



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

Freagra ar Eascairí - Return of Writs: Cork North-Central, Dublin Fingal, Dublin Mid-West and Wexford	312
Introduction of New Members	312
Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions	318
An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business	326
Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters	346
Organisation of Working Time (Domestic Violence Leave) Bill 2019: First Stage	346
Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2019: Motion	348
Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2019: Financial Resolution	350
Ceisteanna - Questions	351
Biotechnology Industry	351
Departmental Staff Data	355
Estimates for Public Services 2019: Message from Select Committee	359
Ceisteanna (Atógáil) - Questions (Resumed)	359
Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions	359
Personal Injuries Commission	359
IDA Ireland Jobs Data	361
Small and Medium Enterprises	363
IDA Ireland Jobs Data	365
Climate Change Policy	367
Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions	369
Employment Rights	369
Company Registration	371
Industrial Development	373
Corporation Tax Regime	375
Job Creation	377
Job Creation	379
Harbours and Piers Development	382
Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate	384
Court Sittings	384
Aquaculture Licence Applications	387
Pharmacy Services	391
School Enrolments	393
Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill 2019: Order for Report Stage	396
Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill 2019: Report and Final Stages	397
Confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government: Motion [Private Members]	402
Personal Statement by Member	439
Confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	440

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 3 Nollaig 2019

Tuesday, 3 December 2019

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Freagra ar Eascairí - Return of Writs: Cork North-Central, Dublin Fingal, Dublin Mid-West and Wexford

Introduction of New Members

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call on the Clerk of the Dáil to announce the returns to the by-election writs for the constituencies of Cork North-Central, Dublin Fingal, Dublin Mid-West and Wexford.

The Clerk of the Dáil made the following announcement:

I gcomhlíonadh Bhuan-Ordú 198 de na Buan-Orduithe i dtaobh gnó phoiblí, tá orm a chraoladh go ndearnadh, sa chorrthoghchán a bhí ann an 29 Samhain 2019, de chionn an Teachta Liam Ó Céilleachair a thoghadh chun Parlaimint na hEorpa, an Comhalta seo a leanas a thoghadh don Dáil:

In compliance with Standing Order 198 of the Standing Orders relative to public business, I have to announce that at the by-election held on 29 November 2019, consequent on the election of Deputy Billy Kelleher to the European Parliament, the following member has been elected to the Dáil:

Dáilcheantar Chorcaí Thuaidh-Lár Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin

Constituency of Cork North-Central Pádraig O'Sullivan

Tá Rolla na gComhaltaí sínithe ag an Teachta de réir Bhuan-Ordú 1.

The Deputy has signed the Roll of Members in accordance with Standing Order 1.

I gcomhlíonadh Bhuan-Ordú 198 de na Buan-Orduithe i dtaobh gnó phoiblí, tá orm a chraoladh go ndearnadh, sa chorrthoghchán a bhí ann an 29 Samhain 2019, de chionn an Teachta Micheál de Bhailís a thoghadh chun Parlaimint na hEorpa, an Comhalta seo a leanas a thoghadh don Dáil:

In compliance with Standing Order 198 of the Standing Orders relative to public business, I have to announce that at the by-election held on 29 November 2019, consequent on the election of Deputy Mick Wallace to the European Parliament, the following member has been elected to the Dáil:

Dáilcheantar Loch Garman Maolcholm Ó Broin

Constituency of Wexford Malcom Byrne.

Tá Rolla na gComhaltaí sínithe ag an Teachta de réir Bhuan-Ordú 1.

The Deputy has signed the Roll of Members in accordance with Standing Order 1.

I gcomhlíonadh Bhuan-Ordú 198 de na Buan-Orduithe i dtaobh Gnó Phoiblí, tá orm a chraoladh go ndearnadh, sa chorrthoghchán a bhí ann an 29 Samhain 2019, de chionn an Teachta Proinséas Mhic Gearailt a thoghadh chun Parlaimint na hEorpa, an Comhalta seo a leanas a thoghadh don Dáil:-

In compliance with Standing Order 198 of the Standing Orders relative to Public Business, I have to announce that at the by-election held on 29 November, 2019, consequent on the election of Deputy Frances Fitzgerald to the European Parliament, the following member has been elected to the Dáil:-

Dáilcheantar Bhaile Átha Cliath Thiar-Meán Marcas Mac an Bhaird

Constituency of Dublin Mid-West Mark Ward

Tá Rolla na gComhaltaí sínithe ag an Teachta de réir Bhuan-Ordú 1.

The Deputy has signed the Roll of Members in accordance with Standing Order 1.

I gcomhlíonadh Bhuan-Ordú 198 de na Buan-Orduithe i dtaobh Gnó Phoiblí, tá orm a chraoladh go ndearnadh, sa chorrthoghchán a bhí ann an 29 Samhain 2019, de chionn an Teachta Clár Ní Dhálaigh a thoghadh chun Parlaimint na hEorpa, an Comhalta seo a leanas a thoghadh don Dáil:-

In compliance with Standing Order 198 of the Standing Orders relative to Public Business, I have to announce that at the by-election held on 29 November, 2019, consequent on the election of Deputy Clare Daly to the European Parliament, the following Member has been elected to the Dáil:-

Dáilcheantar Bhaile Átha Cliath-Fhine Gall Seosamh Ó Briain

Constituency of Dublin Fingal Joe O'Brien

Tá Rolla na gComhaltaí sínithe ag an Teachta de réir Bhuan-Ordú 1.

The Deputy has signed the Roll of Members in accordance with Standing Order 1.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have been looking at precedents and I have found that on some occasions in the past, an opportunity was given to party leaders to say a few informal words on this occasion.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: Absolutely. Good call.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: First, I call the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Ar mo shon féin, ar son an Rialtais, ar son Fhine Gael agus ar son na Neamhspleáigh, ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh na Teachtaí nua-thofa. To be elected to serve in Dáil Éireann is one of the greatest honours that our citizens can bestow on any of us, and has been since the first men and women were elected here 100 years ago. Today will be a memorable day for Deputies Pádraig O'Sullivan, Joe O'Brien, Mark Ward and Malcolm Byrne, as well as for their families and supporters who have joined them here for the occasion. They must be very proud, and rightly so. I especially want to welcome those who are in the Gallery for this momentous day. The Deputies are joining us three and a half years into the Thirty-second Dáil. I hope their stay will not be a short one. I bear a little regret that having lost two fine women and two fine men, they have been replaced by four men. Perhaps there will be an opportunity to rectify that in the not-too-distant future. It is good to see that our new Deputies are all former members of local authorities. One of them is a former member of Fingal County Council, where I started my political life. It is good to see that the new Deputies have come into politics through the traditional route. They have already demonstrated their commitment to public service and to the local communities they represent. While we will disagree at times on policy and while we might argue on how to solve the challenges of our time, I think all of us in politics are united by a single desire to make the communities where we live better places and to make our country a better place too. My wish is that we all seek to do our best in a spirit of humility, understanding and respect, motivated by the same principles that guided our forebears when they first gathered here 100 years ago. I congratulate the new Deputies and welcome them to Dáil Éireann.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Ar mo shon féin agus ar son Pháirtí Fhianna Fáil, ba mhaith liom i dtús báire fáilte faoi leith a chur roimh an Teachta Malcolm Byrne agus an Teachta Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin chuig Dáil Éireann. Mar aon leis sin, ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis an Teachta Mark Ward agus an Teachta Joe O'Brien as ucht a bheith tofa sna fothoghcháin ag an deireadh seachtaine. Gan amhras, is onóir den scoth é seo do na Teachtaí nua-thofa. Is pribhléid den scoth í bheith tofa mar bhall de Dháil Éireann. Táimse sásta go mbeidh sé ar a gcumas acu an-chuid oibre a dhéanamh sa Teach seo sna míonna atá romhainn ar son a muintireacha féin, ar son a ndúichí féin agus ar son na tíre. Déanaim comhghairdeas leo. It is my great privilege as leader of Fianna Fáil to welcome Deputies Malcolm Byrne and Pádraig O'Sullivan to the Fianna Fáil ranks in Dáil Éireann. I congratulate Deputies Mark Ward and Joe O'Brien too. Deputy Joe O'Brien is an impeccable Corkman. I wish them well in pursuit of their parliamentary duties.

All of us here will remember our first day in Leinster House. It is a most memorable day. Anyone who believes in politics and in parliamentary democracy will respect the privilege that has been bestowed on the new Deputies and the trust that has been placed in them by the people. My party is very grateful for the great wisdom of the people of Wexford and Cork North-Central, who have placed their trust in Deputies Malcolm Byrne and Pádraig O'Sullivan. Both of them have been excellent county councillors. Both of them have a great passion for education. Deputy Malcolm Byrne has worked for the Higher Education Authority and Deputy Pádraig

O'Sullivan has worked as a secondary school teacher. Both of them have a great commitment to the issues before us. The priorities and needs of the people were very clear on the doorsteps in all four constituencies. It was very clear that the priorities of the people were housing and health services, illegal drugs and crime and, of course, regional economic development and climate change. These are the issues that we experienced first-hand when we met people. I thank all of the members of all parties who knocked on doors and participated because it is the essence of democracy that we have people who are willing to do that on behalf of all of our candidates and parties. Family members and members of the organisations are essential to the wheels of democracy. We thank those who knocked on the doors on behalf of those candidates, some of whom are in the Visitors Gallery witnessing today's events. We appreciate their contribution to our democracy as well as in terms of this momentous day for the four Deputies who have been elected.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas agus fáilte mhór a chuir roimh na Teachtaí Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin, Malcolm Byrne and Joe O'Brien and I welcome their families. This is a momentous and special day for all of them. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle will, I am sure, forgive me for extending a very special welcome to the man to my left - position-wise, not politically - Mark Ward. Mark is a very welcome addition to a very strong Sinn Féin team. I welcome his parents, Joan and Billy, and his son, the wonderful Oisín, who is a gifted and talented hurler.

There was something in the stars for us Dubliners that on the day we lost Jim Gavin, we gained Mark Ward to this Parliament. The challenges that face all of us collectively and individually as political parties are very considerable. The message has come back loud and clear that the current Government of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is failing ordinary people. They have said that very loudly. It is incumbent on us Deputies in opposition, therefore, to set out our stall, not just of critique and analysis but of solutions and answers, which solutions and answers the people so desperately long for.

I wish each of the Deputies a fair wind in this Dáil and I again congratulate their families. I take this opportunity to put one and all on notice that the battle is now on to change Ireland, to change politics in this State, to deliver for people and to plan for the decade ahead, a decade of opportunity in which we can rise to the challenges of our people. This in the end was the message sent to us from the doorsteps. I welcome Wardy on board the team and I thank our activists and the electorate who came out and cast their vote for Sinn Féin.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: On my own behalf and on behalf of the Labour Party I most sincerely welcome the four newly-elected, newly-minted Deputies to the elected assembly of the people of Ireland. It is an extraordinary privilege. I remember a few years ago walking onto the plinth for the first time on the way in here. I remember also going into the Dáil bar for the first time and being told it was only for Members. It is an extraordinary privilege to be in this place, to be chosen by the people of their constituencies to be the successors of decent people who founded this State. We celebrate the centenary of these Houses this year.

I know Malcolm Byrne very well. I hope I will get to know Joe O'Brien, Mark Ward and Pádraig O'Sullivan, if time allows. I am not sure how long we have to make those acquaintances. I thank everybody who participated in the by-elections. It is challenging now in the new world of social media for people to put themselves forward for election. There are many critics out there. It takes some degree of courage to put one's name on a ballot paper. I always remember the phrase of Uachtarán na hÉireann that testing the love of the people can be a daunt-

ing prospect. For our democracy to thrive we need people to put themselves forward. I thank candidates of all opinions and hues who offered a choice in each of the four constituencies. No doubt wider choices on the direction of our country will be offered in coming months. However, I will leave that discussion for another day. Today is a joyous occasion for four people who have achieved an extraordinary ambition for themselves and their families. I congratulate them and wish them well in their careers in this House.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On behalf of People Before Profit, I commend the four newly elected Deputies. It is not an easy thing to put one's name on a ballot paper and stick one's head above the parapet. There is a lot of hard work involved and the new Deputies set themselves up for a lot of responsibility and expectation on behalf of the constituents who elected them. It is a brave thing and the four Deputies deserve commendation on putting themselves forward and taking on the responsibility and privilege of being an elected representative in this House. I also commend all of those who put themselves forward who were not elected, and all the hard work that they and their teams put in over the past while.

There are many things one could say about the recent by-elections. I do not want to take away from the achievement of those who were elected or who ran, but it should be a concern to all of us, some three or six months away from a general election, that there was such an abysmally low turnout. Notwithstanding the political difference that we will and should debate over the next few months on key issues such as housing, the health service, infrastructure and inequality in our society, we also all have a great responsibility to make ourselves relevant to the almost 75% of the electorate who did not turn out and who did not engage. I do not blame them. We all have to take collective responsibility for that. The sense of disengagement and disillusionment with the political system felt by many was palpable on the doors. I am sure those who were elected would acknowledge that. We have a job to prove ourselves as relevant to making a difference to the lives of huge numbers of people who feel disenfranchised by our political system. That should be a solemn responsibility for us to do better over the coming months as we head into a general election.

Having said all that, well done to the four Deputies.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Déanaim comhghairdeas leis na Teachtaí Dála nua agus céad míle fáilte don Dáil. I congratulate the four Deputies who have been elected. It is a proud day for them for them and their families and I wish them well in this Dáil. Being elected through a by-election is a very special way to be elected. I was too and I remember that day back in June 2009. It is an interesting way to come to the Dáil rather than through a general election.

I mean absolutely no disrespect to the four gentlemen who have been elected but it means the gender balance is skewed again. We hope that the general election, when it comes, sees more capable women being elected. I wish the four new Deputies well and I hope they enjoy this day. This is a day to be enjoyed. The other days may not be quite so enjoyable.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Ar an gcéad dul síos, ba mhaith liom mo chomhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis an gceathrar Teachtaí Dála nua. On behalf of the Rural Independent Group and other Independents, I congratulate the four successful Deputies and welcome them here today and their family members and supporters who went out in all kinds of weather and knocked on doors for them. It is a major honour, as others have alluded to, to be elected to this Dáil and come to the Chamber today. The new Deputies will need to be careful how they vote tonight to ensure they will not be gone again this evening. There is a learning curve and it is a great

exercise in democracy that the new Deputies and all the other candidates put themselves before the people for selection.

Like others, I am concerned about the low turnout. People ar fud na tíre and in rural Ireland are definitely concerned as there has always been a healthy turnout in rural Ireland. People are concerned that successive Governments have abandoned them and are not listening. They want to be listened to. I wish the four new Deputies all the best for as long as they are here and for their future careers.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: On behalf of my colleagues and Deputy Healy, I welcome the four new Deputies to this House. I agree with Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett that we must reflect on the participation in our democratic system. It is a major honour to be elected and be part of our constitutional Republic. The very centre of this and the source of everything we do in this country is the vote and the fact that the individual is sovereign. Each of us is king or queen. This should steer the work of all four Deputies, who represent everybody in their constituencies. Thinking beyond that, we are a national assembly, and to take Edmund Burke's advice, it is not Deputies' industry that is needed but their independent opinion in the national interest and representing all our people. It is what we seek and try to do. If we can do that, maybe we will restore confidence and the numbers of people who vote, which is the centre of everything.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I welcome the four new Members, Deputies Malcolm Byrne, Pádraig O'Sullivan, Mark Ward and Joe O'Brien, and their families. It is not just today that their families will be aware of the effort that goes in to getting elected. Most people become an overnight success after 15 or 20 years and usually much time goes into this feat. This is a memorable day. Like Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan, I was elected in a by-election and it is a very different experience from a general election because the new Deputy might come here in the middle of a term or, in this case, at the end of the life of a Government. We will soon find out if this will be measured in weeks or months.

I wish the Deputies well and reiterate the point made on turnout. There was good engagement on the doorsteps but it was very obvious there was a high degree of disillusionment. People were forthcoming in telling us what the issues are and we must take very serious note of them. We will speak about what is probably the primary issue in a Private Members' business debate tonight. I again wish all four Deputies and their families well.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ba mhaith liom, ar mo shon féin mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle agus ar son an Chinn Comhairle, fáilte a chur roimh bhaill úir an Tí: Pádraig O'Sullivan, Malcolm Byrne, Mark Ward agus Joe O'Brien. Guím gach rath orthu go léir ina gcuid oibre anseo sa Dáil. Tá a fhios againn go léir atá tofa go dtí an Teach seo gur onóir faoi leith é a bheith tofa agus níor cheart dúinn dearmad a dhéanamh air sin choíche. Táimid go léir ag súil go mór le bheith ag obair leis na Teachtaí nua atá tofa agus guím gach aon rath orthu mar Theachtaí Dála de chuid Dáil Éireann. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh siad sult agus taitneamh as a dtréimhse anseo.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind all leaders and those posing questions to watch the

clock.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We learned from *The Irish Times* today that a further 60 women have applied to join the 221+ support group for those affected by the CervicalCheck scandal after the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, RCOG, expert panel review found abnormalities in their smear tests as opposed to the original tests. These were women who were originally given the all-clear and later developed cancer. The review has produced a result that was different from the original CervicalCheck finding with very negative implications, as we know, for the treatment these women had to go through and for their health outcomes.

