They are looking for something new from the Government. Of course, stability is important but the Government must also show the vision and the endeavour to move forward; to redefine what the Government delivers for people and to remould how it delivers. Change is difficult. Change that is outside of our control, initiated by the decisions and actions of others, is even more daunting still. But change can also be a canvas on which to create something new. We know that where there are threats, there is also opportunity. I accept this is a time for caution. We must take Brexit seriously. Sinn Féin proposed a Brexit stabilisation fund of €2 billion to meet the challenge. That

is the level of funding needed to respond to the Brexit crisis properly. The figures announced yesterday simply will not cut it as they fall far short of meeting the scale of the challenge.

Caution and fear are two very different things. This is not a time for fear, this is a time for innovation, for fresh thinking and for big ideas. It is a time for solutions. Government priorities must be set to match the hopes and aspirations of the Irish people, not by the smallness of those who seek to damage our island for narrow political gain. Sadly, the Government has missed the moment. It has failed to see the opportunity. It has also failed to seize upon the canvas that change presents. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, has instead used Brexit to dig in. He has used Brexit as an excuse to deliver more of the same. The Minister says it is a budget for stability as Brexit looms, but the truth is that this is a budget that protects banks, insurance companies and landlords. It is a budget that is built on policies that back vulture funds over households. It is also a budget that puts workers and families on the front line to take the heavy blows should a crash Brexit transpire. There is a lack of vision, a lack of ambition and a lack of belief. That is what guides this Minister's preparations for Brexit and that is what guided the formulation of this budget.

Instead of writing modern music for modern times, what we get is Fine Gael singing the same old and played-out song. Yet again, Fianna Fáil stands ready as the backing vocalists. In the first verse they tell workers and families they must take the hits. In the second verse, they tell the powerful and the rich they are on their side. Where have we heard that before? It is not so long ago that the same song was played for the enjoyment of bankers and bondholders. That is Fine Gael for you. Right on cue. How utterly predictable. How utterly uninspired. This budget comes at a time when recent reports have shown that this State has the fifth largest number of ultra-wealthy individuals *per capita* in the world. This is also a place where 137,000 workers live on the minimum wage and one where average incomes simply do not keep up with the cost of living.

The Government approaches the budget as a blunt accounting exercise, in the same way as a corporation might present its books. That is flawed thinking. Government budgets must go far beyond that rigid perspective. Budgets are about choices and priorities. Budgets are about the lives of workers and families. Budgets are about people and communities. It is the responsibility of the Government, of the Minister for Finance, to look beyond the blunt figures to the human beings on the other side. The failure of the budget to prioritise the well-being of the people is a big mistake. The Taoiseach can be absolutely certain that it is the well-being of workers and families that will prove the strongest bulwark against the impact of Brexit. Unfortunately, the Government does not understand that. It has again resorted to measures which first defend the interests of those at the top.

The mistakes and missteps made by the Government in this budget mirror the bad policy decisions taken by Fine Gael since coming to power in 2011. How do we know they were bad decisions? It is because they are not working. The Government's policies and budgets simply have not worked. The Government is not delivering solutions. One only has to look at the facts. Last week in University Hospital Limerick, we saw the highest number of people on trolleys on record in one day for any Irish hospital. The Government has not fixed the chronic overcrowding in hospitals; it has made it worse. In our alternative budget, Sinn Féin offered a suite of solutions as the first steps to a single-tier universal public health service over ten years. The Government's budget ignored it.

Family homelessness on the watch of Fine Gael has increased dramatically. When the Gov-

ernment came to power in 2011, eight families were becoming homeless every month. Today, after almost nine years of Fine Gael in government, 90 families become homeless every month. The Government has not solved the housing and homelessness crisis; it has made the misery worse.

In our alternative budget, we proposed solutions to bring down extortionate housing costs and launch a major programme of public housing construction to meet affordable and social housing needs. These measures would have done something real for those trying to get on the property ladder such as young couples looking to realise the dream of their own home. We also proposed an immediate rent freeze, a much better measure than this Government's failed rent pressure zones, RPZs. The Government ignored these solutions as well, however. It is an indictment of both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil that the majority of people have far less money in their pockets now than they did when those parties came to power together more than three years ago. They have not improved the affordability of life for workers and families. Together, they have made it worse. In our alternative budget, Sinn Féin proposed the introduction of a living wage of €12.30 an hour. This, again, was ignored by the Government. Worse still, the 137,000 minimum wage workers were thrown under the bus. There was not one red cent for them.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Shameful.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Government simply refuses to listen. Suggestions, which it knows will make a difference in the daily lives of so many people, are slapped down. The Government knows but does not care. That is poor leadership, bad government and a very short-sighted perspective. It is clear that housing, health and income insecurity are now the main results of this Government's policies. It is also now abundantly clear that the Taoiseach is comfortable with that reality.

The Government needs better objectives, priorities and solutions. It needs the political will to deliver serious achievements that will have real meaning in the lives of workers and families. Let me make a few suggestions. How about a truly free education system from the first day of baby infants to the final day of college? How about a national health service where medical treatment is free at the point of delivery? How about a housing system that places affordability and accessibility at its core? I refuse to accept that these things cannot be done in the Ireland of 2019. After all, we are not asking the Taoiseach to land on the moon. We are not asking him to contend with the great mysteries of the universe. Even in the context of Brexit, an ambitious social agenda is possible. In fact, Brexit makes an ambitious social agenda absolutely essential.

This is well within the gift of politicians who want to create a better society. It is, however, dismissed by those who do not. Making sure everybody has a home, can see a doctor when they are sick and have a decent education is the responsibility of the Government. It the responsibility of the Taoiseach. How dare anybody try to present these goals as the aspirations of hypocrites, cynics, wolves or ostriches. These are the goals of decency, fairness and common sense. These goals should be the basis of any worthwhile political agenda. They should be the priorities of any respectable state and any self-respecting government.

I am proud to hold such principles. I make no apology for coming into this Chamber to say to the Taoiseach and the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, that I am a believer. I believe in the politics of equality and social justice. I believe in representing and standing up for ordinary people. That is what I do. That is what Deputy Pearse Doherty did yesterday in his response to

this budget. That is what all the Sinn Féin Teachtaí Dála on these benches do every single day. We do this because we sincerely believe that every child should be supported in going as far as possible in life, that every worker should have decent wages and conditions and that every family should have the right to a happy life.

The only way to ensure these things is to deliver economic justice and that is what annual budgets should do. Budgets should be stepping stones in delivering a just society and a fair Ireland. Unfortunately, this Government's budgets do the opposite. They hold back families, workers and communities. It takes a village to raise a child. Families and communities are that village. I know of a woman who sums up the responsibility of government succinctly. She states: "All children need and deserve three things - a good home, a good doctor and a good school." For that simple, yet profound, vision to be realised, work must pay. We must, therefore, raise incomes. People at work ask themselves what has happened to the principle of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Even full-time employment cannot guarantee families a life free of poverty. Successive Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil Governments must bear responsibility for this. Those parties have followed a political agenda sustained by attacks on workers' pay and conditions. This has resulted in a frightening growth in precarious work and poverty wages. It is not radical for us to demand that jobs be high in quality, sustainable and carry wages that deliver a living.

The Taoiseach pours scorn on the idea of economic justice and progressive taxation. He does not do that because he thinks these ideas will not work. He pours that scorn on these ideas because he sees equality as a threat to his power and as a threat to privilege. He states it is impossible for the Government to deliver world-class public services and raise incomes at the same time. He is wrong because he is wedded to a way of thinking that delivers only for those who are already making it in life. He can see no other way forward but the discredited idea of trickle-down economics. If ever there was a form of fantasy economics, surely it is that myth. Let us look at what policies shaped by trickle-down economics have delivered in this State. An entire generation of young people are worse off than their parents. In times gone by, couples would make sacrifices to save for a mortgage. Today, the same sacrifices are made to pay extortionate rent for substandard accommodation. The cost of utility bills and insurance goes up and up and the cost of making ends meet has become unbearable for many. Our citizens are being ripped off left, right and centre. Saving for the future has been made impossible for many families. Relationships are breaking down under the resultant strain. The mental health of workers and families suffers because of stress, anxiety, depression and a paralysing uncertainty about the future.

While I am on this issue, how is that this Government still cannot recognise that we have a mental health crisis?

Deputy David Cullinane: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, are on their knees. Communities and families are crying out for help. During 2017 and 2018, some 747 people in this land tragically died by suicide. People are dying and this Government has allocated a paltry €14 million in new money for mental health services in 2020. Shame on the Government. That is especially the case when we all know early intervention can save lives. None of the pressures experienced today by workers and families has occurred by accident. So much of it is the result of bad governance and bad policy and too many lives are being jeopardised and ruined as a result. This needs to be put right and it needs to be fixed and fixed fast.

The first step in fixing it is in how we frame budgets. We need to talk about who is prioritised by the Government. It prioritises those at the top. That is who it looks after. It believes they are entitled to the first focus and first call on the resources of the State. Is that not a crazy proposition? Let me speak plainly. Bankers do not deserve to be the priority for the Government. Let us look at their track record. It is one of corruption, toxic behaviour and gratuitous bonuses. Rip-off insurance companies do not deserve to be the priority for the Government. Let us look at how they treat people. They charge sky high premiums, engage in double-pricing and exhibit a complete lack of transparency. Extortionate landlords do not deserve to be the priority for the Government. Let us look at the nightmare hard-working renters have been put through in recent years. Bankers, insurance companies and corporate landlords take enough and get enough. The only reason they should be the priority of Government policy is when the Government is taking them on.

It is workers and families who must be the priority, now and always. It was the determination of workers and families that brought the economy back from the disaster wrought by Fianna Fáil. It was the resilience of those same workers and families that delivered the recovery, despite the brutal era of cuts and austerity inflicted on them by Fine Gael and the Labour Party. It was workers and families who did the heavy lifting during the tough times. How incredible is it then that workers and families are told to stand at the back of the queue when the fruits of that recovery are ready to be distributed? It is incredible but not surprising. This has long been the story for workers and families under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. They have experienced decades of being told that a good life is only the preserve of society's upper echelons. That is insulting, wrong, unjust and unfair. I would go as far as describing it as theft. Every time the Government prioritises the banks, the landlords and the ultra wealthy, it steals from workers and families. It steals their ability to make ends meet. It steals their sense of security and well-being. It steals their happiness, peace of mind and right to a good life that is both affordable and sustainable. That is what Governments in this state have done for generations, including on the Taoiseach's watch. The Government plays politics with the aspirations of workers and families, while funnelling the profits and good times to the rich and powerful. It is easy for politicians who are well paid and well connected to tell workers and families that they have to wait. Workers and families are told to wait for a living wage, affordable housing, healthcare and childcare services. Imagine, in 2019, telling workers and families to wait for such things. Imagine telling them to wait for the basics and their share of the recovery they built.

The Government's big idea in the budget is to put the financial burden of the climate crisis onto the shoulders of workers and families. The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, has called it the Brexit budget. Make no mistake - for ordinary people, it is the fuel tax budget. In the absence of measures to enable people to transition to a low carbon lifestyle, something we support, increases in fuel tax just will not work. All they will do is make people poorer. Those for whom every single euro is precious will be hammered by this decision. The Taoiseach should stop the spin about it being a green measure. He should tell the truth. This fuel tax increase is about raising funds and nothing else. The Minister described the climate crisis as "our defining challenge." It would have been commendable if his actions had matched the gravity of his words. If he really wanted to tackle climate change, he would have dramatically increased investment in public transport and renewable energy. He has not and will not. Instead, he chose to use the demand for climate action to squeeze workers and families even further, but we should not be surprised as that is his way. It is, after all, the Fine Gael way. Until the day a Government is prepared to invest in alternatives, taxes like this one are nothing but a dead end. They will not work and the Government will have abdicated its

duty to take real and effective action.

The Government states it framed the budget on the supposition of a no-deal Brexit. It should have framed it on the understanding workers and families need a new deal from the Government, a new deal which they have earned. It is they who brought the State back from the abyss. We must renew the social contract between the people and the Government. We must agree principles around which we can build a new and a better society, one which will work for everybody, not just the privileged few.

Let us put a number of fundamentals on the table, the pillars from which there is an undeniable public benefit. First, work must pay through the deliverance of a living wage. Second, housing must be available and affordable. Third, healthcare is a right. Fourth, education must be free. It must be really free. These four pillars can shape the basis for a new deal that will deliver for workers and families across the country. Such a deal would be good for citizens and the economy. This new deal would shift the priority of the Government away from the banks, big corporations and landlords. It would place the focus of the Government where it should be on the well-being of workers and families. A well paid, well educated, healthy and happy citizenry strengthens our society. A well paid, well educated, healthy and happy citizenry strengthens the economy too. The four pillars of this new deal would be underpinned by decency, fairness and goodwill. They should be the bedrock of the Government for Ireland. We should be able to say about living in Ireland that one will have a job that delivers an affordable and good life. We should be able to say one will have a home that will not be financially crippling. We should be able to say one can see his or her doctor or go to the hospital without worrying about the cost. We should be able to say children will receive a free education from the first day of school to the last day of college. This is a deal the vast majority of citizens would get behind. This is a deal under which people would finally see real and tangible benefits for their tax money. It would break the economic model of winners and losers. It would be progressive and positive. It would be uplifting and fair. It would be modern and, above all, is achievable.

For too long, people have asked themselves what they are getting back from the Government. That question is justifiably asked. The absence of tangible benefits for ordinary people corrodes public confidence and trust in politics and politicians. People are tired of promises and abstract notions. They want something they can see and touch. They want something that brings value and better their lives and those of their families. For too long, the Government has restricted the prospects for the people by accepting the limitations of cyclical economics and by policies set in the narrow space between boom and bust. Fine Gael calls this prudence, but I disagree. I call it class politics. It is a system of politics that gives bailed out banks sweetheart deals. It is a system of politics that delivers millions of euros of public money in subsidies to private landlords, instead of building public housing. It is a system of politics that preserves preferential tax treatment for millionaire executives over delivering a package that would meet the needs of citizens living with disabilities. The budget, like all Fine Gael budgets, is about ring-fencing the wealth and privileges of those at the top. If prudence was the mainstay of Fine Gael financial policy, we would not have had the debacle of mind-boggling cost overruns at the national children's hospital. Neither would we have had the utter fiasco that is the national broadband plan.

Let me offer a different and I believe correct definition of prudence. Providing for the four pillars I have outlined is the essence of prudence. It is prudent because the social and economic dividend would be significant and transformational. Delivering on the four principles I have outlined is the surest way to cushion the blow of any future economic shock, Brexit-related or

otherwise. A new deal represents a way forward. A new deal would make the recovery real for workers and families. It would represent a new departure in the relationship between the people and the Government. It would renew the idea that the Government should serve the people and that those in government are servants of the public. We should all agree that the Government needs to get back to that fundamental principle. Many are disconnected from politics and excluded from the decision-making process. They ask what government is about. I believe the new deal would answer this question in a progressive, pragmatic and ambitious way.

Sinn Féin's alternative budget would represent an important first step in delivering this new deal for the people. We showed how the Government could introduce measures that would have an immediate and positive impact on people's lives. We showed how it could reduce costs and raise incomes. We showed how it could give workers and families a break. We also outlined how it could begin the work of delivering a safer and more affordable future. We showed how that could be done without putting the economy and the public finances at risk. The budget was an opportunity to do the right thing and deliver solutions for workers and families, but the Minister for Finance, hemmed in by a tired and divisive ideology, has again squandered that opportunity.

Budget 2020, like all budgets, was about choices. The Minister and the Government have made bad choices. Families and workers need and deserve a break, but the budget has delivered nothing for ordinary working people, renters, couples trying to buy a home and parents crippled by the cost of childcare. It was another do-nothing budget from a do-nothing Government, supported wholeheartedly by its do-nothing partners in Fianna Fáil. It was almost comical yesterday to hear both the Minister for Finance and Fianna Fáil's Deputy Michael McGrath dust off the mantra that the centre must hold. It would be comical if was not so tragically misguided.

Deputy David Cullinane: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, decidedly of the right, have failed Irish society and citizens. Yes, the budget was developed in the shadow of Brexit. However, the policies and budgetary decisions of Fine Gael since 2011 and Fianna Fáil before it cast a darker and longer shadow over the lives of workers and families who will be looking at the budget and wondering what is in it for them. Sadly, the answer is very, very little. I am now more convinced than ever that the needs of ordinary people will not be prioritised unless and until there is a Sinn Féin Government and a Sinn Féin Minister for Finance. It is then and only then that families and workers will get a break and the new deal that they so badly need and richly deserve.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I will share time with Deputy Sherlock.

Before I get into the body of my remarks on the budget, as I wished to respond to the invitation offered by the Taoiseach during Leaders' Questions to read the Low Pay Commission report in detail, I went out to see if I could do so, but it has not been published. I, therefore, ask the Taoiseach to facilitate its publication in order that we can continue our conversation and speak on the basis of the same information.

The budget, published yesterday and crafted by Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance with their Fianna Fáil partners, was a depressing document. Brexit is a real and present danger to the economy, but that does not mean that all social progress needs to halt. This is a do-nothing budget from Fine Gael. It will not protect many of the people who are most vulnerable

to a no-deal Brexit. It will not protect most people in receipt of social welfare payments, as I outlined in some detail this morning, who have received an effective cut because of the accepted rises in the cost of living next year. It will not protect most people with disabilities because the small amount of extra spending is outweighed by rising costs that have been acknowledged.

Fine Gael is responsible for some of the rising costs. The Labour Party implemented a rent freeze when in government, but Fine Gael now allows annual rent increases of 4% in rent pressure zones and a free-for-all outside them. However, wages are not increasing by 4% and there has been an increase of zero in most social welfare payments from the Government in the budget. The Minister for Finance glossed over the extra €200 million to be spent this year to cover the massive cost overspend on the national children's hospital and the national broadband plan. Each of these projects will cost an additional €100 million next year, the same amount the following year and the same again in years to come.

The Government's summer economic statement identified €1.9 billion worth of pre-commitments in public spending to cover population growth and national pay agreements. That is done every year. They are normal demographic trends. Yesterday the Minister for Finance slipped in an extra €200 million as another piece of what he called "pre-committed" spending. It was only pre-committed because the Government had lost control of the cost of both major projects. It could have done a lot of good with that €200 million. It could have sheltered people from the effects of a no-deal Brexit. However, there were other opportunities to raise revenue in a socially just way that would not have had any disruptive impact on the economy. The banks are each making hundreds of millions of euro in profits, but as they are still writing off losses from the crash against corporation tax, they effectively pay none. Last night the bank levy was maintained at the figure of €150 million. By raising the levy, the Government could have raised enough additional money to raise social welfare rates to at least the equivalent of inflation to cushion the impact of inflation on these vulnerable persons next year.

We are in a very different economy from the one we faced in 2011. At the time there was a €11 billion hole in the public finances. That was the difference between the State's income and its committed expenses. Today the public finances are in balance, yet Fine Gael, supported by Fianna Fáil, has delivered a depressing budget. It is depressing in every sense and will depress spending in the economy. It has no vision for the future. There will be no cause for celebration among the hundreds of thousands of low paid workers and those who rely on social welfare payments to put food on their tables. In our current economic circumstances there was simply no need to implement such a restrictive budget, even with the prospect of a no-deal Brexit looming. In fact, economic demand suggests we must shelter the most vulnerable from these threats in a counter-cyclical way.

The challenges we face are different from those in 2011. The appropriate solutions are also different. The main threats we face are the loss of trade with the United Kingdom and an increase in prices due to tariffs or currency fluctuations. The solutions are investment in alternative industries and State supports to help to open up new markets and enterprises and preserve jobs during the rough transition period. Unlike in the last crash, we are not facing a sudden drop in the tax take or a collapse in the banking system.

We have the ability to use our national resources in a productive and imaginative way to counteract the economic downturn from Brexit and to build the low-carbon economy of the future to which we all aspire. Fine Gael seems to be stuck in the past. The solutions to the hole in the public finances are not the same as the challenges that require us to restructure the economy

to adjust to a new trading relationship with the United Kingdom. What is needed now is for the Government to step forward with a positive vision for our future economy. For example, the State should be building sufficient sustainable homes to solve the housing crisis once and for all. Everybody says that fundamentally it is a supply issue. I am speaking about building not just houses but homes. Near zero emissions houses and apartments can be built for almost the same cost as a conventional home but would be forever cheaper to maintain and keep warm. Instead, Fine Gael has doubled down on its failed housing strategy. Its solution is to continue what it has been doing, which has failed.

It might have been a cause for celebration that €2.5 billion is to be spent on housing but yesterday, the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, did not actually say that €2.5 billion would be spent on housing. He said €2.5 billion would be spent on housing supports. More than €750 million, which is one third of the housing budget, will now go to the housing assistance payment and other payments to private landlords next year and every year. This is not a solution. For €750 million we could build well over 3,500 homes on public land. Instead, thousands of families will remain in limbo, in temporary rental arrangements rather than being provided with the permanent solution of a permanent home.

The Government is not thinking at the right level of scale. Before the Celtic tiger economy went horribly wrong under Fianna Fáil's stewardship, our economy was producing 40,000 to 50,000 homes a year. I agree that the peak of 90,000 homes was completely unsustainable but the CSO reported that in 2018 there were only 18,000 new dwelling completions. We are now building 18,000 dwellings rather than the 40,000 to 50,000 sustainable dwellings that could be built in our economy and country.

The economy has recovered but building has not ramped up. The profit-driven private development model is simply not delivering. The solution is for the State to step in, as it has done many times in the past, to build tens of thousands of homes every year. The Labour Party's vision is a €16 billion fund to build 80,000 homes over five years. We would build on the land that the Labour Party kept in public ownership, which would reduce building costs to about €200,000 or less per home. We would restore the capacity to engage in house-building through regional housing executives as part of local government, to consolidate and reinforce the expertise throughout local authorities to develop land and build or commission housing according to local needs. They could then rent out this housing to anyone who needed it, to provide affordable, secure homes. This is the common model that houses anything from one third to half of the population of all of the major European cities. It provides a social mix inside a single tenancy type. For some, it would provide a home for life and for others it would provide an affordable rent that would allow them to save for a deposit for their own home elsewhere. Fine Gael has no such vision. Instead, it is just putting more money into the hands of private landlords while we wait for private developers to build homes people cannot afford. We cannot continue with this.

We also have an affordability crisis. When the private developers build homes, they are simply unaffordable. Even the Government's own version of affordable housing is out of reach of those who do not have the capacity to build up large deposits, which is a huge number of our people. Quite frankly, the Government's housing policy is disastrous and budget 2020 has done nothing to give hope to those who have been waiting for years for their own home.

I acknowledge that budget 2020 has put more money into healthcare. The Taoiseach was unsure of the exact sum this morning. However, the main problem with the system is not

whether we put €650 million or €1.1 billion into health next year. International comparisons show that we spend as much, or in some cases more, than other countries that have far better healthcare. This morning, it was almost as though the Taoiseach was telling us not to mind the outcomes and to look at the spending. That used not be his style.

A big part of the problem in our health service is having public and private systems duplicating services and working in parallel silos. The all-party Sláintecare report recognised this and proposed a single State healthcare system. The Labour Party is committed to this vision. In the worst of times, we brought in free GP care for children aged under six, as the Taoiseach remembers. Fine Gael was reluctant then and its reluctance to deliver a national health service is clear from the long delay before yesterday's announcement of the next phase to extend free GP care to children aged under eight, which will not happen until well into next year. We welcome this slight extension but it would have cost only €80 million to extend free GP care to all those aged under 18. Why is the Taoiseach so reluctant to implement this part of the Sláintecare strategy? It can only be because he is not really committed to it.

The Labour Party acknowledges the scientific evidence on climate change and the expert support for the need to raise carbon taxes. As the Taoiseach pointed out this morning, they need to be part of a much larger and comprehensive parcel of policies to reduce greenhouse gases and make our economy more sustainable. I am very glad the Taoiseach has read the Labour Party's alternative budget document. He was able to brandish it this morning. It shows that public transport fares could be reduced by 10% and that we could afford to roll out a major programme to begin retrofitting council housing on a massive scale next year.

These are examples of real action on climate to lower the cost of home heating and transport and make it possible for people to make lifestyle changes to mitigate climate harm. The Government has suggested that it did all it could in difficult circumstances but the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, still managed to find €150 a year for the self-employed, which is an increase of €3 a week, and he found €5,000 for those who inherited expensive family homes.

Following on from the Taoiseach's repeated public pledges about cutting taxes for the better off, budget 2020 had several delicate and quiet steps to lower tax for the wealthiest. For this reason, I do not accept that Fine Gael has done all that it could to protect the most vulnerable from a no-deal Brexit. Fine Gael, the Independent Alliance and Fianna Fáil are using Brexit to hide their lack of consideration for the most vulnerable in Irish society. Budget 2020 showed, once again, that the Government has no vision or long-term plan. The Labour Party wants an equal society, and our alternative budget shows how much progress could have been made on implementing the first major steps in implementing that vision for workers and on climate, housing, healthcare and to ensure a fair start for every child in our country.

I will give an example of the Labour Party's vision for our future as a low-carbon and dynamic economy. Bord na Móna is a State enterprise, of which we are all very proud. It is owned by the people through the shares held by the Government on their behalf. In the past, Bord na Móna employed thousands of people in good jobs in areas of the country that were the least developed economically. As we all know, burning peat is a sunset industry. In recent decades, we have learned that burning fossil fuels causes climate change but that does not mean that Bord na Móna has to die.

We have a tremendous opportunity to give that innovative company a new lease of life, but Fine Gael has no vision for that. The Minister announced a just transition commissioner

focused on the midlands, which will support “over 400 environmentally sustainable jobs, with up to 100 more jobs through expanded peatlands rehabilitation.” Are 500 jobs the height of the Government’s ambition? With more than 2 million people employed in our economy, Fine Gael’s answer to regional disadvantage with more than 6% unemployment in the midlands is to talk about the potential to create 500 jobs. I welcome every new job, especially in those disadvantaged areas with greatest need for them, but how much will these 500 jobs transform our economy? We could do so much more.

I will read onto the record Bord na Móna’s new mission statement:

Bord na Móna has a new national mission to:

- Support national energy security by fast-tracking renewable energy development across our land bank
- Build a circular economy aiming for higher value recycling and eliminating waste
- Develop new sustainable businesses across our land bank
- Continue to support significant employment across the Midlands of Ireland

Underneath this statement, Bord na Móna has engaged in a range of pilot initiatives, including wind energy, recycling, rehabilitation of bogs and even fish farming. We now need a full review of what has been learned from these initiatives, including the potential for scaling up. That is the ambition that is missing from the Government. We own Bord na Móna and a range of other State companies. There is no reason we should fail to prepare a large-scale programme of investment in our State enterprises to fulfil the mission of sustainability that Bord na Móna has so clearly adopted.

EU rules pose no barrier to a state investing in its own enterprises. There is no barrier to us investing in companies owned by the State no more than there is for any other investors investing in their own companies. We have billions of euro in the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund. What is that money doing now? Why is the Government not planning to make a strategic investment in our future with our own money? We should have a national vision of creating thousands of sustainable jobs through State enterprises. The private sector also has a major role to play, but there is no reason we cannot accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy by major investment through our own enterprises that have a proven track record.

This is the kind of vision our country needs for what Ireland could be as a dynamic, low-carbon economy in the foreseeable future. Countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands are well on the way to implementing similar visions, with cities such as Copenhagen on track to be carbon neutral. We are far behind, for no reason other than a lack of vision and a lack of strategic investment.

Labour wants an equal society, closer to what has been achieved in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, where social democratic economics have been followed, and where the economic guidance given benefits people and the environment. That is the vision we need for the country.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I apologise for my voice. I will start on the climate action agenda. Yesterday, the Minister announced that €90 million would be ring-fenced. The language used in the document was vague and non-committal. According to the document, the ring-fencing of

that €90 million is to protect the most vulnerable, have sustainable mobility programmes, have agri-environmental schemes, and plan for a low-carbon future. Within that €90 million nods were given to specific issues, such as €20 million for the midlands for a social housing energy-efficiency programme; €5 million for peatlands rehabilitation; €6 million for the just transition; €9 million for those so-called sustainability mobility projects; and €8 million towards the purchase of electric vehicles.

On the carbon tax, those of us who are members of the Joint Committee on Climate Action signed up to the 42 recommendations in the committee's report arising from the Citizens' Assembly deliberations. One of the primary recommendations was that if there was to be an increase in the carbon tax and if that carbon tax was ring-fenced, there would be no price increase until the Department of Finance carried out a study on the effects of fuel poverty, particularly for those who live in fuel-impooverished households, such that moneys could be made available subsequently to ensure that if retrofitting or energy efficiency measures could be carried out they would be done.

Nothing in yesterday's announcement gives me or my party solace that we will have any time soon a programme with a specific budget to upgrade the thousands of houses that need to be retrofitted. Instead all we got was the €20 million that was announced for social housing energy projects in the midlands. Nobody in this House - I am from Cork - would argue against that, but the €20 million as a starting point is woefully inadequate and too focused on one geographical area, notwithstanding that it is going to happen there. It needs to be broadened and we need to see the specific proposals for that €90 million to ensure that for every citizen who wants to spend money from savings or borrowings to have their house retrofitted, there is a scheme that will supplement the cost of retrofitting those homes if we are to meet the targets.

We have not had that study from the Department of Finance. While the Government pays lipservice to the recommendations of various committees of this Legislature, it makes no genuine attempt to take seriously the recommendations of specific committees. This was an all-party recommendation. The Government needs to show greater urgency on what it intends to do on the issue of climate action.

I wish to speak to the issue of disabilities. All Members are inundated by constituents asking about the lack of proper respite facilities for people with intellectual disabilities. The vagueness of the language used in the expenditure report that accompanied the Minister's Budget Statement yesterday merely stated that €25 million would be made available for disability services.

There is a package of measures on the provision of ASD services and respite care for people with intellectual disability. However, again the language is vague and on respite, it simply states that the Government will build capacity and respond to the evolving needs of service users and their families. That is so vague that I do not know what it means. In budget 2020, the Government is referring to building capacity at a time all Deputies and Senators are inundated with requests from parents whose children have intellectual disabilities and who need respite and cannot get it. I am aware of one case where a family has not had respite in ten years for their son. What does that mean for them? It is meaningless language. We want specifics on whether that family and countless other families can see in this budget something that gives them hope that their son or daughter arising from this budget will now get respite. There is a massive waiting list for ASD appraisals. We all have the waiting lists for our constituencies. Not only is there a waiting list for the initial assessment but the person is not guaranteed the services thereafter. That is causing massive stress. The language of the budgetary documenta-

tion is suitably vague. It states: “Funding is being provided for an Autism Plan [. . .] to improve services for people with Autism and their families.” What in the name of goodness has been going on for the past three years during the lifetime of this Government? Is it telling us that in 2020 there will be funding for an autism plan, when I am sure even the Taoiseach’s office is inundated with requests from families for proper services for people with ASD and for people who need respite? I am not trying to score a narrow political point. There are resources available that could be deployed in a way that focuses on the individual families such that they can get access to respite in a decent and fair way to alleviate the stress they are under.

The narrative of education over the past few weeks has been about the compulsory teaching of history at junior cycle level. There will be a critique of whether that becomes a Trojan Horse for other subjects to have an equal case to be made compulsory. It overshadows the fact that there is absolutely no provision in the education budget for the reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio and more specifically, in respect of the provision of additional teachers to teach English as an additional language. There are over 26 languages spoken in a school quite close to where I live. That school is struggling to provide English language resources and does not have enough teachers to meet the demand. I am sure the same is true across the country. For a small sum in the overall education allocation, the Minister could have had a tremendous positive effect in ensuring that English as an additional language, EAL, teachers could be provided to give people who are part of our community the opportunities to learn English in a properly-resourced way in order that they can go about their business as citizens.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There is a very well-worn formula whereby the Minister for Finance makes a long budget speech with lots of pomp and ceremony and fanfare and the next day the Opposition goes meticulously through the budget measures, etc. Hours of Dáil debate have been dedicated to the budget to give the impression that something significant has happened. What really has happened? Hundreds of thousands of people who are merely existing, not living, had any faint hope dashed that this Government would do anything about their plight. On Monday a journalist in *The Irish Times* stated the Government is “gaslighting” the nation about affordable housing. It is gaslighting the nation about the budget as well because using the pretext of Brexit, the Government and Fianna Fáil constantly repeat the refrain that we must go softly, softly, we cannot do anything, we must maintain the *status quo*. The mainstay of the budget was to set up a €1 billion fund for business to withstand Brexit shocks but with no strings attached obliging them to maintain jobs if they get a bailout from the fund.

It would be nice if the media reported that, rather than giving the impression that we are all in this together. We know well from the last recession that we are not all in this together. To prove that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, which will sign off on the budget, postponed any measly increase in the minimum wage, using the bogeyman of Brexit. The tens of thousands of lowest-paid workers in this country include workers in this building. Yesterday, I met an usher who has just started to work here and told me that he earns a couple of cent above the minimum wage and he got nothing in this budget apart from a carbon tax. One would expect a carbon tax to be loaded onto the backs of those who create most of the carbon emissions, for example, on some of the 100 global companies who create 71% of emissions and have done so since 1988. Instead, however, it is levied across the board on workers, pensioners and the disabled, who have no alternative means of heating their homes or of transport.

The idea of taking the wealth that exists in our society and bringing it under the control of the State in order that the lives of the majority can be improved is always off limits in these

budgets. Imagine if yesterday, for example, the Minister announced that he was going to build not-for-profit housing on the vacant sites all around the country and give councils the money to build on them. That is a revolutionary idea now in the era of neoliberal capitalism. It was a normal idea 40 years ago when I was growing up. Yes, it would be a major annoyance to the BAMs of this world, to the investors, developers and landlords who are doing very nicely out of the housing scarcity but imagine how it would transform the lives of thousands in this country. Building workers would be paid decent wages to build the houses, rents and mortgages would be at cost price, there would be democratic input from communities into their surroundings. All of this would be completely possible, had the State yesterday decided to set up a building company and use the record numbers of high net worth individuals, the billionaires and millionaires, and to tax them to pay for that. The fifth largest number of such individuals *per capita* in the world exists in Ireland.

The same goes for childcare. Parents up and down the country are paying a second mortgage in childcare costs. Why not have a public childcare system as we have a primary and secondary school system, subsidised by the State, to allow women in particular to work to their highest ability?

The fourth largest financial sector in the EU is based in Ireland. What if, instead of a carbon tax with a minimal impact, the Government decided to introduce a financial transactions tax of 0.1%, a measly amount, on highly profitable companies and used it to pay for the immediate introduction of free public transport because the amount is equivalent? That would be a massive contribution to the environment and to the lives of workers who commute. Instead, that wealth will be left untouched and untapped because the main parties in here have a consensus. They will quibble over a fiver here or there but will not consider the idea of actually challenging the 1%, who in Ireland own 15% of the wealth. That goes for Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance, for Fianna Fáil, which had a hand in this budget and which will not, I assume, vote against it, for Labour and the Greens, who have been in government with them and look to do that again if the numbers stack up. It goes for any parties in the House that accept the idea of a limited fiscal space and of leaving the super rich and corporations untouched, and that talk about “progressive” and “modern” but do not talk about capitalism. In America, there is probably only one presidential candidate likely to be able to undercut and defeat Trump in the next election, namely, Bernie Sanders. He is the only candidate who talks about the 1%, a political revolution against the billionaire class and a class war, with the working class being victorious. The reason only Bernie Sanders can defeat Trump is that he tackles the issue of wealth.