I met one such woman last evening, Bernadette Kiely from Cork, with her daughter, Claudia, who has been advocating for quite some time on behalf of Bernadette. What is quite extraordinary is that it was only in November Bernadette Kiely discovered she was part of the original audit by CervicalCheck. If it was not for her solicitor who sought access to her medical records in October just past, that fact would never have come to light. Mrs. Bernadette Kiely was never informed of the fact she was part of the audit and the audit letter, dated 8 July 2017, from Dr. Flannelly was never disclosed to her.

Ms Kiely has applied to become part of the 221+ group. She is a victim of non-disclosure. She has been rebuffed by the Department. She rang the Minister's office 23 times to try to have a conversation with, and to get access, to him but to no avail. She had to email the Taoiseach's office because she was originally refused a medical card. The daughter did all this work on behalf of her mother because the treatment has left an impact so the daughter is fighting the case. Bernadette should have been entitled to the *ex gratia* payment just like everybody else. She should have been part of the group. It is inexplicable she was not included from day one.

We need answers to her specific case. As the Taoiseach knows, the HSE has admitted liability for non-disclosure to quite a number of women but not to Bernadette. I have all the documentation and all the letters here confirming all of this. The outcome of the RCOG panel review is that both the cytology and the follow-up on colposcopy were inadequate and lacked active management. Both of these represented missed opportunities to prevent cancer or diagnose it at an earlier stage. There was an earlier referral in 2009 for colposcopy. It was 2015 when the second colposcopy happened and she was detected to have cancer.

How many more Bernadettes are out there that we do not know about? It is extraordinary, given all of the controversy surrounding this issue for the past two years, that there are still stories like Bernadette Kiely surfacing and emerging. All the focus to date has been on cytology. Is the Taoiseach satisfied in terms of the quality control mechanisms on the colposcopy dimension to this issue with regard to many of the women involved?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for that. I am not familiar with that individual case nor is the Minister for Health, but we will certainly check it out. The Minister has undertaken to speak to the Deputy personally afterwards and take any documentation from him. We will see if we can look into it and see if anything that needs to be rectified can be rectified.

Today will be another difficult day for women affected by cervical cancer, and for their families and friends. I hope it will be another step in restoring confidence in the CervicalCheck programme, which we all know has saved many lives, detected cancer early and prevented many hysterectomies and more radical surgeries as a result of that. I know that when the CervicalCheck audit first became public in May 2017, it caused enormous concern and controversy

and led to a very difficult debacle that we have all been managing since then. Looking back on it, I did not handle it in the way I should have. I made some mistakes, as did the Government, the Opposition and, as Dr. Scally pointed out in his report, the media. I hope that on this occasion we will all handle it a little bit better than we did two years ago. It is encouraging that on this occasion it was ensured that the individual women involved got the information, either by letter or in a meeting if they preferred, long before the report came to Cabinet or was published. It is a significant improvement on two years ago that those affected were informed before the report came to the Cabinet or this House or entered the public domain.

The audit will be published at 3 p.m. today. It was discussed at the Cabinet meeting this morning. Patient advocates are also being briefed on it today. Briefings are being provided for members of the Opposition who want them, particularly the relevant spokespersons. Again, that will happen this afternoon. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has agreed to come before the Oireachtas joint committee in the next two weeks to explain its report and to answer any questions Deputies may have about it. It is a very technical and scientific area and the college is better placed to explain it than politicians, although we will do our best. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is the professional body for obstetricians and gynaecologists in the United Kingdom. Its members are experts in their field. It carried out its work totally independent of Government and I thank it for that work, which will help to improve this programme into the future.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I put two questions to the Taoiseach. Media reports suggest that 60 more women have applied to be part of the support group for women who have been involved in this controversy. I asked the Taoiseach how many more Bernadette Kielys are out there. There is correspondence going back to 2016 and 2017 between CervicalCheck and Bernadette Kiely's consultants. Some of the letters have a familiar ring to them. It is interesting that a letter to her consultant stated that a review of colposcopy was conducted based on the cervical screening history of Ms Kiely prior to her diagnosis. I will not go through the whole letter but it states the case had been discussed at multidisciplinary team meetings for quite some time. My understanding is that there would have been a comprehensive trawl of all records and that all of the women involved would have been identified. It is extraordinary that this documentation only emerged in November following a discovery order to the hospital. The letter also states: "Please ensure that this correspondence is added to Ms Kiely's medical record" and "If open disclosure is indicated in this case, please follow the local hospital guidelines." We have seen those lines before.

How many additional women who should be part of the support group have been discovered through the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists process? The media estimate a figure of 60. With regard to the question I asked on quality control and the colposcopy element of this matter, the expert panel review is very critical of the lack of active management of this case and the lack of follow-up. Is the Taoiseach satisfied that colposcopy services have performed adequately in light of this ongoing controversy?

The Taoiseach: Once again, I am not at all familiar with Ms Kiely's case. We will have to look into it. Not being familiar with the case, I cannot tell the Deputy how many cases are similar to it. I would not be able to answer that question. It might be worth sharing the six conclusions of the report with Deputies. The first is that cervical screening saves lives, including many of those women who consented to take part in the review. The second is that cervical screening cannot prevent all cases and will fail to prevent between 30% and 35% of cancers, even in well run programmes. Of the 1,034 women who took part in this audit, it is to be ex-

pected that 30% to 35% would have discordance. That was the case. Some 29.8%, or 308 women, had discordance and in approximately half of these cases, it may have had a clinical impact. I suppose that is the number of women who could apply to join the group. The third conclusion is that the pattern of discordance in this review resembled that in a similar but larger-scale slide review in England. When the service was audited in England, the same or similar levels of discordance were found.

The fourth conclusion is that screening failures have serious consequences for the women affected, as we know.

The fifth relates specifically to colposcopy. Scrutiny of colposcopy revealed that there were cases where better management could have yielded better outcomes. It found evidence that clinical practice guidelines had not always been adhered to. While this will not usually result in cancer, when we examine cancer cases following colposcopy it is expected that suboptimal management will be identified. This is far from concluding that colposcopic practice in the CervicalCheck programme is substandard, but it serves as a reminder that guidelines are in place to minimise poor outcomes.

The sixth finding is that the CervicalCheck programme is working effectively. There is no evidence that the population risk of cancer, having been screened in the programme, is significantly higher than that in any other national programme.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Workers and families delivered a damning verdict on the Government's housing failures in the by-elections last weekend. Today, Sinn Féin has welcomed our newest TD, Deputy Mark Ward, to the Dáil. He is a Deputy who understands the impact that the Taoiseach's policy failure is having on the lives of ordinary people. His first job of work today will be to vote no confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. That is the mandate he has been given. The people deserve better. People throughout the State tell us daily of their suffering under the Minister's housing failures. They must be listened to. They tell us of rents reaching highs of €2,000 per month, of years on waiting lists for a council house, of working every hour of the day with no prospect of ever owning their own homes and of scrimping and saving every last penny and still barely getting by.

Every day, our newspapers are filled with the real human impact of the failure of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to tackle the housing crisis and today is no different. Today, Fr. Peter McVerry has written to *The Irish Times*. He tells of attending court with a young homeless boy who was charged with the theft of a bottle of orange of a value of €1. He also tells of a homeless man charged with the theft of four bars of chocolate of a value of €3, and another charged with the theft of two packets of Silk Cut cigarettes. He then contrasts that with a Deputy on his way to or from a very highly-paid second job in Brussels, who stops by at the Dáil to sign in so he can collect his full €51,600 of expenses for attendance at a Dáil that he does not in fact attend. Does that not illustrate how absolutely out of touch this Government is and how glaringly cut off it is from the realities facing ordinary people's lives? I understand that the Deputy in question will make a guest appearance today. He will be here, it seems, to save the bacon of the failed Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

People deserve better than that. They deserve better than the nod-and-wink politics of jobs for the boys. They certainly deserve better than a housing Minister who lacks the ability or even the humility to admit and accept that his housing policy has failed. That policy is now in

its fourth year and it is simply not delivering. In fact, the problem has got worse. Many of the families, young people and pensioners who may be listening to proceedings in this Dáil find their housing situation is grimmer than ever. It is not good enough to keep spinning, to try to explain things away or to ignore the problem that is evident. Business as usual will not suffice. We need solutions. People want affordable homes to rent and buy, they want measures to deal with out-of-control rents and they want radical solutions to these very real problems. The Minister does not have these solutions and he will not listen to those of us who are offering them. Does the Taoiseach accept that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, is simply not up to the job and must go?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond. I ask that Members would watch the clock.

The Taoiseach: No. I do not accept that. The House will have its opportunity to make that decision, on behalf of the Irish people, this evening.

Once again, I congratulate Deputy McDonald on her party's by-election success. Sinn Féin had a fabulous "get out the vote" operation. We will not be caught off-guard on that on the next occasion.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: That sounds like begrudgery.

The Taoiseach: It is not begrudgery at all.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: It is.

The Taoiseach: A "get out the vote" operation is a great thing to do and all parties do it. Sinn Féin just did it much better. It is a genuine compliment actually.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Can you not take a compliment when you are get one? You do not get many of them.

The Taoiseach: I think, however, that Sinn Féin should not over analyse the success, or congratulate itself too much. Across the four by-elections, my party won many more votes than Sinn Féin, and Fianna Fáil more still. The result was certainly no endorsement of Sinn Féin's policies.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: How many Deputies did Fine Gael get?

The Taoiseach: I spoke with Deputy Dara Murphy over the weekend. Deputy Murphy is willing to co-operate with any investigation by any statutory body into his attendance in Dáil Éireann, be it the ethics committee, the Committee on Members' Interests or the Standards in Public Office Commission. It is right and proper that the Deputy should do that and he is willing to answer any questions they may ask or provide any documents that may be necessary. I believe that it has, however, shown that our expenses system in this House, while it has significantly improved from ten years' ago with expense now largely being vouched or verified, is far too lax. In this House we have a system that is essentially designed by politicians for politicians and that should change. I will write to the Ceann Comhairle and to the party leaders to suggest that this whole issue should not be a system run for ourselves by ourselves.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: It should be one handed over to the Standards in Public Office Commission and the next Dáil should have a different regime when it comes to expenses and to verifying attendance. This should be done independently and separately of this House. The time when we make rules for ourselves should end.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am not interested in self-congratulation or in any congratulation. I have raised with the Taoiseach the real experiences of people who cannot get a house and who do not have a home. I raise with the Taoiseach the scenario where children will wait for Santa Claus in bed and breakfasts, in hotels and in family hubs. I raise with the Taoiseach a situation where people live in the box-rooms of their parents' homes, including - in cases I know of - children with very severe health conditions and significant disabilities, some of whom are waiting for surgeries. I have raised with the Taoiseach the reality of what is a human misery, and I raise the fact that an entire generation of our people have no real hope that they will ever own their own homes. Those same people understand that they will struggle from month to month just to make the rent. The Taoiseach has failed again to address those realities. If the Taoiseach was to admit out loud that these things are rife across our society then he could land on no conclusion other than his policy is failing, that we need a change in policy and that we need a change in Minister. That is the logical outcome of the reality we face. I will put the question to the Taoiseach again. The Government's housing policy has failed. This is manifestly the case. We need a change in policy and a change in Minister. When will the Taoiseach deliver that?

The Taoiseach: The housing crisis is very real and it affects many of our citizens and our constituents, including people we know, in many different ways be it through high or unaffordable rents in some cases, be it the struggle to secure a mortgage and to raise a deposit to buy ones own hone, or the sharpest end of the housing crisis, which is rough sleeping and family homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland is our five-year housing plan. We are now three and a half years into that five-year plan and it is reasonable to ask the question as to whether it is delivering. The Deputy has asked that question and I will give a few examples on how it is delivering. In 2015 only 7,000 new homes were built in Ireland. This was the year before Rebuilding Ireland. This year, over 20,000 new homes will be built in Ireland, roughly a trebling of housing supply since Rebuilding Ireland, our housing plan, was launched. House prices were rising at 7% or 8% per year. They have now levelled off. We know that, before Rebuilding Ireland was introduced in 2015, the social housing stock was only being increased by about 6,000 per year. It is going to be 10,000 this year, the largest increase in any year this century during boom and during bust. We will see from the figures that will come out today, if they have not come out already that, while overall homelessness levels continue to rise, we are seeing a fall in child homelessness, a fall in family homelessness and the number of people rough sleeping-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: So, there is no harm done.

The Taoiseach: -----at the lowest level in many years.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Is it a figment of our imaginations, so?

The Taoiseach: No, those are just the facts. I do not do figments.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Come on.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Government's procurement programme was supposed to be a key element of the public service reform agenda. Among other elements, it was supposed to

ensure that the awarding of contracts would be transparent, open to competition and represent best value for money for the State and the taxpayer. Through a series of replies to parliamentary questions that I asked of each Department, however, it is now clear that this process is deeply flawed and contracts are being awarded in the complete absence of competition and without any clear sense that value for money is being achieved or that the interests of the taxpayer are being protected. This has happened not on a handful of occasions or even a few dozen occasions; astonishingly, contracts were awarded outside of the formal tender process on several hundred occasions between 2017 to 2019.

The following is only a sample. Advice to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment about the national broadband plan at a cost of €14.6 million was not subject to procurement guidelines. That contract must be in jeopardy. The provision of health insurance at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, at a cost of €1.5 million, was not subject to procurement guidelines either. At the higher end of the scale, contracts with a value of more than €13 million were procured on 74 occasions by the Department of Justice and Equality, all without any competitive process. Perhaps one of the worst offenders in terms of how often the guidelines were breached is the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. In 2018, it was found to have issued 60 non-compliant contracts totalling €5.4 million. In 2017, it reported 69 non-compliant contracts.

The Department of Education and Skills awarded 21 contracts, worth €4.64 million, without a competitive process between 2017 and 2018. The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht awarded nine contracts, worth a total of €1.45 million, outside of the guidelines between 2017 and 2018. An “urgent” requirement for printing at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection that cost €262,000 was outside procurement guidelines. As Ms. Stephen McDermott at the Journal.ie has shown in his analysis, at least 348 contracts awarded by Departments between 2017 and 2019 failed basic compliance with procurement guidelines. That is shocking.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy. As he will see from the Exchequer returns being released today, the Government’s reputation for competence around the management of the public finances is enhanced. As he will see, this year-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Is what?

The Taoiseach: Is enhanced. As he will see, this year we will record a budget surplus even greater than was projected on budget day. He will be aware that, only the other day, Standard & Poor’s raised our credit rating. Therefore, the facts say otherwise - a surplus being recorded that is bigger than we anticipated on budget day and Standard & Poor’s improving our credit rating in recognition of the sound management of the public finances by this Government.

When it comes to procurement laws, as the Deputy will know, there are national procurement laws and there are also EU procurement laws.

Generally, contacts are put out to tender and they go to the best tender, taking into account cost, quality and other issues on which a contract may be scored. On the specific contracts the Deputy has raised, I would have to check into them and come back to him and I shall. There are exceptions to procurement policy and sometimes Departments and Government agencies will have continuous frameworks in place rather than retendering every time, every six months or every year. They can put in place a standing framework, which cuts down on bureaucracy

and cost. There is also constant engagement on procurement policy and all Opposition groups, including that of the Deputy, are encouraged to engage in it. There is engagement at present with all Departments on specifics that are being looked for.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Taoiseach cannot have his cake and eat it. He is taking the praise for the reports he is getting. Many of these reports are being issued by people who are getting contracts without any tender process. I get a real sense that the scandal of having 348 Government contracts awarded outside of competitive guidelines has not been acknowledged or accepted. The Taoiseach does not accept it. If Mary Ann or Willie Joe is applying for a downstairs toilet or a basic level flat shower in the house because they are disabled and want a disability grant they have to get three competitive tenders from three recognised and approved builders. They go through all of the process yet the Taoiseach can dish out contracts to his friends and his people here without any recognition and tell me in reply that all of the people are praising him. They are praising him because many of the same people are being hired by him without proper competitive rules. The game is up. The people see this. There are rules and regulations for the daoine beaga, the little people, who must comply with everything, including small business people, small shop owners and small people who cannot supply their local schools because of procurement rules, but the Government can hire and fire and give out contracts willy-nilly without any recognition of the tax and the scandal of the waste that is going on. Someone needs to pinch the Taoiseach and he should get real if he did not listen to the people that week with the low turnout. They are fairly annoyed and fed up with the Government and its excuses on the children's hospital, national broadband and God knows. It is a gravy train here and the Taoiseach lets it run and roll and stands over it.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy knows full well that no Minister or politician is involved in awarding contracts. That is not the way it works.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The heads of Departments-----

The Taoiseach: Perhaps it did 20, 30 or 40 years ago but it has not worked like that in a very long time. No Minister is involved in making a decision on who does or who does not get a contract.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Blame the Secretary General, like you did last week.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy should know better than to make false allegations such as that in the House.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They are not false allegations.

The Taoiseach: Absolutely they are false and the Deputy should withdraw them.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They are not false allegations. They are facts but the Taoiseach does not want to listen to them.

The Taoiseach: No, they are not. They are false allegations.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the representative of the Green Party and Social Democrats group, Deputy Joe O'Brien.

Deputy Joe O'Brien: I thank the people of Dublin Fingal for their support in the by-election and I congratulate my three colleagues who were also elected.