As a socialist, I stand for the democratic ownership and control of wealth to provide for the needs of society, including housing, which is the biggest crisis we face, in respect of rent and social housing. We need an effective corporation tax rate, given that even the EU norm could allow 20,000 social and affordable homes to be built immediately. Education, which was ignored yesterday, should be a right for every person, including children with special needs or autism spectrum disorder, ASD. High quality childcare should be free. Why should people in Dublin, the capital city, have to pay on average €1,000 a month? Measly concessions have been introduced by the Government but they are difficult to access. There should also be a national health service. All such measures could be provided if the wealth in society was taken and used for the benefit of the majority. Instead, yesterday was a continuation of the same, with the position of the lowest paid left utterly unimproved, and a failure to tackle the biggest crises in the State, namely, housing and health. It is unfortunate that the Minister and the Taoiseach invariably leave the Chamber before the left-wing Deputies speak. That is fine - we are used to it - but

we consider it a signal of their unwillingness to listen or engage and it is noted by the people.

Deputy Gino Kenny: The budget has been neutral and has not wasted a good crisis. What was supposedly a surplus budget has turned into a deficit budget for the majority of people. It has used the spectre of Brexit to fig-leaf a lack of real gains for working class people. This budget of political choices has favoured raising carbon taxes rather than taxing the real polluters in society.

Carbon tax was introduced ten years ago. Since then, the number of cars on the road has doubled. The idea, therefore, that carbon tax changes behaviour is rubbish. It is a stealth tax, which does not change behaviour whatsoever. There are alternatives to carbon tax, a good example of which is a tax on commercial air fuels in Europe. I believe that most people do not know about the concept. If a tax was applied to air fuels in Europe, it would reduce emissions without having much effect on jobs at the companies in question. If it was levied on Irish airspace, it would generate €900 million per year, which would be underpinned by legal action to prevent companies from passing on the increase to their customers. Such a measure is possible but there is no political will to take it.

The Government has deferred the 30% increase in the hourly minimum wage for workers. Some 137,000 workers earn the minimum wage, many of whom are women, migrant workers or lone parents. Another example of political will is that there is no prudence in respect of extending and maintaining tax breaks for senior executives of multinationals. Some 1,000 executives have a special tax arrangement called the special assignee relief programme, SARP. Eight of them earn salaries of between €3 million and €10 million, which is obscene. This tax break costs the Exchequer €28 million per year. I could comment further on loopholes in the budget and the tax avoidance that such individuals and companies practise. It amounts to a great deal of money, which could offset carbon tax or address the housing crisis, for example.

On housing, I find it hard to believe that the State will invest a further €80 million in private landlords. Next year, €1 billion will be given to private landlords. You could not make this stuff up. Landlords currently chase rents to inflationary levels, meaning that they do not even seek HAP anymore but rather homeless HAP. This amounts to more than €2,500 per month, which the State pays while lining the pockets of private landlords. It is incredible that it is going on but it is the policy and ideology of the Government. The Government is not for turning but what I have just outlined needs to be changed quickly.

The country is very wealthy but the budget compounds the wealth inequality and the ongoing related crisis that is experienced daily. It is a budget of the extreme centre. The Taoiseach commented on the hard left but I find that somewhat offensive. I am a socialist, not of the hard left. We do not appreciate being called derogatory names by the Taoiseach.

This will be the final Fine Gael budget of this Dáil. I hope workers will remember that Fine Gael is no friend of theirs.

Deputy Joan Collins: When Deputy Cowen rose to speak on the latest Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil budget, he managed to say almost nothing about the budget and the measures therein. Although he is one of Fianna Fáil's most prominent spokespersons, all he did was treat us to a litany of silly jokes. Deputy Michael Martin and those on the Fianna Fáil benches thought he was hilarious but they are easily amused. One of Deputy Cowen's jokes was about the left not being interested in being in government. I would love to be in government, however, and to

have the opportunity to frame a budget that represented real change in the country and was in the interests of the majority of people, but I have no intention of ever being in government with the party that brought the country to its knees just ten years ago. That was no laughing matter for Fianna Fáil. While it might want to pretend it never happened, it did and I assure its Deputies that it is far from forgotten.

Two weeks ago, during Leaders' Questions, I raised what I believed was a crisis of poverty in the country, which goes alongside the crises in health, housing and homelessness. Dealing with those three critical areas in an urgent and effective manner should be the litmus test of any Government. The reality is that after four years and four budgets from this Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil Government, in each of those areas the crisis has become worse. More people are homeless. More people are on housing waiting lists. Rents are soaring out of control. The poverty gap is growing. The budget says loudly, "Crisis, what crisis?"

I notice that very few Deputies from Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael are here. They are not here, they are not listening and they do not care. To put it bluntly, given the number of phone calls I got from constituents over the past 24 hours, youse just really do not give a fuck and it is just absolutely outrageous that this is happening and that people are being subjected to the budget. I will give an example of a woman who came into me on Monday. She rang my constituency office and asked if she could talk to me about the fuel allowance, and I told her to come straight up to my office. She has Crohn's disease and has just had a transplant. Her house badly needs insulation. She is on the invalidity pension, while her daughter is on jobseeker's allowance. She applied for the fuel allowance scheme but the reply she received stated:

You do not qualify for this allowance. The means limit for your household is €348.30 per week. Your household means of €365.50 per week exceeds this limit.

She is one of the four out of five families that do not get the fuel allowance and are on low incomes. She needed that fuel allowance to apply for the warmth and wellbeing deal. She cannot do that now. The woman was in tears. Her house has nearly been taken away from her. Her husband has left her and she is dealing with paying a mortgage and trying to make an arrangement with the banks. These are the people who need support. Instead, the group of people who are implementing the budget just pocketed a €30 per week increase in their wages in September. I can say proudly that I have never accepted the increases since 2017 and have given them back to the State because I do not believe we should accept wage increases while others are in this situation and have not been brought up from the circumstances they faced during the austerity years.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I noted a few minutes ago that the Deputy was using unparliamentary language. It was a four-letter word. In all my years here, it has not been customary to do that. Knowing Deputy Collins, I consider that she is above that and should withdraw the word.

Deputy Joan Collins: I accept that but I am very angry to see people coming through the door of the constituency office who are on their knees, only to have the Government bring out a budget like this.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are not going to debate it. The Deputy is well able to make her case without using unparliamentary language. I take it that she has withdrawn that word.

Deputy Joan Collins: I withdraw. In his speech yesterday, the Minister for Finance mentioned Brexit more than 30 times. He initiated a hard-Brexit fund of €1.5 billion to €2 billion, if required. Of course, it will be necessary in the case of a hard Brexit for the Government to try to alleviate the worst effects on the economy, people's jobs and livelihoods, but there is no plan set out to help those at the bottom who will be severely impacted by a hard Brexit. I am beholden to Social Justice Ireland, which provided figures showing that prices of imports from the UK that were hit by World Trade Organization tariffs would rise by 2% to 3%, raising the cost of living for the average household by between €892 and €1,360 per year. Food expenditure would be most severely affected. Those are the figures for the average household but those in the bottom three income deciles spend twice as much of their income on food as do those in the top 10%. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance have gone out of their way to say there will be no supplementary budget but that is exactly what will be required to protect the poorest in the event of a hard Brexit. It is a disgrace that the budget contains no increase in basic welfare payments, in particular when Deputies received a €30 per week increase this year and are comfortable in the knowledge that they will get another €70 in 2020. It is a prudent budget for those on the ground but not for those in the Dáil who accepted those wage increases.

I will not comment on the housing and homelessness crisis except to say that this disgraceful situation has been normalised over the past five years. The amount spent on emergency accommodation has risen by 300% and €400,000 per day is spent to put a sticking plaster on the problem. Meanwhile, €1.5 billion goes to private landlords in housing assistance payments.

As with most aspects of the budget, there is a lack of transparency in relation to health. There is real concern that some of the increases announced will be paid for through cuts in other areas of the overall health budget. Mental health groups have said that €25 million of the €55 million allocated in 2019 has simply disappeared and I am very concerned that this will happen in other areas. Once again, there is no commitment to the €5 billion Sláintecare implementation fund.

Brexit uncertainty has kept this Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil Government in power for another year. The same Brexit uncertainty has been used to excuse a budget which fails to deal with real crises in our society. There is a great deal more that could be done. For example, the Comptroller and Auditor General reports in respect of corporation tax that among the top 100 companies, eight paid no corporation tax or less, five paid 0% to 1%, one paid 1% to 5% and seven paid 5% to 10%. Every year, €4 billion in tax foregone is provided through numerous tax breaks and there appear to be no reviews of their effectiveness in respect of job creation or investment increases. Real transparency in these areas is required. No mention has been made of a wealth tax. I refer to an article by David McWilliams, who is hardly a member of the so-called "loony left" or a socialist, in which he points out that Ireland now has the fifth largest number of ultra wealthy individuals *per capita* in the world. The top 1% owns just over 25% of all wealth in the State and the top 5% owns just under 50%. The gap is widening. A tax on the top 5% would bring billions in extra resources to deal with the problems in our society. I refer to a point I made earlier and say "Yes", I want to be in government as part of a movement for real change in Ireland.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Budgets are strange creatures. This is my 11th or 12th one. Listening to the Minister of the day, as we did yesterday, one hears of X billion going here and Y billion going there and of a few million for this and a few million for that. One might be forgiven for thinking that everything is positive, that life will get better and that all of the problems and challenges in society will be resolved. With the finance available to all Departments, we

should have state-of-the-art services for all and should not have the numbers we do on housing lists, on health services waiting lists and in consistent poverty. We should not have the inequalities we do in our society.

The budget is dominated by Brexit to allow for an event on which we still lack clarity and certainty after three years. I acknowledge that there are challenges in drafting a budget in such a climate. That was brought home particularly today in the audiovisual room with representatives from Border communities earlier. They fear a no-deal or hard-deal Brexit. They said the dairy industry in Northern Ireland may be wiped out and that there were similar implications for fishermen. They will lose the EU funding, which has been so beneficial, and it is doubtful the UK Government will pick up the deficit there. That is not to mention the loss of easy movement across the Border, particularly in relation to education. I understand, therefore, that the budget has Brexit in mind. I am struck, however, by Brexit language such as “pressing and immediate risk to our economy” and “targeted new interventions to help vulnerable but viable firms to respond to the Brexit challenge”. Where is the same language and urgency in addressing the challenges we continue have in society in the scandal of homelessness, exorbitant rents, inappropriate and poor rented accommodation, insecurity for tenants and people paying more in rent than they would in mortgage repayments but who are unable to get the deposit to buy? One might say we have interventions, but the facts and statistics show that the so-called “housing interventions” are not working because homelessness is increasing.

We have young people in full-time employment who face insurmountable challenges to becoming homeowners. The help-to-buy scheme was intended to address this. An analysis of the scheme by the Parliamentary Budget Office, which I thank for its insightful work, shows that it has benefited households at the upper end of the income distribution, with a significant number of claims having been made by households which had already saved a 10% deposit. That suggests the scheme did not fulfil its original aim but supported instead a significant number of transactions that would have taken place anyway. The scheme is nevertheless to continue in its current form for two more years. The scheme in its current form does not take the budget office’s analysis into account. It continues the ideology that a profit-driven market will deliver for all housing needs.

The housing assistance payment, HAP, has worked for some but there is discrimination and insecurity among HAP households. Those households now face the difficulty of their homes being taken over by so-called vulture funds at whose mercy they are then placed. These funds can get higher rents than are available from HAP recipients. Given what is spent on emergency accommodation, hotels and bed and breakfast rooms, there are people who are a great deal of money from the housing crisis. The reality is that people are worse off.

Like Deputy Joan Collins, I attended Social Justice Ireland’s budget analysis this morning. I thank that group for its work. Its representatives pointed to a reality that we all know. It is the vulnerable in society who get left behind unless welfare increases keep pace with increases elsewhere in the economy. Their statistics demonstrated the need for a €9 per week increase in the minimum social welfare payments to ensure social welfare rates keep up with wage growth. If social welfare rates are allowed to fall behind earnings over time, increases in poverty are inevitable. Brexit will hit those involved further because they have the least capacity to absorb an increase in the cost of living. What we will see, then, is a further increase in inequality.

I always look to see in particular how people with disabilities are treated in the budget because they are the most vulnerable. Survey after survey, such as the survey on incomes and

living conditions, show that 35% of this group are at risk of poverty. That is double the risk for those without a disability. One in three lives on an income below the poverty line. There was an interesting pre-budget submission from the Oireachtas disability group. I am a member of that group but it is driven by Senator Dolan and Deputy Ó Caoláin. The group felt disappointed about the treatment of the sector and that the 643,000 members of the disability community have been sidelined in the budget. Senator Dolan said there has been a failure, once again, to specifically address the issues confronting many people with a disability and it is most disappointing, particularly in the wake of the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There should have been more benefits in light of the considerable additional challenges that such people face in their lives. Senator Dolan welcomed initiatives in the budget but they are outstripped by the level of need which is increasing every year.

On climate change, I agree with the increase in carbon tax but felt I had to vote against the motion last night for a couple of reasons. First, we do not know where the €500 million collected from carbon tax to date has been spent. Second, the fuel poverty review should have been the driver in determining carbon tax. Where is the increase for the polluters, for example the aviation industry? We know the detrimental effects of emissions and the need to transition to a low-carbon economy. We talk about equality-proofing budgets but we must also climate change-proof them. It is all very well putting more money into electric vehicle infrastructure but there is not much point having that unless people can afford to buy these cars. The ideas about having a just transition fund and commission are good, provided the commission does not descend to the level of a quango that ends up costing money rather than resolving the issues.

The budget also contained the predictable annual increase on the price of cigarettes. The ultimate goal is for the country to be smoke free because we know the cost to the health service of smoke-related illnesses but I wonder whether this is the right way to go. I represent the Dublin Central constituency and know the work that Retailers Against Smuggling are doing. There will be increases in the volume of illegal cigarettes as a result of the budget.

There is an issue of fairness in respect of corporate tax. Firms and companies that are making a profit should contribute to society. Unfortunately, some of them do all they can to avoid this and employ people to find loopholes and ways to circumvent having to do so. A report from the Comptroller and Auditor General found that among the top 100 corporate taxpayers who account for 70% of the corporate tax intake, eight paid a rate of 0%, five paid between 0% and 1%, one paid between 1% and 5% and seven paid between 5% and 10%. A number of large firms are not playing fair by paying their fair share. More transparency is needed in this area. Taxation measures generally have supported business and the better off and have done very little to help the less well off.

The two years early childhood care and education, ECCE, scheme for all children is helpful but the 0.2% of GDP that goes into childcare is the lowest of any EU country. By contrast, the comparable figure in Sweden is 1.9%. A distinction arises because some crèches will not accept the ECCE because they can get more money from parents who can afford it. We are now seeing fee-paying crèches, adding to fee-paying primary and secondary schools.

I acknowledge the positives in the budget, which include the research and development credit for micro and small companies, the increase in the numbers of SNAs, additional teaching posts, especially the educational teaching posts, and the microbrewery tax relief. The additional 1 million home care hours are welcome but detail is needed on exactly how many home care hours are required to keep people at home and not in nursing homes or hospitals.

There were increases for the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to spend on additional support for artists and culture. I attended an interesting presentation by Words Ireland in the AV room. The organisation was seeking modest increases to encourage more translation of Irish works, school libraries and writers. The amount it was seeking was small and I wonder whether it will be granted.

Ms Angela Dorgan, the chairperson of the National Campaign for the Arts, stated: “This budget is sending a message to artists that Ireland does not value them.” The campaign stated that of the €5 million of increased funding, €3.75 million has been reallocated so the increase is really €1.25 million. There is also the question of the increased investment for *Údarás na Gaeltachta*. What about the modest increases that *Conradh na Gaeilge* was also looking for?

I was part of the Moore Street Advisory Group and hope there will be action on foot of its report.

There is an increase of some €21 million in Ireland’s overseas development aid budget. That is a modest but welcome increase. We are now contributing 0.4% of GDP but still have a long way to go until we reach the desired 0.7%. The highest we have achieved was 0.5% in 2008. We need a plan for how to reach that level in the coming years.

While we are doubling our annual contribution to the green climate fund, we must look to reduce the number of carbon credits that are being bought to offset carbon emissions.

I know from my own work that the need in the health sector is for community-based responses. That is especially true for supports relating to addiction, with recovery-oriented programmes, awareness programmes in schools and youth services, and the local community policing forum to assist communities to live safely. I support the call for core funding for the drugs and alcohol task forces. There has been a recent improvement where we now have beds for people who are addicted to tablets.

One area of mental health that has been neglected is that of dual diagnosis.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has received an increase but youth services and projects are still suffering the effects of cuts from previous years. They are also now having difficulty paying the increases that they must offer.

The threshold for capital acquisitions tax was increased from €320,000 to €335,000 on transfers between parents and children. I gave the Minister a study suggesting that there is a gross discrimination in this measure against those who have neither married or had children. We talk about importance of equality but this is a serious inequality for single, childless people who want to leave money or property to other family members and friends. I know of a case of an elderly man who married his long-time carer so that the carer could inherit without having to pay considerable taxes.

Overall, it is difficult to see where in the budget that the second strand mentioned by the Minister, namely, to improve our public services and help our most vulnerable citizens, is being met. The budget is cushioning large enterprises while exposing vulnerable groups to bear the brunt of a difficult Brexit, whether hard or soft. It is going to eat into small businesses. Inflation rates are going to increase and the vulnerable will suffer the most. Businesses and corporations obviously are coming before people.

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Next Thursday, 17 October, I will be at the famine statues with All Together in Dignity. There will be groups there representing areas such as disability and homelessness. There will be people in recovery and addiction, former prisoners and the unemployed. I wonder how happy those people are going to be with this budget. The motto of All Together in Dignity is the same as Irish Aid: "Leave no one behind". There are people who are being left behind, and even further behind because of what is not being done in the budget.

We must get away from the idea that budgets have to give something to everybody. Everybody does not need something from a budget. There are people in society who are comfortable and well off and such people do not need anything in a budget. There are other people who need an awful lot more than they have been getting.

We must budget for longer periods because we need to see where things are going after the initial year of the budget. Of course, if there is an extension of Brexit, or a soft Brexit, we need to know if readjustments to the budget will be made. It would be good to see what effects this budget will have in six months.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am glad to have this opportunity to contribute again on budget 2020. I wish to quote from the opening remarks of the Taoiseach earlier because I thought we had gone to a parallel universe:

One of the earliest recorded examples of economic strategising appears in the very first book of the Bible. Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, was able to predict the trajectory of Egypt's economy - a period of boom, followed by a period of bust. Forewarned, he was forearmed, and he was able to guide the country through the worst of the crisis, saving his own people as a result.

Imagine it, the Taoiseach invoking the Bible. That was a mouthful for him or the speech-writer who dug it up for him. The Taoiseach was caught out later in his speech on the pronunciation of a name. I do not have the best pronunciation but he had obviously not even read his speech.

The Taoiseach likes to quote from the Bible but he should try and live by it and look after the people who are less able to look after themselves. The waste in the past number of years has been a shocking indictment of this Government when it has had the considerable benefit of corporation taxes. That money has been squandered like snow in a ditch.

This is a raggie-taggle, harum-scarum budget put together under the mighty cloud of Brexit. I am not making light of Brexit and how serious it is but I am demanding that the Government does something tangible. There have been words, support, strong statements, leaks and unintended leaks, and whatever else from Ms Merkel and others. The Government should tell the EU to pony up. If the EU wants to show support for Ireland, it should put some money in our bank account and not have us borrowing to deal with the astronomical undermining of our economy and people by the forthcoming and unfolding Brexit, a no-deal one if it happens.

The Government has had three years to look at the issue of Brexit and Ireland still seems not to be prepared.

As I said yesterday, the budget is like a fist of Presto. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle will know what Presto is. It is brought out to hens in the yard and when it is thrown out, the cock

will get most of it because he can fight and he is the strongest. That is what this budget is like. The Government is throwing out crumbs to people who have to try and live day to day.

As usual, once the details come into focus, many of us can get a clearer sense of what yesterday's statement by the Minister, which went on for an hour and ten minutes, entails. Reaction has been swift, and, in some cases, it has been brutal. This is among independent observers, including NGOs and others who work at the coalface such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul or housing trusts. The Minister said this is a budget without precedent. It certainly was that. Never before has such a lack of attention been paid to a national housing emergency. This is the most incomprehensible neglect. There was barely a paragraph on it. I salute the hard work done by Fr. Peter McVerry and Brother Kevin in the Capuchin Day Centre who feeds the homeless but the Government hardly mentioned it in the budget. That is certainly unprecedented. It is crazy. The Government just wants to wish this crisis away because it knows an election is in the offing and it thinks it can walk past and ignore it.

The Minister stated that the Government had allocated €6.6 billion for the delivery of social housing supports in the past four years. There is no point talking about the past four years because the Government has failed utterly. I am only speaking for Tipperary but I cannot see the houses that were built in Tipperary right from Carrick-on-Suir to Moneygall, and across from Ballingary to Araglin and the Galtee mountains. The Minister neglected to say that this essentially translates as the transfer of massive sums of public money to private and corporate suppliers of housing. It has been farmed out and it is not working. I am not here to speak on behalf of developers or builders but the reason it is not working is it is not profitable for people to build houses. I have said here a thousand times that it must be profitable for a man or woman to do a day's work for a day's pay. It must be in some way reasonably rewarding. There should be some job satisfaction but, above all, they must be able to make ends meet. The rate of local authority building has been abysmal under the Government. This is apparent everywhere, including in Galway, the county of the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, who is representing the Government in the Chamber.

The Minister for Finance said he was allocating a further €20 million for homeless services to provide support to citizens in emergency accommodation and increase preventative measures, long-term support and day services, yet, as Focus Ireland has pointed out, the range of unmet needs and the absence of policy responses to the particular problems faced by these young vulnerable families is symptomatic of the absence of any overarching strategy to deal with the escalating crisis of family homelessness. That is a damning indictment coming from Focus Ireland, which has a long track record in supporting the homeless and trying to get homes for families. The Government should be ashamed. Focus Ireland also said that while Rebuilding Ireland recognises that family homelessness raises different challenges than homelessness among adults, it offers no analysis or policy responses to these challenges. We have had enough of examining and reports; we need meaningful, tangible responses that will deliver outcomes. I do not like using these kinds of words but we need to put roofs over people's heads and provide for the most needy. The Taoiseach can return to the Bible and wax lyrical about passages from the different scriptures. He has a damn cheek.

Now we hear, as my colleague, Deputy Boyd Barrett, pointed out yesterday, a €27 million cut in central Government funding for local government has taken place. Councils were starved in the years of austerity and in the years since, when corporation tax revenues were available, which they might not be for much longer, the Government used them to plug holes here, there and yonder. It is a con job. They should just get the spin machine out to con the people. The

Government knows that money will not always be there and it is a very unwise practice to use it to block holes in the public purse. It could be called creative accounting. Local government is starved of funding. The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government will announce plans in the House to build so many houses in Tipperary, Kerry or wherever, but the council officials tell us they have no money. There are drawings, a consultation period, Part 8 process and this goes up to the Department, then six months later it goes down to the county council, six months later again it goes back to the Department, and then back down to the county council six months after that. This goes on and on and not a hen house built or even a planning permission approved. This means is that funding from central Government has been reduced by another 13% in this budget, which is staggering. It is all in the fine print. Amidst all the gloss and spin, media briefings and press conferences that went on yesterday, there was nothing about that €27 million. The county councils have closed up shop. We used to build rural cottages in Tipperary. We used to give housing loans to people who were able to build houses but now the county councils do not have even a bob to give them. Where was that 13% cut in the Minister's speech? It was a real trick-of-the-loop job, or hide and go seek or whatever name someone cares to put on it.

The Minister said the Budget was framed in the context of Brexit. Sin é an cheart. That is true but the Brexit issue has emerged as a great place to hide things and keep other things out of sight. People are becoming weary of it. They know the Government has not done proper planning or proper engagement with communities, especially in the Border counties, and in the production sectors that make our exports. I will not mention the beef industry, which the Government has abandoned. Brexit has emerged as a great place to hide but the Government parties will have no place to hide when it comes to the election, whether that is November or next February or May, as the Government hopes. The increases in carbon taxes and on that it has introduced will not come into play after next May. This is creative politics, not accounting, to try to dupe the people but the Government is dealing with an educated electorate, and thank God, it sees the Government for what it is.

Brexit has become a byword for inaction with this Government and an excuse to target the least well off. Gach lá, it is the daoine beaga, the little people, who are the target while the big boys waltz away. The Government would not engage with the banks or tackle the conglomerates as I have demanded for the past five years. In my own county, I refer to Coolmore industries. We are all in awe of its magnificent success in the racing fields and in the employment it gives but it wants 27,000 acres of land. I appealed to, and begged the Government - I will table an amendment to the Finance Bill - to ensure that the owners of any farm over 750 acres, which is big enough for ten families, should be taxed 50% because they are not farmers. These are conglomerates gobbling up land and killing off communities with families unable to survive. Whether it is schools, GAA or soccer fields or clubs, these communities are locked up. The company has put up a fence and there is security everywhere. A snipe would not go through the ditch. When we had landlords, the men and women who worked there always got milk, food and alms and they looked after them but not a snipe would go through these lands because they are so well fenced and secure. There are combines in the fields all summer during harvest time and they have security watching all night in case anyone will attack them. No one is going to attack them but people are extremely upset that any small or medium-sized farmer cannot extend or buy a bit of land because Coolmore wants it all. The IFA, ICMSA and others tell us that they are putting a floor under the price of land. They are and they are pulling the two legs from under any farmer who wants to farm or try to. Now they have gone into cattle, if you do not mind, with beef feedlots for the Goodman empire and the other conglomerates in the

meat business. To hell with the ordinary people. They can put a floor on the price like pulling a shutter and opening or closing curtains.

The Minister for Finance stated: “In preparing for no deal, we can ensure that the Government has the necessary resources at its disposal to meet the impact of Brexit while keeping our public finances on the credible path they have been on since 2011 [no one believes that] and that our responsible management of the public finances means that we will meet the challenge of a no-deal Brexit from a position of strength.” Just look at the national children’s hospital. It is a gaping monstrosity of a black hole gobbling up every other project in health, including mental health. I am happy to be wearing a green ribbon for World Mental Health Day tomorrow. We do not have a single bed in Tiobrad Árann. There is not a single long-stay bed for mental health in the whole county, which is 120 miles long. Today other Members told us that €25 million was unspent in the budget but we cannot get a 24-7 specialist nurse to look after people. They are bundled into overcrowded emergency departments - I salute the staff there - which is no place for people undergoing mental health episodes or psychotic attacks.

They are hunted down the road to take their own lives. What is going on is insane. The lunatics are running the asylum. The Government then has the cheek to state it is managing the finances prudently. This morning the Taoiseach talked about spending €17 billion on health services. He must be in awe and envious of the money the Minister for Health is getting compared to what he was getting when he was the Minister for Health, but it is being wasted and gobbled up. It is like giving candy to a child, with no meaningful assessment of outputs. One million hours has been thrown at home helps, but we insult family carers by not recognising them by not providing them with decent care services. We have young people in County Tipperary who are providing care on a 24/7 basis and suffering from burnout. One can allocate 1 million hours, but there is a need for 2.5 million to allow the home help service to catch up. Above all, there is a need to lift the embargo that is crippling the HSE officials who are dealing with this issue, good officials who are not allowed to provide any more home care packages. It is all spin. We welcome the announcement of an increase of 1 million hours, but, as I said, there is a need for 2.5 million to allow the home help service to catch up. There is also a need to lift the crippling embargo to allow family members who want to do so to go home from hospital and free up stepdown beds. To allow them to do so, there is a need to have homecare packages in place for them. The cheek and arrogance of the Government in stating that it is being prudent. Fifty years ago Fine Gael had the name of being good and financially prudent.

Turning to broadband provision, there is no service available in vast areas of my county, anywhere within a mile or half mile of any town, be it Clonmel, Cahir, Carrick-on-Suir, Cashel, Tipperary town, Roscrea, Nenagh, Dundrum or Templemore. There might be a service available three poles away, but one might as well be in Mongolia as one cannot receive or use it. The Government is discriminating against rural people, be they students, farmers or those who want to work at home and travel less. A farmer must fill in all of the different application forms required, while students must complete their CAO forms, as well as study. People also want broadband for social purposes. It is complete discrimination and diatribe for the Government to suggest it is being financially responsible. The national broadband project has trebled in price and will run to five times the price indicated. It would not matter if it was ten times the price because people living in rural Ireland will never have a service.

Eir was mentioned by the Government. For while I was hoping the project might be given to that company, but thanks be to God that did not happen. I know of a 93 year old woman who was without her telephone service for several weeks and every excuse in the world was given.

She was relying on it to be able to use her independence alarm to provide for her safety as she lives alone. She had to wait seven weeks in 2019 to have the phone fixed. I salute the workers in Eir because there are not enough of them on the ground. They have to deal with all kinds of bunkum. They have to obtain a road opening licence from the county council in order to fix a wire. My county is one of the worst in giving such licences on time. One can have to wait for five or six weeks. An entire community near Fethard was without connections recently because of a delay of seven to eight weeks which resulted in total confusion and bedlam. To hell with the people of rural Ireland. Once we have everything in Dublin, they do not matter. Eir should be ashamed of itself. Adam Ledwith is our go-between here and also frustrated, as we all are.

When the late Albert Reynolds took power, he promised that he would have a telephone in every house within one month and he did. He was able to do this back in 1979. Now, it takes seven, eight, ten or 15 weeks to have a phone fixed. When one has to use the phone line, one is on it for an hour and 20 minutes, as one has to listen to music and is passed from one person to another, from Billy to Jack. One has to appeal not to be passed on to somebody else to have one's query dealt with. The human touch is gone. It is disgraceful how people are being treated, especially in rural Ireland but also in cities. There are answering machines to deal with everything, but there is no one available, except for slick PR ads.

I mentioned yesterday the disastrous economic stewardship of the national children's hospital, a project which is going to suck up resources. I have six grandchildren and another is expected any hour. None of those children, should they ever need it, will be able to access it because one cannot access it by road and there is no helipad. A helipad will be required three stories high that will be capable of taking a light aircraft on a calm day. It is madness and lunacy. The lunatics are running the asylum.

The Government had its chance to dump the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, but it would not do it. Where is the credibility? The Parliamentary Budget Office has informed us today that a total of €440 million in recurring over-runs in the Departments of Health, Education and Skills and Justice and Equality is expected in 2019. This means that budget 2020 projects Supplementary Estimates of €335 million, €50 million and 55 million for the Health, Education and Skills and Justice and Equality Votes, respectively. Is this creative accounting? It beggars belief. Does the Government think people will accept this drip-feed of information? The devil is in the detail. He is certainly roaming around here and dressed in a collar and tie and sometimes wearing a dickie bow. This has been a consistent feature in the lifetime of the Government. The Minister for Health, in particular, seems to be absolutely incapable of manning his Department. We heard what his former friend, Mr. Tony O'Brien, had to say about him. This is the same Minister who sat here one night and defended him. Mr. O'Brien said he was like a frightened rabbit caught in the headlights. I said he would not run a sweet shop or move a wheelie bin up and down the street. He has no experience and no expertise but plenty of arrogance. There were 500 patients on trolleys yesterday in our little country. There are busloads of people being organised by the Healy-Raes and Deputy Michael Collins. A number of constituents of mine have also travelled to Belfast. "Belfast or blind" is their motto. It is some legacy of the Government. How many of the people in question in west Cork and County Kerry were strong and lifelong members of Fine Gael? That is how they were treated - they were being allowed to go blind. There is none so blind as those who cannot see. That is the Government's motto, but the people in question can sense and know what the Government is doing to them and they will be waiting at the ballot box with their peann luaidhe or little pencil. They will give the message where it hurts and will finally get through. Unfortunately by then,

too much damage will have been done.

The leadership of the Irish Hospital Consultants Association, IHCA, which I met recently at a briefing here, voted no confidence in the Minister for Health at an emergency meeting held to debate what consultants see as a crisis in the public system, but he will still appear on “Six One News” and bluff and blunder. He will announce a dental scheme for young people without engaging in consultation with the Dental Association of Ireland or understanding how it will deal with the proposal. When I was young, there used to be school visits to have our teeth checked, but that is happening less and less. Now there is utter confusion as children will all be told to go to the dental surgery without an appointment and that they will receive treatment for free. It is a total con job to scatter people with a Blunderbuss, just like the British did in the war to divide and conquer. Both we and the Government know that they will not receive any treatment and that these are the actions of a con artist. The Government should be in a circus, but I would not put it on a high wire because it can only walk on the ground.

The IHCA made the extraordinary statement that the Minister was shirking his responsibility to fix the health service, but he does not know what shirking is because he has shirked responsibility for every aspect of the job since he was given it. He should not have been given it as he had no experience to put him in charge of a €17 billion budget, at which more and more money is been thrown every other year. The president of the IHCA, Dr. Donal O’Hanlon, said consultants did not believe the Minister had the authority, understanding, inclination or experience to deliver timely, quality hospital care services. They are not my words but those of the president of the IHCA. I am adding my own words because I know from personal experience the arrogance that oozes from him. He thinks he can walk on water, but it will swallow him up. He may be able to walk on the seafront in Greystones or Bray, but the water will encapsulate him and he will be gasping for breath. The president of the IHCA said the Minister had increasingly become complacent and deaf to the suffering of patients across Ireland. Of course, he is. As I said, there are 500 patients on trolleys. It is disorganised bedlam in emergency departments. Putting mental health patients in on top of them, as has happened in Tipperary, is unacceptable. We begged and pleaded, including Caroline Lonergan and many others in Tipperary, for families to have a simple room, to where patients who were psychotic could be brought. The families are begging for help, but they are grasping at straws. They could rest in peace in such a room, away from the madness and bedlam in the emergency department. However, they were refused, notwithstanding the fact that a new 40-bed modular unit was being built but which will not be staffed. The person in question will not be given one of these beds.

What kind of policy is the Government implementing? It is like the extermination of the Jews - let people die on the streets and in the fields and take their own lives. The Government does not care. Everything is all right in Dublin, but to hell with everybody else. After three years in office, the Minister has presided over an unacceptable increase of 153,914 patients on outpatient waiting lists. Imagine these figures. One would hardly see them or read them out because they are so embarrassing. Some of those 153,914 patients have been waiting for three of four years. This amounts to a 37% increase, or almost five additional patients every hour, while over the same period, the number of patients treated on trolleys has increased by 36% since May 2016. The Government should be called the “Government of the trolleys”. There is a song about my trolley and your trolley, but these figures are disgusting. The Government has not one shred or ounce of shame. If it had then it would not preside over the figures for the number of people treated on trolleys. In many cases in South Tipperary General Hospital, Clonmel, these patients do not have a blanket, a pillow or a sheet to lie on. Can one imagine that? Our NGOs

go all over the world helping out in war-torn states and would not see conditions as bad. Not a pillow, not a sheet nor a blanket. They must cover themselves with their jackets and patients of 93 and 94 years of age have to lie there with huge indignity. There are no sockets along those corridors into which drips or other intravenous equipment could be fitted up. It is disgusting. People in prisons are treated 20 times better. These patients have nobody to feed them, to help to wash them and there is no dignity in going to the bathroom. It is scandalous. There are only vending machines laid on for them. The Government should be brought to the Hague to be tried for war crimes. Noise on those corridors causes sleep deprivation and sleep deprivation is a war crime. The Government should be summoned to the Hague and the International Court of Justice for a war crime in the way it treats patients in Tipperary and throughout the State, and especially those mentally unstable people in Tipperary, which could be any of us at any time. None of us know what can trigger a mental health issue. It could be just a very fine line. These people are being treated with disdain. The Government should be tried for war crimes because of sleep deprivation abuse. Yet, hundreds of millions of euro more will be allocated to the very same Minister, in the absence of significant reform around recruitment and retention. There has been no reform whatsoever but still the Government will throw money at it. It does not appear to matter. Every year the bill grows by nearly €750 million.