I made a very conscious decision about 20 years ago to dedicate my life's work to the area of human rights. It was a time when immigration was new to Ireland and I was determined to work to help ensure that as a society we would treat people new to our shores in a proper way and that we would recognise the huge richness and value they bring. It is somewhat fitting that I as stand on my first day in Dáil Éireann, the Irish Government is being questioned by the United Nations in Geneva as we speak on its record in upholding its commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.

I will give some of the points the UN has raised on Ireland's performance on tackling racism. It has criticised the Government for failing to reform its legal framework on hate crime and has called for a clear time-bound commitment to make the necessary changes in law. The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 does not effectively combat hate speech, particularly online attacks. Members of An Garda Síochána still lack training on how to deal with racially motivated crime. The UN has also questioned the impact and effectiveness of the State's Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy and warned of discrimination towards black Irish people and people of African descent in the Irish workplace. On direct provision, the UN has said there is an urgent need for improved reception conditions. This is the UN saying this, not me.

Noting that a national action plan against racism has not been renewed since 2008, which is almost 12 years ago, the UN has questioned whether the State plans to introduce a new plan and whether a timeframe exists. I ask these questions because there was some hesitation from the Minister in Geneva. In the context of this and the nastiness that reared its head during the by-election campaign and before, is the Taoiseach planning to develop a national action plan against racism? In the context of the by-election campaigns and the various utterances by people in these Houses and outside, does the Taoiseach feel there is a general need for candidates and elected representatives to up their game in how they speak about people who look different or are from a minority?

The Taoiseach: I again congratulate the Deputy on his stunning by-election victory in Dublin Fingal. Ireland's cross-departmental delegation is appearing before the UN Committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The delegation is headed by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality, Deputy Stanton, and will be answering questions on our combined fifth to ninth reports, prepared and submitted under the convention. These reports cover the period from 2011 onwards.

Notwithstanding some of the events of recent weeks, I am proud to lead the Government that has led the way on issues of integration, immigration and migration. Since the party I lead came to office, 120,000 people have been made Irish citizens. I am delighted that they are part of our family. We have accepted thousands of refugees from all over the world when other countries refused to do so. We sent our navy to the Mediterranean to help rescue migrants and disrupt human trafficking. We have brought in the new McMahon standards relating to direct provision. These ensure that the quality of accommodation has improved. We have also recognised Traveller ethnicity for the first time, something that was resisted for a long time by previous Governments. We have published and implemented the national migrant integration strategy as well as a national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy. In addition, we have the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, which was established by the previous Government of Fine Gael and Labour.

On hate crimes, as the Deputy pointed out, our Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act is out

of date. The Act dates from 1989 and needs to be updated. Work in that regard is already under way. I am not sure of the current status of this work but the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, launched a public consultation on it a few weeks ago. Should this Dáil be here in the new year, and I am sure it will be, I would hope we can make progress in updating that legislation.

Deputy Joe O'Brien: The Taoiseach has not answered the question. I suppose I should get used to this.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Deputy will get used to it.

Deputy Joe O'Brien: I remind the Taoiseach he did not answer the question about whether he plans to develop a national action plan against racism. I sit on the monitoring committee for the implementation of the migrant integration strategy. There are a limited number of actions relating to racism in that strategy and they are not being implemented. Is the Taoiseach planning to develop a national action plan against racism and does he feel that candidates and elected representatives need to up their game?

The Taoiseach: We will certainly give consideration to a national action plan against racism. We have established a new anti-racism committee and that has a mandate to review current evidence and practice and to make recommendations to Government on how to best strengthen our approach in tackling racism. As the Deputy knows, we already have a national migrant integration strategy. Strategies are not implemented overnight, they are implemented on a step-by-step basis over time. I am happy to give consideration to a national action plan against racism but the Deputy should bear in mind that much of what is required is being done already by means of the other programmes and strategies we have in place.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: The business this week shall be as set out in the second revised report of the Business Committee dated 2 December 2019.

In relation to today's business, it is proposed that No. 14, motion re proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2019, back from committee, and No. 15, motion re financial resolution of the Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2019, shall be taken without debate and any division demanded thereon shall be taken immediately; and should a division be in progress at 8 p.m., Private Members' Business shall be taken for two hours on the conclusion of the division, and the Dáil shall adjourn on the conclusion of Private Members' Business.

In relation to Wednesday's business, it is proposed that No. 16, motion re Planning and Development (Amendment) Regulations 2019, referral to committee, shall be taken without debate and any division demanded thereon shall be taken immediately. In relation to Thursday's business, it is proposed with regard to No. 44, statements on housing solutions, that the statements of a Minister or Minister of State and the main spokespersons of parties and groups, or Deputies nominated in their stead, shall not exceed ten minutes each, with ten minutes for all other Deputies and a five-minute response from a Minister or Minister of State, and all Depu-

ties may share time; and with regard to No. 45, statements on Scouting Ireland, that the statements of a Minister or Minister of State and the main spokespersons of parties and groups, or a Deputy nominated in their stead, shall not exceed ten minutes each, with five minutes for all other Deputies and a five-minute response from a Minister or Minister of State, and all Deputies may share time.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are three proposals-----

Deputy Joan Collins: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have to put the proposals to the House. There are three proposals. Is the proposal pertaining to Tuesday's business-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Not agreed.

Deputy Joan Collins: Not agreed.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Not agreed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have not even asked.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle should ask the question then.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Deputy should let the Leas-Cheann Comhairle speak.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Murphy should not pre-empt anything. Please, Deputy Murphy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Go on, finish the question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Murphy is a long-standing Member. Is the proposal for dealing with Tuesday's business agreed to?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Not agreed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have to put the question.

Deputy Paul Murphy: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, we object to the idea that we will pass, without debate in the House, a motion to support handing over €17 million to the greyhound industry. It is utterly scandalous, not only considering we normally have a debate but also because it is in the same year that saw the "RTÉ Investigates" documentary-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----talk about 6,000 dogs per year being killed. The doping-----

Deputy Michael Creed: There was a debate on the matter but the Deputy did not turn up to it.

Deputy Paul Murphy: There was a debate in committee but not in the Chamber. Every year we have a debate in the Chamber. We need a debate in the Chamber between those who support giving €17 million-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A brief comment.

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----as opposed to giving it to disability organisations that are falling or to building more than 80 houses.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Standing Orders do not allow for a speech. They allow for a brief comment, which the Deputy has made, and only one Deputy from each group may make one.

Deputy Bríd Smith: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Murphy has made the point.

Deputy Bríd Smith: It is an entirely different point.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will now put the question.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: This is not a meeting of the Business Committee.

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

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 91; Níl, 34; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	

<i>D’Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>		
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>		
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>		
<i>Halligan, John.</i>		
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>		
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>		
<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>		
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>		
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>		
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>		
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>		
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>		
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>		
<i>Lahart, John.</i>		
<i>Lawless, James.</i>		
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>		
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>		
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>		
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>		
<i>Mitchell O’Connor, Mary.</i>		
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Murphy O’Mahony, Margaret.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>		

<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>		
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Paul Murphy and Mick Barry.

Question declared carried.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with Wednesday's business agreed to?

Deputy Bríd Smith: It is not agreed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Bríd Smith can make a brief comment.

Deputy Bríd Smith: We know that the report from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists was published at 3 p.m. Information about it is appearing on Twitter. We need a full discussion on the report. We heard alarming statistics today that 300 out of 1,000 women had discordant results.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I ask that the House to arrange to discuss the report this week out of respect to the women and their families.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Business Committee. It makes rec-

ommendations-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: I ask that the debate be taken.

Deputy Bríd Smith: The Business Committee could not have made recommendations last week as the report had not been published.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, the Business Committee-----

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: On the same issue, we not only need but deserve to have a debate with questions and answers.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This is a matter for the Business Committee. I call the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris.

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Out of respect to everyone, the women who participated in the audit deserve that people read the report. It has only been published and so no one has done that yet. Those women also deserve that the Opposition Deputies attend a briefing with the experts from RCOG who carried out the report.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I agree.

Deputy Simon Harris: Representatives from RCOG have also agreed to go before the Committee on Health, and I and the CEO of the HSE are before that committee next week as well. I have no difficulty in facilitating a debate. Out of respect for the women involved, however, and the lessons derived from the Scally report, which criticised the conduct of this House in the past on this issue, people should at least read the report first-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Simon Harris: -----before putting partial information into the public domain.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Bríd Smith: The Minister should agree to have a discussion on this issue on Thursday. It will not be respectful to the women and the families if we leave it until next week.

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy is taking her information from Twitter.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Will Deputy Smith consider the offer from the Minister? Is the proposal for dealing with Wednesday's business regarding planning and development agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with Thursday's business agreed to? Agreed. I would like the attention of the Deputies for one minute. I have a long list of those wishing to raise questions on the Order of Business. I remind all Deputies that only questions, and not statements, on promised legislation should be raised. I ask for order, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputies, please.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Please.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is important that all of the Deputies should know this, because I have to implement Standing Orders. Deputies should now ask questions on promised legislation or on the Order of Business. This is not an opportunity to take a circuitous way of raising questions that can be dealt with under parliamentary questions or Topical Issue debates.

I have a long list of Deputies who wish to speak and I ask the Deputies present to assist me, please, in ensuring we can get through this as quickly as possible. I call first, as is customary, Deputy Micheál Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The programme for Government is very clear regarding legislation-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask for order, please, and for Deputies to have their meetings outside the Chamber. I call Deputy Micheál Martin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The programme for Government and the legislative programme are clear regarding climate change. They state that the global image our country is to be transformed so that we will be recognised as one of the cleanest and safest environments in the world. That is an exaggeration and a bit of hyperbole, to say the least. The failure of the Government to legislate for a complete ban on smoky coal reflects badly on it and flies in the face of the noble aspirations in the programme for Government.

It was 1990 when former Minister, Mary Harney, brought in a smoky coal ban. We now need definite, robust action. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, when he last answered me here, promised that the Minister would be engaging with the Attorney General and that he would deal with this issue robustly. It is a terrible indictment of the Government that it is not standing up to vested interests from outside the State that are threatening to sue. I ask the Government to get on with enacting a ban and sign this measure into law. We are going backwards at the moment regarding the quality of air, and recent surveys have shown that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: To be clear, I am going to deal with the leaders of parties first.

Deputy Martin Kenny: Put my name down.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If everyone takes the opportunity to come in on the same issue, that is another circuitous way but a good try.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: If it is the same issue-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Micheál Martin for raising the important issue of air quality. We had a detailed discussion about this matter just last evening at the Cabinet sub-committee on the environment. We acknowledge that poor air quality has a severe impact on people's health. We are keen to act on this issue, and things have changed since the 1990s. We now know that peat briquettes and wood are as bad for air quality as smoky coal. Switching from smoky coal to those other solid fuels does nothing for air quality. There is also a serious risk of a legal challenge being taken on that basis that could bring the entire smoky coal ban down. We do not want to risk that happening because that would be bad for air quality as well. We are, however, moving towards a solution, and I believe the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, Deputy Bruton, will be able to make an announcement on this topic in the next few weeks.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy McDonald and preface her contribution with a

reminder that this time is for questions on the promised legislative programme.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The review from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, RCOG, has now been published, as the Taoiseach indicated. He stated earlier that this would be a difficult day for the women concerned and their families. I have no doubt it will be. The Taoiseach also expressed the hope that this would be another step along the road to finding out what happened and rebuilding public confidence in our screening programmes. I share that hope.

We have a duty as public representatives to uncover exactly what happened and why, and to rebuild that confidence that we all desire. To do that, not alone do representatives from the RCOG need to appear before the committee, as the Taoiseach indicated, but we need a debate and discussion and an opportunity for questions and answers on the floor of this House as well. Will the Taoiseach specify when he envisages that debate and that opportunity for a question and answer session with the Minister for Health taking place?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A promise-----

The Taoiseach: I said something else as well that I meant sincerely. When the Cervical-Check audit report came out in May, we in this House did not cover ourselves in glory and nor did large portions of the media. I specifically recall Deputy McDonald making statements that had to be taken back and her party's spokesperson sent out tweets that had to be deleted. Let us not have that happen all over again. This is a report from the RCOG and not a Government report. The right thing is for people to get a chance to read it and that representatives from the RCOG be allowed to come in and answer questions on its report. After that, then by all means let us have a debate in this House, including statements or questions. Let us not, however, turn this into a political football. It should not be.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: No, but when will we have that debate?

The Taoiseach: Out of respect for the women affected and their families, let us get this process right this time. Let us read the actual report, and not on Twitter. I am not referring to Deputy McDonald but another Deputy.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: Let us read the report and have a chance to consider it. We can then let the people from the RCOG who wrote the report explain it and answer questions. After mature reflection and consideration, let us then have a debate in this House with questions. Let us not do all over again what happened two years ago. I ask that we please not do that.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: When will we have the debate?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Howlin.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: According to the latest labour force survey, there are, thankfully, more than 2.3 million people employed in the country, but also some 128,000 unemployed people. Alongside that measure of unemployment, nearly 1.5 million people of working age are not in the labour force. Our employment rate is less than 60%, compared with more than 70% in many developed European countries. Part of that gap is explained by historical patterns of gender difference in the labour market and part by the number of young people in education. We need to address both of those issues.

Today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. One of the calls being made is to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to access jobs. Tens of thousands of people with disabilities are frustrated at being deprived of the opportunity to work. There may be a requirement in some instances for employers to make minor adjustments to the workspace to facilitate a wheelchair or to make changes in work times to facilitate someone who needs to attend regular appointments etc. Some employers may be worried about extra costs, but we really need to get to grips with this issue. Does the Taoiseach agree with my views on this matter? What is the Government going to do to facilitate those with disabilities to participate fully in the labour force?

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Howlin for raising the fact that today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. It is appropriate that we discuss this. As Deputy Howlin points out, many people with disabilities would like to work if they can be assisted and facilitated to do so. There are, however, many barriers to doing so, and our job as a Government and a Legislature is to remove some of those barriers. Examples of what we are doing include situations such as where a person might be receiving disability allowance and then takes up employment. People in that situation can now keep their free travel for at least five years, and that kicked in last year. We have also changed the medical card limits in respect of the disability allowance. Many people on disability payments fear losing their medical card if they go to work, so we have changed the rules in that area. We have also changed the disability allowance rules to provide that if a disabled person takes up work and it does not work out, and sometimes it does not, he or she can get the disability allowance payment restarted quickly. There is also a grant for employers to make adaptations to the workplace to facilitate people with disabilities, particularly physical disabilities. Sadly, that grant is undersubscribed every year. It is paid for by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. We would like to see it availed of more. We have set a target of increasing the number of people with disabilities working in the public service from 3% to 6%. Those are the kinds of thing we are taking action on. I thank the Deputy for drawing the attention of the House to the fact that today is International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Later this evening, we will discuss the gamut of policy failures of this Government in the area of housing and homelessness. Because People Before Profit requested it, on Thursday we will discuss solutions to the housing crisis, in case the Taoiseach is tempted to say we do not want to discuss solutions. There was a whole chapter in the programme for Government on “Ending the Housing Shortage and Homelessness”. Last night, the foremost housing campaigner in this country singled out one issue to be addressed. He said the key issue is the need to stop the flow of people into homelessness from the private rented sector because of evictions on the grounds of sale. Does the Taoiseach think he knows better than Peter McVerry? If he does not, and if he respects that Peter McVerry knows what he is saying, will he remove the money message from the Anti-Evictions Bill 2018 of People Before Profit and Solidarity, which proposes to do precisely that, namely to end sale of a property as a ground for eviction? Peter McVerry has identified this as the single major reason that people are going into homelessness.

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): With regard to homelessness, the best way we can help people who are in housing insecurity is by increasing the number of homes being delivered. Rebuilding Ireland set out a target of 125,000 homes by the end of 2021. So far under Rebuilding Ireland, 64,000 new homes have been delivered, 26,000 homes are on site in the last 12 months and a further 30,000 homes have

planning permission. We are increasing the supply of new homes dramatically. For those who do not yet have their homes-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is not the question.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: Earlier this year, we passed the most progressive-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is not the question.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I am getting to it. The Deputy spoke for a minute and I am going to speak for a minute. Earlier this year, we passed the most progressive rental reforms we have passed in three years. That was done with the majority support of this House because that is the only way things can get done here. The Government is in the minority. I cannot bring forward legislation and get it through without the support of this House. The reforms in question were very important. Earlier this year, the Taoiseach and I met representatives of the main non-governmental organisations in the country to talk about the issue of rented houses going up for sale and about why we could not do what is being proposed by Fr. McVerry, the reasons behind that-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Minister knows better than Peter McVerry.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: -----and why it would not actually solve the problem of homelessness. It would just displace the problem.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Minister knows better than Peter McVerry.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Boyd Barrett to listen to the Minister.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: Fr. McVerry has been an advocate for the homeless for more than 35 years. It is a challenge we have had in society for far too long. We are doing everything we can to fix it within our means.

Deputy Joan Collins: The Irish National Teachers Organisation has welcomed the reduction in class sizes in almost every school in the country. It has made the point that there has been a failure to reduce class sizes in DEIS band 1 schools. Will the Minister consider reducing class sizes in those schools on a *pro rata* basis compared with every other school? Has the Minister received the upcoming report on class sizes in DEIS schools? If so, will he release it at his earliest convenience?

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, the recent budget was framed in the expectation and fear of a no-deal Brexit. It was not a budget I wanted to be part of in terms of education. From a point of view of responsibility and the point of view of the country, there was an acceptance that we would make indicative moves on the pupil-teacher ratio. That is why we reduced the ratio in respect of schools with four teachers or fewer. We were not in a position to do anything more. The Deputy will be aware that we are spending €120 million on interventions through DEIS. This is working well. It is bridging the gap in terms of schools that were disadvantaged prior to DEIS. I want to build on this area. I am having discussions with my party colleagues on how we can build on the €120 million DEIS intervention.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The programme for Government explicitly mentions the agriculture and food sector. I note the presence of the Minister, Deputy Creed. The Independent

Farmers of Ireland group, which manned the factory gates during the recent protests, is still locked out from the talks. All the usual suspects, including the non-independent chairperson - the former Secretary General of the Department, Mr. Dowling - are at the talks. Will the Minister include the people from the Independent Farmers of Ireland group in the talks? They were here last week. They represent those who have lost faith in their organisations. The group has organised at a national level and is registered. Will the Minister allow representatives of the Independent Farmers of Ireland group into the talks? They have been approved. They are representative. It cannot be business as usual, with Meat Industry Ireland and the usual suspects inside there excluding the people who matter on the ground.

Deputy Brian Stanley: On the same issue-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am sorry, but I am taking leaders or their representatives only. The Deputy will have to come in again. I must abide by the rules. Perhaps the Minister's answer will suffice.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am pleased to say that talks at the beef market task force resumed today after an attempt to begin them in October. There are six farm organisations representing the farmers of Ireland in the room: the Irish Farmers Association, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association, the Beef Plan movement, Macra na Feirme and Meat Industry Ireland. I acknowledge the point that has consistently been made by Deputy Mattie McGrath. We negotiated with the Independent Farmers of Ireland group in September. After those talks concluded, the Department received notification from the negotiators that the Independent Farmers of Ireland group was dissolving because it had achieved what it set out to achieve. Subsequently, we have received representations from two different organisations claiming to be the Independent Farmers of Ireland group. I ask Deputy McGrath to say which of these organisations he is seeking to have represented at the talks.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am advocating for the real farmers, not the big ones represented by those who are forgetting the ordinary people.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call a representative of the Green Party or the Social Democrats. They can decide among themselves.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Ladies first.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This should be sorted out in advance.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I asked the Taoiseach a question about Holles Street hospital a few weeks ago. In his response, he spoke about three proposed new hospital buildings. He continued:

All three of those hospitals, including Holles Street, are privately owned. The difference is that when the new ones are built, they will be publicly owned. They will be State-owned buildings on State land.

I welcome that statement by the Taoiseach. I am checking that he stands by that statement.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach or the relevant Minister.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I asked the Taoiseach. It is in relation to a statement he made.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is customary-----

The Taoiseach: I will answer as best I can. The Rotunda hospital will go to Connolly hospital, which is owned by the State. The Coombe will go to the St. James's campus, which is owned by the State. The arrangements for Holles Street hospital moving to St. Vincent's Hospital have to be worked out. My understanding is that it involves a 99-year lease. The building is owned by the State and the land is State-controlled at the very least.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Tell the Pope.

The Taoiseach: I do not have its freehold title.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Pope missed that.

Deputy Michael Creed: It is a Jesuitical matter.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That would be an ecumenical matter.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As far as I am concerned, the Social Democrats and the Green Party have one representative. Perhaps I will be able to bring Deputy Eamon Ryan in later. Has Deputy Stanley's question been answered?

Deputy Brian Stanley: No.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: He is very upset.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The injunctions against two farmers that I raised with the Taoiseach last week have been lifted. I do not know whether there was Government intervention. It is very welcome that the beef task force talks have been convened today. We wish the talks every success. If they are to succeed, we need to have everyone at the table. The process must be inclusive. In answer to an earlier contribution the Taoiseach questioned who is the Independent Farmers of Ireland group. I agree that the situation was fluid over the summer. I contacted the Minister, Deputy Creed, on this matter yesterday. I have seen correspondence from the solicitor for the Independent Farmers of Ireland group in relation to the organisation being properly constituted from W.A. Smithwick solicitors in Kilkenny. It set out very clearly that the organisation is properly constituted and has elected representatives.

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

Deputy Brian Stanley: I do not mean to be obstreperous or awkward when I say it is important that these people are at the table and are brought into the process. I am trying to be helpful, as I was when I asked about the injunctions last week. We need to get to the far end of this.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will have many disappointed Deputies today.

Deputy Michael Creed: As I have said-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister does not have to repeat what he has already said.

Deputy Michael Creed: -----there are six groups representing farmers in the talks. We have correspondence from the initial representative body, the Independent Farmers of Ireland, which communicated to my Department that it is now dissolved. No sooner had that happened

than two separate groups were claiming to be the successors in title to the Independent Farmers of Ireland, namely, the group to which Deputy Stanley referred and another organisation. The voice of beef farmers is adequately and professionally represented in the context of the talks. I ask the Deputy, insofar as he raised the issue, on behalf of which Independent Farmers of Ireland group he makes his representations.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask Deputies to assist me, or their colleagues, who are awaiting an opportunity to contribute.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: Page 57 of A Programme for a Partnership Government commits to implementing the national dementia strategy. The largest and best dementia care home in Ireland is St. Joseph's in Shankill. In spite of promises from the Minister, Deputy Harris, on the floor of this House that it would remain open, it is now weeks away from closure. The board announced that, as of last Friday, it will no longer take in new residents. I am in contact with the chief executive officer and I have been told that the facility is weeks away from closure. There is fear and concern in the community. Will the Taoiseach give a commitment to the patients, volunteers, staff and families that, regardless of what happens in terms of the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, St. Joseph's will remain open?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy John Brady on the same issue.

Deputy John Brady: Last month, on 7 November, I raised the issue of St. Joseph's dementia care home in Shankill following an announcement from the board that it was facing a brick wall, with potential closure of its day care and residential facilities. This is the result of gross underfunding year on year. On 7 November, the Minister gave a commitment in this Chamber that the facility would not close. The board of St. Joseph's has engaged with the process and the National Treatment Purchase Fund but, unfortunately, that engagement came to an unsatisfactory conclusion last Thursday.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Brady to allow the Minister to respond.

Deputy John Brady: Owing to a massive deficit, the board had to take the unprecedented step of refusing further access to the residential facility.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister for Health.

Deputy John Brady: The Minister needs to honour the commitment he gave on 7 November.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister understands the question.

Deputy John Brady: The Minister needs to give a commitment that funding will be found and that the doors of this facility will remain open. I want him to give that undertaking to the people and families who are suffering anxiety-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Brady, you are being unfair to the Chair.

Deputy John Brady: The families need a commitment from the Minister today that this facility will remain open.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This session could come to an abrupt end if Deputies are not reasonable, not to me, but to their colleagues who are waiting.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Simon Harris: Since this issue was raised, the Government has provided more funding to St. Joseph's through the HSE. More funding has been provided and that secures the day care facility. In regard to the residential facility, people can be politically disingenuous if they wish but no politician can direct the NTPF in regard to the rate. It is a matter of public record that the NTPF has offered to pay more. It is also a matter of record that this is not enough for St. Joseph's in terms of its sustainability.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: It needs €50 million.

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

Deputy Simon Harris: If Deputy Donnelly was in this seat, he would not be able to change the position. The law is very clear in regard to the NTPF. The process has not been exhausted in regard to the NTPF. An appeal has not been lodged. I reiterate the position that I intend to keep-----

Deputy John Brady: The Minister committed to keeping it open until the middle of next year.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is getting a response.

Deputy Simon Harris: This is like a bad council meeting. This is a serious matter. I intend----

Deputy John Brady: The Minister needs to take it seriously.

Deputy Simon Harris: The Deputy is being disingenuous. I intend to keep the doors of St. Joseph's open. I will use every legal tool I have available to that end. I call on St. John of God, which does an awful lot of work in this area, to step in and resolve this problem. We will keep this facility open and we will do it through the process.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Danny Healy-Rae on the programme for Government. I ask him to put a question and not make a statement.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: On the programme for Government, this Government promised that it would assist people to remain in their homes for as long as possible through home help service provision. However, in Kerry, for a person to get home help another person must die. Why is it that Kerry has been without funding for the provision of home help services since last May? The wife of an elderly man of 92 years of age was on Radio Kerry over three days pleading for home help services for him. I made representations on behalf of an 87 year old woman and I was told that someone would have to die before she would get services. Why is funding not being provided for home help service provision in Kerry?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister understands the question. I call Deputy Carol Nolan on the same issue.

Deputy Carol Nolan: There is a serious problem across the country. I am very aware of the problem in Laois-Offaly where, I am told, owing to budget restraints, no more home help hours can be allocated. It is stated in the programme for Government that this Government is committed to supporting our elderly people, yet they are not being given even a few hours of

home help. I ask the Minister to intervene urgently, in particular in Laois-Offaly where there is a terrible situation in regard to home help hours.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Nolan for her brevity. I call Deputy Michael Healy-Rae on the same issue.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: It is not right or fair that the wife of a 92 year old man has to go on Radio Kerry to plead with the Minister to provide him with home help so that he can come home. It is a disgrace, it is wrong and I ask the Minister please to do something about it.

Deputy Simon Harris: The law that this House passes prohibits me, as Minister for Health, from directing the HSE to provide a service to any individual. However, we have a job to do in terms of the provision of adequate resources. We are funding 18 million home help hours this year. We have provided more funding between now and the end of the year through the winter plan and we will be providing 1 million additional home care hours in 2020. I will specifically ensure that in regard to Laois-Offaly and Kerry there is a fair distribution of those hours.

Deputy Shane Cassells: At a meeting last week of the Committee of Public Accounts, I questioned the Chairman of the Revenue Commissioners on the issue of the removal of flat rate allowances as the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance had told me in this Chamber that this was not a matter for them, even though it impacted some 600,000 workers and many hundreds of miners in my home town of Navan. Last night, on the eve of an election, the Minister for Finance pulled a rabbit out of his magician's hat and announced that a tax strategy group would be established to examine this matter. When did the Taoiseach and Paul Daniels dream up this group, as the Chairman of the Revenue Commissioners had no clue about it last Thursday? How many days after the general election is it due to report back to Government and hit these 600,000 workers.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the Taoiseach in a position to respond?

The Taoiseach: I did not think we were on the eve of a general election. Maybe I have been counting the numbers wrong. I will have to come back to the Deputy with an answer to his question as I am not familiar with the matter.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, will be aware that his Department provides substantial funding to Teagasc, the work of which I commend. Does the Minister have any say in how it spends the substantial funding it receives from the Department? I ask that question because it is rumoured that Teagasc farm walks in Cork south-west are to cease. These walks are not only educational and informative, they are a social outlet for many farmers. Does the Minister have a say in how Teagasc spends its funding and, if so, will he ensure that the farm walks continue?

Deputy Michael Creed: I thank the Deputy for the question. Teagasc is an independent statutory body established under legislation in this House. It has a substantial budget and it deals with research and education, critically, for farmers, which includes knowledge transfer, farm walks, etc. I am unaware of the points raised by the Deputy and I would be very surprised if they had any veracity.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: I ask the Minister to follow up on the matter.

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: On the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2019, in rural

Ireland one of the most reliable bus services is the bingo bus. On foot of media coverage over the weekend, concerns have been raised by the operators of bingo events, in particular Midleton CBS Past Pupils Union. These organisations hold bingo events to raise funds for local clubs, which distribute the money fairly and legally. The proposed legislation provides for a cap of 50% on the prize money, which is based on the night's takings. In other words, if an event takes in €700 on the night, the maximum prize fund will be €350. There is another issue, namely, the roll-over jackpots. How is this covered in the legislation? If the Taoiseach wants to avoid an elderly lady swinging a bag at him, he will need to sort this out.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Aylward on the same issue.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: I have no truck with the professional organisers of bingo events. I want to focus on the small bingo operators. Bingo is a rural pastime. Small minibuses collect people and bring them to and from bingo once or twice a week in the nearest town. The operators make approximately €100 a month.

This will cap that. It is a social thing and that needs to be taken into consideration. I am not talking about professional gamblers or people who make big money.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does Deputy Martin Kenny wish to add to the case already made?

Deputy Martin Kenny: I understand that there are two sections in the Bill. Section 11 allows a lottery permit, which the Department tells us is what smaller bingo operations will come under. They will not be restricted in that way unlike where there is a lottery licence. It would be very useful if there was clarity on that as there are many people, urban and rural, many of whom we saw outside the gates of Leinster House earlier, who play bingo and enjoy the social gathering. It would not be in the interests of anyone on these benches that anything would be done that would in any way inhibit the enjoyment that these people have. Clarity would be very useful on that because it is badly required.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, is not here but perhaps the Taoiseach will respond.

The Taoiseach: I assure any Deputies from rural Ireland that bingo is pretty popular in urban Ireland and Dublin.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: I should not have said rural.

The Taoiseach: There are no plans to cause difficulties to bingo players. What is intended is a legislative change that will ensure that charities receive a fair share from bingo operators who act as their agents, that is a minimum of 25% of proceeds. These measures will increase transparency by placing some additional responsibilities on applicants for lottery licences. It is right and proper that the charities, as the licence holders, get a return for their charity. Over time, bingo operators arose to act as agents for charities and sports clubs. These agents were allowed by law to take up to 40% of the proceeds and charities frequently ended up with very little, which is wrong. To ensure this no longer happens the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, proposes that a maximum of 25% of proceeds can go to operators, 25% to charities and 50% to prize winners. It is simply designed to ensure that the charitable purposes such as the sports clubs, school renovations and so on, will benefit as intended and as bingo players would expect.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Michael Collins. I do not want him to make a two-page statement. He has one question.

Deputy Michael Collins: Page 95 of the programme for Government, under education, says the Government is committed to delivering the school capital investment programme. Three years ago, the people of Bandon were promised four classrooms and a teachers' resource room in St. Brogan's College to cope with the huge demand for entry to the school. Two years on, not a shovel has been turned, leaving a nightmare for dozens of parents who applied for entry to the school. It is compounded by Hamilton High School's inability to cater for any more first year boys next September, leaving Bandon in a crisis of not being able to cater for a large number of boys seeking admission to first year in September 2020. Parents are being advised to take these children to Cork city, which is a 45-minute drive. Will the Taoiseach and Minister for Education and Skills meet the schools in Bandon to see what can be done in the short or long term to avert the crisis for many parents in Bandon?

Deputy Joe McHugh: I am happy for my officials to follow up on this.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Breathnach.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: The programme for Government gives a commitment to tackle crime-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sorry, I ask the Deputy to hold on. There are many Deputies who are using body language to indicate to me that they were first, second or third. I can only take Deputies as I find them and I have time to write down their names. We are six minutes over. I ask Deputy Breathnach to show the others how to ask a question.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: I will have the question asked in one minute from now.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am not interrupting but it is important to make it clear. I am not depriving anybody but I will cut it shortly.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: The programme for Government gives a commitment to tackle crime, and CCTV surveillance plays a large role in that. There are two schemes, the Garda CCTV scheme and the community scheme. The community scheme is not working. Twenty-two applications have drawn down about €500,000 of a €3 million fund. Will the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice and Equality examine what statutory instruments or laws can be changed such that the data controller would involve a combination of the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána and the CEOs of local authorities to draw down this money and deal with criminality and crime, particularly in the Border area.

The Taoiseach: We are very keen to see the money for community CCTV drawn down. There have been difficulties in some places around who is or who is not the data controller. The Deputy raised this with me personally earlier and I will ask my office to look at it and see if there is anything that can be done to make these programmes more operational.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is an example of a question and answer. I call Deputy Curran, who I am sure will provide another.

Deputy John Curran: The Taoiseach will recall that he launched the national drugs strategy some years ago, which is effectively a partnership approach between the voluntary, statutory and community sectors. More recently, the community sector is concerned that it is not

having meaningful input into the strategy and its implementation. It wrote to the Taoiseach about four weeks ago requesting a meeting, which the Taoiseach acknowledged. Will he agree to that meeting and can it be organised during this Dáil session?

The Taoiseach: It is not my practice to organise meetings on the floor of the House. The Deputy will appreciate that I receive a lot of requests and my diary is now full until the recess. However, I will meet them as soon as it is practical to do so.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Crowe. I know it will be a question.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The Taoiseach mentioned the importance of marking the International Day of People with Disabilities. What about people who have a disability and are looking for respite care? I raised this with the Taoiseach last week and hoped to get the Minister for Health today. We were told that Cuisle was closing on Friday. Families are being pushed towards a hotel model. Unfortunately, for many of the people who used to go to Cuisle, hotels are not suitable. They are not inclusive places. Is there some sort of plan for a replacement for those people caught in this situation?

The Taoiseach: I am not in a position to update the Deputy. It is a decision for the Irish Wheelchair Association. The Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, was due to meet it, but I am not sure if that has happened.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: Yesterday, I met pharmacists in Kildare representing 74 different pharmacies. Those pharmacies received 2.5 million visits last year. We all know the value of pharmacies in local communities. In addition to the medicines and prescriptions they dispense, the interactions they provide in smaller rural areas are very important. The proposed cuts announced on 25 October to pharmacists are unreasonable, unfair and unjustifiable. They make a mockery of Sláintecare. They will particularly damage pharmacies in small, rural and disadvantaged areas. There is no doubt that should the cuts go ahead, pharmacies will close. A meeting will take place with the Irish Pharmacy Union, IPU, on 5 December. Will the Taoiseach reconsider these cuts and not proceed with them?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We had a Topical Matter debate on this.