I welcome that the Christmas bonus will be paid, but again people have to be thankful for what should be a right or a just reward for our people, who built our country. *Ní neart go cur le chéile*. They raised their families and worked very hard to educate their families. The Government, however, crows about it and claims how good it is. We are aware that another €30 million is required for non-recurring costs in other Departments, including the Departments of Finance and Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Department of the Taoiseach was not mentioned at all. I read a report in the newspaper recently about it - I do not look at them a lot - and I saw that the current Taoiseach spends a lot more on little incidental expenses than the former Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, did. It is probably on makeovers to make sure he is ready for the selfies. It is disgusting. Where is the moral compass? If they ever had one the Government has certainly lost it, and this Taoiseach has lost it. The people of Ireland are waiting for him to do his tour around the country when he thinks he will be going out to get votes.

Then there is the matter of the banks and the favourable treatment they have received yet again. Stamp duty has increased again by 1.5%. I put it to the Minister of State with responsibility for housing, Deputy English, that his Government has allowed a situation where families are trying to repurchase their family homes back from vulture funds. The former Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, said that vultures were a necessary part of nature. Vultures, however, come and attack my sheep when they are lambing, and pick the eyes out of them before the lambs are even fully born. That is what vultures are. This is what people think of vultures, yet the Government believes they are a necessary part of life today. People who may want to buy back their homes will now find it much more difficult. Part of the 1.5% increase means they would have to form and set up a company. They cannot get money except from moneylenders at 10% or 15%. A decade has passed since the taxpayers bailed out the banks to the tune of €67 billion. The banks are writing their own law every day of the week. They are merciless and our main pillar banks are the most merciless of all. They do not care about people, people's lives or their mental health. There have been suicides and yet the Government makes it easier for the banks all of the time. The Government will not engage with the banks and will not touch them or put any tax on them. The Government is in hock to the banks and is afraid of them. The banks and big businesses, the meat industry and the big multiples, and the conglomerates who buy up all of the land, own the Government. They have the Government in both pockets

and the pockets are zipped. The Government is toothless, useless and fruitless because it will not even engage with them.

Consider the beef industry for example. The Government set up another task force. Who does it put in charge of it? A retired senior civil servant who was a Secretary General of the Department for however long he was there. There is nothing wrong with this person in his job or his person, but he is a total and absolute insider. He knows every comma, every dot and every syllable in the rules that the farmers want changed. These are the rules that always support the factories. The appointed person should be able to be an independent chairman and not have anything to do with the Department. While I have nothing against him personally, he should not be there. The role should be filled by somebody from outside who knows nothing about the industry but who would be clinical, who would give a fair hearing to the beef producer organisations and independent farmers and who would put respectful manners on Meat Industry Ireland, MII. It is a joke to think that this insider, and a safe pair of hands as far as the Government is concerned, would have been reappointed. The Government has lost all interest in the beef industry. The Government pumped billions of euro into Anglo Irish Bank, Irish Nationwide, Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland and Permanent TSB at a great social and financial costs to the taxpayer. Many lives were lost, taken at their own hands because of bullying and intimidation. Today that bill stands at €42 billion, with the State's financial watchdog telling us that taxpayers will continue to pay €1 billion every year. This is shocking.

I have only nóiméad amháin left but I want to single out a mean and desperate cut made in yesterday's budget. Once again it was a sleight of hand by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Madigan. Last week it was the hare coursing and the greyhound racing. Now the Minister, Deputy Madigan, has unceremoniously decided to take the funding from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which is an outstanding organisation that is valued by many of us here. We and our children have taken part in its events. For 15 years, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann was funded separately to the Arts Council, and by God did they earn it. The Comhaltas promoted our ndúchas, our heritage, our rince, ár n-amhránaíocht agus gach rud mar sin. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann had 750,000 visitors at its most recent fleadh close to the Minister of State, Deputy English's constituency in Drogheda. It was held there for the past two years. There were 15,000 performers from all over the world. Comhaltas operates in 18 different countries worldwide. Some €50 million was brought into the Drogheda economy because of the fleadh in the last year. What kind of a death wish has the Minister, Deputy Madigan, against rural Ireland? The Minister has decided, without any debate or discussion, to give the funding to the Arts Council. Comhaltas must now go begging, cap in hand, to the Arts Council to get money from it. We know who will win that war. It will be the fancy things that are put on such as parades here in Dublin, and God knows what. It will be every kind of different arty-farty stuff, although the arts do great work too. Comhaltas should not be in that situation. The organisation has outstanding prowess. It has done us proud on the world stage, and iar-Sheanadóir, Labhrás Ó Murchú, is its ard-stiúrthóir. I ask the Government, and I demand, that this money be put back in where it was and not to have Comhaltas going like beggars looking for the funding. It has earned it. It has done us proud. It has promoted our heritage, our teanga agus ár ndúchas. This Minister, Deputy Madigan, does not know who to attack next in rural Ireland. This is a direct attack on our heritage, our ndúchas, our culture, our rince, ár dteanga agus gach rud mar sin. The funding has to be put back in where it was, and this has to be answered in a debate in the Dáil.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: We have all had time to digest yesterday's budget. It is ab-

solutely certain that most of the Fine Gael Deputies and candidates will be up in arms about the inability to produce the now annual, bog standard “what the budget means for you” leaflet because in reality, the budget means very little to most cohorts of Irish people.

The budget has been framed against a no-deal Brexit and it was a judgment call to produce one budget. The Social Democrats alternative budget recognised that a no-deal Brexit was a possibility but we advocated a supplementary budget when there is more clarity around the issue in order that the major issues could be addressed and not put off for another year for another Government after the next general election.

What Ireland is this budget for? There is no doubt that people who are financially sound and who have the luxury of waiting to see how Brexit plays out will regard this budget well. A person earning more than €75,000 a year, who is a special assignee from abroad and can avail of the special assignee relief programme, SARP, and who has had his or her very favourable tax status extended will be very happy with the budget. If a person is on the Irish Greyhound Board, he or she will be relieved and very happy to see €17 million coming its way. A private landlord will be relieved that renters have not been given the assistance to lower their rent costs or even to keep the costs static at what are already ridiculously high prices.

The Minister for Finance made quite the song and dance yesterday about what he referred to as good governance and responsible politics. He even had the audacity to go so far as to claim credit for the responsible management of the public finances and somehow managed to do it with a straight face. Perhaps that is because he studiously avoided any reference to the billions of euro wasted on cost overruns at the national children’s hospital and the upcoming national broadband plan. I heard the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, say this morning that the intention was to sign the contract for the latter within the next couple of weeks. It is difficult to say it is a prudent decision when facing the prospect of a no-deal Brexit. The Budget Statement did not discuss how the glossy Project Ireland 2040, the national development plan, had been fundamentally undermined by the fact that the billions of euro supposed to pay for the projects listed therein had been used up in funding cost overruns at the national children’s hospital and on the national broadband plan. These points underline the lack of prudence, which is something the public sees clearly. In the vein of the old adage, actions speak louder than words. One can use the words “prudent” and “responsible”, but people will make up their minds when they look at the reality. Essentially, they have already done so, from which there is no rowing back.

In the housing allocation the Government added €80 million for the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme. When added to the projected budget for this year, it brings the total HAP budget for 2020 to just over €500 million, which is a fortune. It is €500 million of public funds transferred directly to private landlords in a move that will do nothing to curtail the spiralling unaffordability of rents and everything to exacerbate the problem. The Government has also ignored the urgent need to freeze rents nationally and address the affordability issue by implementing a proper, affordable and secure rental scheme. Renters will be impacted on by Brexit. They are terrified by it because of the precarious lives they are living.

The budget announced yesterday is yet another step in the galloping commodification of housing that is an ideological hallmark of the Government. It is about the Government outsourcing responsibility and individualising the problem. This is writ large in the public pronouncements by vulture funds that Ireland is the gift that keeps on giving and in recent comments by high earners who said they were shocked to see what tax rates they would be paying if they

did not have favourable tax schemes to protect them. The budget underlines the Government's ideological politics of big business and big money. That is the Ireland at which the budget aims.

Yesterday the Government continued the now daily tradition of greenwashing by once again making all the right sounds about climate change. On radio this morning the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, lauded the extension of the retrofit scheme. He argued that if someone was unable to change to an electric vehicle, he or she could undertake a home retrofit instead. While that sounds good, not everyone has thousands of euro just sitting around waiting for him or her to think up ways to spend it. A pay-as-you-save scheme would have been essential for people looking to retrofit, but they have not been given the opportunity because the Government has not put such a scheme in place. Its approach is about individual action and individual responsibility, but we need a collective approach. That is why the Social Democrats have called for a front-loading of the retrofit scheme, whereby the work could be undertaken and the money repaid via a pay-as-you-save scheme.

Carbon tax has been a feature of budgets for the past ten years, but none of the revenue from it has been ring-fenced so far. Most of it will still not be ring-fenced next year either. Only revenue from the new increase announced yesterday in the existing carbon tax will be ring-fenced, but a song and dance has been made about carbon tax this year as though it were a new initiative from the Government to try to sell itself using environmental opportunities. Since 2010, €3.34 billion has been taken in in carbon tax. This year €440 million was taken in. All of it went into the Central Fund to pay off our enormous national debt or run services. It has not been used to change behaviour. Next year's €90 million increase will be ring-fenced, not the €90 million, plus the original €440 million. If the tax is about changing behaviour, why is all of it not being used? Otherwise, it is just greenwashing.

The budget contains one or two welcome changes. One initiative, one for which I have argued year in, year out, will impact on the small number of people under 25 years of age who are exiting care. If they are in receipt of the HAP or a couple of other types of payment, they will now receive the adult social protection rate instead of the lower rate. This is an important recognition of vulnerable persons. However, the non-means testing of the social protection budget means a *de facto* cut.

Other news of particular interest to young people is that there will be a noticeable lack of investment in the third level sector. Students face significant increases in the cost of living, a rental market that ensures they cannot afford accommodation and inadequate public transport. This means that many are dropping out of third level education, deferring or not taking up places in the first place. We know that there is this crisis, but the Thirty-second Dáil will not deal with it because the budget is the last in this Dáil.

I cannot conclude without referencing what essentially amounts to a pretend health budget. There is a great deal of spin about curtailing the annual Supplementary Estimates and so on, but no reference is made to the fact that there is *de facto* an embargo. We have all heard about people who, having found jobs, are just waiting for their start dates, but the House can be sure they will not start until 1 January. Their employment has not been factored in to the overrun. The Government is postponing the real cost for inclusion in next year's budget.

Almost 1 million people are on healthcare waiting lists. While I welcome the re-announcement of new therapist posts, the allocation of these resources must be strategically targeted to ensure areas such as Meath, Kildare and Fingal will catch up. During a previous recalibration

on foot of a system being put in place by my colleague, Deputy Shortall, before she left the Department of Health, they were the areas that gained most, but they are still far behind. Where there are large young populations, how their futures are determined cannot come down to a postcode lottery.

Other than that from the financially comfortable, most commentary has described the budget as a damp squib. The majority of the country cannot afford it to be a damp squib, including those who rely on disability services and supports. Those facing eviction notices from landlords cannot afford a damp squib. Those who struggle to put food on the table or to heat their homes cannot afford a damp squib. The Minister of State, Deputy English, knows them because just as they come to my constituency office, they also go to his. Those who get up early in the morning, who work very hard and are doing everything society expects them to do, find themselves left with mere pennies at the end of the week if they are lucky. They struggle with the cost of living and they cannot afford a budget that is a damp squib. This is the last budget this Government will deliver, and it is a damp squib.

It is worth remembering that doing nothing has an impact in a continuing crisis. Those crises have hidden behind the curtain that is Brexit and we can see them worsen year on year. Health and housing are the two big areas but the provision of disability services continues to be a problem. In addition to underfunding, there is a lack of strategic thinking in the area. That is the reason we wanted to see a two-budget strategy. We have all spoken to volunteers who work with sporting bodies and the arts community, among other groups in the voluntary sector. Very small amounts of money would make a very big difference to them. It was important that we could see how Brexit played out and see what the opportunities are, but we have postponed those measures for another year.

One allocation that looks very vindictive in the budget is the fact that the Data Protection Commission did not get the expected income it sought. Now, it is facing a fight with the Government with inadequate resources. That seems very targeted and vindictive and could be counterproductive. We all acknowledge that a crash-out Brexit is a very real danger and we must be prudent in managing the situation. For that reason, we thought a two-budget strategy would be the right way to go. Is this about the timing of Brexit or is it about the timing of the next general election? We all know there will be a general election within the next six or eight months. Brexit is the curtain behind which many of the domestic crises have been hidden. They will not be ignored when it comes to knocking on doors. It was evident in the local elections that people are concerned about how public services are being delivered or not being delivered. That is a message the Government will hear loud and clear when it comes to knocking on doors whenever the election takes place.

Deputy Catherine Martin: The Government has made a lot of noise about how this budget is about two things, namely, Brexit and climate. Let me say right here and now very clearly, this budget is not a climate budget. It is nowhere near a climate budget. It is a further tinkering around the edges when it comes to climate action, instead of the wholesale changes we so desperately need in every area of Government policy. The Government is so concerned with the €90 million it intends to raise through increasing the price of carbon, that it honestly seems to think that is all the climate action it needs. The Government honestly seems to think that €90 million and a cycleway here or there is all that is needed to tackle the climate crisis, out of a budget of €70 billion. Frankly, it is embarrassing.

Carbon pricing is an essential part of what we must do if we are serious about curbing emis-

sions but it must be done in a fair way. It would be much more progressive and fair to raise the carbon price as the Green Party proposed and as was recommended by the ESRI, by returning every cent raised back to the pockets of every person across the country. That would have been a much fairer way than the approach the Government has taken, and would have ensured that we begin on a road to curbing our carbon emissions, while protecting many of those who would be most affected.

The Government has provided €1.2 billion for the possibility of a no-deal Brexit, with further moneys, as required. Where is the similar scale of urgency for the climate emergency? Where is the similar level of urgency for the biodiversity emergency? Where is the similar level of urgency for climate justice, for reshaping our economic model to value social and caring work, to reduce income and wealth inequality as we move towards a more sustainable, less wasteful, more caring economy?

The Minister was right in one thing yesterday; there were no surprises in this budget. Given Fine Gael's record over the past eight years in government on climate, we did not expect much. We dared to hope, but with its record we knew it was a slim hope. The Minister made good on his promise. There were no surprises. I will give him that. In the entire budget there was not one truly ambitious move on climate. Just as expected, there were no surprises there. There was no change of direction in housing, no indication the Government is moving away from its private market-based approach that has not been working. There were no surprises there. There was no scale of ambition in transport, education, health, social protection or any Department at all. No surprises means no ambition. It was a *status quo* budget from a *status quo* Government.

We do welcome some individual measures, such as the increase in the qualified child allowance. That is something we sought, albeit on a greater scale. We also welcome the increase for lone parents. It is something, but it is far from where it needs to be. However, on climate, there was so little. The just transition commissioner is welcome. For that reason, it is all the more surprising that Fine Gael had little or no interest in our comprehensive just transition legislation, which was before the House only a few weeks ago. The Minister indicated that it would meet a death through the dreaded money message. There is so little for protecting biodiversity. A total of €5 million was allocated to peatland restoration. If the Government was serious about climate, it would be ten times that amount. A total of 2% of the spend on transport was allocated to cycling. It is astounding that we are still only at 2% for cycling. We should be making it easy for children to cycle and walk to school and for people to feel safe to take that alternative, but only 2% was allocated to cycling. The same goes for the lack of ambition in afforestation and retrofitting. Meagre steps in the right direction will not cut it any more.

While it might be a Brexit budget, or rather a take-cover-under-Brexit budget, there is no certainty for people and SMEs in the measures provided. There is no clarity. It is deeply disingenuous and insulting to all of the students and schoolchildren who have campaigned and gone on strike for climate, to call it a climate budget. Likewise, for all those taking part in the Extinction Rebellion protests, and most importantly, for the future generations of people in Ireland and around the world who will have to deal with the fallout of the State's inaction on climate on days like today.

Not alone is there no ambition to deal with climate change in the budget, there is no ambition in the budget for education. While the new allocations for special educational needs are to be welcomed, there is not enough in this budget to view education as a priority, to provide for the future and to invest in children. Schools are struggling because of capitation funding

cuts and are losing teachers to pay inequality. Parents are struggling under the weight of back-to-school costs. Once again, the Government has neglected the ongoing crisis in third-level education funding. Universities are in crisis, while students across the country are grappling with the second-highest fees in Europe, a skyrocketing cost of living, housing issues and lack of transport. There is nothing in the budget to help students to break down the barriers. There is no real increase in funding for higher education, and no extra supports for students.

The opportunity to use the human capital initiative for green skills development is also a missed opportunity. Educating young people for the new green economy is an essential step and it was missed in the budget. That leads on to the fact that there is no real ambition in this budget on housing. Once again, the failure to adequately engage in the provision of affordable housing options and to stem the tide of families being made homeless is brutally apparent. There has been no change of tack and no change of course, while there is no security for renters. It is just a continuation of a plan that evidently is not working and has not been working for years. The Government continues to rely on the private market to deliver homes for sale and rental without tackling the issue head-on. It is not providing the level of funding needed to build social and affordable housing. It is also failing to invest in the cost rental model on the scale proposed by the Green Party that would truly protect renters. Continuing the help-to-buy scheme without addressing the underlying problems of affordability and supply is going to keep young people shackled to mortgages for unaffordable homes. As a result, they will be at risk of interest rate increases and subsequently paying large amounts of their income in mortgage repayments.

There is no ambition for health services in the budget, certainly no ambition for mental health services. Students and young people are suffering intensely from the lack of provision of adequate mental health supports. At a time when young people are under more pressure than ever because of high fees and soaring rents, most are having extreme difficulty in accessing counselling and psychotherapy services on campus. Outpatient waiting times for CAMHS are shocking, especially when one thinks of the urgent need of young people in crisis. Only 68 more staff are in the mental health support services of the HSE today than in 2009. More than 2,500 children are waiting for mental health services, while more than 8,000 people are waiting for primary care psychology services. However, we let them wait. The Government continues to let them wait in agony. It is not only the people directly concerned who are suffering with mental health problems but also their families. They have to watch them suffer without being able to help. Shame on the Government. However, this comes as no surprise after eight years of Fine Gael in government. This is a meek, ineffectual budget delivered just when Irish people are taking to the streets and raising their voices to seek change. We need change and action, but this budget will not bring them about.

Sitting suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 5.30 p.m.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): We are in a critical phase of the Brexit process. The European Council meets next week ahead of the rapidly approaching Brexit deadline of 31 October. Despite media speculation - of which there has been plenty, although much of it is inaccurate - this Government has been always clear we want to be helpful and we are willing to consider proposals that might break the impasse. Ireland wants a positive outcome to this process, and we will keep working until the last minute to try to find a way forward. The Taoiseach spoke to the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, yesterday, and they will meet again tomorrow. I met Michel Barnier last night in Brussels to take stock of the ongoing talks between the task force and the UK. To be clear, Ireland cannot

accept a deal that risks undermining the Good Friday Agreement or jeopardises our place in the European Single Market through unproven solutions or future promises. Michel Barnier reaffirmed clearly yesterday that this remains the EU position also.

Ireland continues to work closely with the European Commission on interim arrangements for the Border in the event of a no-deal Brexit. We have a shared twin objective of avoiding a hard Border on the island of Ireland and protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Ireland's place therein. The UK's current proposals do not form a basis for an agreement. We know that. We need real and honest solutions to avoid a no-deal Brexit and all that will entail for Ireland, the EU and the UK. The UK must match its stated aspirations for a deal with legally operational and credible solutions that are compatible with the withdrawal agreement. The UK proposals of last week were a welcome step forward, but there is more road to travel, particularly in the area of customs. The Government has been clear about the potential cost of Brexit for Ireland throughout this process, particularly a no-deal Brexit. A no-deal Brexit will never be Ireland's or the EU's choice but nevertheless, we must continue to prepare for that outcome.

In preparing budget 2020, the Government was acutely aware of the scale of Brexit's implications and the need to ensure we put in place timely, targeted and temporary measures for the sectors most exposed. Prudence dictated we prepare budget 2020 on the basis of a no-deal Brexit. Overall, the Government has made €1.2 billion available in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Some €650 million will be made available to support the most vulnerable sectors, including agriculture, enterprise and tourism, as well as assisting the workers who will be affected in the most vulnerable regions. Some €355 million will be provided to minimise trade disruption through investments in ports and airports, primarily in infrastructure but also in staffing, including through Global Ireland 2025, enterprise, tourism, farming and competitiveness supports. Some €220 million will be used to provide immediate assistance to firms and enterprises, including farms across the country. This includes new initiatives to assist enterprises to transition and restructure. For some, this will be as they look at new markets and having to potentially change the kind of products they produce. We are providing immediate support for beef farmers and for those involved in fisheries, as Members would expect. We will continue to support food companies to reorientate towards new products and markets, and to support other sectors to improve their competitiveness. Some €40 million has been allocated to the tourism sector for the worst affected regions and new marketing initiatives. InterTradeIreland will receive an extra €2 million to support cross-Border firms, North and South. These measures are in addition to the wide range of supports already in place, including the €600 million for Brexit-related loan schemes. At the same time, the Government has sought to help employers and employees in vulnerable companies to keep them at work. Some €45 million will be provided to support businesses and workers that may face difficulties in the short-term. The national training fund will support tailored training and upskilling for workers. Further funding will be released as the impact on particular sectors and regions becomes clearer. This will allow for targeted measures for the most affected parts of the country when needed.

I recently updated the House on our Brexit preparations, so I will not expand on the full range of steps we have taken to mitigate the risk Brexit poses to our businesses and citizens. Suffice to say the Government will ensure this work will continue for as long as necessary in all Government Departments and State agencies, in tandem with the EU.

I am pleased to have secured an increase of almost 9% in the current allocation to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2020, known in my Department as Vote 28. This will support Brexit preparedness in the implementation of Global Ireland 2025 and in continuing to

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deliver a world class passport service. In June 2018, the Government launched Global Ireland 2025, an ambitious plan which aims to double the scope and impact of Ireland's international presence by 2025. This expansion will deepen our impact across priority regions. It will leverage opportunities to grow our trade and inward investment, it will further strengthen political relationships with our partners and it will enable us to better support Irish citizens and our diaspora abroad. As a small, open economy that depends on a stable international trading system, we are particularly vulnerable to the serious risks now facing the rules-based order that has defined international relations and trade for decades. We cannot afford to underestimate the risks they pose for us, and it is in our overwhelming national interest that we step up our efforts to support the international system on which we depend.

Over the lifetime of Global Ireland 2025, Ireland will open 26 new diplomatic missions. We will also strengthen the existing embassy network. We have made good progress already, with the opening of new embassies in Monrovia, Wellington, Bogotá, Santiago and Amman, and the opening of new consulates in Vancouver, Mumbai, Cardiff, Los Angeles and Frankfurt. This expansion will continue next year with the opening of new embassies in Kiev, Manila and Rabat, creating new opportunities for Irish businesses.

The Government decided Ireland should participate in Expo 2020 in Dubai. This is expected to attract some 25 million visitors over the six-month exhibition period and is a unique promotion opportunity for Ireland. Our presence at Expo 2020 will offer a global platform to connect Ireland's universities, agencies, businesses and institutions with the rest of the world. It will highlight Irish innovation, support trade and tourism opportunities in the United Arab Emirates, UAE, and the wider gulf region, and strengthen bilateral relations with the UAE, for which Expo 2020 is a major national priority. My Department is the lead Department for this team Ireland project, involving a number of Departments and State agencies, as Members would expect.

The Passport Office has seen a threefold increase in applications related to Brexit in 2019, compared to the pre-referendum baseline. Almost 850,000 passports and passport cards were issued between January and the end of September 2019, an increase of more than 15% over the same period in 2018. It is likely the level of passport demand will continue to grow into next year. The implementation of the online channel for adult and child renewals has transformed the passport application process. This award-winning service is a resounding success, with more than 760,000 applicants for passport books and cards processed through the online channel since it was launched in 2017. So far in 2019, 62% of all eligible renewal applications were processed online. This service has already delivered significant savings and efficiencies and improved customer service. For 2020, the Government has allocated almost €838 million for official development assistance, ODA, an increase of just under €21 million on the 2019 budget allocation. Some €551 million will be managed by my Department, with the remaining accounted for through Ireland's share of the EU development co-operation instruments and ODA-eligible contributions from other Departments. This is the sixth consecutive year allocations to ODA have increased and the level of funding is approaching pre-financial crisis levels. We expect ODA, as a percentage of GNI, to be in the region of 0.31%, and next year's figure will be similar to that of this year.

The Government's allocation to ODA has increased by €131 million, or 18.5% in the past two budgets since the Taoiseach and I launched Global Ireland 2025. The Government remains firmly committed to making significant incremental steps toward meeting the Global Ireland 2025 objective of allocating 0.7% of GNI for ODA by 2030. Ireland is well recognised for our

commitment to reducing poverty and vulnerability, our focus on the least developed countries and for reaching those furthest behind first.

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Let me begin by highlighting the challenging budgetary environment for next year. We are in an unprecedented position and we need to be responsible in our preparations for the possibility of a no-deal Brexit. On my own behalf and that of Members, I offer my continued good wishes to the dedication, hard work and commitment of the Tánaiste. I wish him well in the difficult days that lie ahead. We know that he continues to enjoy the support of everybody in this House in his unique leadership role at this time of challenge.

In the context of these challenges, I am pleased to have secured an overall increase of €190 million for the justice and equality Vote group in 2020, which will safeguard and support the progress that has been made in recent years towards our vision of a safer, fairer and more inclusive Ireland. The total 2020 allocation for the justice sector is €2.98 billion, split into six Votes: An Garda Síochána, prisons, the Courts Service, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC, and the Policing Authority.

Regarding the Garda Vote, I am particularly pleased with the increase of €122 million. This is a clear illustration of the Government's commitment to the Garda reform process and the implementation of the plan, A Policing Service for the Future. The current expenditure allocation has increased by almost €98 million. In real terms, this means that the Garda Commissioner will be able to recruit up to 700 new gardaí next year along with administrative and professional support staff. The overtime budget of €95 million will be maintained for 2020. In combination with ever increasing Garda numbers, this will provide flexibility of deployment for the Garda Commissioner to meet possible demands over and above those which can be met from rostered Garda resources.

Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24-7 basis. The key importance of information and communications technology, ICT, and digital innovation was emphasised in the report of the Commission on the Future Of Policing in Ireland. In this regard, significant capital funding in the order of €75 million will continue the vital investment in ICT. This will support the ongoing business requirements of An Garda Síochána and enable it to deploy the latest cutting-edge technology in the fight against crime. The capital budget, which has increased by 26% to €116.5 million, includes €9 million to strengthen and expand the Garda fleet. Some €32 million will provide for the Garda capital building and refurbishment programme.

This year, my Department embarked on a programme of significant transformation from a traditional divisional structure to a functional structure. This move to a functional organisation mode is the largest change programme in the history of the Department. The work of the Department has been aligned under a civil justice and equality pillar and a criminal justice pillar. Both pillars are supported by central enabling functions of corporate, transparency and European affairs. The new structure will enable more flexibility, better service to our customers, greater transparency and accountability and evidence-led strategic planning. Funding for this reform will continue in 2020.

Turning briefly to the justice and equality Vote, an increase of €47.6 million, some 9%, brings it to €549 million. This will be used to improve access to justice and to provide supports

to the vulnerable people who need them. I am particularly pleased to announce funding of €1 million for the establishment of the judicial council, bringing the total allocation to €1.25 million. The council will have a significant role to play in ensuring excellence across the judicial system, developing sentencing guidelines to ensure greater consistency and examining the issue of personal injury claims. An additional €4 million for criminal legal aid brings the total allocation to €65.3 million. The Legal Aid Board has been allocated €42.2 million for next year, including €1 million to continue the Abhaile scheme for mortgage arrears. Since it was set up in 2016, the scheme has provided financial advice and negotiation support to more than 12,000 households at risk of losing their homes.

Forensic Science Ireland's expert advice and scientific analysis contributes greatly to the investigation of crime. I am pleased that the allocation for the construction of the forensic science laboratory will be almost €40 million in 2020. An additional €2.6 million in current funding brings the total allocation for Forensic Science Ireland to €54.4 million.

The work of the Probation Service is key in reducing recidivism. The total allocation of €48.9 million for the service includes additional funding of €1.1 million for next year. It has also been possible to allocate additional funding for a number of other areas within the justice and equality Vote, including €500,000 for the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, bringing the total allocation to €11.2 million. An additional €500,000 will bring the total for the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB, to €9.1 million. I acknowledge the great work this body does on a daily basis to protect people from harm and bring criminals to book. Some €500,000 will bring the allocation for the Private Security Authority to €3.8 million next year. The Data Protection Commissioner's overall allocation of €16.9 million is up by more than €1.6 million from last year. An additional €700,000 brings resources for the Inspector of Prisons to €1.2 million. Expanding and developing that office will be a priority next year. I am sure Members will agree that research is vital to support evidence-based policymaking and service delivery. I am pleased, therefore, to announce a total allocation of €1.3 million for research, which includes an important allocation of €700,000 in funding for the Central Statistics Office, CSO, for its sexual violence prevalence study.

Earlier I mentioned our vision of a safer, fairer and more inclusive Ireland. It is positive that an equality budgeting analysis took place this year following our engagement with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, which has provided us with a framework. This approach to budgeting is one that we will need to augment and be guided by into the future. I am pleased that for 2020 it is possible to provide increased funding of more than €700,000 for LGBTI+ initiatives. This funding will support implementation of the LGBTI+ strategy that the Government plans to publish shortly. I am also pleased that funding has been maintained for the various subheads within programme D of the Vote - An Equal and Inclusive Society.

Direct provision has been the topic of much commentary in recent weeks. There has been a significant increase in the number of people seeking international protection this year, with a 53% increase recorded in the past nine months. This has naturally put the system under considerable pressure. I wish to acknowledge the hard work, commitment and ongoing dedication of my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy David Stanton, in this area. While funding of more than €80 million is being allocated towards the significant pressures being faced by the direct provision system, the requirements and policy responses will need to be kept under review on a whole-of-Government basis in 2020. An interdepartmental group chaired by my Department is reviewing how best to meet our obligations in providing material supports to people seeking

international protection in our State. Its recommendations, which are expected shortly and will feed into considerations by the Cabinet committee on social policy, are expected to have an impact on this area of expenditure. My Department needs to find new accommodation centres. We are currently running procurement competitions around the country. Reducing our reliance on emergency accommodation will be a priority. We will also continue to make improvements to existing accommodation centres. Processing applications more efficiently will help to reduce pressure on direct provision services. I am pleased to announce an additional allocation of €1 million for immigration service delivery, which will include additional staffing to fast-track applications. This will speed up the process of identifying as soon as possible the people who require our protection and those who can safely return to their countries of origin.

I will now turn to the prisons Vote. An increase of €24.3 million on the 2019 allocation will bring the total Vote to €383.3 million. Additional current expenditure of almost €10 million includes €5 million across a number of areas to meet the demands arising from higher prisoner numbers and increased maintenance costs of the prisons estate, along with €5 million in pay increases. I am delighted it has been possible to allocate an additional €12.5 million for the courts Vote, which will have an overall allocation of in excess of €150 million for next year. The capital budget for the courts has been increased by €10 million. I acknowledge my appreciation of the relationship my Department and I have with the Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe. I acknowledge his interest in ensuring adequate and proper funding, and an appropriate level of funding, for the Department.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: This is the fourth budget this Dáil will pass, which is a fairly remarkable achievement when one considers the Government has only 57 seats in Dáil Éireann. I was party to the confidence and supply talks that took place in Trinity College Dublin three and a half years ago. The Tánaiste was at the other side of the table. I have to say that if somebody had suggested then that a fourth budget would get through I do not think the people in the room would have believed it. In fact, most people assumed the Government would be lucky to last a year or a year and a half.

The confidence and supply agreement was only for the purpose of facilitating three budgets. We have fulfilled our part of the agreement in achieving this and we got many benefits for the Irish people in return. The reason there has been agreement on the fourth budget is because of circumstances outside of the control of the House and any party in the House. I refer specifically to Brexit.

If we had a general election at this time, or at the time of the Brexit soap opera across the water, we would be rightly criticised by the Irish public for engaging in an act of extreme recklessness and stupidity. One of the benefits we as a country have in trying to deal with the extraordinary issue of Brexit is that when our European friends and partners, as the Prime Minister of the UK repeatedly refers to them, look at this country, they see a stable political environment. They see political leadership. They see agreement among all Irish political parties that significant challenges face the country from Brexit, which can only be dealt with through political negotiation and political agreement. The fact we have political leadership in the House and that it applies throughout the House has been to the benefit of the country. It is in marked contrast to the absence of political leadership in the United Kingdom.

The fact we are able to get a budget through for the fourth time when the Government has only 57 seats shows that a minority Government can achieve results and can have successes. One of the constant criticisms in Westminster is that it is impossible for the British Government

to achieve anything because it does not have a majority. Results can be achieved in politics without a majority but people must be prepared to compromise and recognise that getting everything they want is unachievable. The fact that Brexit still has not been resolved means the budget had to be agreed. It is a budget that had to have Brexit at the forefront, which the Government did. Without Brexit there really is very little in the budget. In due course I will speak about the justice Vote and the increases in respect of it.

We need to recognise that, unfortunately, the issue of Brexit has damaged the relationship between this country and the United Kingdom. It is the case that our history is dominated to a large extent by the relationship the island has had with our neighbouring island. This is not so much the case for the relationships the island of Britain has with other parts of Europe to the east of it. They have probably been more consequential than the relationship it has had with this island. We have had a long and difficult historic relationship. Fortunately, in recent years we have had a blossoming relationship. We have been able to get on extremely well. The blossoming of this relationship reached its apotheosis when we got the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. It showed that two sensible political systems could come together and reach agreement on what is and was a highly contentious issue. In the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement relations improved and increased dramatically.

Part of the reason we have such a good relationship with the United Kingdom is because we were allied with it on European matters. I am sure Ministers who have been able to liaise with their UK colleagues in Council meetings would confirm this. I am sure the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, is aware that in the area of justice, among the parties with whom he would feel most aligned at European Council meetings are the Ministers from the United Kingdom. It is extremely upsetting that in the recent past, this excellent relationship has been damaged by Brexit. We need to recognise we will get through this issue and that we will then have to work further on the nature of the relationship we have with the United Kingdom to make sure it is fully improved.