The Taoiseach: Department officials met an Irish Pharmacy Union delegation on two occasions and received a detailed submission from the IPU on 8 November. The submission is being considered by the Department in the context of the statutory fee-setting process under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act and the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest, FEMPI, Acts. The Minister for Health is due to meet the IPU to discuss the matter further.

Deputy John Brassil: The programme for Government gives a commitment to enhance our primary school facilities. I am glad the Minister for Education and Skills is present. Last night, I attended a meeting in Castlegregory national school, roll number 11746Q. It is a five-teacher school with 134 pupils and no general purpose room. It applied for one last year and sent an application on 28 March. On 5 April, less than a week later, a point-blank refusal came down. The school made a very convincing case to the public representatives present at the meeting last night, which was attended by 80 people. Will the Minister at least commit to an assessment of needs on the school to establish the need for a very worthy and needed general purpose room?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will soon abandon parliamentary questions.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I would like further details of the school situation. It is important to point out that there is a scale of prioritisation with the need for new schools, extra classrooms and special education provision. There is a big budgetary demand but I am happy to have my officials look at the application.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: I attempted to go down the parliamentary question route on this matter but without success. On ambulance targets, there is supposed to be a turnaround time of 60 minutes from when an ambulance drops a patient off at an emergency department and is ready to leave again. Some 22% of ambulances in Mayo failed to meet that target, taking more than an hour to get out of the emergency department. A response to a parliamentary question argued the Government was trying and that there was pressure on emergency departments at this time of year. There is no ambulance service whatever in the part of south Mayo around Ballinrobe. It is physically impossible for ambulances in the current bases in Mayo to reach south Mayo, and specifically Ballinrobe, which has a significant population, in that timeframe to which I refer. We cannot afford to have ambulances taking longer than an hour to turn around when they cannot even get to where they are supposed to go in certain areas. Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister for Health to explore the possibility of a full-time base to cover south Mayo? Will he please try to address the turnaround times? Setting an hour as a turnaround time is already unambitious and not good enough. Not being able to meet that turnaround time is pretty appalling.

The Taoiseach: We are increasing funding to the National Ambulance Service every year. Only last week I was with the staff at the main call centre in Tallaght. Decisions on where services are located are really best made by them rather than us. I am advised that there are new centres at Tuam and Mulranny that have assisted. I will certainly make the National Ambulance Service aware of what the Deputy has said.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Article 15 of the European Union regulation on the governance of the energy union and climate action indicates that the Government must make a submission on 1 January 2020 on a new national energy and climate action plan. It is the most important plan for the country and determines how we will meet the Paris climate commitments. It sets out the fines, etc., we will have and must, as already stated, be submitted on 1 January. The Government has a public consultation in respect of the plan that closes on 31 December 2019. Is it expected that, when the rest of us are ringing in the new year, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, will be up all night working to take into account the findings of the public consultation? How will those two dates marry? How will the Government consult with the public when the closing date is the day before the submission must be made to the European Union on the most critical document on which this Parliament or the Government have to agree?

The Taoiseach: I am not sure about the exact timelines but I will check with the Minister and ask him to correspond with the Deputy. It sounds like our submission may be a little delayed. I will double-check that and let the Deputy know.

Deputy James Lawless: Commuter rail services in north Kildare have been in crisis for some time because of a lack of carriages, rolling stock and, in particular, parking spaces. My local station at Sallins and Naas is probably the busiest station on the Kildare line and it is almost unusable at this stage because spaces are simply not available after 7 a.m. This has the effect of frustrating commuters' efforts to get to work and flies in the face of public policy, which is to try to get people onto public transport. A proposal was painstakingly put together by local

stakeholders and representatives, as well as interested parties, to extend parking facilities there but I was told this morning that CIÉ rejected that proposal at a board meeting in the past couple of days. At this point, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport must intervene as the matter has reached crisis point. Our services are bursting at the seams. The Minister referred me to the National Transport Authority, which referred me back to him. We are going in a circle and nothing is being done. Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister to intervene?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Nobody is listening to me about the amount of time being taken.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy and I will inform the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport that he raised this matter. I will ask the Minister to reply to the Deputy directly.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: In recent years, I have raised the issue of local needs requirements in the context of the planning process. There are currently families living in wee villages but it is impossible for them to get planning permission to build in the countryside. I have raised this matter with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government many times. In all counties, there are large numbers of people on housing waiting lists. We have an opportunity to get people out of towns in order that they can live in rural Ireland. Currently, we are breaking European law. I have asked the Minister about this on many occasions and tonight he will face a confidence vote. People are asking why so many citizens are on council housing lists. Will the Minister please do something, once and for all, to sort out the problem of local needs requirements?

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I thank the Deputy for the question. The number of people on social housing lists has decreased by approximately 20,000 since Rebuilding Ireland began because we are providing more housing for people.

Deputy Paul Murphy: They have all transferred to the housing assistance payment.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: The Deputy spoke about a particular way of combating further delays on the housing lists. We still operate to the 2005 guidelines. We are involved with the Commission in updating those guidelines in light of rulings that have come from there. Local authorities must work to existing planning guidelines and there is also the national planning framework. The position has not changed but as soon as we have clarity from the Commission we will be able to bring forward new guidelines.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have exceeded the time for the Order of Business but today was exceptional. I have a list and I must give other Deputies an opportunity to contribute tomorrow. I remind Members that this is about the Order of Business and not constituency questions.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Sean Fleming - to discuss the future of Portlaoise general hospital; (2) Deputy James Lawless - to discuss the lack of autism spectrum disorder school places for

secondary school children in Kildare; (3) Deputy Darragh O'Brien - to discuss the shortage of secondary school places in Fingal, County Dublin; (4) Deputy Dessie Ellis - to discuss the lack of facilities or community gain for Finglas village in light of the plans for the area; (5) Deputy James Browne - to address the shortage of special needs education places in County Wexford; (6) Deputy John Brady - to discuss securing of funding to sustain residential services at St. Joseph's, Shankill; (7) Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin - to discuss the lack of second level school places in Newbridge and Kildare town, County Kildare; (8) Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy - to discuss proposals to cut community pharmacy funding; (9) Deputy John McGuinness - to discuss the availability of High Court judges in Kilkenny; (10) Deputy Gino Kenny - to discuss the proposed commencement of the medical cannabis access programme; (11) Deputy John Brassil - to discuss the need for a general purpose room for a school; (12) Deputy Pearse Doherty - to address issues relating to aquaculture applications for Ballyness Bay, County Donegal; (13) Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - to discuss school planning area boundaries in Cork; (14) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett - to discuss the importance of funding for disability groups; (15) Deputy Pat Buckley - to discuss the possibility of a bypass for Castlemartyr and Killeagh on the N25 in County Cork; (16) Deputy Bríd Smith - to discuss the review of CervicalCheck by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; and (17) Deputy Jackie Cahill - to address the impact of beef imports on pricing for Irish beef producers.

The matters raised by Deputies John McGuinness, Pearse Doherty, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy and Darragh O'Brien have been selected for discussion.

Organisation of Working Time (Domestic Violence Leave) Bill 2019: First Stage

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide for a period of paid leave as a consequence of domestic violence and for that purpose to amend the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997, to extend as a consequence the protection against unfair dismissals conferred by the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015 and to provide for the consequential amendment of certain other enactments; and to provide for related matters.

I am sharing time with Deputy Quinlivan as co-sponsor of the legislation.

Domestic violence continues to be under-reported due to stigma, shame and fear. One in five women will experience violence in the home and 41% of women know someone in their circle of family or friends who has experienced intimate partner violence. Domestic violence is mostly spoken about in terms of the home but the reality is the abuse often follows victims into the workplace. Co-workers may be aware of a colleague's abuse but in the absence of workplace policy they may be unsure how best to support their colleagues. Managers need guidance on how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and how to respond to a staff member's disclosure. Employers in the public and private sector must introduce domestic violence workplace awareness policies and procedures for management and staff.

As legislators, we have a role in protecting women in the workplace and ensuring that the rights and entitlements of victims, as employees, are enhanced and protected. Our legislation provides for a statutory annual entitlement of up to ten days of domestic violence-related paid

lead. This provision would enable victims to take the necessary time off work needed to seek support, find accommodation or attend court in a structured and supported environment. It also addresses unpredictable absenteeism and reduced productivity for employers.

Earlier this year, Vodafone introduced ten days of domestic violence-related paid leave and additional support for its employees globally. New Zealand, Australia and provinces in Canada have all introduced forms of paid leave in this respect. Ireland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention and enactment of supporting legislation were very important landmarks and we must build on these. This Sinn Féin domestic violence-related paid leave Bill does just that and I commend it to the House.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: This legislation is an important addition to existing workplace rights. The provision of a statutory entitlement to paid leave is an acknowledgement by legislators of the challenges faced by workers when trying to escape an abusive relationship. If we are to end this epidemic of domestic abuse in Ireland, we need a whole-of-society response that both supports and protects women.

Sinn Féin's legislation provides for up to ten days of paid domestic violence-related leave. An employee does not have to provide proof of abuse or documentary evidence for the leave needed, as to do so would potentially act as a barrier to victims seeking the support they often desperately need. As with existing leave entitlements, the legislation enables an employer to refuse or terminate leave where he or she believes the employee is not using the leave for the specified purpose. In turn, the employee has recourse to the Workplace Relations Commission in such circumstances where the leave has been taken for the specified purpose but has been terminated or refused by the employer. Research tells us that abusive partners often do not care a whit about the split between home and work. Stalking, persistent phone calls or threats in the workplace can often occur. Coercive control, now recognised under the Domestic Violence Act, can lead to abusers focusing their efforts on a partner's workplace for the purpose of ending their employment.

Legislators and employers have a responsibility to respond to this avenue of abuse by putting in place the necessary workplace and employment rights and protections for victims. Sinn Féin will be engaging with all political parties in the coming weeks to seek their support for this legislation. We look forward very much to productive dialogue with all stakeholders to advance this much-needed entitlement.

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): No.

Question put and agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2019: Motion

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the following Regulations in draft:

Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2019,

copies of which were laid in draft form before Dáil Éireann on the 15th November, 2019.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 83; Níl, 30; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	

<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>		
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>		
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>		
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>		
<i>Halligan, John.</i>		
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>		
<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>		
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>		
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>		
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>		
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>		
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>		
<i>Lahart, John.</i>		
<i>Lawless, James.</i>		
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>		
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>		
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>		
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>		
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>		
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>		
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		

<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>		
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell.

Question declared carried.

Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2019: Financial Resolution

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I move:

THAT section 125A of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 (No. 31 of 1999) be amended to provide for the specified rate of stamp duty in respect of an insured person in respect of relevant contracts renewed or entered into on or after 1 April 2019 and on or before 31 March 2020 and on or after 1 April 2020 in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

Question put and agreed to.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): It is proposed that we have just two groups of questions, with a total of 30 minutes for questions to the Taoiseach. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Biotechnology Industry

1. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the role his officials have in implementing the bio-economy framework which was launched a year ago; and the actions that have been taken since. [47452/19]

2. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach the role his Department has in implementing the bio-economy framework which was launched a year ago; and the actions that

have been taken since. [49141/19]

3. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the role of his Department in implementing the bio-economy framework. [50047/19]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, together.

My Department co-ordinated the development of the national policy statement on the bio-economy which was published in March 2018. This delivered on commitments given in the Action Plan for Jobs and the Action Plan for Rural Development and built on actions in Food Wise 2025.

The policy statement sets out Ireland's ambition to be a global leader in the bioeconomy and outlines a policy framework to underpin the successful development of the bioeconomy in this country. The policy statement identifies actions to expand the bioeconomy, including promoting greater coherence between the many sectors of the bioeconomy; strengthening the development of promising bio-based products and growing the relevant markets for them; removing regulatory constraints; and accessing funding available at national and EU level as well as leveraging private investment. The Government has mandated an implementation group, jointly chaired by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, to co-ordinate the implementation of the policy statement. The group is working in close collaboration with industry and other partners to bring forward further recommendations to develop the bioeconomy. The membership of this bioeconomy implementation group includes officials from my Department as well as from other relevant Departments and agencies.

The first progress report from this bioeconomy implementation group was published on 3 September 2019. The progress report highlights activities undertaken in the areas of policy integration and coherence, industrial and commercial development, progression of leading bio-economy value chains and awareness raising and financing. Many of the recommendations identified in this progress report dovetail with the actions identified in Project Ireland 2040, Future Jobs Ireland and the climate action plan.

Detailed questions on development of the bioeconomy in Ireland are a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, who have lead responsibility in this important area.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is important to focus on the wider bioeconomy in order to take sustainability to a more strategic level and show how Ireland can both address the environmental emergency and provide the good, secure and sustainable jobs we require.

When the national framework document for the development of the bioeconomy was published 20 months ago it was welcomed, but it has to be said that there was much scepticism about the Government's intentions. Some 51 submissions were made in the consultation process, providing a long list of very specific proposals for action. However, the final framework focused instead on general statements of intent and certainly was not an action plan of the type the Government likes to launch in many other areas. It was published without an implementation plan and only the vaguest statements about specific Government funding or actions.

Last year, one company, Glanbia, spent more on one bioeconomy project than was spent on all Government-funded activities put together. Very important activity is under way in this area,

much of it for several years. However the evidence indicates that there has not been a dramatic step change. Despite this, the Taoiseach still talks about having a vision for global leadership in this sector. It is similar to the target for electric vehicles, something which the Government is happy to talk about but fails to back up with any credible strategy or demonstration of the capacity to achieve it.

Can the Taoiseach tell us if the bioeconomy framework is being implemented? What specific targets has he set to achieve the stated objective of achieving global leadership in this field?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The bioeconomy strategy pays lip service to forestry and its importance to the bioeconomy, biodiversity, a circular economy, etc. However, the actuality of Government policy suggests that all of this is just lip service and nothing more. A report by Mr. Jim Mackinnon, commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, has come out just this month. Frankly, it is damning of Government forestry policy. It points out that there is no coherence of targets. The Government has three different targets. We do not have enough foresters or inspectors. There is no serious campaign to win people over to the value and virtues of forestry. There are problems with the excessive emphasis on the industrial model of forestry. There are huge backlogs in the processing of applications because we do not have enough people working in the sector. Most damning of all, this year there is a target, which the Taoiseach has announced on several occasions, of planting 8,000 ha of forestry. The actual rate of tree-planting this year is the lowest in 30 years, at 3,250 ha. There is a consistent pattern of the Government failing to meet its own targets by a long chalk when it comes to forestry. From the points of view of biodiversity, climate change and the bioeconomy, can we get more than lip service when it comes to an afforestation programme?

Deputy Joan Burton: The constituency I share with the Taoiseach has seen the investment of billions of euro in plants in the Dublin 15 area which manufacture biological drugs. They are at the cutting edge of modern medical treatments which are particularly important for children with rare conditions and diseases. Regarding the bioeconomy, we know clean air is critical to the wellness of both adults and children. However, clean air is not in evidence on many days of the year, particularly in Dublin and other big city areas in Ireland. A bioeconomy project could provide clean air for the citizens of urban areas. The report talks about focusing on education, training and skills. Clean air in cities will require greening cities and neighbourhoods. Trees act like giant vacuum cleaners and clean the air.

Another key bioeconomy project is public transport. If we want to get people out of their cars and reduce the pollution they produce, we need a public transport system. At the moment, it is still unclear whether a public transport proposal for Dublin will involve cutting down thousands of trees in the city. This Government has a problem with producing joined-up ideas that make sense in the context of the fantastic potential of the bioeconomy. We are already aware of this potential with the investment in our own constituency.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: If we are to have a proper bioeconomy we need a wider national land use plan, one which maps our approach to climate change and the biodiversity crisis and recognises that all different end uses are interconnected - what we do in forestry, how we restore peatlands and what type of farming takes place where. That wider national land use plan would give us a better idea of what limits we can set in the bioeconomy area. We cannot have anaerobic digesters everywhere if it increases levels of ammonia or other pollutants. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Teagasc have opposed such a land use plan. They say we cannot tell farmers what to do. I am not suggesting that the plan should deal with the micro

level. However, if we are serious about climate change, we need a wider land use plan. We also need it to get our bioeconomy right and avoid making the mistakes made in the North. Massive supports introduced in the North for the bioeconomy had serious pollution and other effects downstream. The bioeconomy must be framed within a land use plan.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Is the Taoiseach satisfied that the implementation group has the capacity to oversee all of this work in the future and meet the objectives that have been set in the bioeconomy framework? One of the guiding principles of the framework is the precautionary principle to prevent policies or actions causing harm and damage to the public or the environment. Last week, *The Irish Times* reported that air quality stations are not in place in the majority of towns where smoky coal is still burned. *The Sunday Business Post* reported over the weekend that the Government had stalled the roll-out of a nationwide ban on smoky coal as a result of legal threats from three private coal companies. Is this the case? Given that the European Commission has already signed off on Ireland's smoky coal ban, why is the Government not proceeding with the matter as planned?

I put it to the Taoiseach that re-municipalisation of the waste management system needs to be actively considered. There is widespread illegal dumping across the State. Enforcement is minimal or non-existent and our waste cycle is opaque at best. In truth, nobody really knows or can be exactly sure where their waste or recyclable materials end up. The sustainability principle is described as a core principle of the bioeconomy, yet we know that our waste management sector does not and will not meet the objectives set out in the policy framework. Surely it is time to start the discussion on bringing waste management back into public ownership.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputies for their questions. The bioeconomy plan is being implemented. To give some examples of the progress being made, we have significant actions across the bioeconomy policy framework, including the development of physical infrastructure and the creation of piloting facilities such as the Lisheen national bioeconomy campus and the Páirc na Mara marine project, as well as research capacity at the BEACON bioeconomy research centre. Two EU LIFE awards have been successful and were secured to aid the scaling up of small on-farm and larger industrial bio-refining activities. The Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, has awarded funding for two bioeconomy related projects. The launch of BioConnect Ireland's regional and technology cluster in Monaghan supports bioeconomy development. The BEACON bioeconomy research centre signed a memorandum of understanding with the Technological Higher Education Association to develop bioeconomy related education activities in technological universities. The Irish Co-operative Organisation Society was also awarded EU Erasmus+ funding to develop training to support bioeconomy development by co-operative members and farmers. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, have co-funded two research projects on the agri bio circular, ABC, economy and bio-circle which are focused on regional bioeconomy development. The ABC economy project held two workshops with industry, regional and rural stakeholders in counties Tipperary and Monaghan in the second quarter of 2019 to assess value chain development and the sustainability of regional biomass supply chains.

I was also asked about funding. Funding of €14.2 million has been provided through Science Foundation Ireland, with €4.6 million allocated to the Lisheen project under the regional enterprise development fund. Funding is also being provided through Enterprise Ireland's regional economic development fund for BioConnect in Monaghan and Páirc na Mara in Connemara. Applications have also been received in the disruptive technologies fund to support industrial development of the bioeconomy. Two EU LIFE projects have been successful in

securing funding to develop bio-refining to assist small-scale beef farming activities and industrial level bio-refining activities.

Funding opportunities also exist at EU level, including Horizon 2020 societal challenge 2 and the bio-based industries joint undertaking, a €3.7 billion public private partnership that focuses on the development, de-risking and scaling up of innovative technologies and bio-refineries. The European circular bioeconomy fund, ECBF, is being designed by the European Investment Bank, EIB, with the support of the European Commission via Horizon 2020. The fund will provide access to finance to innovative circular bioeconomy companies and projects of various sizes. ECBF management funds will raise funds from public and private investors with a target fund volume of €250 million, and aims for a first close in the first quarter of 2020. A proposal by the EIB to invest €100 million in the fund will be submitted to the board for approval.

On the issue of forestry, Deputies will be aware that approximately 11% of our land is now covered in forest, the highest level for 350 years. This is, however, very low by European and international standards. We have set a target in the climate action plan to plant 440 million trees during the period of the plan. There is a job of work to be done to convince farmers, landowners and communities to buy into that target. As I mentioned at the International City/County Management Association, ICMA, conference on Friday, I am very keen to encourage large landowners, not just farmers, to plant at least 1 ha of native broadleaf trees. We want to pay them to do it and this could form part of our reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy.

On the issue of air quality and clean air, Deputies will be aware that in cities the problem is closely related to diesel cars. Our policy solutions include making diesel cars less attractive to buy and run, increasing the supply of electric vehicles and investing in public transport. Deputies will be aware that in recent days I announced a €1 billion five-year investment in our railways. In many towns, smoky fuels are responsible for poor air quality. We know that smoky coal, peat and wood are equally bad when it comes to damaging air quality. This issue, on which I answered a question from Deputy Martin earlier, needs to be looked at in the round.

Deputy Ryan raised the issue of a land use plan. While it is not something I am familiar with, I will give it consideration. I have not heard any objections from Teagasc or the Department to that but perhaps that is the case. Part of our climate effort will involve land use change and forestry or LUCF.

The re-municipalisation of waste management is a matter for the local authorities. At least one authority has passed a motion calling for re-municipalisation. It is up to one or two authorities to try this approach and see how it goes. I believe they will find it very expensive and difficult to do. It would be interesting to see if any of the local authorities in Dublin want to give this a go. That would then allow other local authorities to see whether it is a good idea.

Departmental Staff Data

4. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff employed in the Britain and Northern Ireland affairs section of his Department. [47453/19]

5. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the EU and Northern Ireland division of his Department. [47642/19]

6. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the international division in his Department. [47832/19]

7. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the EU and Northern Ireland division of his Department. [48843/19]

8. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the EU and Northern Ireland affairs section of his Department. [48732/19]

9. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach the status of the work of the international division of his Department. [49040/19]

10. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the status of the work of the international division of his Department. [50372/19]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 4 to 10, inclusive, together.

The international, EU and Northern Ireland division of my Department covers work on all international, EU and British-Irish and Northern Ireland affairs within the Department, including Brexit issues. There are 26 staff in total, headed by a second Secretary General. Included in this are seven staff in the British-Irish and Northern Irish affairs division headed by an assistant secretary and 19 staff in an EU and international division, also headed by an assistant secretary.

The British-Irish Northern Ireland division provides advice to me regarding Northern Ireland affairs and British-Irish relations. This includes work to advance peace, prosperity and reconciliation on the island of Ireland, including assisting me in my engagement with the British Government in institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement and on restoration of the institutions, including the Assembly and the power-sharing Executive in the North.

The EU and international division provides advice and briefing on relevant matters, including my varied international engagements, for instance, meetings of the European Council and other EU summits, bilateral engagements with Heads of Government of EU member states and other countries, and international affairs more generally. The division also works closely with other relevant Departments, notably the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Augmenting this ongoing work is the Brexit preparedness and contingency planning unit, which assists a Secretaries General group overseeing ongoing work on national Brexit preparedness and contingency planning. The unit works closely with other divisions in my Department, including the economic division, and with colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which has overall responsibility for Brexit.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Should the Brexit withdrawal agreement be implemented in the next two months, as is highly likely, Brexit will be nowhere near finished. The Taoiseach has accepted on a number of occasions that we are facing into a hard Brexit when it comes to 80% of our trade with the United Kingdom. There are potentially years of negotiations ahead of us with regard to European Union-United Kingdom issues and bilateral matters.

During the past year, the Government has accepted our position that there needs to be a new approach to Anglo-Irish relations to replace the connections we had in the context of shared EU membership. One of the benefits of that membership has been the familiar meetings with British politicians and between our respective civil servants for nearly 50 years. That had a

tremendous impact on developing close relationships, a common agenda in Europe and, critically, the peace process in Northern Ireland. I am surprised that, even though we have had some discussions on this issue, they have not gone beyond general statements of intent and a few comments about the British-Irish Council, which is in no way structured to be able to achieve the sort of engagement we need. When will the promised proposals for new working structures be presented?

The British Home Secretary announced the other day her intention of introducing a new visa waiver system for EU citizens entering the UK. This would require a landing card system and registration similar to the one operated by the US. While we can assume that the common travel area means that this will not apply to Irish citizens, it has serious implications for EU citizens entering the UK through Ireland. Equally, it is unclear whether this is covered in the withdrawal agreement, as the special economic status for Northern Ireland relates specifically to trade and commerce. Has this matter been discussed with the British Government?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Last month, I attended the Palestinian children conference organised by the Irish trade union movement. Throughout that conference, speakers outlined in stark detail Israel's human rights abuses of Palestinian children. The conference was opened by a young Palestinian boy who, at just 17 years of age, was already a former child prisoner. I commend Ireland's trade unions on organising the conference and on their long-standing commitment to the Palestinian people.

November marked the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, yet Palestinian children continue to endure systematic and widespread violations of their rights, including their right to life. Over the past 20 years, Israel has detained more than 12,000 children. The latest figures tell us that there are 185 Palestinian children currently in Israeli jails. More are imprisoned for stone throwing. Their basic rights to, for example, legal representation and parental visits are routinely withheld. Child detainees have been blindfolded and deprived of sleep, had their hands and feet restrained and been intimidated and assaulted at the hands of the Israeli military. Children detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system can be as young as 12 years. In some perverse way, these children consider themselves the lucky ones. In the past year alone, more than 27 Palestinian children have been killed and 2,000 injured during Israeli air attacks.

In January of this year, the UN warned that children's access to school on the West Bank is not safe. In a statement, the UN noted threats of demolition, clashes on the way to school between students and security forces, and teachers stopped at checkpoints. It also noted that the violent actions of Israeli forces and, on some occasions, settlers presented real and imminent dangers.

Has the work of the international division of the Department of the Taoiseach included a response to these human rights abuses endured daily by Palestinian children? What engagement has the Taoiseach had with the Israeli political leaders on this matter?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: As well as the issue of Israel's abhorrent treatment of Palestinian children as described by Deputy McDonald, whose question I echo about what the Government will do to raise this ongoing and systematic denial of rights to children in breach of every sort of international law and standard, I wish to ask about what the Government is going to do to raise its voice and demand that the EU take action and impose meaningful sanctions on Israel over its continued expansion of illegal settlements, which are now spurred on

by President Donald Trump's decision to throw out 20 years of US policy, never mind international law and the Geneva Conventions, by endorsing the expansion of those settlements, the most recent of which, and probably the first by-product of President Trump's dangerous shift in policy, is in the city of Hebron, where Israel is talking about a massive expansion. One young man has already been shot, which is just the start of the problems that will arise. Given that Israel flagrantly breaches the Fourth Geneva Convention on the transfer of populations and UN resolutions on the question of the expansion of settlements, where is the call from us to the EU demanding sanctions? All the words mean nothing if we continue to allow Israel to do this and breach international law and international human rights standards. Never mind refusing to imposing sanctions, Europe still extends Israel favoured trade status. What are we going to ask the EU to do loudly?

Deputy Joan Burton: The new European Commission has been sworn in. We note that one of the Government's own Deputies is taking up a job with it despite serious questions over his use of fobbing in the House and whether the Taoiseach is standing over his appointment as an employee of a member of the Commission. Dr. von der Leyen has stated that her Commission is going to pursue an agenda of change, notwithstanding the fact that Brexit is still to be resolved. Has the Government held discussions with the Commission's incoming members, including its new President, regarding the pathway for the period after the British general election, which is less than ten days away? Does the Taoiseach foresee changes in the structure of the discussions? We have already heard that Ireland will not be particularly represented in further discussions in terms of having special access to the negotiations. A period of a further year has been set aside. What are the implications of that for relations between the North and South? What will be the impact of Brexit on the EU's agenda now that a certain amount of Brexit fatigue understandably seems to be setting in? How does the Taoiseach propose to ensure that the issues of the island of Ireland are kept foremost in the view of the incoming members of the new Commission?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Will the Taoiseach condemn the coup in Bolivia? Does he believe that any other term appropriately describes a situation where an elected president is forced to resign by the military, where the army is on the streets to protect the coup, shooting and killing protestors, where supporters of Mr. Evo Morales's party - Movement for Socialism, MAS - have been dragged out of their homes, where a MAS mayor is dragged through the streets, her hair is cut off and she is covered in paint, and where indigenous flags are torn off army uniforms and burned by crowds of the far right? The military has installed as replacement a woman, Ms Jeanine Áñez, who is a white supremacist, does not have a single indigenous person in her Cabinet, who has previously tweeted about dreaming of "a Bolivia free of indigenous satanic rights", who has said that the capital city "is not for the Indians - they belong in the high plateau or el Chaco", and who has recently signed a decree effectively giving permission for the armed forces to engage in whatever human rights abuses they want in trying to put down those protestors who are standing up against the coup. Will the Taoiseach speak out against this coup or will he effectively continue to endorse it by refusing to call it what it is?

The Taoiseach: Earlier, Deputy Martin asked about the future structure of British-Irish relations after Brexit. He rightly pointed out that after Brexit we will not be in a position to meet British Ministers in the way we do now, three or four times a year at Council of Ministers meetings in Brussels or more frequently at the European Council. One of the suggestions we are working on is to strengthen and restructure the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and use that Good Friday Agreement institution as a mechanism to ensure structured engagement

between the Irish Government and the British Government. It is something I intend to pursue with the Prime Minister if he is re-elected or the new Prime Minister if there is one in the next couple of weeks. The matter of landing cards has not been discussed to my knowledge with the British Government but we will monitor any proposals as they develop.

With regard to Israel and Palestine, I have not had any engagement with the Israeli Government or Israeli politicians but I met the leadership of the Palestinian Authority when they came to Dublin. The Tánaiste is in Israel and Palestine this week and is continuing his efforts to deepen our engagement in the region and help to bring peace to the territories.

Deputy Boyd Barrett asked about meaningful EU action such as sanctions. The simple fact is that when it comes to issues such as defence and the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU only acts with unanimity and there will not be EU action given that the 28 countries are not unanimous in their positions on Israel. Some are very supportive of Israel and others are closer to the Palestinians. Without a move to qualified majority voting on foreign policy, I do not see EU-wide sanctions being imposed or action being taken.

I have met President von der Leyen twice and I hope she will be able to visit Dublin soon. We will be at the European Council next Thursday and Friday. I will be watching the UK results come in on Thursday and Friday at the European Council and it promises to be an interesting meeting. The next steps will really depend on the results of the UK elections. There is the possibility of a special Council in January or February to set out the EU's negotiating guidelines for the next phase of talks, which will be negotiations with the UK on the free trade agreement and security and political partnership, but that is all a few steps ahead because we do not yet know what the outcome of the UK elections will be next week. Michel Barnier will remain in the role as negotiator on behalf of the EU, and Phil Hogan as trade Commissioner will have a central role given that a huge part of the future relationship will be free trade.

With regard to Irish issues, I hope we will still have the team of me, the Tánaiste and the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, in place for the next phase of discussions. It would be very much in the country's interest that this be the case, given the contacts and competencies we have built up over the past two and a half years in representing Ireland when it comes to Brexit.

I must be honest and say I have not been following the events in Bolivia closely but I absolutely condemn any military coups wherever they occur.

Estimates for Public Services 2019: Message from Select Committee

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): The Select Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for public services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2019 - Vote 37.

Ceisteanna (Atógáil) - Questions (Resumed)

Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions

Personal Injuries Commission

39. **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 regarding personal injury awards. [50374/19]

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: This question is on the timeline for implementation of each of the 14 recommendations of the Personal Injuries Commission regarding personal injury awards.

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. During its 18 month work programme, which concluded in July 2018, the Personal Injuries Commission, PIC, delivered two reports with 14 recommendations. The first report of PIC, published in December 2017, made four recommendations. The first recommendation was the adoption of a standardised approach to the examination of personal injuries. The Personal Injuries Assessment Board, PIAB, has rolled out a standardised template to its independent medical panel. I understand Insurance Ireland has distributed the medical reporting template to its members. The second recommendation was promotion of best practice training for medical professionals completing personal injury medical reports, and PIAB has engaged with relevant providers on this. The third recommendation relates to the book of quantum, which has been superseded by PIC's second report, which recommends that a judicial council, when established, be requested by the Minister for Justice and Equality to compile judicial guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. The fourth recommendation was that relevant injury data be collated and published by appropriate bodies. PIAB has since published data in line with this recommendation.

The second and final report made a further ten recommendations. I expect that they should be implemented as soon as possible by the relevant bodies. Recommendations Nos. 1 and 2 relate to the judicial council described earlier. Recommendation No. 3 proposed that the Law Reform Commission bring forward legislation to cap damages that a court may award, and this work is under way. Recommendation No. 4 provides for the development and roll-out of best practice standard treatment plans for soft tissue injuries and is being worked on by the HSE. Recommendation No. 5 proposed that no offer of settlement or payment of a personal injury claim can be made unless and until a detailed medical report has been obtained. Insurance Ireland has advised that it is standard practice for insurers to base personal injury claims settlements on medical reports. Recommendation No. 6 requires claimants to give prompt notification, within one month, of any potential injury so that a proper investigation may be undertaken. This was addressed through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: We all agree the 14 recommendations are very important, but will the Minister indicate whether the Government will take the issue seriously and commit to agreeing a timetable for implementation of all the recommendations with the various bodies, including the Garda Commissioner, Insurance Ireland, the Law Society and the Bar Council, to give certainty to Irish business and consumers? Last Sunday, someone from a small enterprise rang me. That person will be forced out of business. People are very concerned. People think we are doing nothing about this, quite honestly. We need to make people aware and let people know that we are serious about this, and we will try to help them and try to keep people in jobs.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am, as I know the Deputy is, very aware of the serious impact of high insurance costs, particularly liability insurance, for businesses and consumers. We as a Government are using every lever at our disposal to bring down insurance costs. We have done a huge amount of work and I expect all of this work will pay dividends. The Judicial Council Act has passed, which means that once the new council is in place, it will establish a personal injuries guidelines committee comprising judges and mirroring the models in place in neighbouring jurisdictions. It will draw up the guidelines of the level of damages that should be awarded in personal injuries actions. This should promote consistency in the level of personal injuries damages awarded by the courts. These guidelines will replace the book of quantum.