Part of the reason we are in this situation, whereby we have this difficult relationship, is that the United Kingdom leaving the customs union and the Single Market is incompatible with the Good Friday Agreement. I recall the referendum, when it was never suggested the United Kingdom would leave the Single Market and customs union. Discussion on Northern Ireland was at a minimum when it came to the debate as to whether Britain would leave the European Union. It may have been the case that people did not realise the consequences of Brexit but once it was announced there would be a departure of the United Kingdom from the customs union and the Single Market, it was inevitable there would be difficulties in respect of this island. Some people in the United Kingdom do not understand that if it is out of the customs union, there inevitably will have to be checks on the island of Ireland. The approach adopted by the Government, which is supported by all Members of the House, is the correct approach. Let us not put this matter off to be resolved at the end of the trading agreement. If it is left off at that stage we will not be able to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the ability of people on this island to travel to and fro between the two jurisdictions on the island.

None of us is a fortune teller who can predict what will happen in the United Kingdom and how this matter will be resolved. Ultimately, it can be said that the only way we will get an end in sight to the issue is if there is a decisive electoral event in the United Kingdom, whether that be a general election or a second referendum. If there is a decisive electoral event, there can be clear movement for United Kingdom to leave in the way it wishes, and at present it seems to wish to leave with no deal, which would have dire consequences, or, alternatively, it may seek

to stay.

I will now speak about the specifics of the budget. I welcome its provisions in respect of the justice Vote. As the Minister has stated, the justice Vote will increase to €2.98 billion which is, in effect, almost €3 billion. This is an increase of 4.7%. The Minister quietly and without much publicity managed to get a good increase in the amount of money available. I welcome that there will be 700 new Garda recruits under budget 2020. In the confidence and supply agreement, Fianna Fáil got the Government to agree to recruit 800 new gardaí each year. We got this for the first three years. It is now down to 700 but in the circumstances of what has happened, it is a good result.

The Vote recognises funding still will be available for the Policing Authority. I may have a different view to the Minister for Justice and Equality on the future of the Policing Authority. The Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland recommended it be got rid of and replaced with a different board. This would be short-sighted as the Policing Authority has been a success. In fairness to the Government, it introduced the Policing Authority
6 o'clock in 2015. We need to be very careful about getting rid of it and going back to the drawing board and starting up an internal Garda body that will be responsible for Garda oversight and improvement. If it is the case the Policing Authority will remain in place in the next year, I welcome it.

I also note an increase in funding for the Courts Service and the Prison Service. It is important that we devote the money allocated for the Judicial Council. For far too long, the people of Ireland have been waiting for a judicial council. They may not understand what it provides for but if we tell them it is a mechanism whereby they can make a complaint about the behaviour of a judge, they will be surprised the provision is not already in statute.

I welcome that it is there. I also welcome the other provisions in respect of the new forensic science laboratory. Things move very slowly in Ireland but we really need to get that new forensic science laboratory operational as quickly as possible. I ask the Government to prioritise it and ensure it is done. One of the legitimate criticisms of the Government is that it is very good at making announcements but it lacks action in delivery. We need to see delivery.

I have spoken for ten minutes and I will hand over to my tánaiste, Deputy Calleary.

Deputy Dara Calleary: There is no doubt that Brexit dictated very difficult decisions yesterday. However, Fine Gael's incompetence over the national children's hospital and the national broadband plan made those decisions even more difficult and made the already narrow envelopes even narrower.

Many figures stood out but the €365 million set aside in the event of a no-deal Brexit for social protection, for extra unemployment benefits and extra retraining jumped out at me and show the severe consequences for our country in the event of a no-deal Brexit. When one thinks of how many people that will need to assist, it brings home the very serious position we are in at the moment.

In my portfolio, ní raibh scéim mhaith le haghaidh mhuintir na Gaeilge agus muintir na Gaeltachta inné. Tá sé soiléir nach bhfuil aon suim ag an Rialtas seo i gcúrsaí Gaeilge nó i muintir na Gaeltachta. Ní raibh ach suim bheag airgid sa bhreis le haghaidh Údarás na Gaeltachta. Ní raibh ach €700,000 le haghaidh an current agus €1 mhilliún le haghaidh capital expenditure. I will say this in English. Údarás na Gaeltachta has been bitterly treated by the

Government. The other job development agencies, such as Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland have got extra money in the context of Brexit. Údarás na Gaeltachta got its first increase in ten years yesterday and it is far short of what is needed.

Chomh maith leis sin, níl aon airgead sa bhreis le haghaidh na straitéise. Níl ann ach suim an-bheag. Léiríonn sé sin go bhfuil an Rialtas ag caint mar gheall ar an nGaeilge agus go bhfuil an Taoiseach ag dul amach agus ag dul timpeall ag caint mar gheall ar an nGaeilge, ach nach bhfuil aon suim aige i dtodhchaí na Gaeilge nó todhchaí pobal na Gaeltachta. The Government is either serious about it or it is not. The title of the Department is the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht is very much in the third division and does not even have a voice at Cabinet, as is very clear from yesterday's budget.

We need to wait until tomorrow to get the full detail on the Department of Rural and Community Development. It will take the Minister, Deputy Ring, two days to come up with a good story for that budget. I have no doubt he will deliver a good story with lots of fighting and shouting about it but it still will not hide the underspend in the Department. It will not hide the fact that rural areas are facing major challenges of which the Government is ignorant and to which it is incapable of responding. The Government continues to finance schemes that depend on local authorities that do not have the money to co-finance those schemes, because of the cuts in local authority funding. That is why there is underspend. The Minister needs to address that with the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, for the Department of Rural and Community Development to finally get its work done.

On Leaders' Questions today, in respect of community affairs in urban areas, Deputy Micheál Martin raised the RAPID programme and the need for drugs programmes, as the threat of drugs is taking hold of communities the length and breadth of this island. We await tomorrow's version of Harry Potter by the Minister, Deputy Ring; it will be a good one but it will not make any difference to rural communities.

It is good that the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, is here. Speaking of Harry Potter, the health budget is up there with it. I acknowledge one person who has made a significant difference on the health budget and that is John Wall. Issues in the health area have forced individual people to stand up and do heroic things. John Wall is the latest of those with his campaign on resolving the medical card issue for people with terminal cancer conditions. I hope the Minister, Deputy Harris, stands by that commitment and does not do his usual thing of telling us what we want to hear and then running away from it. The Minister owes that to people in John Wall's position. I am pretty sure he will stand up to that commitment.

The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, took great store by this year's health overspend being one of the smallest ever. That has happened on the back of people waiting for therapists who have not been allowed to take up their jobs. Parents in County Mayo got letters yesterday from early intervention services informing them that the occupational therapist was going on maternity leave. No cover will be provided because the HSE has no money to provide such cover for a full year. That is how the overspend is being managed; it is on the backs of children and their parents. It is nothing to shout about. There is also the sanctioning of posts and then not appointing them. The Government puts its head in the sand claiming there is no moratorium when the dogs in the street know there is.

There is a commitment for only €10 million to staff four new hospices in Mayo, Kildare, Waterford and Wicklow. These hospices have been built completely as a result of local effort.

The understanding always was that the Government would provide the full staffing commitment. However, if that amount is divided in four, €2.5 million will not fund Mayo hospice. We need urgent clarity on that matter.

The ring-fencing of the carbon tax is an important development. People will now see where their money is going. I remember previous budgets where 8 cent a litre was added to fuel prices overnight and that money went into the great black hole of Government finances. We need to ramp up the work of the warmer home scheme and ramp up the ability of the SEAI to deliver to communities and homeowners in order that they can see the benefit of that scheme. There needs to be greater flexibility and greater support given to householders who want to make the transition to low-carbon heating systems in their homes. It works. I have seen some of the work the SEAI has done in estates, resulting in considerably lower fuel bills for people on low incomes. It has resulted in considerably lower emissions and much healthier conditions. There are benefits all around. However, it is very expensive. Unless the State puts real money behind it, people will not see the benefit of this ring-fencing. Overall consideration will need to be given to ring-fencing much more than just the money announced yesterday.

This summer was dominated by protests at beef factories. Farmers are frustrated and feel they do not have a future. Older farmers and younger farmers are saying they cannot continue to be slaves to the land. However, yesterday's budget makes no reference to funding. There is extra funding for the flawed beef exceptional aid measure, BEAM, scheme, which has not delivered. The Government has ticked a box thinking that they have gone away and it can move on. It cannot and they have not gone away. The BEAM scheme as it exists is undersubscribed because it is not working and is not relevant. Across a range of measures in agriculture and in rural and community affairs, the Government needs to hear those voices from the protests over the summer. Those are real and are not going away. The Government needs to respond. All the pain of such transition - climate transition and Brexit transition - cannot be put on the shoulders of just one community and the Government had the chance to do that.

A very unusual alliance of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Colleen Rooney must be in the Government's mind this evening. Between Angela Merkel yesterday and Colleen Rooney today, the Government has got away with little coverage of the budget. Somebody should warn Colleen Rooney that the Taoiseach is due to appear in Liverpool tomorrow as I know he has a penchant for photos with celebrities.

The Government has rightly wrapped the budget around Brexit. The threat of Brexit to our State and our island is scary when one reads those figures. However, it cannot give the Government a complete *carte blanche* for avoiding its responsibilities under so many other headings. I have only ten minutes and could spend much more going through the many other areas in which the Government is not delivering. Deputy Browne will speak later about the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly's, area of mental health. Once again, we have a shimmy over the funding in that area.

We also have a shimmy over the funding for Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which has been moved under the Arts Council. The Government then claims the Arts Council is getting a bigger budget. That relationship did not work previously and will not work again.

Across subheads in each Department there are shimmies all over the place to hide cuts in funding and hide areas the Government is not servicing. The State needs to stand up and work collectively as we fight the Brexit situation, but a time will come when the Government will be

held to account for this shimmy approach to so many areas affecting people's lives.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Last year Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil promised this House a housing budget. The Minister for Finance said affordable housing was one of his priorities, while Deputy Micheál Martin claimed he had secured additional investment in affordable housing and fast-tracked delivery of social housing. A year on how has that budget worked out? The level of homelessness has risen for children, pensioners and adults. Rents in urban centres have gone up to astronomically unaffordable levels, while house prices remain out of reach for workers on modest incomes. Fine Gael ditched the fast-track social housing plan only a few weeks ago as reckless. Zero affordable housing has been delivered under any central government scheme this year, whether to rent or buy. The number of house completions remains well below the Rebuilding Ireland target and while the number of planning permissions is up, developers are taking advantage of the fast-track planning process and delaying the commencement of building.

By every single measure, the housing crisis is much worse today than it was last year. There is not much stability for people trapped in insecure or unaffordable accommodation, contrary to what we have heard this evening. So much for Leo and Micheál's housing budget. Things have got so bad in the past 12 months that one would think housing would have been one of the priorities, if not the only priority, of the budget presented to the Oireachtas this week. After all, it is the number one matter of public concern. That is not just my opinion. Every opinion poll in the past 12 months has confirmed it. Last October a Red C opinion poll conducted for *The Sunday Business Post* indicated that 73% of voters for all parties felt budget 2019 did not do enough to address the housing crisis. In January this year an Ireland Thinks poll conducted for the *Daily Mail* indicated that 43% of people ranked housing as their single biggest concern, twice as high as any other issue. Last year Eurobarometer conducted a survey for the European Commission which indicated that 54% of people ranked housing as their number one issue, significantly higher than all others, yet despite the depth of the crisis and the public clamour for action, budget 2020 offers nothing new to address this problem. For struggling renters, aspiring first-time buyers and those in need of social and affordable housing there are no new initiatives. Perhaps that explains the low key nature of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government's press conference this morning on the budget. Unusually for his Department and unlike his colleagues, it was not even streamed live on *MerrionStreet.ie*. No additional detail was provided beyond the information we were given yesterday; it was a deeply uncomfortable Minister avoiding tough questions from journalists and none of us was any the wiser at the end of it.

According to the budget announced yesterday, the number of real social housing units will remain well below the 10,000 unit target to be owned by local authorities and approved housing bodies as recommended by the all-party Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness in 2016. Just 8,500 real social housing units will be added to the stock of local authorities and approved housing bodies next year. This is in stark contrast to the 19,000 rental accommodation supplement, RAS, and housing assistance payment, HAP, tenancies the Government will try to fund next year. They are expensive, short-term insecure tenancies in the private rental sector that are bad for social housing tenants and the taxpayer. One of the remarkable features of the budget for next year is that it will be the first time we will see more money going to subsidise private rental tenancies through the HAP, RAS and rent supplement schemes than we are giving to local authorities to directly build or buy social homes. A total of €800 million will go to the local authorities, but more than that figure will be spent in subsidising insecure private sector tenancies. These subsidies will dramatically increase the demand for rental prop-

erties. That will push up the price and the big losers will be people on modest incomes, mainly young people, who are not eligible for social housing support and will be squeezed even harder whether they are in or trying to access private rental accommodation.

There was no increase in the funding for affordable housing over what was announced last year. The Minister confirmed at his press conference this morning that not a single affordable unit to rent or buy would become available next year and that only a small portion of the cost rental pilot units would be available in 2021. The Government will claim that the help-to-buy scheme will help first-time buyers. Thankfully, however, the Parliamentary Budget Office has produced a report that states that to date 40% of the people who availed of the scheme did not need it. They had a 10% deposit, including those who were buying homes for between €400,000 and €500,000. Much of the money has not gone to people who are desperate to get onto the property ladder.

The extra €20 million allocated for homeless services is a stark admission of failure. The Government has resigned itself to the fact that homelessness will continue to rise next year. This is a *status quo* budget. Given that the *status quo* is an ever-deteriorating housing crisis, that means that in 2020 the situation will continue to get worse, but it could have been different. The Government could have made better choices, for example, by doubling capital investment in public housing. It could have used the money to deliver 17,000 real social and affordable homes. It could have introduced a rent freeze for struggling renters and a refundable tax credit to put a month's rent back into their pockets. It could have more ambitious targets for housing, first, to tackle homelessness or Traveller-specific accommodation, but it chose not to do anything because it has no vision or ambition and no desire to give workers and their families a break. Instead, Fine Gael, slavishly followed by its friends in Fianna Fáil, will continue to implement a failed housing policy. The Government could have decided to make the provision of appropriate, secure and affordable accommodation its priority in budget 2020. That it chose not to do so is a damning indictment of this Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil Government and budget 2020, which is why it should be opposed.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The health service is in a perpetual state of crisis. The Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Jim Daly, knows that; I know it; we all know it. We see it every day in our advice clinics and read about it every day in the newspapers. It started a long time before the Government had the really convenient excuse of Brexit which it blames for everything that goes wrong. We have had eight years of Fine Gael in government, four budgets with its best friends in Fianna Fáil and what has it brought us to? People cannot afford to see a GP. They go without; they wait until they are really sick with multiple ailments and if they have the money, they spend the €60 to see a GP.

In the area of primary care the Government increased the threshold to qualify for a medical card for those aged 70 years and over, something which will benefit many. As a move towards a universal primary care system, I welcome it, but what about those who are younger than 70 years? What about the young workers living alone who earn a little over €184 a week after tax? There will be no medical card for them and none for the couple with a child who earn over €266.50 after tax. Sinn Féin proposed that the roll-out of universal free GP care be advanced next year by giving everyone without a medical card or a GP visit card two GP visits without charge per year in order to lift the burden of being sick off workers' families and young people. Many of them cannot afford to be sick. The measure we proposed would have benefited 2.8 million people, including the retail worker, the mechanic, the butcher, the prison officer, the student, the teacher, the tradesperson and many more. The Government announced nothing for

them to make their lives easier or give them a break.

The home support waiting list of people who need just a few hours help in order to stay in their own home stands at 7,000, almost 1,000 of whom are in north Dublin. I know this because many of them come to me looking for help. They are not looking for much, a couple of extra hours. That is all they need to help them to stay safely in their own home. The service has been targeted for cuts, with the freezing of hours in the past six months. We have heard countless stories of children who have had to cut their working hours or give up their jobs in order to provide care for parents at home. The same applies to the parents of children with disabilities. They have had to take up full-time caring duties because of the lack of home support services. The Government could have tackled this issue in the budget, if it was fair, by taking part of the burden off those caring for loved ones, but it did not do so.

The Government heralded the allocation of an extra 1 million home help hours as a key measure in the budget. However, this addition will barely clear 40% of the home support waiting lists. The Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, confirmed as much to me today at the Minister for Health's press conference. The extra 1 million hours will leave people on waiting lists as an extra 1.5 million hours of home help are needed approximately. What are the people concerned supposed to do? A targeted allocation of €59 million was needed to get rid of the waiting lists. That is what the Department of Health and the HSE told us, which is why Sinn Féin included it in its alternative budget. It was a matter of choice. The Government had the option to choose to do the right thing, namely, to invest in areas and people that need it, but it did not do that. Almost 700,000 people are on hospital waiting lists throughout the State but what is the Government's response? It is an additional €25 million for the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, a scheme that those working in the health service say does not represent value for money. They go as far as to say it is a cynical exercise in waiting list manipulation that does not ultimately improve care for people in the medium or long term. The Government chose to allocate scarce resources to the private health sector at the expense of increasing resources for the public hospitals. I tire of saying this given that when Fianna Fáil was in government, the geniuses working with it in the Department of Health came up with the idea of the NTPF and it was as wrong then as it is today. It did not work then and it is not working now. Every year, the Government invests more money in the NTPF but the outworking of that is seen in respect of waiting lists, which are not decreasing. It does not reduce the numbers and just removes money from the public health service. Outpatient waiting lists grew last year by 54,000 to 569,498, while the number of patients waiting more than 18 months has grown by 24,000 to 106,786.

The national maternity strategy needs at least €7.5 million per year over the next ten years just to keep it on track. I will not be distracted by a task force. We need implementation. A strategy exists and the Government simply needs to get behind it. In the budget, a sum of €8 million will be allocated among four essential health strategies, namely, the cancer strategy, the maternity strategy, the trauma strategy and Vision 2020, the ambulance reform plan. There are no measures in the budget to reopen closed beds to address the crisis in capacity, no idea of how the four strategies are expected to deliver on the budget allocated to them, nor a breakdown of how much money will go to each strategy. It is no wonder the Irish Hospital Consultants Association voted no confidence in the Minister for Health. The Irish Medical Organisation stated the budget will not allow for any new service development, while existing services will be further stretched.

The Government could have given a medical card to every patient who has cancer for the duration of his or her treatment or for however long he or she has cancer, which would have

cost €40 million, or 0.0002% of the overall health budget. It could have invested in problem gambling supports to help with the epidemic of gambling problems that people experience throughout the State. It could have invested in helping women by rapid-funding the national maternity strategy, or tackling period poverty with money and resources, or rolling out a State-sponsored contraception scheme to provide for free contraception for all women. It could have invested in hiring the additional staff needed to reopen the 500 beds that were closed by Fianna Fáil. There is nothing in the budget for the children in my constituency who wait 33 months for what the Government call early intervention. If it had any shame, it would change that name. It cannot be called early intervention if a child must wait 33 months.

The budget, like all budgets, is about choices, priorities and ideology. The Government has nailed its colours firmly to the mast and delivered a budget for landlords, private healthcare providers, speculators and bankers. Sinn Féin would have made different choices that would have helped workers, families and young people, who are the people beside whom we always stand and for whom we are proud to stand up.

Deputy Seán Crowe: My colleague noted that some of her constituents have waited 33 months for early intervention but in my constituency some people have waited 40 months. That is a long time for somebody to secure speech and language supports for a child, in view of the fact that during that period, the child will regress. Budgets are supposed to be transformative, to make circumstances better and to make positive changes in people's lives. The majority of people listening to the Budget Statement yesterday, however, will say it contained little for them or their families. It was short on ideas, policies and solutions. As my colleagues noted, it lacked vision and action that would address many of the crises that society faces and that are breaking our communities. It will not address the housing crisis or homelessness, nor do anything for the people I passed on my way to the House earlier who were sleeping in shop doorways. It will not do anything for those who are trying to pay rent, which continues to rise. Every day, people visit my office and ask where they can rent accommodation, but there is nothing in the budget for them. There is nothing in it for those trying to buy a home or those trying to secure a local authority house. As my colleague outlined, it will not address the health crisis or the waiting lists for life-changing operations, which are getting longer. For recruitment and retention in the health service, too, there is nothing in the budget.

While it will deliver for a small few and is certainly positive for bankers, vulture funds, developers, speculators, wealthy landlords and those who are on high incomes, it will not deliver for hard-pressed workers or their families. The Government had a choice: it could have created an alternative budget like that which we proposed. People watching the debate are probably frustrated, thinking it is the same all over again, but they have to realise that if they vote the same way, they will get the same results. There was great hope following the previous election, given that it was the first time Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were a minority but what happened has been much the same. They have worked together and the budgets have been much the same as ever. They have not tried to address the crises that affect people. Those at home watching the debate are probably pulling their hair out, wondering how they will pay their next bill. Children are back at school and I have talked to people who asked how they would pay for school uniforms. Some of them approached moneylenders.

The Minister for Justice, Deputy Flanagan, mentioned the additional gardaí but he needs to get wise. He needs to visit some of the communities we represent and see what is happening on the ground. There is open drug dealing, kids of seven years of age act as couriers for drug dealers, cocaine is freely available, and there is intimidation of families because of drug debt.

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The Minister, Deputy Flanagan, mentioned the 700 additional gardaí but people will ask where they will be deployed and what they will do differently.

The budget lacks ambition, direction and gives little hope to families. Our alternative budget would have tried to address the rip-off costs faced by countless families with sky-high insurance premiums. People face expensive bills, extortionate rents, eye-watering childcare costs and rising back-to-school expenses. The Minister for Finance cynically used Brexit as an excuse to stand still in respect of the budget, with no attempt to address the problems facing families. While it is true we need to address Brexit, our alternative budget was much more ambitious, with a stabilisation fund of €2 billion compared with the Government's proposed fund of €1.2 billion. This morning I hosted a meeting with families from Border communities, who told their own stories and outlined the concerns they have about the impact that Brexit will have on their lives, such as a hardening of the Border. They told personal stories of what they have seen in their lives. We have a duty not to return to that because we have come too far.

We all have a responsibility to act differently. That is what budgets are about but I do not see that in the budget that was put forward. In light of the choices made and the direction taken, there is a lack of vision, ambition or solutions to the challenges facing ordinary people. In many cases, people will be worse off after the budget is passed and they must scramble around to try to deal with the challenges they face. There will be more of the same. Unfortunately, the crises faced by the people on trolleys or sleeping on the streets, or by the children going hungry in many communities, will remain the same. We have heard no solutions or ways to tackle those crises for families.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: Unfortunately, Fine Gael's ideology shines right through the budget which it has prepared with the collusion of Fianna Fáil and the complete invisibility of any influence from the Independent Alliance. I will go through some of it to explain why I say this. First, the poor lose and the banks win. An extra €250 million could have been taken through the bank levy, on which we voted last night. The Labour Party opposed the levy on the banks remaining the same because of the fact that they are in profit and our need for them to contribute as a matter of urgency to the economy now that we face Brexit, the demands of climate change and major crises in housing and health. While it was right to frame a budget that set money aside to protect us from Brexit, the banks could surely have contributed to some extent to all of it. On the other hand, poor people are contributing because their cost of living will go up. They have received no increase, whether they are carers, people with disabilities, unemployed or pensioners. There was absolutely nothing for them. The rise in the minimum wage to €10.10 has been put off until later next year. Poorer workers are, therefore, going to lose. The poor lose and the banks win.

I refer, in particular, to carers. With others, I recently attended a briefing in the AV room on behalf of carers. Their demands were modest and could have been addressed. An obvious issue is that the basic €5 was not added to social welfare payments. My Limerick colleague, Deputy Willie O'Dea, was unable to use his influence under the confidence and supply agreement to achieve it this year, which is unfortunate. There were other demands by carers which should have been addressed. One was related to the income threshold. There are thousands of people caring for loved ones on a full-time basis who receive no carer's allowance because their income is above the income threshold. That is something that could have been addressed. It would have been worth doing if ideology had not come into it and ensured they had got nothing to help them with the increased cost of living, while the banks were allowed to go off happily laughing at us for bailing them out. They can get on with their business, while pressing hom-

owners in mortgage distress and others who depend on them for some access to funding.

Another example is the failure to increase the minimum wage. There are people on the minimum wage who will not be able to afford to pay for the basics in the coming years. I refer, in particular, to childcare workers. While there will be some package in the budget in respect of the cost of childcare, I do not know whether it will be of great help. It has been a long time coming and was, in fact, promised last year. However, it was still not implemented. One can see from SIPTU's Big Start campaign and research on childcare that workers in the sector are mostly female and extremely badly paid while doing an important job. Increasing the minimum wage would have helped these workers. When he was responding to my party leader, Deputy Howlin, during Leaders' Questions this morning as to why failing to increase the minimum wage would not cause hardship, the Taoiseach referred to the fact that a lot of people on the minimum wage earned the second income in their household. Most of them are women. Why should women be left stuck on the minimum wage just because they do not have as much income as their husbands or partners? It was a particularly illustrative comment as to from where the Taoiseach was coming on the issue. I do not know if it was picked up on, given that the remark was something of an aside. However, it indicates the thinking that these workers do not really matter. They are working in childcare or other jobs that pay low wages. The lower paid segments of the economy tend to employ women and we are aware of the gender pay gap.

I support what Deputy Louise O'Reilly said about another women's issue, namely, access to a free, comprehensive contraception service which includes the supply of long acting contraceptives. We need a comprehensive programme. To be fair to the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, he has set up a working group on the matter within the Department, but it needs to be delivered. It was a key ancillary recommendation of the committee on the eighth amendment, but there was nothing in the budget about delivering it.

I come back to the ideology. Again, the private sector has won over the public sector. The Fianna Fáil win on the National Treatment Purchase Fund benefits the private sector, rather than the public health sector. I refer, in particular, to housing. There are many issues with the ideology on housing of the Government that must be pointed out. I looked at what happened at O'Devaney Gardens in the Dublin City Council local authority area this week. The policy is clearly skewed towards private profit. Publicly owned lands are to be used to provide a massive profit in the value of the land to private developers. That is how the model has changed under Fine Gael. It places councillors in a difficult position. They are told to take it or leave it, but it was not always like that. I want to take a little time to go back over the history. I visited the various Dublin regeneration projects on 12 December 2012 when I was a Minister of State. A couple were moving well, including those in Dolphin's Barn and St. Teresa's Gardens. One of the projects I visited was in O'Devaney Gardens. At that stage there was an option for the local authority to lead the redevelopment. Instead, the land was sat on until it increased in value and the proposal now made is skewed completely towards private developers. It is a fundamental change in policy.

I have looked back at the housing action report published by my colleague, Deputy Alan Kelly, when he was leaving the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2016. When I was in government, we had hardly any money. However, we funded the voids programme and I received a very small budget for public housing at the very end of my time as Minister of State. As soon as the economy started to recover, Deputy Howlin decided as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform with Government agreement to allocate €4 billion for housing. There is an appendix at the back of the housing action report which sets

out the housing developments approved in 2015 and 2016. I know the ones in my constituency and I am sure other Members can look at the list to see what was delivered or not as the case may be in theirs. These were public social housing developments for which money was allocated. One development of 40 homes in Clonmacken in Limerick is only now beginning, even though it was approved in May 2015, but there is nothing on the ground as yet. There is no sign of the development of 21 homes in Castletroy. A 21-home development planned for Drominbeg, Rhebogue, has yet to start, mainly because of the campaign against it led by a local authority member from Fianna Fáil. It was to be developed by a housing co-operative. One scheme has been delivered at Speaker's Corner on Hyde Road. It comprises four units for Simon. The 11-home scheme planned for Shelbourne Square on the North Circular Road has not been delivered. That is the list for my constituency. I do not know if it is as bad anywhere else. I am not trying to knock Limerick City and County Council, but it shows that the ideology changed and that public housing was not delivered in the way that was needed. Looking back, I need to explain that it is an ideological issue. The HAP scheme was introduced when I was Minister of State with responsibility for housing. Some €400,000 was spent on HAP in 2014. That amount has now gone up to more than €750 million, between this scheme and other means of transferring money to private landlords.

HAP was established when we were starting to recover from the economic collapse and people were starting to get jobs. Many people were on rent supplement and, if they went to work, they lost all of their housing support. HAP was part of the action plan for jobs and its purpose was to protect people who could go back to work and make it payable for them to do so. Some people would not go back to work because they would lose all their housing support. It was never intended to be a substitute for public housing but that is what it has become.

I am disturbed that we had the same speech from the Minister as last year. I read last year's speech and the headlines are the same. For example, "affordability" was one headline but there is no affordable housing. Even the O'Devaney Gardens proposal puts paid to the notion of so-called affordable homes. One would have to be earning approximately €150,000 per year to afford a home. There is no affordability.

I read the summary of Rebuilding Ireland's action plan for housing and homelessness that was published in 2016. Its stated aims included addressing the unacceptable number of households, particularly families, in emergency accommodation. There are more than 10,000 now in emergency accommodation so that position has worsened. The Government at the time promised to get people out of hotels by the following July, which never happened. Another aim of the action plan was to moderate rental and purchase price inflation, particularly in urban areas. Everybody knows that rental prices have not been moderated.

Another aim was to address a growing affordability gap for many households wishing to purchase their own homes. That has not happened. People cannot get mortgages or save for deposits because they are paying high rents. Another aim was to mature the rental sector so that tenants see it as one that offers security, quality and choice of tenure in the right locations, and providers see it as one they can invest in with certainty. That is not happening. There is no security of tenure. There is no rent freeze, which the Labour Party and others have proposed.

Another aim was to ensure housing's contribution to the economy was steady and supportive of sustainable economic growth. We are not seeing anything like the numbers that were promised in this document. Another aim was to deliver housing in a way that meets current needs while contributing to wider objectives such as the need to support sustainable urban and

rural development and communities and to maximise the contribution of the built environment to addressing climate change.

On climate change, there is something in the budget related to housing but it is fairly abysmal. There is €45 million for retrofitting local authority houses, which I think the Minister said in his press conference will provide for 1,000 houses. One thousand local authority houses in my city alone are in need of retrofitting to bring them up to standard. I do not begrudge the midlands its particular scheme but something similar is needed throughout the country. We must bring all local authority houses up to a decent building energy rating, BER, level because, by definition, the people who live in them are in the lower income brackets and it needs to be ensured that they do not suffer from fuel poverty.

I welcome one measure relating to climate change and homes that was announced in the budget, which is the money allocated to the warmer homes scheme. The waiting time for that scheme is between nine months and a year and it is, by definition, for people who own their own homes but have low incomes because they must be on fuel allowance to qualify for it. People on low incomes cannot come up with the matching funds to avail of other grants from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, to bring their houses up to a decent energy standard and protect themselves from fuel poverty. Those who have the money and are well off can avail of the schemes. That is representative of an ideology that needs to change. There needs to be a focus on poorer families and bringing their homes up to standard because they are the ones who must spend a lot of money on home heating, etc.

The housing budget needs to be dug into in that kind of detail to see how the prevailing attitude is now one where the private sector will deliver. The public sector owns sites. Local authorities may not have the capacity to build themselves but they can hire other people. Why could local authorities not hire builders rather than handing sites over to developers?

Another commitment in the Rebuilding Ireland summary relates to rapid build. A number of companies in Ireland build prefabricated homes and do not require all the construction workers of which we acknowledge we have a shortage. There is no reason that programme seems to have been dropped completely. We could have those homes alongside the traditionally built homes to speed up the delivery of social housing but it is not happening.

This budget has let down the poorest people in our society and bolstered those who can afford to deal with the difficulties that will doubtless arise no matter what kind of Brexit comes to pass. I welcome the large allocation to shore up those who are most at risk from the Brexit, whether that is people living near the Border, businesses that are particularly vulnerable, or sectors such as agriculture and food. However, it needs to be ensured that those funds are easily available when businesses suddenly get into trouble. I am thinking of the time, during the economic crash, when the Dell crisis hit Limerick. The then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Coughlan, ran off to Texas to try and stop the closure but it was too late and it could not be stopped. The closure of the factory felt like a tonne of bricks coming down at that time but there is time to prepare this time around because we know we face Brexit. We must ensure that these welcome supports are available and ready. Businesses need to know how to access those supports if they need them urgently to protect jobs and keep businesses going. For example, we were able to deploy the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund in response to the Dell closure and other Members will be aware of similar closures elsewhere in the country. However, it took a long time to access the funds to help the workers to retrain and find other opportunities.

There is a lot of information, a number of briefings and many different schemes. Some of them are in the form of loans rather than grants. Getting a loan is not always something that a business in trouble can contemplate because it does not know whether it will be able to pay it back. We must focus on accessibility in the context of Brexit.

We needed a bit of imagination and energy and some new thinking in the budget. That is particularly true because we know a certain amount about Brexit and a lot about climate change. We could have seen something fundamental and radical in the budget, for example by ensuring all homes are made warmer and easier to heat and by addressing other issues relating to climate change. There was no radical shift. I read the Minister's speech from last year and it did not differ an awful lot from this year's. We needed something radical and a sense that there are crises coming down the road. The economy is in recovery mode but many people's personal finances have yet to recover. They are struggling and will struggle even more because this budget will not give them anything. That means the amount they can spend on the necessities of life will reduce because of the increases in the cost of living, basic foods, rent, childcare, heating homes and so on.

My party leader described this as a do-nothing budget and we needed it to do something for those who are most vulnerable. It did not do so. It is a timid budget, one that went back into the rabbit hole because the Government is afraid of Brexit and climate change and thought it had better do nothing to scare the horses. We needed the budget to do something to protect the people who are most vulnerable and, unfortunately, it has not.

Deputy Bríd Smith: The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, is being praised in the mainstream media for his prudent budget. The reality, however, is that it is a blatant class-biased budget that is using the Brexit and climate crisis to hit workers and the poor, in the main.

I will examine a few things he is up to in the budget as he looks after his own. The Central Bank has predicted that tens of thousands of jobs will be lost if there is a no-deal Brexit but instead of taking measures to create jobs, the Minister has used the crisis to benefit his rich friends. Some €80 million in a full year will be given to support small businesses and agriculture but instead of tying any grant to a guarantee that jobs will be defended and retained, the Minister is giving handouts to company executives. Disgracefully, he is using the cover of Brexit to extend the notorious special assignee relief scheme, SARP, that allows company executives who earn more than €75,000 a year to cut their tax bill by 30% when they earn over that figure. This scheme was due to be phased out but now has been extended until 2022, thereby costing us €28 million annually in tax foregone.

He is giving more tax breaks to companies that pay their executives in share options through a key employee engagement programme. He is giving tax reliefs to high-flyers who travel back and forth to countries such as China. Just 144 people availed of this scheme in 2014, gaining them a tax break of up to €35,000 each. He is giving tax relief to bookies in order that they get €50,000 in relief through not paying a betting duty. Yet he is also hitting workers and the poor. In a disgusting move, the Minister has stopped the 30 cent increase on the minimum wage. He is making the workers who get just €9.80 an hour pay for the cost of the Brexit crisis. A group of expert economists has calculated that to provide the minimum essential living standard requires a living wage of €12.30 an hour, which is a far cry from €9.80. Nevertheless, the Minister has stopped a 30 cent per hour increase. This will hit in particular lone parents and their children, who are already locked into poverty.

A no-deal Brexit is going to lead to higher prices, which we all accept, and therefore any Government which cared for its people would have given tax relief to workers. However, the Minister has not given a penny to PAYE workers. PAYE workers are paying €8 billion more in taxes than they did before the economic crash because of the introduction of the USC and the reduction in tax allowances. The Minister could have put money back in workers' pockets to enable them deal with higher prices and to help keep the economy going. Instead, he chose to look after his wealthy friends.