I also note that comments made last month by the interim Insurance Ireland CEO, Mr. Gerry Hassett, that if award levels come down, so will premiums. This is the secret to success here. I believe the judicial council and the committee will make a huge difference to the price of insurance.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: It is extremely important that the Minister and the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, engage with PIAB. I remember when the PIAB was set up by the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Ms Mary Harney. It definitely made a difference at that time. There is no question but that insurance costs came down and that the cost of motor insurance for young people in particular fell. Unfortunately, the services of the PIAB are not being used as much as they should be and people are going to court, which is sad. This all goes back to the amounts being paid in respect of claims. The Minister referred to the judicial council. When will that be set up and when will it start its work? The quicker that is done, the quicker insurance claims will fall.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The Chief Justice is doing what he can to identify the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the judicial council and its relevant committees can hit the ground running once established. I expect that the council will be set up next year. As I understand it, it should be done very quickly because the law is passed and everything is in place.

The Deputy is right about the PIAB. We have increased its powers in order to ensure that there is greater compliance with its process. This is because the PIAB route is quicker and cheaper. I have said before that we need to change the culture because insurance claims should not be seen either as some type of windfall or as easy money. I am not taking away from genuine claims. There are genuine claims in respect of which compensation is deserved. I heard about a case - and I am sure the Deputy read about it as well - involving a woman who was asked at the checkout desk of a shop if she had paid for her shopping bag. She was so upset by the question that she decided to take a case and sought compensation of €75,000. That was outrageous but, thankfully, the judge dismissed that case, and rightly so.

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

40. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she has taken to ensure that jobs created here by client companies of IDA Ireland are of decent quality and offer decent pay and conditions; if her Department maintains records regarding the pay scales relating to jobs offered by IDA Ireland companies; if not, whether she will consider same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50132/19]

Deputy Imelda Munster: I want to ask the Minister about the steps she has taken to ensure

that jobs created here by client companies of IDA Ireland are of decent quality and offer decent pay and conditions. I also want to ask if her Department maintains records on pay scales relating to such jobs and, if not, whether she will consider ensuring that it does so in the future.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. Creating high-quality, well-paid and secure jobs, whether in indigenous or overseas firms, has been a top priority of mine ever since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

The multinational sector in Ireland continues to thrive, with new jobs being created in sectors including information and communications technologies, life sciences and financial and business services. Many of these positions involve sophisticated and knowledge-intensive activities, such as manufacturing, shared services activities and research and development.

The average salary of jobs created by the clients of IDA Ireland is €66,000 per annum. This is significantly higher than the national average wage of €46,000 per annum and reflects the high value nature of the roles in the firms concerned.

The strong salaries generally offered by multinational firms are only one of the benefits foreign direct investment, FDI, has for the Irish economy. Client companies of IDA Ireland also have a hugely positive effect on the local economy, with over eight jobs being created for every ten directly FDI-driven roles. Overseas firms also invest heavily in research and development and generate significant revenue for the Exchequer. It is also the case that many of the multinational firms in Ireland have been operating here for many decades. The jobs they provide, and the wider commercial activity they sustain across the economy, have therefore been vital in supporting families and communities for many years across our island.

The salaries offered by IDA Ireland client firms also reflect the capacity of our talented workforce. That has been internationally recognised again recently, with the International Institute for Management Development ranking Irish workers highly in terms of flexibility, adaptability and motivation. I know as well, from regularly meeting overseas firms that operate here, there is nothing they value higher than the quality of our people.

Deputy Imelda Munster: We have long been successful in attracting FDI, particularly through the work of IDA Ireland and by offering low corporation tax rates and other questionable tax incentives to foreign companies. In fact, we overly rely on FDI. Our economy is over-reliant on a small number of multinational corporations in the context of the tax take. Some 45% of the total corporation tax take for 2018 came from just ten companies, which shows how vulnerable the State would be if those companies were to jump ship.

I was interested to hear the Minister state that the average wage of a job created by IDA Ireland is €66,000 per annum because I found it hard to get that sort of information from IDA Ireland. I wrote to the latter seeking clarification on pay scales for employees in its client companies and was told that such information is not available. I was not seeking any personal or private details, I was looking for broad information on the pay scales to get an idea of the quality of the jobs being provided by IDA Ireland client companies. I do not see why this information would be denied to me. There is a difference between looking for the average wage and looking for the pay scales. Can the Minister explain why this difficulty is there and whether she stands over it? These companies are given funding by IDA Ireland so I do not see why they would not release information of that sort.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The average salary figure of €66,000 per annum I have

given the Deputy is calculated using my Department's annual business survey of economic impact, which entails consulting with up to 4,200 companies across the country. However, neither my Department nor IDA Ireland has access to comprehensive information on the pay scales or salary levels within multinational companies in Ireland. As will be appreciated, details such as this are operational matters for firms themselves. There is no obligation, legal or otherwise, on companies to provide such information to my Department or to IDA Ireland. It is also the case companies are often reluctant, for reasons of commercial sensitivity, to making information widely available on the conditions or salaries they offer to their employees. What is clear, however, from the information available is the jobs being created by multinational firms are well paid on average and are well above the national average wage.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I know there is no legal obligation to provide that information but as companies in receipt of State funding, grants and questionable tax incentives, one would imagine that the Department or IDA Ireland would be delighted to give out the information on pay scales, even if only to prove they are providing quality jobs.

I want to give the Minister another example. National Pen in County Louth received €2.9 million in funding from IDA Ireland last year. So far, it has ignored a Labour Court recommendation to recognise a trade union for the purposes of collective bargaining. That recommendation was made two months ago and the company has continued to ignore attempts to even begin negotiations on that. The company received substantial funding from IDA Ireland, the workers are taxpayers and the Labour Court has made its recommendations. What does the Minister intend to do about this? Does she intend to do anything? I presume she does not just represent big business and that she also represents ordinary workers. What happens if the Labour Court makes a recommendation and a company in receipt of substantial State funding continues to ignore that recommendation and fails to engage in negotiations?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am not familiar with the particular case the Deputy mentioned so I do not want to comment on it. However, FDI companies make a huge contribution. I only visited WuXi Biologics outside Dundalk three weeks ago. That company announced 200 new jobs in addition to the 400 jobs already announced. There will be 600 high-quality jobs in the biopharma space right on the Border in Dundalk. There will be 2,000 people employed next year during the construction phase.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The question related to a Labour Court recommendation.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I just want to tell the Deputy how important FDI is, especially in the Border region. She should go and look at that site. The development taking place there is amazing. Some 2,000 people will be employed on the site come January in light of the work due to be carried out. They will be 600 high quality jobs and staff from throughout the region - Cavan, Monaghan, Meath and Louth - will work on construction and at the company. It represents investment of €500 million, which is a massive vote of confidence in the Border region.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Those jobs are welcome, but the Minister has not answered my question-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): The supplementary questions have been asked. The next question, Question No. 41, in the name of Deputy Troy, will be taken by Deputy Scanlon.

Small and Medium Enterprises

41. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeline for the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the OECD review of SME and entrepreneurship policy in Ireland and the accompanying roadmap; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50375/19]

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: What is the timeline for the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the OECD review of SMEs and entrepreneurship policy in Ireland and the accompanying roadmap? Will the Minister make a statement on the matter? The OECD report on SME sales policy initiatives needs to be addressed in respect of finance issues; low productivity, start-up rates and uptake in management; training; and research and design incentives, as well as the adoption of digital technologies.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I launched the OECD review of SME and entrepreneurship policy in Ireland with the Minister of State, Deputy Breen, and the Deputy Secretary General of the OECD, Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, on 31 October 2019. The report is pivotal research on the current environment for SMEs and entrepreneurship in Ireland, the scale of which has not previously been undertaken. I am working with my Department officials on how best to progress implementation of the main recommendations in the OECD report and intend to bring forward a national strategic document for SME and entrepreneurship policy outlining planned policy interventions in the near future. The strategy will set out the policy vision, objectives, targets, lines of action and performance indicators specific to SMEs and entrepreneurship. It will cover all areas of policy intervention and all SME and entrepreneurship populations. The new SME and entrepreneurship strategy will be a living document that will continually evolve in line with enterprise needs.

My Department officials will drive forward with the policy formulation through the innovative new SME and entrepreneurship consultative group, chaired by my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for trade, employment, business, the EU digital Single Market and data protection, Deputy Breen. The new stakeholder group provides a platform for high-level, structured engagement among the Government, agencies, representative bodies and small businesses. The establishment of the SME and entrepreneurship consultation group is an important recommendation from the OECD review, which I have implemented.

The inaugural meeting of the SME and entrepreneurship consultation group took place on Wednesday, 27 March 2019 at the Royal College of Surgeons and it subsumes the functions of the former advisory group on small business. More than 40 stakeholders attended the inaugural meeting of the consultative group, and together with my officials, they will oversee the effective and efficient implementation of the OECD's recommendations.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: What is the timeline for the implementation of the 11 specific actions the OECD outlined in its roadmap for SME and entrepreneurship policy in Ireland?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The OECD laid out a number of recommendations and we will develop the strategy. For example, only 6% of our SMEs export but we want to double the number as quickly as possible. We will scale up the training online voucher programme for SMEs, expand the exporter development department of Enterprise Ireland, EI, which assists companies, and beef up InterTradeIreland's grant support and funding advisory services. We will broaden the remit of the local enterprise offices, LEOs. The Deputy will be familiar with

the LEO in his county of Sligo. I want to empower the LEOs to do more to help our indigenous sector. We want to increase management skills among SMEs because we have found that SME managers who have completed management skills courses are more focused on increasing productivity and embracing lean programmes across their businesses. We will also step up the financial skills and the knowledge among SMEs. The measures I have outlined are all part of Future Jobs Ireland, our whole-of-government strategy to prepare businesses and workers for the world of tomorrow.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I welcome what the Minister outlined. Given that the OECD has indicated that enterprises may fall between the cracks of eligibility for LEO or EI services, it is important that we support increasing the remit of the current LEO network to support firms of between ten and 249 employees that have limited or no export potential. We must secure such jobs as well as we can.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I am a great supporter of the LEOs, as is my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Breen. They have done great work. We increased their budget by €5 million in budget 2019 and have introduced a number of new funds. In July, I announced two funds for the LEOs, one of which was a €2.5 million competitive fund, for which there were 16 successful projects. It was up to the LEOs to bid for the funds to support projects in their regions, many of which were collaborative. The LEOs have become good at working with one another. We do not want to see county boundaries but rather them working together.

The productivity challenge fund is worth €500,000. The LEOs work with a broader base of companies, such as those employing more than ten people and those in freight, transport and retail. I welcome the Deputy's comments on the LEOs.

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

42. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and location of jobs secured by the IDA in the past three years in south-west County Cork, in particular the three peninsulas and eight islands in west County Cork. [50344/19]

Deputy Michael Collins: Will the Minister outline the number and locations of jobs the IDA has secured in Cork South-West in the past three years? I refer in particular to jobs on the three peninsulas and eight islands in west Cork.

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): No enterprise policy is more important than strengthening regional development, including through the growth of foreign direct investment, FDI. The Department is doing everything it can to increase and deepen FDI throughout the country. The energy and resources we have invested into that objective is, as the evidence illustrates, producing results. In 2018, for example, the IDA delivered 113 regional investments, with 56% of net new jobs created outside Dublin, while in the past four years, 44,500 new FDI-driven jobs have been created outside the capital. We will do our utmost to encourage further such job growth in all parts of Ireland in 2020 and beyond.

Cork, which the Deputy mentioned, has traditionally been a strong performer in respect of FDI. The trend continues, with a steady and positive increase in employment numbers in IDA client companies in the county in recent years. Currently, there are 169 IDA client companies

in Cork, employing approximately 39,000 people, while almost 2,100 net new jobs were added by multinational companies in 2018. There are many reasons companies choose to invest in Cork. It is known for its high-quality technical workforce, its adaptability and its commitment to innovation. In the past 12 months, there have been some high-profile announcements from Cork-based IDA clients, including plans to create 100 new jobs at Forcepoint and 200 new jobs at Janssen Sciences in Ringaskiddy. There have also been a number of significant research and development announcements, including plans by Stryker to invest €200 million in a number of projects at three of its Cork facilities. These high-calibre investments are a great vote of confidence in Cork's workforce and a testament to the pro-enterprise environment fostered in the county.

As for the Cork peninsulas and islands, I assure the Deputy that the IDA, with the support of the Department, actively draws the attention of its clients to every region of Ireland through its network of offices in Ireland and overseas. The agency has a number of incentives in place to encourage companies to invest throughout Cork, including the provision of investment advice and expertise, hosting site visits and providing financial supports in the form of IDA grants.

Deputy Michael Collins: I will focus on Cork South-West, the constituency I represent. It was an area where farming, fishing and the construction industry experienced something of a boom when times were good, but unfortunately all of these industries are going through a very difficult time. Employment is scarce on the ground in Mizen Head, the Beara Peninsula, the Sheepshead Peninsula, Bantry, Skibbereen, Clonakilty and Bandon. I am interested in hearing what efforts the IDA has made in south-west Cork. People are travelling 60 or 70 miles to get work in the city. I would like employment to be brought back into towns and villages in west Cork. Has an effort been made in that regard by the IDA in the past number of years?

Deputy Pat Breen: Deputy Collins also referred to the islands. As he knows, in the past month the Tánaiste and the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, formally launched a consultative process which will formulate a new national policy for the future development of the islands. This will lead to the development of a national policy which will ensure our island communities are supported in a sustainable way for generations to come.

The IDA made 55 site visits to Cork this year. Due to commercial sensitivities, we do not have information on specific locations where site visits have taken place. Last year there were 61. We also need to realise how important indigenous industry is to west Cork. Deputy Collins mentioned tourism. The marine and maritime sector is extremely important.

Part of the regional enterprise plan launched by the Minister, Deputy Humphreys, last March is focused on the delivery of regional enterprise hubs, business clustering to ensure skills and talent are available and, as I said, supporting the maritime and marine industry which is synonymous with west Cork and provides a lot of industry. Tourism is an important industry in west Cork.

The unemployment figure for the area is currently 5.1%, a decrease from a high of 10.5% a few years ago. Cork has done really well and the future is positive for Cork. There are 24,500 more people working in south-west Cork than there were a number of years ago.

Deputy Michael Collins: I thank the Minister of State. We discussed the islands, and their focus is very much on tourism. I attended the launch of the national policy on the islands, at which the Tánaiste and the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, were in attendance. They were

most welcome to Sherkin Island recently. Any focus on the islands is very welcome. Sherkin, Cape Clear, Bere, Whiddy and Dursey make superhuman efforts but they need extra resources from the Government, as do towns and villages in west Cork.

When I left earlier today it was alarming to see the lines of traffic from west Cork heading towards Cork city. It appears that the focus is on cities, which I have no issue with, but areas like Bandon, Skibbereen and Bantry need a greater focus to ensure that good jobs are created for people. People have to travel and are left with very little in their wage packets at the end of the week after travelling 60 or 70 miles every day.

Deputy Pat Breen: The regional enterprise development fund is extremely important for the regions in Ireland and was initiated by our Department. The Minister, Deputy Humphreys, and I recently visited the Ludgate Hub and saw what Skibbereen can do. It is a very innovative project and a lot of micro enterprises are working out of it.

The regional enterprise development fund has benefited west Cork, together with other centres such as those in Macroom and elsewhere. There is a good news story to be told. We are of course working to ensure that balanced regional development continues, which is important and very much part of Project Ireland 2040. Regional enterprise plans have worked in the past and I believe they will continue to work in the future. It is about collaboration and working together with institutions. The Ludgate Hub and faster broadband are a template for more companies to work out of the area. West Cork is a beautiful area. As the Deputy said, tourism and the marine industry are important and contribute a lot to local industry.

Climate Change Policy

43. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has had engagement with the task force on climate-related financial disclosures; and if she is considering promoting new auditing structures for businesses with regard to carbon emissions. [50376/19]

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The task force on climate-related financial disclosure is one of the key initiatives to try to steer the enterprise sector towards supporting climate action. It was founded in 2015 and the first status report was released in 2017, with a further update this year. It is critical for Irish business to be at the head of this and leading rather than following, which is what is currently happening. I am keen to hear the view of the Minister and Department on this initiative, what they are doing to promote such disclosures and what we can do to try to make this happen in Ireland.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. While I am aware of the work of the task force on climate-related financial disclosures, TFCF, set up on the recommendation of the Financial Stability Board of the G20, I have not had any direct engagement with this group. My understanding is that the group has developed voluntary climate-related financial disclosures, recommended to complement the financial reporting and auditing process of large publicly-listed companies. They are to provide useful climate-related information to lenders, insurers and investors and so the Deputy may wish to look for further information from the Department of Finance or the Central Bank in that regard.

In 2017, I signed regulations transposing into Irish law directive 2014/95/EU on disclosure

of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups. The directive, referred to as the non-financial reporting directive, amended the EU accounting directive and placed new requirements for large companies or groups with more than 500 employees, including banks, insurance companies and large listed companies, to report annually on their policies in regard to environmental matters, social and employee matters, respect for human rights and bribery and corruption. These new rules took effect in Ireland for financial years starting on or after 1 August 2017.