Pensioners in Ireland are often in dire poverty and many had hoped they could get an extra €5 a week to help them. Again, they got nothing. There is nothing for carers or people with disabilities, even though waiting times for assessments are notorious and even though this is against the law.

The outrageous discrimination against those under 24 years has not ended. It has only changed for those who can live independently and are on a payment like RAS or HAP. Thousands of young people under 24 years - bearing in mind that youth employment is much higher than the national average at 11 % - who live with their parents or who find themselves newly unemployed and live with their family, will still get just €112 per week.

The climate change hypocrisy is breath taking. The Government's only answer has been to slap a €6 on every tonne of carbon. This means a 2 cent per litre increase on the price of petrol and home heating oil. The Minister made it clear that this is only the start of carbon tax hikes that will continue until 2030. By the time he has finished, many will pay an extra €500 to €1,000 a year in carbon tax. He claims this will be an incentive to change behaviour but there already is a carbon tax on petrol and still the numbers of cars on Irish roads has doubled. Ireland is one of the most car dependent societies in the world because investment in public transport is so low. It was very interesting to hear the Minister answer a question on "Today with Seán O'Rourke" earlier on why carbon taxes had not reduced emissions. His answer was that they were not high enough. In other words, we have not penalised people sufficiently to change their behaviour, What incentive, however, has he given to help people change their behaviour? There has been no improvement in public transport and very little support for retrofitting, while continuing the same mantras over climate change. Dublin has one of the highest bus fares in Europe, which is double the EU average. There are not enough buses because 300 buses were cut from the fleet by the last Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government. Those cuts have not been fully restored. In rural Ireland, public transport is almost non-existent outside the main towns. At the same time, Fine Gael's gross hypocrisy on climate change is shown by the fact that it refused to put a tax on aviation fuel or on the profits of companies like Ryanair. Such a tax could have yielded €900 million annually and could have provided resources to move to free and full public transport.

Furthermore, they continue to block all measures that would leave fossil fuels in the ground. In the same week, the Government announced its support for building a liquid nitrogen gas terminal at Shannon for imported fracked gas from the US. It is breathtaking in its hypocrisy.

As for Bord na Móna, a paltry €6 million has been allocated for workers and communities. This is disgraceful and I believe we will see uproar in the midlands because of this. Compare this to northern Spain, where the coal industry was wound down and where €250 million was pumped into those communities, which had roughly the same number of workers, to facilitate a just transition. Compared to what has been done for the business community and the multi-national executives, it is disgraceful how workers have been treated. The €20 million that was announced for retrofitting homes in the midlands was part of an announcement made in a com-

mitment to retrofit the nation's social housing stock. How many times must the Government re-announce the same projects under different guises to hide the level of inaction on climate? Just like on Brexit, the Government's aim is to make the poor pay for the crisis.

In the face of Brexit and the climate crisis, we needed a radical change of policy to create the tens of thousands of green jobs which are needed. As Irish homes are among the least energy efficient in Europe, we need a massive State-run retrofitting programme. As our electricity is far too dependent on fossil fuels, we need public investment in renewable energy that could create thousands of jobs. This Parliament could begin by publishing the legislation to allow the production of offshore wind energy that has been promised to the House for the last three years. We are yet to see ink on the paper.

The country faces a massive housing crisis. As Members from many parties here have noted, thousands of jobs could be created if a publicly-owned building company was set up to construct the social and affordable housing we need. There is plenty of money available to fund programmes like these if only we had a Government that was not beholden to the rich. We could stop spending millions on legal fees to defend the Apple tax and could take back the €14 billion, for example. We could stop the banks we bailed out getting away with tax-free profits. If we closed the loopholes they gained from past losses, we could raise an extra €900 million. We could introduce a wealth tax on higher incomes for those earning over €80,000 a year. All of these measures would provide real answers to the twin crises of Brexit and climate change. The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, however, prefers to use these as excuse to pursue his blatant class agenda to make the poor and workers pay for the twin crises we face. This budget is a disgrace.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Budget 2020 is a series of missed opportunities that will do next to nothing to address some of the major issues facing communities and households across the State. Hundreds of thousands of families will either be worse off or no better off on foot of the budget. By failing to make the kind of ambitious leap that was required on carers, the Minister has done nothing to address the crisis despite his commitment to deliver an additional 1 million home help hours. Family Carers Ireland sought a reasonable €3.2 million but carers have been left no better off as a result of budget 2020, which did nothing to support them. We are failing so many carers across the State who do a fantastic job. The point has been missed that these carers save the State an estimated €10 billion annually. It is shameful that we cannot give them basic adequate supports and unjustifiable.

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It would have taken approximately 2.5 million additional hours just to clear the backlog in waiting times and that is what should have been done. Beds will continue to be taken up in hospitals where patients cannot be released and carers will continue to suffer as they try to take care of family members. It was a disgrace to leave the carers without adequate supports. There is also an issue about carers now being afforded the opportunity to work or study a few extra hours. It is disappointing that the income disregard was not increased for carers in receipt of carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the carer's support grant. I ask that this be examined. There seems to be a major problem with this issue and it has been brought to my attention today.

It is almost incomprehensible that the Minister made no mention whatsoever of the fair deal scheme. The fact is that this scheme was promised to farmers and businesses who have been continuously suffering and under great financial pressure. It was approved at Cabinet level and it was misleading, unfair and unnecessary to give us the impression that there was

going to be something in the budget for small family farms and businesses. This should also be looked at. There were promised reforms and they now appear to have been reneged upon. This demonstrates a worrying political blindness to the scale of the problems facing the scheme. There is serious discrimination and injustice against family farms and small businesses and the Government is allowing this to continue if it does not address this issue.

Looking to schools, as a former teacher and school principal, I understand the frustration of principals and teachers throughout this State. While I acknowledge the increase in SNAs, it did not go far enough. The three main priorities outlined by organisations such as the INTO and the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association, CPMSA, were not met at all and no attempt was made to resolve the main issues in education that were highlighted. They concerned release days for burned-out principals, many of whom I have met in counties Laois and Offaly. They have only asked for one release day a week to cope with the ever increasing bureaucracy and administration work that they are expected to do within the schools. Few people will want to take up a principal's post because there are no administration release days for them and, indeed, no encouragement or respect either.

There was no attempt to restore the capitation grant, which was cut during the recession time,s or to address the pupil-teacher ratios. We are seeing super-sized classrooms of 30 plus pupils. Many of those pupils have varying levels of need and ability. Many hard-working teachers are trying to teach their classes but what is happening is crowd control. The teachers are not being given a fair chance. What does that say to our young graduates or anyone who may be thinking of entering the teaching profession? It is not encouraging or does not give a good impression. It also demonstrate a lack of respect, support, acknowledgement and value for the profession. It was disappointing that nothing happened in that regard.

The fact that the capitation grant has not been restored means that hard-pressed parents will continue to pay voluntary contributions to schools just to keep the lighting and heating on. That is not a parent's job; it is that of the State and the Government. It must ensure adequate funding is given to school but has not done so. Organisations such as the Society of St. Vincent De Paul continue to see 40% of the requests for practical assistance from hard-pressed parents to defray school costs every year.

I acknowledge the allocation of €1 million to farmers affected by changes to special areas of conservation, SACs, and special protection areas, SPAs. I had written a number of letters to the Minister, Deputy Madigan, on this issue and had submitted a number of parliamentary questions. I welcome this positive step. We need the restoration of the compensation and the opening of the National Parks and Wildlife Service plan that was in place.

I have serious concern about the increases in the carbon tax. This is another nail in the coffin of rural Ireland and rural communities. The carbon tax increases will directly affect all households and communities where there is not adequate public transport. Irish Rural Link raised that point earlier as it has for some time. The Government paid no heed to the consequences of its actions for rural communities that do not have an adequate public transport infrastructure in place.

I want more detail on the package for the midlands and the proposal for a so-called just transition commissioner. I have continuously called on the Minister to ensure a practical focus on this issue as there is great concern. I am also concerned that the money that has been ring-fenced is inadequate. A much greater amount needs to be directed to the midlands. Throwing

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a sweet or two at this is not good enough. People in my own community in Offaly are still concerned and they have not fallen for this tokenistic gesture. We need to see much more.

We have seen the devastating impact that the failure to address the issue in the midlands can have with Bord na Móna. We have seen the ongoing delays in putting a plan together to ensure that the region is looked after. I am not convinced that it is looked after in the budget.

As the detail of the budget works itself out over the next couple of days, it will become clearer that it is sorely lacking in determination and focus to place policy fairness at its core.

It was brought to my attention earlier that Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which has been in receipt of direct funding for many decades has had that funding taken away. This funding will now come through the Arts Council. That is a shameful attack on our heritage and culture. I urge the Minister to review this decision. The annual fleadh has thousands of participants and is worth approximately €50 million to the town that hosts it. It is a great success, boosts tourism and helps local economies in many towns. This is a shameful decision and an insult to Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which has done fantastic work over many years. I hope that decision will be reviewed.

On housing, there is no sense of urgency in addressing the housing emergency. In my own county, couples struggle to pay rents of more than €1,000 in our main towns. I have called on the Minister on many occasions to introduce RPZs in the towns of Tullamore and Edenderry. It is disappointing that the criteria for designation as an RPZ have not been broadened. I have said to the Minister that the disposable income of a particular region should be taken into account when deciding on zones as people are struggling. Many young couples will never own their own home or have a mortgage due to the lack of affordable housing.

The homelessness crisis is not going to be solved in any way, shape or means by the budget. I am disappointed that a more concerted effort was not made on housing.

Overall, it is a matter of deep regret, given the scale of the challenges that most of our vulnerable people are facing, that there has been such a lack of support and indeed response in budget 2020. There might be a few glimmers of hope in some areas of the budget.

Overall, however, it is disappointing. I have had feedback from different sectors such as agriculture, education and health and people are very disappointed. I read the reports as they come in and answer the calls to many concerned people. I feel that it is disappointing.

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about my Department's budget allocation for next year.

In 2020 our total allocation will be €971 million. In a no-deal Brexit, however, we will initially have immediate access to an additional support package of €110 million. This will be drawn from the total contingency fund of €650 million, which has been earmarked by the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, to mitigate the effects of a no-deal Brexit across a number of Departments. It is a first wave of funding to support the businesses most impacted and I will now outline exactly where we will direct the money. It is important to say that Ireland has never been better placed to deal with a big economic shock like Brexit. It is an unprecedented challenge but we are nothing if not a resilient people. We have navigated our way out of challenging times before and we will do so again. Consider how far we have come since the recent

economic crisis. Nearly 220,000 total jobs have been created since the start of 2016 and the unemployment rate currently stands at 5.2%, which is the lowest rate since 2007.

We are planning and investing for the future through Future Jobs Ireland, the nine regional enterprise plans, the regional enterprise development fund and Project Ireland 2040. We must not lose sight of that. We must continue to plan ahead, focus on what is within our control domestically and be the masters of our own destiny. That is exactly what we are doing in budget 2020.

Given the ongoing political uncertainty in the UK, the chances of a no-deal Brexit are high. This is why on day one of a no-deal Brexit, €110 million will be made available to my Department to support vulnerable but viable firms. The funding will be used to activate four specific schemes and three other measures, which build on the many supports already introduced by the Government over the last three years. As I said earlier, this is an initial tranche of funding and there is flexibility there.

The Government is committed to providing further waves of funding as required and I will discuss this with the Minister, Deputy Donohoe as we go along. An initial provision of €42 million will be made available under the rescue and restructuring fund. This fund is for the worst-case scenario. It will rescue firms with acute liquidity or insolvency problems and support them to put a restructuring plan in place to adjust to their new reality. The funding support can be provided in the form of equity or loans of potentially up to €10 million under state aid rules, depending on the circumstances of the business.

In a no-deal Brexit, we will also introduce a new transition fund backed by an initial €45 million. The fund is targeted at small or medium-sized businesses with ten or more employees. It would support firms in the manufacturing sectors and in internationally traded services. It will help them to adapt to short-term shocks such as disruption to supply chain or the loss of market or to adjust their business model as needed. Funding of up to €1 million will be provided through a mix of grants, repayable loans and equity support.

Another fund of €8 million will be made available for a transformation fund for food and non-food businesses. This is a grant scheme supporting larger firms to invest in innovative products and processes to transform their businesses. My Department will provide €5 million to support food businesses and an initial €3 million to support non-food businesses. This is a joint initiative between my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I am also providing Microfinance Ireland with an additional €5 million to support micro-enterprises. It will be used to increase the maximum amount that Microfinance Ireland can lend to firms from €25,000 to €50,000. The loans will be available over a two to five-year period.

The fourth scheme is a €5 million microenterprise emergency Brexit fund, which will be linked to the additional support from Microfinance Ireland and this fund will be operated by the local enterprise offices. It will take the form of repayable grants worth €50,000. Businesses will work with Microfinance Ireland in the first instance and, as required and depending on circumstances, can avail of additional support from the local enterprise office.

Undoubtedly the Border region will feel the greatest impact of a no-deal Brexit and this is why an additional €2 million will be provided to InterTradeIreland in a no-deal Brexit to further support its vital work. As a North-South body, any funding from the South should be matched by the North. Nevertheless, in the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive I am determined

to give them every possible support to help firms on both sides of the Border. Furthermore, an extra €3 million will be provided to my Department's regulatory bodies in a no-deal Brexit to meet additional demands in areas like market surveillance, accreditation and conformity. Those bodies include the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the Irish National Accreditation Board, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Health and Safety Authority.

Separate to the no-deal Brexit package, I am delighted to announce the provision of €12 million for innovation. This includes €10 million in additional funding for the next phase of the disruptive technologies innovation fund. This fund is a key driver of Future Jobs Ireland, our whole-of-government plan to prepare our businesses and workers for the future. I have also secured a further €2 million in capital funding for our innovation programme through Science Foundation Ireland, SFI. This will be used to expand the research programme being undertaken by SFI research centres.

With or without Brexit, these measures will enhance Ireland's competitiveness and attractiveness as a place in which to live, work and invest. In tandem with this I am working with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, to establish a short-term work scheme with training to preserve jobs in vulnerable sectors. I have met ICTU, IBEC and the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, on this measure and we will make a further announcement shortly.

In closing, I reiterate that this €110 million emergency Brexit package in my budget for 2020 will be immediately available in a no-deal Brexit. The schemes will be activated on day one. They will support vulnerable but viable firms and build on the many supports already in place. They have been designed with the feedback of businesses in mind and will ensure that Irish enterprise is able to respond to the challenges that a no-deal Brexit presents. This is the first tranche of funding and if I need additional funds to support firms in the wake of no deal, I will access more of the €650 million contingency fund announced by the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, today.

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Next year, we will invest €2.63 billion in housing. This represents an increase of approximately €250 million from this year's figure. We will build more new social homes with this money than have been built in any of the past 20 years and more than during the so-called boom years, when house building generally was at much higher levels. Next year, we will build more than 7,500 new social homes. In addition, between acquiring and long-term leasing, we will increase the social housing stock by more than 11,000 new homes. We are now surpassing calls for more than 10,000 new social homes a year, which will be achieved this year, with the vast majority being newly built. This is a record number.

As we deliver all of these new homes, we will continue to support people in the private rental market using the housing assistance payment, HAP. Almost 16,000 households will be supported in this way next year. There has been criticism on the use of HAP but nobody has come up with an alternative. Where would these 16,000 households go while we build more homes?

Supports for those in housing insecurity and to tackle homelessness are increasing as we continue to see families and individuals in need of these supports. Despite progress for some people, too many others still find themselves in crisis and extra supports are needed. Funding

of €166 million will help us to help approximately 5,500 people out of homelessness next year, to increase the number of family hubs, to continue to roll out the Housing First plan, to increase our outreach support and to continue our inter-agency work including €30 million in support of the new Dublin Simon detoxification centre at Usher's Island.

More social homes will mean more supports and more security. Our focus is on those who are most vulnerable. Next year will be another year where approximately one in four of every new-built home will be for social housing. We should not look at any one housing measure in isolation. Any new home - be it a family home, a home for an individual, in an apartment block or a once-off house, to rent or to buy, public or private - takes pressures off other parts of the system. All new supply is helping and this is why we will do what we can to continue to drive supply upwards.

Affordable home ownership remains a key challenge. The increase of supply in recent years has moderated house prices and prices are even falling in some areas but home ownership remains out of reach for many. It is true that home ownership has been in decline in Ireland since 1991. This decline is not attributable to any one Government or any one factor. Some 79.3% of households owned their own home in 1991. This fell to 74.4% in 2002, to 67.8% in 2006, and to 69.7% in 2011. The most recent data from the 2016 census show a rate of 67.6%. Much has changed about how we live our lives in the past 30 years, for example, the age until which we stay in education, the age at which we settle down and the number of jobs we have in our working lives. Still, most people aspire to own their own home. The Government must recognise that the traditional way of thinking - building more homes will sort out our price problems - is no longer fit for purpose. The Government has to step in to bridge the affordability gap, and we are doing so. The help-to-buy scheme is being extended, which is welcome. Over the next two years, it will help thousands of young people to buy their first homes and get people out of the rental trap more quickly. Our main initiative to build and sell homes at more affordable prices, the serviced sites fund, is being increased to meet the 3,200 homes approved under the scheme, with funding in place for 3,000 more.

Despite funding being made available and plans being put in place, some taking two years to develop, elected members are delaying and blocking new homes, for example, in places such as O'Devaney Gardens. Councillors and parties that once were not only in favour of the plans but also helped to design them are now going against them because they have been told to do so from on high. These same parties will criticise us in the Chamber for our housing plans, but we are building houses while they are blocking them. We have plans, but they only have tweets. It is time that people recognised the hypocrisy of some in the House when speaking on housing.

The Land Development Agency, LDA, is receiving additional money so that it can progress its first four sites - two in Dublin, one in Cork and another in Kildare. Between these sites, at least 1,200 new homes will be provided, including 800 social and affordable homes, which is well in excess of the 40% minimum required of the agency. Other initiatives, such as the Rebuilding Ireland home loan, have helped or have the capacity to help thousands with more affordable mortgages.

Those renting are paying too much in rent. A suite of new reforms was introduced earlier this year. It is important to note that not everything happens during budget week. In fact, most of what the Government does is not done in budget week. The reforms will strengthen rental protections and controls. We have independent evidence, which has been published, showing that rent controls are working. However, they can work better. The budget provides additional

money and resources to enforce the new laws. The Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, will hire new staff, move to the annual registration of tenancies and conduct inspections under the new laws. Additional funding will also go to local authorities to support inspections of private rental properties and enforce short-term letting laws.

The first cost-rental project is on-site and will deliver two-bedroom apartments at €1,200. Cost rental will expand next year as more sites get under way and the working groups develop a national model in tandem with our partners in the European Investment Bank, EIB.

Changes in stamp duty are being made to help drive the supply of properties for rent. Changes that have been made to apartment guidelines on height are starting to show improvements. There was a 42% increase in the number of apartments built in the first half of 2019 and an almost 90% increase in planning permissions. This is happening because we made the necessary changes. We have given certainty to builders as to what they can and cannot do with sites, particularly in cities and other areas where we want to increase density. We must continue to drive the construction of more rental properties. We also need to see more rental properties becoming available. We have done so, with some 3,000 new tenancies in the first half of the year.

The help-to-buy scheme and the Rebuilding Ireland home loan help people to move out of the rental trap more quickly as more homes are built privately and under our various schemes. Every new home delivered, be it out of vacancy, an unfinished housing estate or a new build, helps to take pressure off other parts of the housing sector and helps people who are in housing insecurity.

Housing adaptation is an important part of our plans in the budget. There is significant funding for the retrofitting of homes and a new scheme derived from the carbon tax will help houses in the midlands to protect themselves and allow for deep retrofits to take place. The new nearly zero energy building, NZEB, guidelines will take effect at the end of the month. The housing adaptation grant will support 12,000 houses for the elderly and those with disabilities. The mortgage-to-rent scheme will support a further 400 people to stay in their own homes.

While there are other measures in the budget for my Department, I will conclude by saying that we are facing a housing challenge and that, while we must play catch-up for the many lost years, we are catching up. What would be happening if Rebuilding Ireland did not exist? No other party has proposed a comprehensive housing plan, and despite having a majority and being able to change our plans, the Opposition parties have not done so. It is time that people recognised the progress that Rebuilding Ireland is making. To the end of June, more than 58,000 new homes had been delivered. Now, more than 2,000 homes are starting construction on site every month and tens of thousands more have planning permission. We will deliver at least 27,000 new homes next year and even more the year after that. Only through driving this supply can we help the people who are suffering from the crisis.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This year's budget is unique, in that it aims to preserve the strong financial supports that assist our agrifood sector while providing for the potential of a significant external shock to the sector in the guise of a no-deal Brexit. The 2020 Estimates provide a gross Vote of €1.647 billion for the Department, of which €1.373 billion is current expenditure and €274 million is capital expenditure. That is a €51 million increase on the 2019 figure.

The 2020 provision focuses in particular on the difficulties in the beef sector. I am provid-

ing almost €85 million in targeted schemes to support sustainable beef farming. This includes €45 million for the beef data and genomics programme, BDGP, and a further €40 million for targeted supports. I intend to consult stakeholders as to the use of these funds, but in broad terms the following options will be considered: the continuation of the beef environmental efficiency pilot, BEEP, suckler cow-calf weighing scheme; the provision of supports for beef farmers rearing dairy beef animals to encourage best practice and improve the efficiency of such enterprises; and encouraging farm practices that ensure the highest standards of animal welfare on beef farms. I have also included €18 million for the sheep welfare scheme and the budget for Bord Bia will increase by €1.6 million, with much of the additional funding focused on promoting the consumption of Irish beef and sheepmeat.

I am providing €103 million in support for the forestry sector in recognition of the vital contribution that it can make to mitigating climate change and augmenting farm incomes. I am increasing the provision for the targeted agricultural modernisation schemes, TAMS, by €12 million to almost €82 million. This will fund investment in a range of environmental and competitiveness measures. The provision in the agri-environment area is increased by €8 million to almost €238 million. This includes an allocation of €3 million generated by the carbon tax, which will fund pilot projects aimed specifically at climate measures in agriculture. A call for a new pilot European Innovation Partnership, EIP, scheme on reduced management of farmed peatlands will be announced in due course.

The provision for the Department's seafood programme has been increased by €5 million to a total of €137.8 million. This will help fund vital investment in our fishery harbours, allow the Marine Institute to progress the construction of a new research vessel and provide for the vital work of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, SFPA, and Bord Iascaigh Mhara in what may be very testing times for the industry.

Regarding the food sector, Teagasc's capital provision of more than €9 million will permit it to proceed with the development of the food hub in Moorepark. Some €8 million will be provided to support innovation and development in the food sector.

The Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund will be allocated €84 million and an additional €1 million will bring the 2020 allocation for Horse Sport Ireland to €4 million to assist with the strategic development of the sector.

The range of existing specific agri-taxation measures are estimated to provide €240 million per year in supports to the sector. I am pleased that these supports have been maintained. I have agreed with the Minister for Finance that our Departments will engage on potential measures to assist farmers in meeting the challenges and obligations set out in the climate action plan and to incentivise better health and safety in the sector.

I refer briefly to the Government's no-deal Brexit package, which is designed to assist the most vulnerable sectors in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Some €110 million will be made available for the agrifood sector in the first tranche, to be supplemented by any exceptional aid provided by the EU. This amount is not yet included in the Department's budget allocation, since we all continue to hope for and work towards a different outcome. If the UK leaves without a deal, though, the provision of €85 million in support for our beef sector will be a first priority, together with €14 million for our fishing fleet. We will also want to support food companies wishing to reorient production and marketing towards non-UK markets - a provision of €5 million is available for this purpose - and to provide necessary supports to other sectors to improve

competitiveness, in which respect €6 million is being allocated. While funds cannot fully address the negative effects of a no-deal Brexit for the agrifood and fisheries sectors, this first tranche of supports will be used to ameliorate the immediate impact on farmers and fishermen as the full impact of a no-deal Brexit crystallises and to make some of the adjustments needed to improve the resilience of businesses in the face of new market realities.

This has been a brief overview of the range of measures that apply in the agrifood and marine sectors for 2020. I am confident that they provide an appropriate balance to support the development of a competitive and environmentally sustainable agrifood sector as well as a contingency to protect our sectors from the worst impacts of a no-deal Brexit.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I propose to share my time with Deputy McConalogue. We will take ten minutes each.

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

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: In my response to the budget announced yesterday I will focus specifically on the housing brief which I hold. I listened with interest to the five or six-minute contribution made by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. I was struck by the famous phrase: "If you're explaining, you're losing." The reality is that we have the lowest homeownership rates in Ireland for more than 50 years. We have the highest homelessness rates in Ireland for more than 50 years. We have the highest rents ever in Ireland. The average rent in Dublin city is €2,024 per month. We also have the longest housing waiting lists we have ever had. That is the context in which the budget was framed.

The overall Vote of €2.6 billion is significant in the context of the additional capital funding provided for public and social housing, but the big issue has been implementation. The difficulty has been the delivery of houses faster to meet the existing need. In the budget announced last year my party and I negotiated lifting the discretionary cap for social housing to €6 million to enable the local authorities to build homes quicker. It would mean effectively that in Cork, Galway, Donegal, Dublin and Meath the local authorities would be able to put the provision of housing estates out to tender up to the value of €6 million. That effectively would mean housing estates of 40 to 50 homes. Instead, the cap remained at €2 million, which meant everything above that figure went through a 14-month process with the Custom House which delayed delivery. It was something we agreed last year, but the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and the Fine Gael-led Government reneged on it. They acted in bad faith and did not implement the measure. We again sought such a measure this year and it has again been agreed that local authorities will have the autonomy to build medium-sized housing estates, which they are well able to do. They will be subject to audit by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. That will speed up the delivery of social homes across the country.

It may take a change of Government to implement the change in policy. That is something I earnestly hope will happen in the coming months. This is a Brexit budget and the two Ministers present, Deputies Creed and McEntee, know that the only reason we are having this budget is Brexit. It is not a normal budget. Others on the far left and in Sinn Féin have tried to frame other things around the budget, but the reality is that it is to provide stability for the country while we enter into a crucial stage of negotiations with the European Union and the United Kingdom to try to ensure we will protect the country as best we can against the effects of a no-deal Brexit. We have put the national interest first in that regard in working as a collective to

try to ensure jobs, the economy and people's livelihoods dependent on the trading relationship between Ireland and Britain and the seamless nature of our membership of the European Union will be protected in the coming months. That is why we have facilitated and will continue to facilitate the passage of the budget through the Finance Bill and the Social Welfare Bill. We have been upfront and honest with people in that regard.

In the few short months the Government has, I wish to see implementation of some of the decisions that have been taken. I want to see the establishment of an affordable purchase scheme for first-time buyers. We negotiated a figure of €310 million last year. The four Dublin local authorities have adopted the scheme which is in place, but we need to get on with setting the criteria to give people hope they will be able to purchase their own home. My party believes in homeownership, unlike others. There are parties represented in this House which do not believe in homeownership, which want a State-run housing system. Public housing is part of the solution and something I support, but my party and I also support homeownership. It is an honest and just aspiration for people to aspire to owning their own home. Homeownership also provides the best security of tenure. We want to see the establishment of the scheme and have it progressed with the criteria set down.

A pilot scheme was announced for the affordable rental scheme in 2015, but we have only broken ground now. That is one example, if another is needed, of how delayed a response has been in implementation on the ground of Government announcements. On the delivery of homes through approved housing bodies, AHBs, the Government has still not grappled with the fact that approved housing bodies remain on-balance sheet. While that will not be a problem this year, as more funding is invested through AHBs, it will affect the delivery of homes. The Government must redouble its efforts and make good the commitment it made to work with the AHBs to get them off-balance sheet. It has not been doing this; rather, it has been paying lip service to it.

In his brief remarks this evening the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, also alluded to the LDA and the fact that €17 million had been allocated to it. I remind colleagues that the LDA was announced in March or April 2018, but we still only have the heads of the Bill, rather than legislation. They were brought to the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government last week. No land has been transferred to the LDA because it has not been set up on a statutory basis. It has been set up by ministerial order, but there is no primary legislation underpinning the funding provided and the Bill was only brought before the relevant committee last week. That is another example of a big announcement and a lack of delivery.

I assume the Minister's officials are listening to the debate. I refer to the pyrite remediation scheme and mica, an issue which many Members, including my colleague, Deputy McConalogue, have raised. I am pleased that mica has been brought into the pyrite remediation scheme, but I am concerned about the level of funding that has been allocated up to next year. As both schemes move forward, we will have to consider the provision of additional funding, particularly when we start to tackle mica in counties Donegal and Sligo. I again record my support for the expansion of the pyrite remediation scheme to cover homes where the damage rating does not reach category 2 and people cannot have their houses remediated. They are stuck in limbo. The Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, is also aware of some of the people affected in that regard. They cannot move on because they cannot obtain a green certificate. There is still an issue in that regard. It is welcome that the pyrite remediation scheme is still in place and that mica will be added to it. We must try to assist the hundreds of families across the country whose houses need detailed remediation and who need to be given a fresh start.

The Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, mentioned that there would be an allocation of an additional €135 million next year to meet the obligations the State had under the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme. He has repeated that no one has come up with another solution or a viable alternative to the HAP scheme, which is true, but the HAP scheme is very expensive and a short-term fix. The long-term solution is to build proper homes for those families who are living on a day-to-day basis with 12-month leases in the private rented sector. A total of 21% are now living in private rented accommodation, the vast bulk of whom have short-term, 12-month renewable leases. The over-reliance in Rebuilding Ireland on housing families through the HAP scheme must be tackled. More than two thirds of all those deemed to have been housed last year under Rebuilding Ireland were facilitated through the HAP scheme, which should be a short-term fix, not a long-term solution.

We must build more social homes through measures proposed by Fianna Fáil such as the lifting of the discretionary cap, the establishment of the affordable housing purchase scheme and an affordable rent scheme which was previously agreed to. It is welcome that the Minister has at long last come around to our view that the help-to-buy grant should be retained for the next two years. We fought tooth and nail to ensure it would remain because it gave some hope to people who wanted to buy. It provided some assistance towards providing a deposit to help people to get onto the housing ladder. In the absence of an affordable purchase scheme being up and running and open for applications, the help-to-buy grant needed to be maintained. I accept that it is expensive, but it is direct assistance for more than 15,000 people whom it has helped to get a foot onto the property ladder to buy their own home and put down roots in secure housing for families. That is what we in Fianna Fáil see as the way forward.

During these budget debates I found it interesting that, for once, Sinn Féin in particular stated that it did not support the help-to-buy grants. Neither it nor the far left ever supported it. This again shows me clearly that those parties do not support the notion of homeownership. People who want to get on and set down their own roots with their own home should be assisted, particularly first-time buyers.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the impact of budgetary measures on the agriculture and marine sector. The overall agriculture and marine envelope leaves people underwhelmed. It falls far short of the expectations of those in both sectors. As for the agrifood and agriculture sector, considering the massive financial pressure farmers have been under in recent months, there is nothing of substance in this budget to address the income crisis. That is particularly the case with beef farmers and their needs, especially in the light of the protests over the summer at meat factories. That was an expression borne from the losses farmers are experiencing. Nothing additional is coming out of this budget to support them in respect of the losses they have experienced.

The beef exceptional aid measure, BEAM, scheme which was agreed at a European level, with €50 million coming from the Commission and €50 million from the domestic Exchequer, covered the reference period from September last year until May this year. The period from May until the present, however, has seen prices at a lower level than was the case during the reference period. There has been no recognition by the Government of the losses farmers have experienced as a result and no effort to ensure any mitigation. This comes alongside what farmers experienced with the €20 million for the beef environmental efficiency pilot, BEEP, scheme, which was announced in budget week last year. As we debate the 2020 budget, none of that €20 million has yet been delivered to farmers. They still await the payments announced this time last year. That is despite farmers having experienced one of the most difficult years in recent

times for income. That speaks again to what my colleague, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, outlined regarding the total failure of the Government to deliver on its promises and commitments.

A significant and important aspect of the budget concerns Brexit and the need to prepare as well as possible to meet the challenge of a hard Brexit. As Deputy Darragh O'Brien outlined, that necessity for political stability to meet the Brexit challenge is the reason Fianna Fáil facilitated this budget and allowed an extension of the confidence and supply agreement. Regarding the agrifood sector, in particular, however, the level of financial commitment to preparations for Brexit are nowhere near what is required. The overall budgetary envelope indicates €650 million is being allocated to Brexit preparation funds, with €110 million of that to be made available immediately for the agrifood and marine sector in the event of a hard Brexit. Similarly, €110 million will be made available to the enterprise sector, while a decision on the allocation of the remaining €400 million will be made later.

Let us look at what has happened with other schemes, however. As I stated, €100 million was allocated to the BEAM scheme to cover losses from September 2018 to May 2019. That scheme was intended to address losses incurred prior to a hard Brexit and it still only partially covered those losses. The idea, therefore, that the €110 million to be released immediately is anywhere near sufficient to facilitate the needs of the agrifood sector simply does not stand up. There is also a great lack of detail concerning how and to whom that funding will be delivered. There also is a question as to whether it will be farmers who ultimately will benefit from it. No detail at all has been given to us and that is the least we would have expected. We require it and are asking to see it now. It is not acceptable, with three weeks to go, that the information provided is so general and there is such a lack of specifics from the Government on how this funding will be spent. It also will be essential for there to be funding from the European Commission in the event of a hard Brexit. A significant package is needed from the Commission to assist us in that case. We will, of course, all be working together, across all parties, to try to ensure that there will be no hard Brexit at the end of October.

I will mention a few other outstanding elements that the budget does not deal with and which the Government must address. A significant number of farmers have come out of the agri-environment options scheme, AEOS, and cannot access the follow-on green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS, because it is closed. It is unfair that those farmers have not got the opportunity to participate. That is particularly the case given our climate change targets and our objectives in trying to boost biodiversity and improve the environment. It does not make sense that those farmers are not being facilitated to join the follow-on scheme.

Turning to the marine sector, the €14 million allocated for Brexit will also be nowhere near sufficient. There has also been very little detail from the Government regarding those funds. We also did not see any additional funds allocated to support the many small fishery harbours around the country. They have left with paltry funds in recent years. No assistance has been provided to the local authorities, in whose ownership those harbours rest, to ensure they are maintained and developed. That needs to be addressed and should have been addressed by now.

I welcome the additional €1 million for Horse Sport Ireland, which brings its total funding to some €4 million. I know that organisation requested and needs additional funds but the €1 million will certainly assist. It needs to be just the start, however. It has been disappointing, given the engagement between the Irish Harness Racing Association, IHRA, and the Government in recent years that once again no funding has been provided for it in this budget. Its strategic plans to develop the harness racing sector have not been supported.

It is similar with the knowledge transfer, KT, programme. It is disappointing to not see a commitment to follow up on and extend funding for that initiative. The existing funding has been underspent. I refer to the previous allocated commitment and the take-up of that scheme. It has been of great benefit to the many farmers who have participated. The Government should examine the underspending and consider extending the scheme for a fourth year.

I will also touch on the issue of stamp duty and the impact that will have on the farming sector. This measure is targeted at commercial property. There has undoubtedly been a bubble in that sector, which has seen major profits made and where the increase in the rate of stamp duty could be justified. The failure of the Government to put in adequate safeguards is, however, going to impact many farmers who are seeking to buy land to expand their farms. It is an unfair measure in that regard. The Government should have examined ways to ensure that those farmers who are being progressive in seeking to expand their holdings would not be penalised in so doing. Stamp duty relief exists for young fully qualified farmers under the age of 35 years. They can benefit from a stamp duty rate of 1%. Consanguinity relief also exists for intrafamilial transfers and that scheme also qualifies at the rate of 1%. A whole category for farmers seeking to expand will, however, be unnecessarily affected by the Government's plans in respect of stamp duty.

The overall message to the Government is that it still is not listening. It still does not understand the income crisis in the farming sector and this budget has not sought to deliver on addressing that issue. My message to the Minister, Deputy Creed, and the rest of the Cabinet is they need to seek funds from the European Commission to assist farmers with the losses they have suffered in recent months. That needs to be done now. We also need commitments from the European Union on what the funding will be from it for mitigation measures in the event of a hard Brexit.

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Politics is essentially all about choices, particularly so when there are limited resources and not everybody can be catered for, as one would hope and like to do. As the Government delivers a prudent budget in the shadow of Brexit, I have chosen to ensure we consolidate the progress we have made in recent years to ensure the social welfare system supports some of the most vulnerable citizens in Ireland.

Compared to 2019, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will spend an additional €690 million next year on pensions, carers, people with disabilities, families and children. Approximately €520 million of that money is needed to simply keep up with demographic changes, particularly with our ageing population. This year, I am seeking a better deal for families and we have provided for further increases to our weekly payments for children, increasing the rate by €3 for children aged 12 years and over, and by €2 for children aged under 12 years. This brings the respective rates to €40 per week and €36 per week. There will be an enhancement of the school meals programme to deliver hot meals instead of cold lunches with provision for up to 35,000 children. There will be a further increase in the earnings disregard for one-parent family payments and jobseeker's transition payment of €15 per week, increasing the incomes of lone parents. There will be an increase in the income thresholds on our working family payments for families with up to three children by €10 per week. That is worth an additional €6 per week to families that are at work. We have also provided for a 100% Christmas bonus to be paid in early December. There will be an increase in the living alone allowance for more than 160,000 pensioners, widows and widowers and for more than 40,000 people living with a disability. There will be an increase in the fuel allowance of €2 per week, bringing its

value to more than €686 over the course of the fuel season. For those who receive the fuel allowance alongside the household benefits package, the Department is providing for over €1,100 per annum towards the energy costs of over 200,000 Irish households. We will see the restoration of the full rate of jobseeker's allowance for 25 year olds and we will see payment of the full rate for 18 to 24 year olds living independently and in receipt of State housing supports. There will be an increase in the number of hours carers can work or participate in education and still receive their full payment. That increase is from 15 hours per week to 18.5 hours per week.

I have also secured an additional €2 million for community employment participants to engage in vital training programmes to prepare them for employment in the open labour market. We have a provision of €2.5 million in additional expenditure for tailored activation measures aimed at vulnerable groups such as women returning to work after many years, Travellers and the Roma community, and a specific provision for ex-offenders.

On women, in particular, I intend to develop a pilot scheme to assist women to return to the workplace. There are tens of thousands of extremely talented, skilled and productive women in towns and villages who have only stepped out of the workplace to raise their families or to care for a relative. Many of them want to return but perhaps some of them lack the confidence those many years outside of the workforce will take from somebody. I hope to partner with some of Ireland's top blue-chip companies to develop a pilot scheme of "returnships", whereby women can re-enter the workforce and quickly build up their confidence and experience, as well as focusing on the need to actively engage within the workforce.

Within this budget, I am also introducing a disregard on the social assistance schemes for any person in receipt of the HSE's blind welfare allowance. This will ensure the blind welfare allowance is not treated as income for the purposes of means assessment by my Department. This ends the situation where somebody on a disability allowance, for example, may have his or her payment reduced because he or she is also in receipt of the blind welfare allowance.

I am also providing funding for research in two key areas: first, for the project to undertake research on funeral poverty in Ireland and on the wider economic impact of bereavement and; second, to establish a judge-led group to determine, based on international best practice, maintenance guidelines and regulations that I intend to put on a statutory footing and which it is hoped will achieve better outcomes for those families affected by separation.

As outlined by the Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, yesterday, budget 2020 has been framed in the shadow of Brexit. In the event of a no-deal Brexit and its economic consequences, €365 million will be provided for extra social protection expenditure on the live register or related schemes or both. Probably more importantly, a further €45 million will be made available to assist people to transition to the new employment opportunities our society is creating. Even in this context, yesterday's budget announcement demonstrates the Government's commitment to providing a better deal for families. This builds on the measures we have taken over the past three years that genuinely are beginning to show a real impact on the level of child poverty in Ireland.

As I stated yesterday, the Low Pay Commission, in its recommendations for the national minimum wage report of July 2019, recommended an increase in the national minimum wage of 30 cent to €10.10 per hour. This recommendation was made on the basis of an orderly Brexit. The Government and Cabinet considered the report at yesterday's meeting and we have decided to make an order to declare for the national minimum hourly rate of pay to be held off for now

until we get a clearer picture of what Brexit becomes.

This year, we have developed a significant welfare package that builds on the increases of recent years and from my perspective, particularly focuses on the groups in society that are most vulnerable and most at risk of poverty, in particular, but not only, families on low incomes with children. The measures announced yesterday adjust the social welfare code in such a way that it will focus available resources on those who need them the most. It strengthens our social welfare system and puts us in a position to provide for further improvements in the years ahead. Next month will see new measures introduced which were announced in budget 2019, including the introduction of paid parental leave and jobseeker's benefit for the self-employed. In addition, I have tasked the officials in my Department to continue working with their colleagues in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to introduce a system next year that will provide for the indexation of the State's pensions. This will ensure pensioners are provided with greater clarity about the value of their social welfare increases from year to year.

This is a social welfare package that provides a better deal for families and targets resources to some of the other most vulnerable groups in society. I will continue to work to ensure the social welfare system is focused on the people who need our support the most.

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I welcome the opportunity to address the House on budget 2020 and the 2020 health Estimates. In line with the overall strategy of the Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform, the health budget has been completed on the assumption of a disorderly Brexit. The Irish economy will face challenges arising from this in 2020 but we can and will meet these challenges if we make sensible decisions now and focus on our strategic goals. That was at the heart of budget 2020.

For me, from a health perspective, this budget is about truly bringing Sláintecare to life in communities across the country. We made a lot of effort on a cross-party basis to put together the Sláintecare plan. It was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform the health service and take party politics out of the direction of healthcare and with budget 2020, this cross-party vision is becoming a reality. In recent weeks, we have taken a number of significant steps to see real, tangible progress with Sláintecare. We have made the decision to dismantle the HSE as it is constructed and to appoint six regional health areas in line with Sláintecare. We have awarded €20 million in Sláintecare integration funding for 122 projects in every county across the country. We published the report by Dr. Donal de Buitléir on private practice in public hospitals, showing that if we want to deliver real care in public hospitals in a better way, we have to address the thorny issue of private practice in public hospitals.

The budget announced yesterday builds on the foundations laid in the past year, particularly with the provision of multi-annual funding for the recruitment of 1,000 front-line community healthcare workers between now and 2021. This is the aspect of the budget I am most excited about when it comes to healthcare. We have built so many wonderful primary care centres across the country. We have 127 in operation. Everybody inside and outside of this House tells me that they need to be busier. The only way they can be busier and the only way more can happen within them is if we staff them. A ring-fenced fund, on a multi-annual basis, for 1,000 front-line staff will mean more speech and language therapists, more occupational therapists, more physiotherapists, more psychologists, more public health nurses and more of all those posts one would expect to see being created in the community. That includes ten extra dementia advisers, which I know there has been a real cross-party focus on in this House and beyond for quite some time. Bolstering capacity in the community and in primary care is vital if we are

to restructure our health service around the community and the patient over the coming year and move away from the hospital-centric model of healthcare. The expansion of community staffing is exciting but it is not the only strategic support to the implementation of Sláintecare delivered by the budget.

We are providing an additional €32 million in ring-fenced funding for Sláintecare and placing a very strong focus on measures which increase care services in the community, which is absolutely vital if we are to reduce waiting lists. In 2020 we will support GPs in managing chronic conditions, preventing further hospital admissions. This will mean paying GPs more to look after patients with chronic conditions, patients who up until now have been going to the hospital for their appointments. We will support families in caring for their elderly and young. This is a key element of providing the right care in the right place at the right time and at the right price, given that we are limited, as all health budgets are.

I would like to provide the House with some more detail on all of these measures. General practice will play an essential role in delivering on our Sláintecare ambitions. The revised contractual arrangements with GPs will provide for a structured approach to the management of chronic disease which will benefit more than 430,000 medical card and GP visit card patients, bringing the investment to date under the revised GP visit contract to €80 million. Ensuring people can access healthcare and medicines without financial hardship is also a key pillar of Sláintecare. Some €45 million has been committed to this end. It involves the reduction of prescription charges for those under and over 70 years of age and the reduction in the monthly drug payment scheme threshold; therefore, it will be cheaper for people to buy medicine for their family if they go to the pharmacy, regardless of whether they are medical card holders. We are also expanding the income thresholds to qualify for the medical card for people over the age of 70 years in order to look after older people, also benefiting 50,000 more people over the age of 70 years with medical cards.

We are expanding the roll-out of free GP care services, but we are doing so on a phased basis. They will be extended to children under seven years at the start of the next school year. For the first time ever, there will be a free dental care package for children under the age of six years, in line with our new oral health policy, Smile agus Sláinte.

We are putting more money into the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, bringing the total budget to €100 million. It cannot be the National Treatment Purchase Fund of old. It cannot just be about giving money to private hospitals. It has to be about using public capacity. I see that the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Health, Deputy Michael Harty, is present. He has highlighted capacity in Ennis that he would like to see used. We have done more in Nenagh Hospital with the new cataract theatre, funded through the NTPF. We have opened more theatres in Bantry General Hospital using the NTPF. This Friday I will meet representatives of the NTPF to set them a challenge to come up with Sláintecare initiatives and community diagnostics solutions. This is not just about putting more money into private hospitals - far from it.

Of course, we are also providing more funding for home care services, with an additional 1 million home care hours. In 2020 we will see the first reduction in home care waiting times in many years. I refer to the roll-out of the new statutory home support scheme, something the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, started when she was in the Department of Health and on which the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, is building. The budget includes €26 million for winter funding, more funding for mental health services and more funding for disability

services. Yes, there is more funding for health services, but it is also about doing healthcare differently and bringing Sláintecare to life.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Helen McEntee): As many have outlined, the budget has been framed in the context of the worst possible outcome of Brexit, a no-deal Brexit. This is a prudent and sensible approach. While we are all working to deliver a Brexit deal, we must prepare for the worst. To do anything else, as Opposition parties appear to have suggested, would be irresponsible and foolish in the current climate.

Budget 2020 builds on earlier budgets by making more than €1 billion available to be spent in the event of a no-deal Brexit. This significant funding is targeted at where assistance will be needed most. It includes €650 million to support agriculture, enterprise and tourism and assist the workers and regions which will be most affected. In my constituency, Meath East, where we are developing a fantastic agrifood and tourism sector, this funding will be very welcome. Some €220 million will be immediately deployed in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Some €110 million will consist of agriculture supports and €110 million of enterprise supports. This will help companies to become more competitive, transition, restructure and look to new markets.

Farmers and fisheries will be able to access immediate supports. They will include €85 million for beef farmers, something I know will be welcomed, on top of the €120 million in additional funding that was made available this year, as well as €85 million separate from the Brexit fund for beef farmers. Some €14 million will be made available for fisheries, with €6 million for other livestock farmers. Some €40 million will be available to the tourism sector to support the areas that will be most adversely affected. It will also assist in creating new marketing initiatives, while maintaining the very close links we have with our UK visitors. Some €365 million is being provided for extra social protection expenditure, with €45 million to support businesses and workers in difficulty.

This does not include the €185 million we have already committed to ensure compliance conditions will be met and trade disruption will be minimised at ports and airports. It also does not include the further supports which we know the European Commission will provide in the event of a no-deal Brexit. While we are doing everything to mitigate the potential impacts of Brexit, we cannot and will not lose sight of the importance of our membership of the European Union and overall commitments. With an overall budget of €270 million for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, we will continue to work with member states, international organisations and local organisations such as European Movement Ireland, the Irish Institute for International and European Affairs, IIEA, and the Wheel. We will continue to invest in initiatives such as Communicating Europe to make sure we reinforce our place at the heart of Europe among citizens. Budget 2020 will keep us focused on doing just that.

While a no-deal Brexit has framed the budget, we have not lost sight of the bigger picture at home. We are spending €70 billion in total, which represents an increase of €3.3 billion on the figure for last year. Many of my constituents are young couples and young families. While the provision of free GP care extended to children under the age of eight years and free dental care for children under the age of six years may seem small, these changes will help families in County Meath and around the country. They will be provided in conjunction with and supported by GPs and dentists.

We are extending the help-to-buy scheme for young first-time buyers to assist them in the

purchase of their first home. The dream of owning a home should not be out of the reach of young people. The Government knows this and we are committed to assisting them. We will also see more affordable childcare services, the expansion of paternity leave, hot school dinners for more than 30,000 children and a pilot programme to provide free school books for primary school students. These are just some of the measures which, in combination, will help to make the cost of living more affordable, particularly for young families.

As the Minister for Health has just outlined, budget 2020 will see further improvements in the delivery of health services. Next year we will see an additional 1,000 front-line staff hired to care for patients in the community. That is what people want. We will see an additional 1 million home care hours that will see families and carers supported in the provision of care for their loved ones. That is extremely important. As the Minister outlined, it will not see us merely chasing demand; we will actually get ahead of it. As somebody with two elderly grandmothers, both of whom live at home, I know that it is extremely important that we allow people to remain at home for as long as possible.

In respect of respite care services, a massive issue in my county, I am pleased to see an increase in the budget for next year. I will continue to work with the Minister for Health and the Minister of State with special responsibility for disability issues, Deputy Finian McGrath, to ensure respite care services in County Meath are improved and increased as soon as possible. I hope the budget will support us in doing this. As a former Minister of State with responsibility for mental health services and older people, I am delighted that, as promised, the budget has increased by €35 million, which brings the total mental health budget to more than €1 billion. This represents an increase of 40% since 2012 and very clearly underlines the Government's commitment to the provision of these vital services.

We have already mentioned pyrite this evening. For many of my young constituents, the dream of owning their own home turned into a nightmare when they discovered that their homes had pyrite. The remediation scheme has been extremely successful in remediating many people's homes. I am pleased that my county colleague, the Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Damien English, has secured a further €40 million in the budget for next year to ensure the scheme can continue, with funding for the mica scheme. It will mean that the homes approved for the remediation scheme will have access to funding.

I will refer to climate issues. I attended the United Nations General Assembly, at which Ms Greta Thunberg spoke and ensured this issue was front and centre on the desks of policymakers from around the globe. We are absolutely committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 by reaching our 2030 targets. This must be met by action. The budget announced yesterday is the start of that action. However, we want to bring about these changes in a fair and timely manner in order that people, farmers, businesses and industries will have time to adjust. At the same time, we must address this urgent issue. I am pleased that we have outlined a trajectory which shows how we can do it in the next ten years.

We are in a unique situation. We are taking measures to protect our society and country from an outcome of a decision for which not one person in this country voted but which has the potential to fundamentally change the country. A no-deal Brexit will never be Ireland's or the European Union's choice, but we must nevertheless prepare for such an outcome. The measures the Government has put in place in the budget underline the significant steps we are trying to take to grow the economy, make it a fairer place for everyone and shield it from the potential

economic consequences of a no-deal Brexit.

Deputy Michael Harty: As I had the opportunity last night to speak about the health service in general terms, tonight I would like to speak about how the budget affects local communities in the mid-west. The first topic concerns Shannon Airport. I welcome the announcement made in budget 2020 of a €2.5 million fund to develop regional airport connectivity with European hubs. I understand this may increase to €10 million over three years. This is a very important fund for regional airports such as Shannon Airport. A competitive route fund for Irish airports will help to achieve balanced regional development. The route development fund is most welcome.

Shannon Airport needs connectivity with a European hub because Brexit will threaten the Heathrow Airport hub. Frankfurt is the ideal location. Connectivity is a key driver for the mid-west regional economy. Many of the companies located in the Shannon industrial zone have identified air connectivity as a key factor in their decision to locate in the mid-west. We need the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to collaborate to achieve balanced regional development to ensure sustainability. The Ryder Cup which will be held in the mid-west in 2026 needs to be marketed through Shannon Airport, rather than Dublin Airport. It is an ideal opportunity to promote Shannon Airport as the gateway to the west.

State-owned airports should be seen as key resources in achieving balanced economic growth and achieving 75% growth in the mid-west region in keeping with Project 2040. This needs to occur as a counterbalance to the unhealthy dominance of Dublin Airport, which will soon have 90% of air passenger traffic into Ireland. Cork Airport has connectivity with Amsterdam and Paris, while Kerry Airport has connectivity with Frankfurt-Hahn. Shannon Airport needs connectivity with a strong European hub and will have to make a strong case to justify receiving a fair share of the funding available in that regard.

Last week Limerick, Galway, Ennis and Shannon chambers published a report by Copenhagen Economics that made recommendations on how Shannon Airport should be developed and the integration of aviation and enterprise policy would deliver balanced regional development in the area. The report has been presented to the Minister, Deputy Ross. I hope he will take it seriously and act on it. I propose that as carriers expand their routes and increase frequency from Dublin Airport, perhaps a mechanism be found that would require them to provide a percentage of their traffic from regional airports. Perhaps 10% of their traffic should leave from regional airports such as Shannon, Cork and Knock. That would be an important driver in shifting the balance of development from Dublin to the regional airports.

With regard to carbon tax, the Government is establishing a just transition fund of €6 million, which is very welcome. It also proposes to establish the position of transition commissioner. However, the Budget Statement only refers to supporting the midlands communities where peat burning stations will cease operation by 2028. A power station omitted from it that should have been included is Moneypoint because it is in a similar position. It must cease burning coal by 2025. It is rarely used as an electricity generating station and is kept in reserve. Even though coal is cheap, the potential fines for burning such high-carbon fuels and the resultant greenhouse gases make burning coal quite expensive. The Moneypoint plant is going through a transition and reducing its workforce from 194 to fewer than 100. The just transition fund should also apply to it. There is no difference between it and the mid-west in terms of the effects the closures will have on the workers, their local communities and the enterprises

and businesses supplying services to them. No group of workers, communities or enterprises should be left behind.

The carbon tax on motor fuel will disproportionately affect those living in rural Ireland because they do not have an alternative transport system. There is very little public transport in rural Ireland. People living in Kilkee, Lahinch and Ballyvaughan who must travel to Ennis, Shannon or Limerick to work have no option but to travel by car. Applying the carbon tax to them will disadvantage them disproportionately. The Rural Link service in County Clare was formerly known as Clare Bus. Unfortunately, it was integrated and has become Local Link Limerick Clare. The transition has been very problematic and not gone smoothly. This is to the disadvantage of Local Link in County Clare. It will diminish the quality of the service provided by Local Link and Clare Accessible Transport. Funding for the scheme is now subject to monthly review, which has led to the workers having a very uncertain future. Another point about the carbon tax is that those living in rural Ireland do not have the option of using electric vehicles because of their range and the lack of charging infrastructure.

There is no reference in the budget to the funding of rural broadband provision, which is very disappointing. The failure to deliver broadband to rural Ireland is hampering the development and expansion of small and medium enterprises. County Clare is no exception. There are hubs in Kilrush, Shannon and Ennistymon to alleviate the difficulties in accessing broadband, but it is essential that broadband be rolled out.

The beef price crisis protests were a physical manifestation of the sense of rural neglect and the lack of respect shown to rural communities. The anger at the protests was palpable. It was one of the most evocative protests I had come across in my time living in west Clare. Farmers believe they are being scapegoated. They are being blamed for driving climate change and producing unhealthy food products, yet lauded for the quality of those products, while being paid derisory prices. The manifestation of this anger should alert the Government to the fact that all in rural Ireland is not well and that it is not being supported by it.

University Hospital Limerick group has identified that it is substantially underfunded by €40 million compared to hospitals of a similar size. There is a 20% shortage of beds and staff compared to other hospitals. There is one MRI scanner, which is 14 years old and was donated by a benefactor. University Hospital Limerick needs absolute investment in staff and infrastructure. There is also a need for investment in model 2 hospitals. There is a proposal for two modular theatres in Ennis Hospital to allow it to achieve its full potential and supply day case services, particularly ear, nose and throat services. I am sure the Minister is aware of the meeting of the health committee this morning. What he said a few minutes ago was not reflected in what we heard at the meeting. There is a huge manpower issue. A workforce intelligence report produced by the Medical Council shows that we have a lot of doctors in Ireland but that they are of the wrong type. They are junior doctors and not in training or capable of providing the service we need.

Deputy Michael Collins: Last night I lay awake thinking about the budget announced yesterday. It is a paper budget which, with any drop of rain, will disintegrate. With the possibility of a hard Brexit, there is more than a drop of rain coming.

The budget does not provide anything for the people of Ireland, especially the hard-working people in rural areas who have more difficulties ahead of them. The Government announced yesterday that it would increase the health budget to €17.4 billion. I express my complete and

utter disappointment in the Government for not providing adequately for people with dementia. They and their carers are still struggling daily, sometimes silently and painfully, owing to the lack of services and supports. The time to end this struggle is now.

What is happening to the money being allocated to the health sector? Why are all waiting lists across the country so long? Where has the money been spent? The Minister has never explained it properly to us. Why is the waiting list for cataract procedures so long? Some people in Cork are waiting up to five years and travelling all the way to Belfast as the waiting list is too long. Where has the money been spent? The waiting lists for hip and knee operations are appalling. Again, where has the money been spent? The people need to know where it is being squandered.

I am delighted that the Minister for Education and Skills is present. I welcome the €1.9 billion being invested in special education, with 400 additional special needs teachers and over 1,000 special needs assistants being hired. I heard a horror story yesterday about 100 parents at a school open evening in Cork city. All of them were looking for a place for their special needs children next year, only to be told that there was only one place available.

We all know how important special needs assistants are to the education system. We have heard so many promises from the Government in committing to increase the number of SNAs. Will it guarantee that this time it will deliver as a matter of urgency? It is vital that the children of today be given the supports they need at both primary and secondary school level. I have asked the Minister before to ensure special needs assistants will be as readily available to secondary school children as they will be to primary school children. Parents should not have to go pleading and begging that these supports be put in place for their children.

I take the opportunity to stress that the pupil-teacher ratio needs to be looked at throughout primary school classes, from junior infants through to sixth class. The ratio needs to be reduced. I would appreciate it if the Minister would clarify if this has happened in the budget.

There was mention of the capitation grant being increased. I would welcome such an increase. The Minister might clarify the amount by which it will be increased. I am on a school board of management and we are scraping to put a few quid together to pay oil, electricity and other bills, meaning that, as well as fundraising, the parents of schoolgoing children have to pay out of their own pockets. It is not good enough to have people going to beg to pay a school's oil bill.

Teaching principals are almost burnt out for what they earn. The budget was an ideal opportunity to factor in that they needed more time behind the desk, instead of trying to juggle teaching and principals' duties which will leave many burnt out not far down the road. I have spoken to many of them in the past 12 months. They are neglected and the Minister will see many early retirements among them if he does not step in.

On carbon tax, the Government took the easy way out. It put a few cent on fuel to catch the ordinary man and woman and struggling families who will be hit at the filling station. They will also be hit when buying the odd bag of coal or briquettes or trying to fill the oil tank to heat their home. Does the Minister realise what will happen? Adults and children will be wrapped in blankets on couches throughout the country because they will not be able to afford to put home heating oil in the tank. Most of the families I meet in west Cork are only putting a small amount of oil in their tanks. They cannot afford to fill it and certainly will not be able to do so

after this budget.

Last night I heard a Minister say the Opposition had no other plans for dealing with our carbon footprint. I had when I made a proposal to the Taoiseach for a park and ride system in west Cork which would have taken tens of thousands of cars off the roads in west Cork, but no one up here was listening. Private operators like Damien Long in Skibbereen are going to pick up the bits and do their best to run the park and ride system from Skibbereen and Bantry which was announced last week. It is receiving significant support and, if supported, will be a game changer in west Cork. However, if the Government was interested in the environment, it would give all coach companies in Ireland a fuel rebate or even an exemption from VAT. For example, last night one coach operator had 11 coaches in Dublin from west Cork for a concert at the 3 Arena. The operator estimated that for every bus it had taken 25 cars off the road. That meant it had taken 275 cars off the road last night. This is the way to go to tackle our issues with the environment. It is a no-brainer. However, instead, the Government took the easy way out and hit the hard-pressed man and woman in the pocket at the filling station and when they bought a bag of coal or a bale of briquettes.

I called for the budget to cater for those 18 years and over with disabilities who were not given a free transport service. Throughout west Cork parents are taking these adults by car when a service could have been made available, even with the funds allocated which are being squandered.

Was appropriate funding made available for school transport? Many children from the Ballineen area who are trying to attend secondary schools in Bandon have been left on the roadside. They were told last week that it was all sorted and that all 18 were to be picked up and taken from Ballineen to Bandon. Everybody was happy. Now they realise it has not been sorted. Ten children were left on the roadside this week. Eight have been taken and ten left behind. What are we doing? Enniskean is a feeder school for Bandon secondary school. The parents were told that the issue had been resolved and went on social media. Everybody was patting themselves on the back. I headed off and thank God I did because I realised on Monday that that was not the case. The parents have been left in a very difficult position, with ten children left on the roadside.

The Minister said the revenue from the carbon tax would be available for the better energy warmer homes scheme. What happened to that scheme during the year? It ran out of money and the Minister was sound asleep for a couple of months when we were trying to tell him that the scheme had run out of money. It is very important for people on low incomes to allow them to have their homes insulated. We can speak about the carbon tax, but there are other ways of improving our environment that are not being tackled and the Government is taking the easy way out by shoving a few cent on a litre of petrol and getting money in that way.

Obviously, there has been a budget for housing and any extra budget should always be welcomed. We discussed a rural resettlement programme at great length. Many rural communities are dying. We have lost post offices, pubs, shops and different services. Rural communities have fantastic facilities to offer. There was considerable discussion in government about rural resettlement. I know that it was done successfully in Deputy Harty's Clare constituency a number of years ago. However, I do not know if it has been factored into this budget.

Have we factored in the fact that no basic funds have been available for social housing on islands off the coast of west Cork? My constituency includes eight beautiful islands, including

Bere Island, Dursey, Whiddy, Long, Cape Clear and Sherkin. I have probably forgotten one or two of them. They are not forgotten when I get back to west Cork, but they have been forgotten by the Government because there is no social housing policy for them. New families cannot live on the islands and have to move to the mainland if they want to find housing.

I do not want to dwell too much on the fishing and farming sectors because I spoke about them last night. I know that many issues are being dealt with because of Brexit. The beef crisis needed some movement in the budget, but it did not get it. It was bad news. There was a proposal to provide €200 per suckler cow. Deputy Harty spoke about farmers. I stood with them in Bandon and at the factory in Cahir with Deputy Mattie McGrath. We stood by them the entire time. We did not just visit them; we stood by them for the length of time they were there because we knew what they were suffering, but the Government forgot what they were suffering.

I see that there is a budget of €19 million for the fishery sector. The Minister, Deputy McHugh, is from County Donegal. If Brexit happens as it appears it will, the fact that we have handed away our fishing rights all over the country will be a problem. We have continued to do this for decades, even recently in the North with the 6 nautical mile zone. If it happens, €19 million will be a drop in the ocean for the hard-working men who have worked tirelessly in the most difficult of circumstances. Some of the boats will be parked and fishermen will lose their livelihoods that they have worked hard for all their lives.

I hope the rural regeneration and development fund is factored into the budget.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has only ten seconds remaining.

Deputy Michael Collins: Indeed. Not one of the 43 projects in County Cork submitted received funding under the rural regeneration scheme. I hope the Government will reverse that decision this time.

I want to talk about roads, although I accept I have run out of time. In west Cork we are looking for funding for a bypass in Innishannon and a southern and a northern relief road in Bandon, all of which projects have been neglected by the Government. It had a chance to turn things around in the budget.

The Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, is now in the Chamber. I have been writing to him in recent weeks about the Ballineen school bus service. The issue needs to be resolved immediately. The parents were told last week that it had been resolved. There were 18 children who were supposed to receive a bus service. Now there are ten who have been left standing on the roadside. We need action on these issues. The budget was a chance to give funds to deal with them.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The decisions made yesterday and today do not reflect where we want to be as a Government or as a country and certainly not where I want to be as Minister for Education and Skills. They reflect this time of uncertainty, which we do not like, but as I am an eternal optimist I hope we will not be going for a no-deal Brexit. The budget, however, is preparing for that. Most people realise that we could not do what we wanted to do and that what we chose to do was done in the interests of this country and State.

Capitation will be raised by 2.5% on top of a 5% increase last year, which raises it by 7.5% in total. I appreciate the pressure on, and difficulties facing, boards of management around this

country. The boards of management, whether in primary or secondary schools, are the largest voluntary organisation in the country, even ahead of the GAA because there are between two and five primary schools in some GAA club areas. I am committed to working towards helping them when we have more opportunity to do that. There was an 11% cut in 2009 and we have to get back to giving them the proper assistance.

I wanted to improve the pupil-teacher ratio, PTR, in primary schools but I was not in a position to do it. However, we have reduced the PTR for retention and recruitment in one-teacher to four-teacher schools. That is a one point reduction. I also introduced one-day administrative leave for teaching principals. They have enormous responsibility not just to teach but also to manage, co-ordinate, supervise, delegate, deal with human resources and become quantity surveyors for school or classroom extensions. It is a very difficult position.

My ultimate objective in this budget was to protect front-line services. Next year 1,300 new places will come on stream for special classes. For every one of those six classroom special units to be developed next year there will be a special education teacher but we will also need special needs assistants, SNAs. That is why we have come up with 1,064 extra SNAs for a total of 17,000 in the country, a 61% increase on 2011. It is a phenomenal increase but we are by no means finished yet. Deputy Michael Collins is right to point out there are difficult and hard cases where parents are trying to find places for their sons and daughters. That is why I wanted to protect front-line services and will continue to do that.

Chomh maith leis sin, chuir mé tús leis an deontas Gaeltachta arís. Tá an deontas Gaeltachta thar a bheith tábhachtach do na mic léinn atá ag déanamh staidéir sa tríú leibhéal. Beidh an deontas sin ag dul ar ais. Beimid in áit difriúil an bhliain seo chugainn agus beidh sé ag dul ar ais sa bhliain 2020 don deontas Gaeltachta.

I acknowledge my colleagues the Ministers of State, Deputies Halligan and Mitchell O'Connor, for their co-operation during this budgetary process. They will speak on their segments, within their budgets. I particularly thank Deputy Halligan for his efforts on school transport. We have changed the policy for post-primary schools, if there is a traditional route to the second closest school. We have also introduced another €26 million into a budget which is coming under pressure from the point of view of special needs. Deputy Halligan will be able to explain that over half of that budget is going to special needs provision not just for private taxis but also the assistants on the buses.

Education is what is left when everything else is forgotten. It is fundamental to the future of this country whether for the creativity of the young people or the capacity-building of the teachers, continuing training, continued personal development. We have to harness the creativity in the classrooms. This does not reflect where I want to be but hard decisions had to be made. I have indicated where I want to go.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Before Deputy Harty leaves the Chamber I agree completely with his assessment of the power of rural broadband to reinvigorate and add great capacity to our rural economy. The Minister for Finance did not mention it yesterday but in a budget briefing, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, confirmed that €120 million has been allocated in the budget for the beginning of that roll-out next year and the contract for the national broadband plan roll-out will be signed in the next few weeks. There is every confidence that we will begin to roll out broadband to those communities that need it and give

them the opportunity to partake in the growth and strengthening of our economy no matter where they live.

We have come through a tumultuous time. In 2011 unemployment was just under 15%, a third of a million people were out of work, our national borrowings were increasing by €7 million every day and Government debt was rated one notch above junk, Ireland's reputation as a safe place to do business was on the floor and 900 of our people left every week. Fast-forwarding eight years to 2019, we are in a very different position. We have restored the economy to sustainability. We will record budget surpluses for 2018 and 2019 for the first time since 2007. We now have a very diversified enterprise and export-led economy rather than one led by a construction sector built on quicksand. Ireland now has the seventh most competitive economy in the world and the second most competitive economy in the eurozone. Our economy is being managed well, as are our public finances. We are investing more in schools, hospitals, houses and roads. Next year there will be a rise of 10% on top of the 25% rise this year. This will improve facilities for young and old throughout Ireland, urban and rural. It will ensure balanced regional development and create jobs. There are 2.3 million people employed in this country, the most people ever at work since the foundation of the State. The unemployment rate is just under 5% and continues to fall every week.

In the past two years working with employers up and down the country we have created 120,000 new jobs, over half outside Dublin city. That has been achieved through the hard work, endeavour and innovation of our people and through responsible and prudent management of the nation's finances. This budget is yet another example of that management.

We launched our new international development policy, A Better World, last February. It provides the framework for expanding Ireland's international development work in line with the Government's commitment to reach that UN target of 0.7% of our gross national income, GNI, by 2030. We are well on our way there. Our development co-operation programme is well recognised internationally for its commitment to reducing poverty, focusing on those furthest behind. That ethos underpins everything we do in our international development work reaching those furthest behind first. The quality of the work we do in Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and with our partner non-governmental organisations, NGOs, here and internationally has been independently validated not alone by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, but also by the Overseas Development Institute, ODI, ranking Ireland No. 1 in the world as the most effective donor in targeting extreme poverty. For 2020, the Government has allocated almost €838 million for official development assistance, ODA, which represents an increase of €21 million on last year. Last year, there was an increase of €110 million, the largest in more than a decade. While we were not able to make a similar commitment this year, we did the best we could in the context of the challenges we face as a result of Brexit. We are fully committed to reaching the target of 0.7% by 2030.

The sum of €838 million is a significant budgetary commitment by the Government to international development but it is also a strong reflection of our people's values. It is the sixth consecutive year in which allocations to ODA have increased and funding levels, thankfully, are now approaching pre-financial crisis levels. The additional resources will provide us with the basis to begin to grow the development co-operation programme and to deliver on the initiatives and commitments contained in A Better World. While the quantity of ODA is important and the commitment to reaching 0.7% of GNI by 2030 is equally important, ensuring that Ireland is well placed to play its role in contributing to a world that is more peaceful, stable and equal is fundamentally in everyone's best interests, including our own.

Since become Minister of State with responsibility for the diaspora, I have focused on developing the Government's support for Irish communities worldwide and for those who, thankfully, return home to Ireland every week. The Government is committed to introducing a new diaspora policy in the first quarter of next year as part of our plans to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025. Over the course of this year, I have carried out extensive consultations with Irish community leaders in Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK with a view towards hearing their opinions and vision as to how we can better engage with our diaspora communities throughout the world and to ensure that the just under €13 million spent annually on supporting Irish communities throughout the world will have the greatest possible effect on enriching and sustaining the communities. The feedback I have received has been positive and all the people with whom we have engaged are anxious to ensure we maintain that strong connection with all our diaspora communities internationally, which in turn work alongside us in furthering Ireland's interests at every possible opportunity.

We constantly explore new ways to foster connections with the next generation of the diaspora, as well as reaching out to those who have recently rekindled or discovered their Irish heritage. That Ireland outside, the global Irish community, is a strong influence on Ireland at home. It helps us shape our sense of ourselves, feeds into our values, and is a source of investment and pride for all of us. A long time ago, when President Robinson lit the candle in the window of Áras an Uachtaráin, it was a beacon to all our diaspora throughout the world. It was a statement of what it meant to be Irish entering the 21st century, an Irishness not rooted in a petty sense of place but one more rounded, global and inclusive, of values and not necessarily of blood. That sense of Irishness was perhaps most eloquently defined in the Good Friday Agreement, not least in its statement that those from the North have the right to be British, Irish, or both, which is why we continue to work hard to protect that agreement through every step of the Brexit negotiations.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I welcome the budget and the provisions made in all Departments in case of a no-deal Brexit, which is a distinct possibility at this stage, just a few weeks from 31 October. I will use the brief time I have to comment on the areas within the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport where we have been able to secure some helpful assistance for the related industries and everybody involved.

On tourism, the sum of €7 million that was secured yesterday for Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, to be spent immediately, is welcome. The funding, which is badly needed now, is to be used both overseas and for domestic marketing, and it is on top of the €35 million increase for 2019 that was secured in last year's budget. The sum of €7 million, to be spent by the end of the year, is most welcome news for those in the industry and I know that it will be well spent by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland.

Further good news yesterday was that the regional access fund will be doubled in 2020 to €2.5 million. For the regional airports, from Cork and Kerry to Shannon, Knock and Donegal, that is good news and it will give them a better opportunity to retain the routes they have and attract new routes through collaboration between the tourism agencies and airlines. The fund will rise to €10 million over the next three years, which is welcome news. It is on top of the €22 million that is provided to the regional airports through the regional airport fund. Increased investment is welcome news. There is also an additional €4.5 million for greenways through carbon tax, which is on top of the greenway funding we announced in June. Expenditure on greenways next year will be €27.5 million, which does not include the Smarter Travel expendi-

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ture in towns and cities for cyclists. It is money well spent that will provide a good return for the Exchequer and communities throughout the country. I will aim to secure more funding in that regard in future because it is a wise investment.

Behind all of that, there is a contingency fund of €40 million in case of a no-deal Brexit. In that event, tourism will be one of the most exposed sectors but the €40 million would represent a large chunk of the annual tourism budget. Given that we will spend €186 million next year on tourism, capital and current, a €40 million contingency package is significant. Although I hope we will never have to use it, I welcome it, and in the event of a no-deal scenario on 31 October, it will be welcome to the industry and everybody involved. In view of the fact that 260,000 people are employed in the industry in every community in the country, the €40 million is very welcome. The good news is that the €35 million provided last year has been provided again this year, as well as the €7 million to be spent between now and the end of the year. It is a good package for tourism and I am glad to have worked on it closely with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, and other colleagues in government.

Some €125 million will be spent on sport in 2020. It is good news because we are keeping our promises to double expenditure on sport between 2018 and 2027, as committed to in the national sports policy, and to triple expenditure on high-performance sport. There was a strong budget for sport last year. We have kept in line with the increase last year and are well on course to achieve our targets. That is good news not only for every community in the country but especially for our high-performance athletes. It is heartening to know that €2 million has been provided for in the budget for our Tokyo Olympic athletes next year. The provision has been secured and the Olympic Federation has welcomed the funding. Our athletes deserve the best possible support when they represent the country on the greatest sporting global stage, the Olympic Games. I am proud we are able to support them financially next year to the tune of €2 million.

There will also be provision for the four games that Dublin will host in the European Football Championship in June 2020 and for the Irish Open. The first tranche of funding towards the Ryder Cup 2026 is provided for in the budget, as is a significant increase for the women in sport programme for 2019 and 2020. The funding for 2018 was €600,000, whereas more than €3 million will be provided for 2019 and 2020. There will also be €6 million for the national sports policy and more than €30 million in sports capital will be announced in the next two weeks. We will announce the large-scale sporting infrastructure fund towards the end of the year and open a new round of the sports capital programme, either later this year or in early 2020, which is good news for every community in the country. I look forward to it being heavily oversubscribed with applications again. It is a sign of the strength of Irish sport at grassroots level that so many people seek to expand their facilities and to facilitate greater participation in sport. There will be an increase in the funding for the national governing bodies of sport this year, as a result of the funding we have been able to secure for Sport Ireland. In addition, investment from the Dormant Accounts Fund will increase from €5 million to almost €8 million in 2020, which is good news for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and people involved in disability sports. That funding will make a major difference to them.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Gabhaim buíochas le muintir na hÉireann as a bheith ag éisteacht leis an gcáinainéis seo agus as an bhfoighne atá acu mar tá an comhthéacs atá againn an-deacair, go háirithe leis an mBreatimeacht.

Budget 2020 is a document which must deal, first and foremost, with Brexit. The budget

had to be drafted in the context of Brexit and we accept that. Brexit was not a decision of any Member of Dáil Éireann or any party represented here. Unfortunately, however, we must deal with its consequences as must the people. While my leader, Deputy Micheál Martin, foresaw this last December and predicted the impact of a no-deal Brexit might be such as to make it crucial for Fianna Fáil to remain within the confidence and supply agreement for one more budget, the reality of what he said is hitting home. People sometimes tell me that we should not use Brexit as an excuse, but the unfortunate reality is that up to 60,000 jobs may be lost. Those are the jobs of 60,000 real people. This is the danger my leader foresaw last year and the reason we felt stability of Government - notwithstanding the fact that we are not part of it - was necessary in the national interest. We are looking at the possible loss of €6.5 billion from the economy and at dangerous political ramifications, particularly in the North of Ireland and along the Border. We accept that the funds we might otherwise wish to see allocated in the budget are not necessarily available at this juncture.

It is worth recalling the gains from the confidence and supply agreement, especially those relating to education. We have the lowest pupil-teacher ratio on record, guidance counselling has been restored in schools and postgraduate grants have been restored to the poorest citizens to enable them to achieve their full educational potential. Despite the knock-on effect of Brexit, the budget has achieved some good with regard to education that it would be churlish to fail to recognise. While the Government has announced the recruitment of 150 mainstream teachers to deal mainly with demographic changes, the provision of additional special education staff is noteworthy and welcome. The House will recall that in the past four months Fianna Fáil has twice moved motions on the education of children with special needs calling for additional resources and better planning. We are glad to see that result in an additional 408 special education teachers, which we hope has an impact.

The greatest challenge for the Government is to plan that special education spend. It is very easy for parties to agree something good, as we have, but it is more difficult to deliver, which is the Government's greatest failing. While we continue to have children without a school place for the current school year, there are other children without a suitable place. Ministers announce extra special classes in the Taoiseach's constituency and a new special school, all of which is welcome, but they were not open on 1 September last. Indeed, some of those are not open to this day. While Fianna Fáil has raised the issue of special education on a number of occasions, I pay tribute to "Prime Time", which has aired a number of episodes since the summer that have had a remarkable impact on the public mood in the context of special needs education as we have seen what families are experiencing on foot of the lack of suitable places for children. It may not affect every family, but families in general can relate to what the people we saw on "Prime Time" have gone through for the sake of their children.

One in four children with an intellectual disability is being put on a short school day illegally. This must end. Over 850 children with special needs received home tuition last year because school places could not be found for them. School places in Dublin 15 have not been delivered while there is a major problem in Cork and south County Dublin, which we have highlighted previously. Next September's intake must be planned now. In fact, it should have been planned a few years ago when the demographic information was made available. We have asked the Minister for Education and Skills to start planning and I want to know what he is doing, other than announcing good news. While it is important to have progress, the Minister must tell us what planning is taking place between the Department and the National Council for Special Education. Without the proper planning, simply throwing in 408 special educa-

tion teachers will not solve the policy of containment we have outlined and which has been described by families and teachers on television. A highly focused approach with the child at its centre is required.

It is welcome to see additional funding being provided for the school transport scheme. However, there will be concern that the €26 million involved is mainly for special needs education. While this sounds fantastic and is a welcome development, the reality is as I have described it on a number of occasions. One child from a family goes 15 miles to the south while another child in the same family travels 10 miles to the east. That is what is happening. The Department and the National Council for Special Education are finding places, no matter where they are. Children are being bused or sent in taxis to these schools rather than travelling to their local school, which is the ideal. It is wrong and it is not the education guaranteed in the provision Éamon de Valera wisely put in our Constitution. What one gets as a result is this increase in the budget for special needs transport, which is the last thing we want to be spending money on. We should be spending it on education in those children's local schools to which they could walk, be driven by parents or carried on shorter bus journeys. Instead, we are dealing with the problem on an *ad hoc* basis and without planning. As a result, some children are left without an education while those who get places are getting them in geographically unsuitable locations.

I have raised with the Minister, by means of a letter and in person last night, the need to sit down with Fianna Fáil to discuss how the discretionary bus scheme, for which some money is provided in the budget, can be dealt with. I understand that a small number of the overall problems were solved this summer at incredibly low cost compared with what was stated publicly. That gives me hope that a modest sum could resolve the school bus problem for the general school population. In fairness to the Minister, he spoke out about the matter during the summer and I am certainly willing to work with him on it.

There are areas of huge disappointment for education in this budget. Higher education stands out as an area in which there is drift. While there is an increase in the national training fund levy, all of which is hypothecated and will be used for good things, and the human capital initiative, which we have yet to see, is a further investment, these are not the sum of what is required. Another year has gone by without any vision for higher education from the Government. The Irish Universities Association reports a real deficit of €138 million in core funding by comparison with what is needed according to the Cassells report. Everyone accepts the figures set out in the Cassells report on what is needed, but that deficit remains. It is a gap that must be filled. Our university rankings are going down the Swanee and that is not fair on our young people and academics. By and large, our young people receive a reasonably good education at primary level, unless they are in the special needs category, where things are a disgrace. By and large, they get a reasonably top-class education at second level. We are letting them down dramatically thereafter, however, and that is not fair, particularly when they are paying a substantial premium to attend university or third level.

The Cassells report has been lying idle on the Minister's desk for more than three years despite these very real concerns. The Oireachtas joint committee is often blamed but Peter Cassells stated that an economic study should be undertaken before any decision is made. The joint committee could not carry out that study and the Government took a long time to decide to send the report to the European Commission. We await the outcome from Brussels. We have seen solo runs on third level fees, but no commitment to action. It is not good enough from this Fine Gael Government, which has no vision or interest in third level. On this side of the House, we see education as a prize to be grabbed and an opportunity for all citizens, not something to be

reserved for the few. While I have great respect for the Provost of Trinity College, Mr. Paddy Prendergast, I cannot accept his contention that student numbers be restricted at university. That will not happen under Fianna Fáil. Unfortunately, we have had no strong statement from the Government and if the Fine Gael drift continues, that is the way it will go.

Deputy Micheál Martin has suggested that a Department of higher education and research is necessary. Such a Department could not get away with having a report like that of Peter Cas-sells on the desk for years. It could not get away with the slow pace of research funding.

It could not get away with the failure to tackle the tumbling university rankings. Such a department should be established to fundamentally change the relationship between the State and educational establishments, to establish a trust and partnership which allows them to develop, arrest the decline and provide the high-quality, world-class education that our young people deserve.

I note the overspending in the Department relating to retirements and the failure to predict them. The Department promised faithfully last year that it would get the figures for retirements right and it has failed yet again. That has again thrown our figures into confusion and we look forward to the Revised Estimates. We will raise those matters at that point.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the budget that was delivered yesterday. I will primarily speak to my own portfolio as the Fianna Fáil spokesperson for children and youth affairs. My colleague, Deputy Thomas Byrne, said rightly that the Government is quick to promise and slow to deliver. Childcare is an example of that.

In 2016, the access and inclusion model, AIM, was announced. Some 3,800 were approved for it and only 2,300 could avail of it because there were not the staff. How can staff be expected to live and pay a mortgage when they are working 15 hours a week in an early childhood care and education, ECCE, setting? It cannot be done. I call on the Minister to take action and address that matter because, until such time as it is addressed, we will not be able to provide a service and look after those children. An access inclusion model is to include all children of all abilities into their local childcare setting. It is the first step of early intervention in giving them the right to education and we still cannot fund it. That model was announced in the 2016 budget and it has still not been delivered.

In 2017, to much fanfare, the affordable childcare scheme was announced. It finally came to fruition a week ago although, even then, only for those people who choose to ignore the issue with the public services card. The people who do not want to give their public services card, or sign up to *mygov.ie*, have to wait until January 2020 for the paper model. That will be four and a half years after the scheme was announced.

That is what the Government is doing for children. That is what has been delivered. There has been lots of fanfare and many press opportunities but the delivery has been very slow. Parents who, three years ago, had a child who was approximately a year old and entering crèche are coming out the other side of the experience having got the benefit of the early childhood care and education scheme but very little or nothing by way of subsidy or subvention.

After all the fanfare, what are parents facing today? We are encouraging women to go back into the workforce, be it through education or the activation model. Under an old model, if one wanted to go back into education, one had the opportunity under a set scheme to get childcare support for 40 hours a week. What have we done in this budget and what have we done to all

the parents previously? We have reduced that from 40 hours to 15 hours. We have acknowledged it ever so slightly by moving from 15 hours to 20 hours but that is very little opportunity for that person who is going back to education. Take, for example, a woman who will have to travel for an hour after dropping off her child in Portumna, if she has to go to Galway. She will have to travel an hour back again after attending classes. That is more than 20 hours a week. There is a requirement there for full-time childcare because there are not regular bus stops in those areas I am talking about. There is transport in the mornings and again in the evening. That is what happens and what is available outside the M50. People do not have the opportunity to get on a bus or a train. They must leave at 9 o'clock in the morning and come home at 5 o'clock in the evening. That is why the measure to reduce childcare support from 40 hours to 15 hours and then back up to 20 hours is ridiculous. The Government is leaving people behind. It is squandering people's opportunities. We are forcing people to stay within the social welfare system. That is what we are encouraging because now they have to pay the difference.

Childcare costs for the lady I am talking about would be another €56. She receives €237 as a lone parent and 25% of that would be gone already in subsidising her childcare to the level it was subsidised until 2016. It is ridiculous and I am disappointed that we are not putting children at the centre of our budgeting.

It is weird to think that so many speakers have come into the House before me and childcare has always been put on the back foot while, at the same time, we say we need to keep this country going. We say we need more women in the workforce and childcare must be at the centre of our policies. It gets very little attention.

Deputy Thomas Byrne also spoke about the "Prime Time Investigates" programmes. It is very disappointing that "Prime Time Investigates" dictates our policy and budget. Some €29 million of the budget that was announced yesterday is to go towards the inspectorate service in Tusla because the "Prime Time Investigates" programme on 29 July showed that the inspectorate was under-resourced. There are not enough people working in the sector. In the past two years, under this Government, we have gone from having inspections every 18 months to once every three years. We talk about assuring parents of a quality service that is underpinned by the regulator in Tusla and that is not being monitored because checks are not happening often enough. They do not have the staff. We acknowledged it yesterday in the budget because we have laid out money for it. It is very unfortunate that we are not keeping our fingers on the pulse. The Government is reactionary, not proactive, and that is very disappointing when children are supposed to be at the centre of all our actions. The voice of the child is not being heard.

It was also regrettable that, in yesterday's budget, the Minister laid out no money whatsoever for the recruitment of social workers. The front-line staff that deliver the service for Tusla are the social care workers. In the past four years, the budget of Tusla has increased by 21%, of which only 4% went to social workers. They are the people who are supporting the families at the front line. They are overburdened with caseloads but we still do not recruit more. What really bothers me is that we have outsourced recruitment to agencies. An agency can get and recruit social workers. Why are we not investing in our own sector? It does not make any sense not to invest in it.

The budget was not the only report published yesterday. A spending review into the effectiveness of Tusla as an agency of the State was also published. The conclusion of the report was that there are insufficient data collected on the level of expenditure and the number of staff at the service programme level for the years 2014 to 2018 to allow for an evaluation of the ef-

iciency of the service provided by Tusla. For example, while the agency tracks the number of children with an allocated social worker, it does not track the number of times, and how often, a social worker is making contact with a child. Anecdotally, I understand that these contacts are not happening often enough and the social workers are overwhelmed by the number of cases they are expected to manage. We have heard all that at the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs over the past 12 months. Social workers are totally and utterly overburdened. For an agency that is in receipt of more than €800 million of public funding every year, this is not good enough.

Since her appointment, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Zappone, has been promising to improve Tusla's system on data collection and management. This year is no different. In 2016, investment was required for the ICT system and, in 2017, more money had to go into the ICT system. It was delivered and came on stream in August 2018. That was required so that staff knew if a child moved from Galway to Dublin and we moved away from a paper-based model. The model is now failing to track how the social care workers are performing and the caseloads they are managing.

I am laying out to the Minister tonight that we have heard a lot of talk and there is much noise but the delivery has been very slow. I am very disappointed by what I have seen for children in the past four years under this Government.

Deputy John Brady: This year's social protection budget allocation allows for plenty of announcements and not much else. The increase in the fuel allowance, the change so that young jobseekers receive the full rate of jobseeker's payment and the moves to deal with child maintenance warranted big announcements but the reality is that these three measures mean nothing. The €2 increase in the fuel allowance will not offset the €6 carbon tax increase, as the Minister has stated. It will not even cover the already rising costs of energy let alone the carbon tax increase. What it will do is push people deeper and deeper into fuel poverty. The announcement was little more than window dressing. It is insulting to those who will be impacted by increased carbon taxes to suggest otherwise. I am still waiting for the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, to tell me if the winter fuel payment from the UK, which was paid to more than 32,000 people living in this State last year, will continue to be paid in the case of a deal or no-deal Brexit. If not, these people will have additional carbon tax to pay without any extra support to pay their fuel costs.

Rather than simply ending age discrimination for young jobseekers, the Government has replaced it with discrimination of a different type with a new precondition. Those aged 18 to 24 years who live independently and are in receipt of housing support will see their jobseeker's payment increase to the full rate of €203. Those who do not live independently will remain on €112.70. How many jobseekers aged 18 to 24 years does the Minister think can afford to live independently on that? The money allocated to this measure suggests that the Government does not think there are many.

The establishment of a child maintenance service is urgently needed. At present, when lone parents seek maintenance, which they are obliged to do to maintain their social welfare supports, they must go through the Courts Service. I will outline one consequence of this. A briefing which I hosted here last week heard from a lone parent who bravely shared her experience of seeking maintenance for her children. Two weeks after she took her former partner to court for maintenance, he savagely attacked her and left her fighting for her life. That was her experience of our current system. Unfortunately, when it comes to maintenance payments, the

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Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is interested only in recouping the money it pays out in one-parent family payment to cover its costs rather than to give children what they deserve or to assist lone parents. The Department cannot even get that right. From 2018 to date, the liable relatives unit has examined 18,078 cases, of which only 2,174 began to make payments. The vast majority paid nothing. The Department will talk about its enforcement powers. They may as well not exist. Since 2016, 19 cases have been referred to obtain an order directing that contributions be made. That is pathetic. We need a child maintenance service, not guidelines or regulations. I ask the Minister, Deputy Doherty, to publish the terms of reference for her new judge-led group which is being funded by her Department to research this issue so that we may know precisely what it will examine.

The silence around the increase in the minimum wage was not lost on people. It is a disgrace that workers here, the very ones who get up early in the morning and go to work, have been left waiting for the measly 30 cent increase.

Sinn Féin made different choices in its alternative budget. This included a decision not to increase carbon tax, to have a living wage of €12.30 for workers, full equality for young job-seekers regardless of age or where they live, and to establish the statutory child maintenance service, something which lone parent families deserve.

This is a regressive budget. One must question whether the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, showed up to participate in its negotiations as our elderly, people with disabilities, young jobseekers and the most vulnerable in society have been completely forgotten in the budget. In the words of Social Justice Ireland, the budget betrays the vulnerable and many are left further behind.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Is minic a chloistear na focail “tapaigh an deis” nuair atá obair mhór le déanamh. Tá obair mhór le déanamh ag an Rialtas seo ach ní dhearna sé í inné. Níor sheas sé sa bhearna baoil. D’fhan sé ar an imeall.

I am hugely disappointed that the Government rejected the many opportunities provided yesterday to address positively citizens affected by the lack of services and the increasing cost of living.

First, as a Teachta Dála representing a Border constituency, I fully accept and endorse the need to prepare for every possible outcome to the Brexit debacle presenting. As my colleague, Deputy Pearse Doherty, stated yesterday, we support the decision to deficit spend in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

One of the very first things that my party called for was special economic status for the Six Counties and for Government here to invest in a Brexit stabilisation fund. Sinn Féin proposed a Brexit stabilisation fund of €2 billion to meet the challenge. This is the level of funding needed to properly respond to Brexit. The figures announced yesterday simply will not cut it and that will show very soon indeed.

We fully understand and support the need to provide against the worst excesses of Brexit but Brexit should not be used as cover to dodge responsibility to provide for essential needs and critical services. There was a clear opportunity to use the economic stability, which the Government never ceases to take credit for, to give a break to the long-suffering disability community and to hard-working families generally.

Crippling childcare costs are pushing many families to the brink in their monthly budgets. There is ample anecdotal evidence that people who are highly skilled and ready to re-enter the workforce simply cannot afford to do so. This requires an intervention. It requires targeted Government action. Increasing the amount of money directed at the sector does nothing to prevent further increases in fees and provides no protections to ensure that those working in the sector are paid and treated fairly. The Government's message to many groups in yesterday's budget could be summed up as "you are in our thoughts and someday we will get around to helping you".

We already know what is needed. We do not need a restatement of what the problems are; we need solutions and directly opposite those solutions we need hard data regarding how they are to be delivered.

Yesterday's ministerial statement and associated budget 2020 documents contained little or nothing for the most disadvantaged and long-neglected sector in Irish society, namely, people with disabilities. There is very definitely a serious block in the Government's attitude to the rights of people with disabilities. Let me make it clear: these rights are not aspirational.

As the vice chair of the Oireachtas disability group, I, along with colleagues, attended a meeting earlier this year with the Secretaries General of almost all Departments. We hoped that this would lead to a whole-of-Government approach to fully implementing the hope and promise of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD. I had sincerely hoped that budget 2020 would at least give some indication of progress being made towards making the UNCRPD a reality, which it is not currently. There is now a clear mismatch between public engagement and pronouncements by Government and actual targeted provisions.

The restoration of the rehabilitative training allowance would not only have reversed a cruel and petty decision taken earlier this year, but it would also have signalled that the Government is listening to people with disabilities and their loved ones and listening to and heeding informed voices in this House. The fact is that there was little mention at all of disability provision in budget 2020. There was not even a UNCRPD balance sheet provided detailing the cost of measures and the progress towards their implementation, as was previously promised. I note that €2 million is to be provided for an autism plan and for autism intervention teams. We have seen sight of neither. The funding announced is so far away from being drawn down that it is almost cruel to dangle such figures in front of affected parents, families and carers, knowing full well that we are many months off seeing its impact.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Some of the Ministers and some of the Fianna Fáil people are suggesting that we did not factor in Brexit when we were doing our budget proposals but we actually did. I want to put that on the record. We put down how we would cost and fund a €2 billion Brexit stabilisation fund and how we would support SMEs, businesses and communities which would be particularly affected by Brexit. There has been a lot of spin in the last day from the Government, as one might expect, but it cannot spin its way out of what it did yesterday, which was very regressive and will make the financial situation for many workers and families across the State much more difficult. It is a bad budget for ordinary workers and a good one for the wealthy. What is new for Fine Gael and its partners in Fianna Fáil? That is what they always come up with.

We voted against the carbon tax increase yesterday for a number of reasons. Everybody realises that we have a climate emergency and that things need to be done about that. We do not

believe, however, that taxing people who have no other alternatives will change the way they do their business. Rural people have no access to public transport. Older people do not have the ability to retrofit their own homes. Some people simply do not have the money to change to electric cars. The Minister almost laughably suggested that he will double the number of electric charging points across the State. On the north side of Limerick city there are two charging points, one of which has not worked for the past 18 months. The Government could not fix it because it was too expensive. I do not understand how the Minister will explain to ordinary people how they are going to change the way they drive to work.

The minimum wage was not mentioned in the budget. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Doherty, was here this evening discussing the minimum wage in the Dáil debate. I do not see how the Government is going to save the country from Brexit and from a disaster by not implementing the basic 30 cent increase which was recommended by the Low Pay Commission. This is not enough to help many workers and families out of poverty. There are 137,000 workers on the minimum wage. They have been abandoned by the Government with no commitment whatsoever. If Brexit does not happen, they might get something, but the Government has not even confirmed that. The Tories in London in recent weeks have even announced that they want to introduce a living wage. This Government is less progressive than Margaret Thatcher's party, which is saying an awful lot about it. Sinn Féin is the party of the living wage. We will introduce it but this Government cannot even keep up with the minimum wage in its past commitments to it.

Fianna Fáil heralded that last year's budget was a housing budget. One has only to look at the housing situation which has worsened year on year, day on day. We have 10,000 people in emergency accommodation. In my own city of Limerick, the average rents are up to €1,225 for a three-bedroom house. That is a 10% increase since last year. In recent years this has increased by over 100%. The budget will make no difference to renters.

With the carbon tax and rents that are continuing to increase, the new measures will have no impact whatsoever. Ordinary people will have less money in their pockets. We propose a rent freeze, which is critical to stopping rents rising any further. We also propose one month's rent back for every renter as a tax break. Again, there was nothing done on housing that will make any significant difference to people who do get up early in the morning, who do work, who own their own homes but cannot afford to send their kids to the doctor when they are sick.

University Hospital Limerick is in an absolute crisis. We have 70 people on trolleys today. Some 70 people might sound like a great number but it is the average number of people on trolleys for every day in October so far. In September there were 1,405 people on trolleys, which is an absolute national disgrace. There was nothing specific in the budget to address the issue of overcrowding in University Hospital Limerick. Sinn Féin had positive proposals which would have dealt with that through the recruitment of 500 nurses and midwives. We also proposed opening 500 new beds and have costed that proposal.

This Government has delivered what is a shameful and hurtful budget with nothing for workers, especially for families, who have been on to me all day asking what is the point in them going to work. They do not feel that they are getting anything for it. The Government is keeping the gravy train going for the wealthy and the landlords, but it is not helping anybody else.

Deputy Pat Buckley: This may be called, by some, the Brexit budget but Brexit did not

cause the mental health crisis in this country; the Government did, by not investing in the services properly. Brexit did not have anything to do with the housing or homeless crisis in this country but the Government did. Brexit had nothing to do with the lack of services in the disability sector, but the Government did. Brexit had nothing to do with the lack of investment in our home care sector, but the Government did. Brexit had nothing to do with the massive overrun on the children's hospital, with the outrageous insurance costs for drivers, charity or recreational event organisers, or small businesses, but the Government did. Brexit had nothing to do with the lack of funding for our regional roads and infrastructure, with how our Defence Forces have been treated in the last year, but the Government did. I could go on for a couple of hours but I am very conscious of the time I have.

I want to try to remind the Government here that this is not Government funding; it is taxpayers' money, and they want value for money.

I will turn my attention to mental health for a moment and raise one or two issues. The Minister of State, Deputy Daly, said in a press conference that the waiting list for child and adult mental health services, CAMHS, is reducing. I can tell the House tonight that it is not. In fact, I could go further. I have a news article here from July 2017 and it states, "over 2,400 children waiting for child and mental health services". Roll on to 7 August 2019, and a reply I got to a parliamentary question gave the exact figure of 2,440 on the CAMHS waiting list, as of June 2019. Misinformation in budgets seems to be a key role of this Government, with the unfortunate support of Fianna Fáil on the other side of the House. The Minister of State also mentioned €39 million in funding for mental health services in the press release today. Can the Minister outline if this is additional, new money or an additional €14 million, patched together with the €25 million that the Government held back last year in the budget that was not spent. On top of that, these measures that this Government has proposed for mental health have the support of Fianna Fáil, which I am extremely disappointed about. These measures that this Government or coalition has produced is a budget that is nothing short of robbery for almost every Irish citizen.

Confusion or misinformation also arises. In 2016, €35 million additional funding was announced for mental health. Sinn Féin managed to clarify, while working with Mental Health Reform, that the actual figure was €15 million in 2017. The €20 million that was left over was re-announced again in 2017, when a €35 million increase was again touted. In 2018, €55 million was announced, which we know was more like €30 million. We have constantly highlighted this in this Chamber. Whatever the Government is trying to do with its budgets, this is certainly not one for people, and misinformation is left, right and centre. I would like to see clarification on that.

I also want to explain the impacts of this budget and what it can do, which I will go through as briefly as I can. There has been constant underinvestment with no future planning except for this rainy day fund. Can Ministers clarify for the people someday the exact truth about what that rainy day fund is for? It will not support people in housing, in health, or in what they expect from their taxes.

I am conscious of time. This budget will leave Irish citizens less well-off. The bottom line is that if we do not invest in our people, in our essential services, and if we sacrifice everybody's health and well-being for a few, we will only see the ever-increasing housing waiting lists, more people on trolleys, more evictions, more businesses closing, farmers losing their livelihoods, people with disabilities not having their needs met, families struggling to provide for their children, morale at an all-time low, and God only knows what will happen then. People will

break down because we are human. The pressures of life can kill. Ill health sets in eventually because we have not invested in our services or in our people and there will only be one option left for many.

This budget was never about the people of Ireland or using taxpayers' money to provide the best services that these people deserve. It was about pleasing the very privileged and the very few so that the Government could ride out this storm on the back of a Brexit excuse. I hope and pray that the people outside this House tonight will see through Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil for what they really are, namely, sheep surrounded by wolves, with nowhere to go.

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am pleased to commend this budget to the House. It has been framed at a uniquely challenging time for our nation, and the Government has been prudent in ensuring that we have the necessary resources at our disposal to meet these challenges while also preserving the longer-term sustainability of the public finances. We are continuing to make progress on the commitment to double funding to culture, heritage and the Gaeltacht by 2025, and I am confident we will honour this commitment.

My Department sees an additional funding allocation of €354 million in this budget, an increase of 5% on last year, and a cumulative increase of 17% for our culture, language and heritage over the past two years. The total funding increase comprises €7.2 million in capital expenditure, which is up 10% on last year, and more than €8 million in current expenditure, which is up 3% on last year. With this funding, my Department will support the delivery of the Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture programme. We will increase support for artists, culture and commemorations, deliver an expanded programme of peatlands restoration works, contributing significantly to the Government's climate action plan, and we will increase investment in our Gaeltacht areas, our language and our islands. The funding will also enable my officials to continue delivering the Department's ten-year €1.2 billion capital plan under Project Ireland 2040.

The arts and culture sector will benefit from funding of almost €193 million in 2020, an increase of more than 2% from €189 million last year. Of this, some €153 million will be current expenditure and a further €39.7 million will be capital investment. At €80 million, funding for the Arts Council, or An Chomhairle Ealaíon, is at its highest level for ten years with an increase of €5 million over last year. This includes €1.25 million in additional funding to enhance the council's work in supporting performing artists, arts festivals, street arts and family events. My Department is also reallocating €3.75 million from within its existing Vote to strengthen the breadth and reach of the Arts Council's role.

The European City of Culture - Galway 2020 will receive an additional €1.1 million in capital funding this year, following funding of €6 million last year. This supports the Government's commitment to deliver Galway 2020, which is a significant international showcase for our national creativity and spirit. Fís Éireann, or Screen Ireland, will receive additional funding of €1 million from this budget. The Government recently extended the section 481 tax credit to the year 2024 and has also extended the regional uplift of 5% to provide an additional incentive to increase Irish and international production across the regions. These measures are in line with the audiovisual action plan, which sets out the Government's ambition to make Ireland a global hub for the production of film, TV drama and animation.

The budget has also granted an additional €900,000 for the Decade of Centenaries 2020

programme. This will enable the delivery of a significant programme of events, including commemorating Bloody Sunday on 21 November 2020 and commemorating the execution of Kevin Barry on 1 November 2020 in an appropriate and meaningful manner consistent with the advice of the expert advisory group.

The budget also provides €1 million to start the process of transferring the National Symphony Orchestra to the remit of the National Concert Hall. Funding of €250,000 is also being made available for the amateur theatre sector across Ireland. There is continued funding for significant ongoing departmental programmes, including the Creative Ireland programme, Culture Ireland, and the investment in the renovation of our national cultural institutions. Schemes and policies announced earlier this year, such as the Per Cent for Art scheme and the extension of the social welfare scheme for self-employed artists, reflect the Government's commitment to Irish arts and artists.

Over the past year I have listened very carefully to the extensive public discussion on biodiversity loss and the threats to nature. The national biodiversity conference in Dublin this year, which I hosted, the development of the Seeds for Nature initiative, the wide-ranging public debate and consultation on the Heritage Ireland 2030 plan, as well as the extensive engagement across Government on climate action were instrumental in my securing additional resources for this area.

Under this budget, total funding for our built and natural heritage sector in 2020 will increase by 15.5%, an increase of €8 million up to €62.5 million from last year's €54 million. This comprises additional capital provision of €6.75 million, up 44% on 2019, as well as additional current funding of €1.46 million.

We will invest €7 million to embark on an accelerated programme of peatlands restoration and conservation works. This programme will result in 1,800 ha of restored peatland in 2020, which should generate 100 jobs in the midlands and ultimately the storage of 28 million tonnes of carbon. The restoration and rehabilitation of raised bogs will provide multiple additional ecosystem services such as water and air quality improvements, flood mitigation, enhanced biodiversity, and opportunities for tourism development, and it will contribute to the social and economic well-being of local communities.

We are providing an additional €1 million to accelerate key nature conservation and biodiversity programmes under the National Parks and Wildlife Service, under which we plan to take on a number of front-line conservation specialists. After many years, my Department is enhancing the farm plan programme by doubling the funding from the current €500,000 to €1 million. This will support measures to protect biodiversity and assist farmers with lands designated as special areas of conservation in their role as custodians of nature.

My Department will continue with archaeological and built heritage investment schemes, and we will continue also to support Ireland's national parks and reserves, because with 9 million visitors a year, it is crucial that we do this. We need also to look after the tourism interpretative master plan and enhance visitor centre experiences and facilities at the national parks. We will continue to maintain, develop and foster North-South co-operation in the culture and heritage sphere, with additional funding to Waterways Ireland and continued support to Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency.

I am pleased that we have been able to provide additional funding for the Irish language.

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My colleague, Government Chief Whip and an tAire Stáit for Gaeilge, Deputy Seán Kyne, will address the increases in support for these important areas.

The Government recognises that our culture and heritage play an integral role in enhancing our physical and mental well-being and nourishing our national psyche. As I said at the outset, while this budget has been framed at a uniquely challenging time for our nation, funding for my Department has increased by more than 5%, which is €15 million. It shows that we have made solid progress over the past three budgets and we are well on our way towards honouring our commitment to double the fund by 2025.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tá maoiniú iomlán de bheagnach €58 milliún don Ghaeilge, don Ghaeltacht agus do na hoileáin, suas ó €55.5 milliún anuraidh. Is méadú de 4% é sin. Táim buíoch don Aire, an Teachta Madigan, as ucht na tacaíochta sin. Gheobhaidh Údarás na Gaeltachta leithdháileadh caipitil bhreise de €1 mhilliún, rud a thabharfaidh a bhunleithdháileadh caipitil go €10 milliún. Is méadú os cionn 11% ar 2019 é sin agus is é an bunchiste is airde le deich mbliana. Gheobhaidh Údarás na Gaeltachta €200,000 breise i maoiniú reatha do chomharchumainn Ghaeltachta freisin, rud a thabharfaidh le breis agus €1 mhilliún na méaduithe a cuireadh ar fáil don earnáil thábhachtach seo le trí bliana anuas. Táim sásta go raibh muid in ann é sin a dhéanamh ar feadh cúpla bliain anuas. Déanann an t-údarás obair fhiorthábhachtach trasna na nGaeltachtaí agus na n-oileán, agus táim fíorshásta go raibh muid in ann breis airgid a chur ar fáil dó. Beidh fáil ag Údarás na Gaeltachta ar mhaoiniú breise freisin má tharlaíonn Breatimeacht mí-ordúil. Gabhaim buíochas leis na hAiri, na Teachtaí Donohoe, Madigan, agus Humphreys, as sin. Beidh Údarás na Gaeltachta in ann tacaíocht a fháil ó dhá chiste de chuid na Roinne Gnó, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta. Beidh comhpháirtíocht thábhachtach idir Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Fiontraíocht Éireann.

Rachaidh €500,000 breise i dtreo an phróisis pleanála teanga in 2020. Leanann sé seo na bearta a fógraíodh níos luaithe chun tacú leis an bpróiseas, lena n-áirítear infheistíocht shuntasach breise chun tacú le hearnáil na luathbhlianta, teaghláigh, agus na healaíona traidisiúnta. Cinnteoidh leithdháileadh breise de €275,000 do 2020 soláthar leanúnach seirbhísí iompair riachtanacha do na hoileáin. Leanann an leithdháileadh breise go dlúth le bunú an choiste idir-ranna um fhorbairt oileán le déanaí.

Baineann an buiséad seo le bainistiú inbhuanaithe a dhéanamh ar an ngeilleagar agus ar an airgeadas poiblí, an geilleagar a ullmhú do dhúshlám an Bhreatimeachta, infheistiú i ngeilleagar ísealcharbóin agus cosaint a dhéanamh ar na daoine is laige inár bpobal. Beidh pacáiste caiteachais iomlán de €70 billiún sa bhliain 2020 trasna an Rialtais, an séú bliain as a chéile ina bhfuil méadú ar chaiteachas. Cuireann bearta an lae inniu an leibhéal is airde maoinithe ar fáil don fheabhsú leanúnach ar ár seirbhísí poiblí. Cuireann sé infheistíocht ar fáil dár n-aistriú go geilleagar ísealcharbóin agus déanann sé cosaint freisin ar na daoine is laige ó thionchar na cánach carbóin. Is é an Breatimeacht an baol is práinne agus is géire dár ngeilleagar. Tá pacáiste de bhreis agus €1.2 billiún curtha i bhfeidhm againn chun aghaidh a thabhairt ar an mBreatimeacht. Beidh suas le €650 milliún i gcaiteachas teagmhais ar fáil chun tacú leis na hearnálacha talmhaíochta, fiontair agus turasóireachta agus chun cuidiú leis na saoránaigh agus na réigiúin is gnóthaí a bhfuil tionchar ag an mBreatimeacht orthu. Beidh €365 milliún de chaiteachas breise coimirce sóisialta ar fáil chun déileáil le bagairt na dífhostaíochta mar gheall ar an mBreatimeacht.

It is clear that the budget is focused on the possible disaster of a no-deal Brexit. Contingen-

cy funds have been put in place across those sectors that are most at risk, including agriculture, marine, tourism and business. Included in that is funding made available through the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation for IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta. I have had a great deal of discussion in recent times about funding for Údarás na Gaeltachta with the Minister, Deputy Madigan, the Secretary General and the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe. Údarás na Gaeltachta has an important role to play, so it is good news that it will be treated the same as IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in terms of accessing emergency funds in the event of a no-deal Brexit to ensure that those jobs at particular risk in Border areas and companies with a high level of exposure due to their level of exports to the UK are catered for.

The budget provides for a 10% increase in investment in schools, houses, hospitals, roads and public transport. In education, the budget provides for 150 new mainstream teachers. I welcome the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy McHugh's reversal of changes that were made during the recession in respect of smaller schools. It is important that those changes are being reversed now that we can do so. The reversal will play an important role in the viability of schools in rural Ireland. The budget provides for more than 400 additional teaching posts to support those with special educational needs and more than 1,000 additional special needs assistants, SNAs.

The budget will support families of different types and ages across Galway and the west more widely through measures such as the increase in the living alone allowance. Widowed pensioners who are living alone and face proportionally larger bills will benefit from this particular increase. There will be an increase of €2 per week in the fuel allowance. The household benefits package will be broadened, the home care tax credit will increase, free GP care will be extended to children under eight years of age from next September and free dental care will be extended to children under six years of age. The medical card income threshold in respect of over 70s will increase and there will be a reduction in the monthly threshold for the drugs payment scheme. These are all positive changes that will benefit our citizens up and down the country.

I acknowledge the work done by my Department and across the Government on this budget. The overriding principle has been to prepare the country for the threat of a no-deal Brexit. That has been achieved. I commend the budget.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I commend the budget to the House. It is a prudent and wise budget and is the right budget at the right time. We have made real progress in recent years, and it is important that our country makes the right decisions to protect that progress for the future. As a Fine Gael-led Government, we are concerned with protecting that future. The plans we have been investing in for the past couple of years - the science strategy, the skills strategy, the housing strategy, the jobs strategy and Project Ireland 2040 - are about long-term thinking and future-proofing the country. It is this investment in our country's talent and its young people through education and job creation that will protect the country's future.

The near future could see a no-deal Brexit. I hope that will not happen, but we are ready for it. The budget will see us through next year regardless of what comes our way. It is a prudent and well-balanced budget. It does not give false hope about next year or put more money into people's pockets that will only have to be taken back in a few months' time. This budget is careful and right. That is what is important. When heading into times of crisis not too long ago,

we had budgets that gave people false hope. They then made spending commitments based on that. For example, people took out long-term mortgages only to be left in a mess years later. We have moved on from those times towards proper and prudent budgeting and management of the public finances. That is why the finances are well balanced this year and why we are being careful about investing across the system.

Before discussing my Department, I will touch on how the budget will have an impact on some local issues, the first of which is health. From speaking to our constituents, we all know the major pressures people are under in terms of home help and respite care. The additional money in this budget, which will deliver an extra 1 million hours of home help, will help people in every county - in my case, Meath and Westmeath - who are under pressure trying to mind their loved ones and need extra help from the State. The increase will make a major difference in that regard. In Meath West, we have also been fighting for many years for extra resources for respite care. This care is mainly for young adults and teenagers whose families need a little break. I am glad that there will be an increase in funding for respite care, which should leave us in a position through the HSE to see the purpose-built facility in Athboy opened and made available to families who need respite care. This would be major progress.

The budget continues to invest in roads, with an increase of 10% for roads, schools, transport infrastructure and all of the various facilities we need if we are to invest in our country. Last year saw a 25% increase in capital expenditure. This year will see a 10% increase, which will have an impact in Meath West, and rightly so, given that we need it.

I mentioned investing in education. We have seen some major changes in this regard, with the largest education budget ever. Money is now available to secure the schools that were announced in recent years for my area of Meath West and that are now going through planning. They are mainly located around Navan and Enfield. The money will ensure that, when they pass through the planning stage, construction can start. The Minister, Deputy McHugh, has increased the capitation grant by 2.5%. This is badly needed and will be spent well on our children's future. That we probably have the largest number of primary school teachers ever means we are making inroads into the pupil-teacher ratio. I accept that we still have much work to do, but we are going the right way. The Minister, Deputy McHugh, is securing that trend. Doing so is important, as we all understand that early intervention is important.

The numbers in respect of small schools have changed so as to make it easier to secure an extra teacher or retain current teachers. We remember how, seven or eight years ago, there was great pressure on small schools. Thankfully, those days are behind us. The extra release day for teaching principals is important, as it will free them up to work as principals by getting in substitutes. Great progress is being made in respect of education. It must continue. In my area, St. Mary's special school has been waiting a long time for a new building. The budget secures the money for that to happen. We are making the necessary progress.

The budget will have a major impact on housing locally and nationally. Next year, Meath County Council will be in a position to provide more than 1,000 houses to families who need them. This number will build on the 1,200 the council delivered last year and the 1,000 it will deliver this year. Likewise, Westmeath County Council will be in a position to deliver 700 or 800 houses for the locality. Doing this is important.

Nationally, this is the largest housing budget the State has ever seen, and rightly so. One of the major issues facing us is the housing situation. It affects people of all categories. We

are intervening in many areas. There is an increase of 11% in this housing budget, which will put us in a position to deliver more than 11,000 new social houses. The big demand in the Dáil has always been for 10,000, but that number will be reached this year. Next year's budget will bring the number to 11,000.

Through the use of the housing assistance payment, HAP, and other rental subsidy schemes, more than 27,000 families will get a set of keys. They will be helped in that by the taxpayer through our Department and local authorities, which will work with approved housing bodies to deliver those houses. This is real progress. Since yesterday, I have listened to speech after speech telling the House that the HAP is a bad use of money. To be clear, the HAP will help 65,000 families to be in homes by the end of this year. I have repeatedly asked Deputies to suggest a different short-term solution while we build social housing. We are in favour of building social housing. We are committed to delivering more than 55,000 new social houses by the end of 2021 under our plans but we recognise that we still need other solutions in the short term. The HAP scheme is a success and provides people with homes. If Members do not like it, they should outline what they would do with 65,000 families and where they would be housed this year, next year and the following year while we replenish the social housing stock.

I will conclude by referring to one statistic. In 2006, more than 90,000 houses were built. Fewer than 5,000 of those were social houses. That is the reason we have a shortage of social housing. Next year, we will build approximately 25,000 houses and more than 11,000 of them will be social housing units. That is the difference. That is a commitment to social housing. I ask those who will be in government in the future to remember that. We must continue to invest in social housing at all times, not to have the on-off supply of such housing that we have seen in the past.

Deputy Mary Butler: I wish to share time with Deputies Niamh Smyth and Aylward.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Mary Butler: Fianna Fáil has afforded the Government the time and space to deliver the best possible outcome for Ireland. As the largest party in opposition, that remains our approach. We need stability at this crucial time in our nation's history and it is for this reason that Fianna Fáil is facilitating the budget. That should not be seen as an endorsement of the Government because there are plenty of areas in respect of which the Government has not come up to the mark or where its policies have failed. We can have stability and certainty or, alternatively, we can have chaos, confusion and discord.

As spokesperson for older people, I wish to focus first on the announcement of 1 million extra home support hours. I am pleased that an increase has been achieved and I hope it will go some way towards meeting the demand for home care. This was a key demand of my party and me, and I make no apology for it. Fine Gael has allowed a crisis in home care supports to escalate over the past year. Every single Member of this House is aware of that. The issue was always going to be a priority for us in the budget discussions. The service has been unable to keep pace with demand and, as a result, we have seen a significant increase in the waiting lists. Currently, more than 7,000 people await home care support packages and, unfortunately, the most vulnerable and the most in need have been left waiting. Allied to that is the significant increase in delayed discharges in acute hospitals. It would have been reckless not to take action in respect of this matter. I would have liked to have seen a larger increase but I am mindful of the overarching Brexit situation the country faces.

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Fianna Fáil has long believed that funding allocated to enable older people to remain at home provides not only the best value but also reflects the wishes of older people and their families. The home care package was introduced in 2006 when Fianna Fáil was in government and it remains an extremely important part of the health service. The Government's health service capacity review anticipates an increase in demand of some 120% by 2031. Today's announcement is a modest step on the road to meeting that.

The Minister of State is aware that the allocation for home support packages is €453 million for 2019. I received information recently in response to a parliamentary question which reveals high levels of outsourcing across all geographical areas, with 100% of home support hours in Dublin being outsourced. Private care can be up to twice as expensive as delivering the services through the HSE and the figures raise serious questions about value for money. The State already forks out hundreds of millions of euro a year on agency nursing and now it has emerged that the HSE had adopted a similar practice for home support hours, which is very worrying. I call for a cost-base analysis to ascertain whether we are getting value for money. I want to know how much of the €450 million budget this year will deliver care and not be swallowed up by travel expenses, bureaucracy and IT issues.

I welcome the clarity on the funding of the three new hospices in the country, namely, in Waterford, Mayo and Wicklow. The hospice on the second floor of the new Dunmore Wing at University Hospital Waterford is testament to the hard work and dedication of the volunteers and the board of Waterford Hospice. They have been fundraising and promoting the hospice for years and will shortly see their dreams become a reality. This will be a state-of-the-art facility, fully equipped to look after our loved ones, and to give them the specialised care they need. Staff will be recruited immediately, so the clarification is welcome. It was very welcome to see that in print on page 108 of the Budget Statement.

I will now turn to social welfare issues. I welcome the fact that the living alone allowance will be increased by €5, which will benefit more than 200,000 recipients. That is an area I highlighted following the previous three budgets because when one member of a couple dies, where both are in receipt of the State pension, the income is halved. However, the cost of running the home more or less stays the same. I am disappointed that the increase across the board for pensioners could not be facilitated this year, but I accept that tough decisions had to be made. I hope that will not be the case next year.

In the past year and prior to that, climate issues have been to the fore and young people have led the way in raising awareness on the pressing challenge of our age. However, the left has been out in force this week criticising the increase in the carbon tax of €6 per tonne. They are the first to take to the streets and protest but real action on climate issues requires brave decisions. No other viable option was put forward. Utilising the carbon tax in a ring-fenced fund, as proposed by Fianna Fáil, is the way towards a just transition in order that those in fuel poverty, namely, 28% of the population, can be protected, including by being given grants to retrofit their homes. We have a long way to go. Single-use plastics will definitely have to be dealt with, as our oceans are being clogged up with disposable single-use plastics.

The Minister for Health announced this afternoon that there would be ten dementia advisers included among the 1,000 additional members of front-line staff. We are all aware that 11 people are diagnosed with dementia every day. There are 55,000 people with dementia in the country and that is set to increase to 70,000 by 2022. The all-party Oireachtas group on dementia, which I co-chair with Senator Kelleher, has long sought that. It is good news that we

finally made a breakthrough today. We have been banging the drum for the past three years. We were very pleased with the news that it has finally been recognised, as is the Alzheimer Society of Ireland. The devil is always in the detail. My question is when we will see the dementia advisers on the ground. Currently, access to a dementia adviser depends on where one is living. There are nine dementia advisers in the country at present and I acknowledge that the extra ten will make a significant difference.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I welcome this opportunity to address the House on the provisions of budget 2020, which is being described as a Brexit budget. As a representative of the Border counties I am acutely aware of the need for prudence at this time. Nonetheless, it would be remiss of me not to voice my concerns on some of the budget provisions for the culture and heritage sectors.

There was undoubtedly an expectation within the arts community that this budget would build on the strides that were made in budget 2019. In Tuesday's edition of *The Irish Times*, Dr. Kevin Rafter, the chairman of the Arts Council, indicated that he expected an increase of approximately 10% in the Arts Council budget. The National Campaign for the Arts had anticipated a 15% increase in the budget. Screen Ireland, in its pre-budget submission, had sought at least €20 million in funding from the 2020 budget. Instead, the allocation of an additional €1 million brought its budget to €17.2 million. The expectations of these organisations are not surprising, given the Taoiseach's commitment in May 2017 to double funding for the arts in seven years. The reality and the expectation did not meet. Rather, the increase in funding for the arts and culture sector stands at a little more than 2%. It is another commitment made by the Taoiseach that will not be delivered.

This is a regressive budget for the arts and culture sector. It is a missed opportunity to build on the work that was done last year. It is worth looking specifically at the budget provision made for the Arts Council. There was significant disappointment following budget 2018.

10 o'clock The chair at that time very publicly expressed her disappointment that a mere additional €3 million had been allocated to the Arts Council budget. Things seemed to get back on track in budget 2019, which saw an additional €7 million being allocated to the Arts Council budget. There was a view within the arts community that the Government was finally recognising the important role of the arts in all our lives and in the life of the nation. That was good work and it has been undone in budget 2020.

The Arts Council is the main funding agency for arts and artists in Ireland. It plays a crucial and pivotal role in directing funding and was established by statute to do that. Having appraised the announcements made yesterday, it seems that the funding of the Arts Council was increased by some €5 million. That is not true. Some €3.75 million of the additional money is actually financing matters that were already under the remit of the Department. The increased allocation, therefore, is a mere €1.25 million and this represents an increase of less than 2%.

It is not entirely clear in what way the role of the Arts Council is to be "broadened". That specific reference was made during the Minister's press briefing regarding the Arts Council taking over Culture Night and Creative Schools. This is welcome after the fiasco of the attack on the arm's-length approach and principle immediately following the introduction of the Creative Ireland initiative. This is an important step in ensuring that public money is fairly and transparently distributed. The Arts Council must have a budget that allows it to provide supports for artists, enable the creation of works of excellence and allow people across the country to access high-quality arts experiences. The Arts Council cannot be expected to do all that with a small

budget. Ultimately, the Government is good at lauding our artists who represent us nationally and internationally. In this budget, however, they are consistently being treated as second-class citizens. They are working in one of the few industries in the country where practitioners have no job security, no pensions, no healthcare provision, no maternity leave and little chance of ever securing a mortgage or owning their own home, given their wages.

Turning to the heritage area, the moneys announced under the heritage programme were also disappointing. While headline figures suggest an increase of 15.5% on the provision made in budget 2019, the reality is different. Some €7 million of the €8 million announced is going towards peatland restoration and generating jobs in the midlands, which is welcome. The €7 million forms part of the just transition fund which was announced to support workers there. The Government is, therefore, double counting and advertising the same money twice. This is another example of the Government spinning. The increase in existing obligations to heritage is €1 million. How would additional funding be used to provide for the Arts Council? We have some way to go in returning to the budgets that were provided some years ago, including amounts up to €20 million. Heritage cannot be allowed to be the preserve of Fáilte Ireland, where investment decisions are driven by visitor numbers. While our natural and built heritage has great potential, from a tourism point of view, it is also very valuable to the communities which guard it.

My time is coming to an end, but I have two final points. I have already asked this question but I will ask it again. The Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, is from Galway. That city is going to host the European Capital of Culture in 2020. It is extremely important that the Government ensures a legacy is bequeathed after that event. I want to see that manifested as a physical space where artists can show their work. We repeatedly see the Galway International Arts Festival having to move around nomadically in the city because it does not have a permanent space. It would be very important for the Government to ensure that an appropriate building will be provided in Galway after it has been the European Capital of Culture in 2020.

I also refer to creative schools, as mentioned by the Minister. It is important to examine what is happening in Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board. It has a local education and arts partnership and it was one of the first. I will not say it was the first. It is a model of excellence in how to deliver arts education. I encourage the Minister of State and the Minister to engage with that ETB to see how it is done. That is something the Government should consider rolling out across all 16 ETBs.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: All of the Deputies in this House were canvassed for funding in the last few months before the budget. I will highlight some of the local aspects first. I refer to SOS Kilkenny, which is a group funded under section 39. It looks after disabled people from the time they are children right up to adulthood. In Carlow-Kilkenny in 2015, there were 4,521 respite overnight stays. In 2018, there were 1,721, which is a drop of 2,800 respite nights. That totals a 62% decrease. This group is trying to look after people and their parents. It is short of money and is trying to fundraise to maintain its activities. I have written to the HSE, the Ministers and everyone else. Budget time is the time to talk about funding.

I would like to talk about the ten community support care homes or residential care centres in Carlow-Kilkenny, eight of which are in Kilkenny and two in Carlow. We are lucky in that we are ahead of most of the rest of the country in that respect. The centres look after elderly people as well, mostly people who live on their own and have nobody else to look after them. Hundreds of such people are being looked after. Those centres too, however, have to fundraise

every day to keep helping these people. My colleague in County Kilkenny, Deputy Phelan, welcomed some Ministers there recently. They went around and saw the service these centres provide to people. If these people were not being looked after in these care homes they would be in private nursing homes or in hospitals. That would place a great burden on the State. Something needs to be done to give these centres the small amount of funding necessary to keep the service on the road. If that funding is not provided, then some of these community centres will have to close. I ask the Minister to look at this issue.

I also met representatives of Horse Sport Ireland recently. That organisation is doing a great job, in Ireland and all over the world, to further the Irish thoroughbred horse sector. A small amount of money would also help that organisation. Such an investment would be rewarded a hundred times over. Finally, I will mention the No Name Club in Kilkenny, which is also looking for a small amount of money under section 39. It was set up some years ago and it keeps young people from drinking by providing alternatives to alcohol. I mention these issues because they are local and this is the appropriate time to highlight them.

I want to turn to the budget in general now. I have concerns about the carbon tax measures introduced yesterday. The devil is always in the detail and we are still crunching the numbers and digesting much of the information. The increase to the carbon tax, however, will disproportionately affect rural Ireland. That is where I come from. I understand that climate change is an important issue, but I do not believe the Government has thought through how this measure will affect some people more than others. It could have made more of an effort to research the effects of these increases and worked harder to find some sort of middle ground. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance have stated that the tax will be introduced gradually to allow those affected to plan ahead. The attitude seems to be that carbon tax will be increased and people should plan accordingly. That kind of hands-off approach, however, will not work. The Government needs to engage in widespread public consultation with a view to taking ownership of the tax hike. It should also take a leadership role in assisting all sections of society to plan ahead for further increases set to be introduced annually. If the Minister has really been informed by the experience of water charges, as he claims, then surely he will see the importance of engaging with the public, hearing their concerns, learning of their needs and respecting them. He must then take definitive action.

Rural communities in general are disappointed at the increase in carbon tax. This tax, which is designed to change behaviour, will probably have a limited effect because most people cannot afford to change to the more expensive alternatives or dramatically retrofit their homes. The cost is even greater for those households dependent on home heating oil. A retrofitting grant should be examined and those grants, at an appropriate level, need to be made available across the board. It is especially important that they are made available to those on lower incomes who are reliant on fossil fuels to heat their homes.

Fine Gael's own Deputies have mentioned that this tax will disproportionately affect rural Ireland. Deputy Kate O'Connell, who is based in Dublin, stated yesterday "that the Government is very aware that there are people who will be burdened with a huge tax bill, particularly those in rural Ireland who rely on solid fuels". She went on to state that "supports for retrofitted homes in rural Ireland would give support to people living in these homes so that they are not faced with a large bill". A rural-based Deputy, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, also admitted that "a massive retrofitting program is required across the country". She put forward Offaly, her own county, and the midlands in general, as a fantastic location for the pilot which has been proposed. That was before she admitted that the people of rural Offaly will be disproportion-

ately affected. It is widely accepted across all sides of the House that the farming and haulage sectors are among the most exposed to Brexit, but the cost of doing business will rise significantly for them, and increasing the carbon tax at a time when the margins could not be tighter is the last thing they need. Will the Minister of State provide clarification on the rebate? There are different rumours going around. The rebate is 6.5 cent per litre at the moment. I am being contacted by hauliers today asking if it has gone down to 5 cent per litre. I would like to have that clarified. That would be a massive decrease at a time when Brexit is coming around the corner and hauliers will be affected more than anyone else because of that.

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, has stated that farmers using green diesel on their farms will not be overly disaffected by the rising taxes, as they will be entitled to a refund through the tax system. We need more concrete detail on this as urgently as possible. It is important to note that not every farmer has a green diesel supply on their own farms, especially small farmers. People might not believe that but farmers do not have their own supply in many instances. They have to get it from their local supplier because they are not big enough to afford tanks of 300 gallons or more.

Commuters will have to endure a significant increase in their travel to work costs. They are hard-working people of the squeezed middle who are already keeping the economy going, and have done so for years, especially during the economic downturn. They have been forgotten in every Fine Gael budget, and I expect it will plough on as normal. The Taoiseach has done nothing for these people since his famous quote about being a Taoiseach for those who get up early in the morning. I have spoken to farmers in Kilkenny. Neither father nor mother may see their young children, who are commuting to Dublin, except for maybe a few hours every day during the week. This needs to be looked after.

I know I am out of time so I had better stop there, even though I could keep going for another while, especially when talking about farmers. I have a lot more to say about the situation with the beef sector etc., but my time is up.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sure the Deputy will get the opportunity again. We move to Deputy Durkan, who is sharing with Deputies Farrell and Naughten.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Like many others, it is interesting for me to look at the budget we have before us. We live in defining times and we have been in defining times for many years now. Thankfully, we survived as a nation and an economy. A few years ago, there was little hope for us. Many of us thought we might never see the light of day again. We have survived thanks to prudent spending and careful planning. This budget again reflects the need for careful planning. I congratulate the Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, the Government and all parties in the House who have been supportive of the all-party stance on Brexit. This is the most defining moment we are likely to have for some considerable time. It consists of Brexit on the one hand and climate change on the other.

The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, has done a tremendous job in steering the country towards the storm and meeting it head on because that is what has to be done. We can speculate on where we should spend more money. Everybody wants to spend more money but there is not much sense spending more money unless we know where it will come from and whether we can afford to pay it back. Due to the challenges we have come through in recent years, we have learned a lesson. We have learned to be more durable. We have learned to think fast, to move fast, to plan quickly and to wait for the results. That has been successful and satisfactory.

We have something we never faced before. We have the possibility of what is a major trade challenge and, effectively, a trade war. I am not suggesting our colleagues across the water deliberately created this scenario, but the situation that is emerging is so severe that it is likely to have the kind of consequences that heretofore we have only dreamed about, not only for us on the island of Ireland but also in Europe and in the UK. The full impact of those combined consequences will not be felt until much later on in the year and into next year. The Minister has crafted the budget in such a way as to plan for the future, to contain the situation as it emerges now, to ensure the public in this country continues to be aware of what is happening and unfolding in front of us, and to ensure we can continue to have the resources to survive in the challenging times ahead.

I have referred to the all-party support. That has been tremendously helpful. There was no other stance to take in this situation. It is good to see, in comparison with some other countries, that the political system in this country was capable of presenting a united force and standing firm. That brought a considerable response from our colleagues across Europe. They saw the Irish political system standing firm and they stood firm as well. The other 27 EU countries stood firm. We owe a great debt of gratitude to them and we look forward to that continued support in the future.

While of course everybody would like to spend more money and have more money to spend, it does not happen that way. We have to pay for it first, we have to plan for it first, and we have to await the outcome. It is a bit like the chicken-and-egg scenario. Looking at the egg does not always produce the chicken, but in this particular situation we do not have any option except to plan what way we are going and hope the right result will follow. From the experiences we have had in the past, it is safe to say that we were previously trudging into the unknown. We now know we can do incredible things in particular circumstances that we were not capable of doing before. We have that experience behind us, which will stand us in good stead in the time ahead. It is to be hoped our economy will be able to survive and we will be able to see ourselves through the storms ahead.

There will be many critics, as there were in the past. There will be experts from all sides who will outline how it should be done and say that it cannot be done otherwise. I have no doubt those critics will emerge in the near future and for some considerable time into the future. My only answer to that charge is that doing it and solving it is the acid test. While we can be criticised by many people, the degree to which we can survive the challenges ahead of us will be the acid test on which we will be judged and on which this political generation will be judged. The future generation can look forward to the careful handling of the economy and of the climate change issue. In those circumstances, we will survive.

Deputy Alan Farrell: I thank Deputy Durkan for sharing his time. With the spectre of a no-deal Brexit looming in the near future, budget 2020 represents a responsible allocation of resources, given the need for us to prepare for the financial implications a no-deal Brexit will have on many sectors across our economy. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Government has found itself with its hands tied by Brexit, and unable to provide further investment in sectors such as childcare. However, to do so, given the current situation facing our country, would be ill-considered, and I commend the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, on his prudent and responsible approach to this budget. It will not set the world on fire and it will certainly not win an election, but sometimes that is not the purpose of being in government. Sometimes the country has to be put before personal and party ambition. As we have seen in the past, unsustainable budget expenditure streams often come back to haunt Governments.

We have seen from previous Governments how working to ensure every citizen receives something in any given budget, without regard to the country's overall economic situation, can undermine the foundations of our economy as a whole. Therefore, I am pleased this Government has not done that. Last year, there was a suggestion we were not going to balance the books in the run-up to the budget and there were significant calls for additional expenditure, but that did not happen because the Minister did the right thing and stood by a commitment we gave years ago to balance the budget by 2018, which we did.

Given the time I have, I cannot touch on all aspects of the budget that was announced yesterday, but as the Chairman of the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, I have to mention childcare, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and Tusla. I am pleased the Department has a budgetary increase of more than €94 million for 2020, and within that €29 million has been allocated to Tusla, which increases its budget to €814 million. It is vital that children are protected and supported as a priority matter by this Government, and we must continue to build on the significant investment that has been made in the Department's budget. It is unfortunate that we are coming from a place of such historical underinvestment when it comes to the funding for childcare, child protection and supports for families in this area. That is changing, although it will take time. I listened to my colleague on the opposite side of the House criticise the Department and the Government for their lack of investment in certain fields. To a certain extent she is correct. It is perfectly acceptable to make those points. However, the bottom line is that we went from zero to €1 billion in just a few short years. That has to be acknowledged. With the additional funding provided to the Department, there are now opportunities for us to ramp up additional supports for working families, as opposed to just social welfare recipients. That will be done through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs liaising with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to target families, particularly lower-income families. We have to do more because as we all know, those in the squeezed middle are still paying Celtic tiger mortgages and must be supported in rearing their children.

We must provide incentives for people to make changes to encourage climate action. I am pleased that we are working to introduce increased carbon taxes in a responsible manner, without overly burdensome levels of taxation. An increase in the carbon tax of €6 per tonne is very modest, notwithstanding what Deputy Aylward had to say. We are talking about an additional cost of €1 or €2 to fill a car with fuel, and from May onwards an additional cost of €4 or €5 to fill a tank of home heating oil. We are taking measures to ensure that those affected, particularly pensioners, receive additional supports by way of the energy allowance, formerly the fuel allowance. We must also continue to incentivise people to move from carbon-emitting vehicles to electric and hybrid vehicles and disincentivise the use of carbon-emitting vehicles in the first instance. That is the entire purpose of the all-party agreement of the Joint Committee on Climate Action and the Government's policy in this area.

It is positive that a further €20 million is being provided to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for homeless services, bringing total funding to €166 million in 2020. We must work to support people who are in emergency accommodation to ensure they can get a home, as well as working to prevent people from ending up in this situation in the first place. I also welcome the extension of rent pressure zones and the significant funds allocated to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to provide supports in this regard. I commend the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, who is rarely praised for the work he does. He has been working steadfastly for several years to get our housing output up to 10,000 units this year. Next year, the figure will

be 11,000 and the following year it will be 12,000. It is very important that we acknowledge the €1.1 billion that has been allocated for this purpose.

In the same vein, I refer to a development on Monday that did not make headlines because of the budget, namely, the decision by Dublin City Council to halt the delivery of 2,000 homes in this city. I find it mind-boggling and frustrating that members of Dublin City Council have thrown out a proposal on ideological grounds, one which was approved by the previous council. This was nothing other than an attempt to garner votes for themselves at the next general election. It was a disgraceful decision and I very much hope the Minister will respond appropriately to it.

I am pleased that additional funding is being provided to the Land Development Agency for the provision of new affordable homes, and that investment is being provided for regeneration and development. I welcome the provision for the exercise of the Residential Tenancies Board's additional powers to enforce rent pressure zones and measures concerning the help-to-buy scheme.

I am very fond of constructive criticism because we do not have all the answers - nobody does. No party has a monopoly on good ideas. However, in regard to the criticism from the bench opposite, which comes while that party supports us in the passing of this final budget under the confidence and supply agreement, I must acknowledge the work of my colleague, Deputy Peter Burke. I refer to his study which showed that €4.35 billion in uncoded political commitments were offered to bribe the electorate into supporting Fianna Fáil at the next general election. We do not know where the money to pay for these commitments would come from. We do not know what will be cut or what increases in taxation Fianna Fáil is proposing to fund these uncoded proposals. The electorate has learned a great deal in the past ten years about budgets that spiral out of control, commitments that are made to everybody and yearly budget giveaways in the style of "The Late Late Show", with one for everyone in the audience. Without being overly critical of Fianna Fáil, which I appreciate has a job to do, we must have that conversation. If some people are disappointed by the budget because it did not put enough back in their pockets at a time of potential national crisis, maybe they need to evaluate what the budget is for. That applies to Members of this House as well.

I apologise for eating into Deputy Naughten's time. I commend this budget and thank all of the Ministers who have worked on it in recent months.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this budget. It is very much a budget that prepares for the worst while hoping for the best. There are a few issues I want to pick up on. We can all highlight weaknesses in the budget, and we would all have liked to see far more money going into services, but there are several elements of this budget that must be highlighted. They provide an opportunity for communities across the country with good ideas and solutions to come forward with constructive proposals that can be developed into very beneficial schemes, not just for those communities but for the country as a whole.

I welcome the fact that €31 million of funding has been allocated for the midland counties to deal with the challenges surrounding Bord na Móna. I particularly welcome the €6 million of funding allocated to measures for a just transition. People will argue that the funding is insufficient, and I agree with them. However, it is seed capital to support communities across the midland counties. Those communities can come forward with good, innovative solutions that will create jobs across the midlands and have them developed into initiatives that can leverage

funding from the European Commission or the urban or rural regeneration and development funds.

I also welcome the acknowledgement in the budget of remote working. While in the past we have paid lip service to this issue, IDA Ireland has continued to pile more jobs into the city of Dublin, which does not have the capacity to cater for them. Meanwhile, many communities across the country with the required office and housing accommodation cannot attract those jobs. The budget announcements included an allocation of funding to establish 300 rural digital hubs across the country, with an average of seven in every county. These will allow communities and individuals to work remotely. I encourage companies and businesses based here in Dublin to see how they can exploit those digital hubs to relocate staff from rural parts of the country and the regions back to those communities. My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran, has advocated remote working for the Civil Service. The Minister for Finance acknowledged this option in his budget speech and a review will now commence. The first area that needs to be looked at is vacant State-owned office accommodation throughout the country to see whether staff could be located there rather than having to develop new accommodation. Roscommon town has thousands of square footage of turnkey commercial office space that would be ready to accommodate businesses tomorrow morning. I encourage business looking at expanding rather than trying to build and source new office accommodation in Dublin to consider the opportunities in provincial towns throughout the country, such as Roscommon town, using the tools of remote working. The Government should capitalise on what it has announced in the budget and it needs to bring together a task force not just of the State bodies but of all of the expertise throughout the economy that could look at how we can incentivise and support businesses and provide them with the knowledge and know-how to encourage remote working and give a substantial boost to communities throughout the country.

With regard to the agricultural sector, several significant announcements were made yesterday. A €300 million fund will be put in place for new agri-environmental schemes. People can dismiss this and say €3 million is insufficient to put in place any type of agri-environmental scheme but it is a blank canvas for farmers to come forward with solutions on how to develop an agri-environmental scheme that supports farm incomes rather than what has happened heretofore, when the environmentalists have created hoops and hurdles for farmers to jump through. I actively encourage the farming community throughout the country to see how they can develop this.

The same issue arises with regard to the €40 million fund of targeted supports for the beef sector. I actively encourage the beef representative groups throughout the country to come forward now with proposals on how that funding can be drawn down in an innovative way to support beef farmers, particularly suckler farmers, throughout the country rather than letting officials in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine design a scheme that meets the administration objectives rather than the objectives of communities throughout the country.

Debate adjourned.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.35 p.m. until 10 a.m. on Thursday, 10 October 2019.