I am aware that the EU Commission has further advised that the TFCDD recommendations, while voluntary, are widely recognised as authoritative guidance on the reporting of financially material climate-related information and the Commission has encouraged financial regulators to implement them. It has provided guidance to companies on climate-related reporting that is consistent with the non-financial reporting directive and the recommendations of the TFCDD. These are to assist companies in regard to their disclosures, including guidelines on climate related disclosures, in order that they can provide relevant, useful and concise reports. I understand that the Commission may consider a review of the directive with a view to addressing issues such as the availability and comparability of the non-financial information being disclosed.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: It appears that Ireland is not connected to this at all. As far as I can see, only two companies are involved in any way in this process, AIB and the Euronext Dublin Stock Exchange. What are some of the large publicly quoted companies in this country? They all have significant climate risks. They include Glanbia, the Kerry Group, CRH and Ryanair, and have exposure because they are in high emissions businesses. It is in their interests to be up first, if they are not to face into a world where they will have difficulties in terms of their ability to raise finance, attract customers and avoid some of the costs that come with non-compliance with proper reporting. We should be ahead of the game rather than waiting for the Commission to make this sort of reporting mandatory.

I am not sure exactly what the Department can do in that regard. To be honest, I would be nervous about trying to involve the Department of Finance because I am looking at this from an enterprise strategy rather than a financial regulatory strategy point of view. It is important that Irish businesses wake up and realise that carrying an Origin Green band with no real disclosure on what they are actually doing from the field to a customer's fork and plate is no longer credible. The Kerry Group can sell a lot of baby powder, but if it is not disclosing where it is coming from and how it is working it is exposed as a company, just as are all large Irish companies. I encourage the Minister, on an enterprise strategy basis, to get active about this.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The enterprise sector has been tasked with reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 10% to 15% by 2030. The climate action plan identified that the largest reductions in greenhouse gas emissions can be realised in the cement and food and beverage industries. An uptake of 80% in the cement industry in using alternative fuels, such as waste, combined with an 80% uptake in a switch from oil to biomass and electricity in the food industry by 2030, would adequately reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the industry target of a reduction of 10% to 15%. Enterprise will also contribute to the ambitious targets for buildings, that is a reduction of 20% to 25% by 2030, as well as a reduction in transport emissions of some 45% to 50% by 2030. That will be done via actions such as improving building energy performance and the replacement, over time, of commercial fleets with electric vehicles.

We are working closely with Enterprise Ireland and it is putting greater emphasis on environmental aid to help businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. Where we are providing

finance and support to businesses, through Enterprise Ireland, we can ensure that those companies are making an improvement in their carbon footprint, such as via the use of combined heat and power equipment. It is good for businesses to improve and reduce their energy costs and to explore more initiatives to enable them be more environmentally-friendly. That makes sense.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: That is important for enterprise and also for the finance community. If we look down the road just a little, AIB has stated that it is going green. Its neighbour, Barclays Bank, was cited recently by Mr. Bill McKibben, a famous climate campaigner, as one of the top ten worst banks and financial institutions for lending to the fossil fuel sector. That sector will increasingly be at risk as those assets risk becoming stranded assets. It was also interesting recently that a survey showed Dublin at the bottom of the table in the context of the green Irish Financial Services Centre, IFSC, and being ahead of the curve in low-carbon financing and lending. That survey found London and Amsterdam as the European bourses seeking to promote this idea the most.

The advantage of initiating the TFCF is that it would bring other expertise or pressure to bear on the funds, treasury management and derivatives sector of the financial services and lending industry in Ireland to ensure that they report their financial and risk exposure if they are still lending and-or trading in high-carbon assets. The IFSC is important to Dublin. Some 30,000 people work there and it needs to be at the top of the league in the context of agenda rather than playing catch-up or being Paddy last which I fear is the case now.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The enterprise agencies are focused on the transition to a green economy. Future Jobs Ireland is one of the ways we can help businesses transition to a low-carbon economy. If we examine some of the supports that enterprise agencies are rolling out, whether it is IDA Ireland or Enterprise Ireland, we can see programmes and initiatives such as lean-green, which encourages businesses to implement lean business principles, paired with good environmental management practices. There is also Enterprise Ireland's GreenPlus scheme, as well as the GreenStart programme targeted at SMEs to aid them with regulatory compliance. There are opportunities in the low-carbon environment for companies to find work and there are some fantastic indigenous companies exploring many energy-saving mechanisms. There is much investment in that research through the disruptive technologies innovation fund and many projects we have supported include climate energy and sustainability aspects.

Ireland, however, has many small enterprises. I do not want to put further burdens on those companies. Instead, I want to reduce it and particularly in the area of administration. We can encourage and support such enterprises to transition to the low-carbon economy because it is most certainly in their interests to make that change and we will get good results by working with them.

Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions

Employment Rights

44. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the work she is carrying out in respect of the right to disconnect; if she will consider the development of guidelines for employers and employees in the area; and if she will make a statement

on the matter. [50130/19]

Deputy Pat Deering: The new era of modern working environments has led to great changes in recent years. New communications and other technologies have caused the boundaries between work life and home life to be increasingly blurred. New digital tools mean that work life has changed greatly for employees and employers. There is, however, an absence of limits in this area. I would like to know what the Minister and her Department are doing with regard to a right to disconnect. Will she consider the development of guidelines for employers and employees in this area?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank Deputy Deering for raising this matter. As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I understand the growing importance of promoting a good work-life balance for employees as new ways of working emerge. This is addressed under pillar 4 of our 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 economy.

Ambition 4.2 under pillar 4 aims to foster participation through flexible working solutions. This includes several deliverables aimed at promoting flexible working. I refer, for example, to the production of guidelines for employers on flexible and family-friendly working options. Flexible working encompasses a wide range of practices including part-time, compressed hours, job sharing, home-working and remote working. Such solutions allow for tangible benefits for employees, including improving work-life balance. It also provides solutions for those who would otherwise take unpaid parental leave but cannot afford to do so.

A key deliverable under this ambition is the completion of research on remote working. My Department is leading on this research, which will focus on understanding the prevalence and the types of remote working arrangements within the Irish workforce and the attitudes towards such arrangements. The research will identify the influencing factors for both employers and employees partaking in remote working. The final report will also include an international policy review which will consider related policy developments abroad, such as the right to disconnect. This will help to inform future policy on remote work. The final report will be published shortly.

Given the increasing digitalisation of the workforce, I believe it is important from a work-life balance perspective that there are clearly defined guidelines regarding workers' rights to switch off after office hours.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997, which covers such matters, falls under the policy remit of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. I have, therefore, discussed this matter with my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, in the context of developing Future Jobs 2020.

Deputy Pat Deering: I thank the Minister for that comprehensive reply. As she rightly states, we are in a different era now. We have continuous access to our phones and emails. We also have many means of communication. People in flexible working environments are now contactable 24 hours a day. The job can be brought home by the employees and they can be expected to work when they are at home as well, whether it is Sunday or Monday and 7 p.m. or 10 p.m. As politicians, we all know that experience. We regularly receive emails from

people at 10 p.m, midnight or even 1 a. m. We have, unfortunately, created an expectation, in these Houses and outside, of instant replies to emails. I welcome the Minister's commitment in respect of guidelines. It is important that definite guidelines are laid down in order to ensure that pressure is not put on people to work at home. It is important that people enjoy a balanced lifestyle. To get the full benefit, employees have to be treated in a fair and equitable way.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: Being able to switch off from work is already an issue and it is going to become more of an issue in the years to come. Our phones are causing these problems. Phones allow us to be contacted by phone or to email 24-7, and that means people are always on. It is not like long ago, when people left work and went home at 6 p.m. Some of us probably remember when there were no computers at home, so there was no need to worry them until going back into work the next morning at 9 a.m. There is now a sense of always being on and of never being able to switch off and enjoy time with one's family. That is impacting on people's lives. It is not good for work-life balance and the problem will only become worse in the future because of the impact of technology. Things are only going in one direction.

When I met representatives of the Financial Services Union a few weeks ago, they told me that this is a big issue in the financial services sector. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is putting together a report on remote working. As part of that process, we are looking at what is happening in other countries. The report will look at how the right to disconnect has worked in France. My own view is that the legislation might not be the way to go. We must remember that one size will not fit all. We have to consult. I know the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, is consulting some of the employer organisations.

Deputy Pat Deering: The Minister said in her original reply that she is in favour of guidelines. Will she give us an indication of the potential timeline for some of these guidelines being introduced after this report is completed? It is important for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to take a leading role in this matter. As the Minister has rightly identified, the phone is the greatest enemy of employees and employers at the moment. I made this point a few minutes ago. Will the Minister give us an indication of the timelines that will be involved in the possible introduction of guidelines?

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I have spoken to the Minister, Deputy Doherty. The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 falls under her remit. She has agreed that we need to examine this area. She is consulting representative bodies like IBEC and ICTU to get their views. I hope that by consulting and hearing different views, we will be able to come up with some sensible guidelines to help everyone. Some businesses that are doing this might not realise the stress it is causing to some workers. I have got a few messages about it. Some workers have been affected. We do not want them to feel bullied or pressurised into taking calls or reading emails. We will deal with this as part of the Future Jobs Ireland initiative.

Company Registration

45. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies by size that had filed with the new Register of Beneficial Ownership, which is overseen by the Companies Registration Office, by 22 November 2019; the number of filings as a percentage of all companies that have filed according to size breakdown; the number of companies by size that did not file with the RBO by this date; and the number as a percentage

of all companies that did not file according to size breakdown. [50140/19]

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Lahart): Question No. 45, in the name of Deputy Troy, will be introduced by Deputy Scanlon.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I would like the Minister of State to give the House the total number of companies, broken down by size, that had filed with the new Register of Beneficial Ownership, RBO, which is overseen by the Companies Registration Office, by 22 November last; to give the total number of filings as a percentage of all companies that had filed by that date according to size and breakdown; to give the total number of companies, broken down by size, that did not file with the RBO by this date; and to give the total number as a percentage of all companies that did not file according to size and breakdown.

Deputy Pat Breen: I thank Deputy Scanlon for introducing this question. The European Union (Anti-Money Laundering: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2019, SI 110 of 2019, which were made by the Minister for Finance, provide that the Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies is the central repository of such information held by companies and industrial and provident societies. The deadline for filing, as set out in the regulations, was 22 November last. The objectives of the beneficial ownership provisions that are being implemented are to strengthen transparency regarding who ultimately owns and controls companies and trusts and to detect, disrupt and prevent money laundering and terrorist financing effectively.

The number of companies filing increased steadily throughout last week as the deadline approached. Due to technical difficulties, any submissions filed with the RBO by midnight on 25 November were treated by the RBO as having been received on time. Data from the RBO show that 152,989 companies had successfully registered beneficial ownership details with it by 25 November. This represents approximately 67% of the total number of registered companies. I believe this figure will continue to increase as submissions received before the deadline are processed. Unfortunately, a breakdown by size of company is not available. The focus of the RBO staff is on processing the many thousands of submissions that have been received. That work will be continuing. We will get the Deputy an update on that as time goes on.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I am glad to hear that the percentage of applications received has reached 67%. It would be very unfair if companies were penalised for a systems failure. There was a five-week period during which this system was set up and people had to register. Registering companies had to file with the new RBO at a time when they were preoccupied with tax returns. Will the Minister of State give companies that have not filed by Friday of this week more time to submit their registrations by extending the deadline to the end of the month? This would be an act of fairness and common sense for all small businesses.

Deputy Pat Breen: I have a further update for the Deputy. On 27 November last, the number of companies that had registered was 157,577, or 69%. Given that we are further on again at this stage, I would say that over 70% of companies have now registered. They are being processed at present. We can expect further news on that.

I have to say that the deadline cannot be extended. I assure the Deputy that the RBO will take a reasonable, fair, practical and appropriate approach to this matter. Each entity that attempted to file with the RBO on time but missed the deadline will be dealt with case by case in accordance with its particular circumstances. The message we should transmit this evening

should be that companies and societies that have not yet filed should do so as a matter of urgency. There was a fairly good advertising and public awareness campaign aimed at securing an increase in the number of companies registering. Emails were sent to 225,000 companies and 1,000 industrial and provident societies. Advertisements were placed in daily and Sunday newspapers and on local radio. A reasonable, fair and appropriate approach has been taken to ensure all companies get registered.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: If 70% of companies have registered, that means 30% of companies have not yet done so. I ask that they be treated fairly. Not every company has the wherewithal to comply with all of these regulations. I am sure all companies will do so eventually. There is no doubt about that. It would be wrong if companies were penalised in any way. Each of them is trying to do its best to create jobs and survive in the world of today. I hope they will be treated fairly.

Deputy Pat Breen: I assure the Deputy that they will be treated fairly. We all know about deadlines like our own income tax deadlines. People tend to wait until the last minute to pay these things or to get registered. As I have said, a steady flow of registrations is coming into the RBO at the moment. They are being processed. They will be treated fairly. I hope we can get that figure much higher before the end of the year to ensure all companies are registered. The awareness campaign I have mentioned will continue. People will be treated quite fairly.

Industrial Development

46. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the changes in policy that are proposed to ensure the accelerated growth of the indigenous high-tech industrial sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49685/19]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I think we have to look to the future. Questions Nos. 46 and 47 are basically related. I know they are being taken separately. I have tabled Question No. 46 to ascertain what is being done to ensure the indigenous high-tech sector continues to grow. We have to make a big effort to ensure the indigenous high-tech industrial sector grows in the years to come.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. He is absolutely right when he says that we always have to look to the future. That is why the Taoiseach and I launched the Future Jobs Ireland initiative earlier this year. The initiative positions Irish enterprise and Irish workers for the world of tomorrow. The pace of change means that the world of tomorrow is coming down the tracks at us very quickly. The indigenous high-tech industrial sector is a key sector of focus for Enterprise Ireland. In line with its Build Scale, Expand Reach strategy, which runs from 2017 to 2020, Enterprise Ireland is helping companies in the high-tech industrial sector to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets now and into the future. To support the accelerated growth of start-ups in this area, Enterprise Ireland's high-potential start-ups division provides financial and non-financial support to innovative start-ups that have the potential to develop an innovative product or service for sale in international markets, as well as the potential to create a minimum of ten jobs and €1 million in sales within three years of starting up. This support includes equity funding of up to €250,000, which Enterprise Ireland invests in partnership with other investors in an investment round. Other supports include innovation vouchers, mentors and capability building programmes such as excel at selling and investor-ready training.

To support established companies in this sector with accelerated growth, Enterprise Ireland engages with client companies through its teams of sectoral focused development advisers using a company-led diagnostic approach, which is used to establish clients' business needs. The agency can then tailor a support package to the company's growth potential based on its ambition, capability and need. A support package focuses, where relevant, on six business pillars, namely, innovation, finance, operations, sales and marketing, people and organisational development.

Support to client companies is awarded based on an agreed business plan. Enterprise Ireland supports focus on innovation to enable companies to develop new market opportunities and maximise their business performance; competitiveness to identify and measure issues for clients; and internationalisation to assist companies tackle the main challenges of breaking into new markets.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Does the Minister accept that in the past the reason for foreign direct investment was that such companies had the technical know-how and money and that in our early industrial history we did not even have the educational back-up? Does she also accept that in terms of education our graduates, working both at home and abroad, are as good as any in the world and that many of them have experience working in the high-tech sector? To get industries up and running we need money and we need to attract and encourage our graduates to develop these industries. The Minister referred to investment of €250,000. If she had experience in the financial world, she would know that in industrial terms €250,000 is a small amount. What steps are being taken to ensure that there will be adequate, real finance available to start-ups, incubation business in, for example, the universities and people who have already worked in the high-tech sector, to take them to viable status? The sum of €250,000 is too small an amount in terms of investment to get them to that stage.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: The €250,000 is for the high potential start-up units. It is just one of a range of supports available to businesses. I refer the Deputy to the document, Overview of Government Supports for Indigenous Businesses, which is available on my Department's website. It is a useful document, which outlines all of the supports that are available to help companies to scale up, invest in research and innovation and improve their management capabilities. The OECD review of our indigenous sector published last month contains a number of suggestions that I will act on as part of the SME strategy. We want to target a 50% increase in the number of SMEs exporting through the expansion of programmes and the development of export capable firms. We also want to broaden the policy focus at the local enterprise offices, which are doing wonderful work with companies, to enable them to work with more companies and increase the adoption of best practice management techniques, including in the key challenge areas of digital and automation skills, sales, marketing and accountancy. We also want to encourage a wider take-up of Skillnet Ireland programmes to develop management capabilities in the Irish SME sector. I also want start-ups to step up their financial skills. Research has shown that while many of our businesses are really good, they are not capable of making good propositions to banks to secure funding. Rather than always looking to traditional lending, they need to look at equity and a range of financial instruments that they can use to invest in their business.

In regard to our young people, I go abroad on trade missions with pride. We have one of the best educated workforces in the world such that when foreign direct investment is coming to this country we can point to our young, highly educated and agile workforce. Also, as a committed member of the European Union, we have access to a huge market. There are many

positives.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I accept that there are many positives but we have to look every day at where the challenges and opportunities are. On the opportunity side, there are many people at home and abroad working in multinational companies who already have much of the experience the Minister speaks about, which they have earned. They worked their way through the education system and then went to work in industry and so on. What programmes are in place to encourage these people to leave their comfort zone and get involved in setting up and growing industries of their own?

The second part of my question was about incubation companies that come out of the universities. In many places around the world where industry has developed in modern times, it came out of education establishments. How does the Minister propose to ensure that people have access to the risk funds that are necessary to bring incubations onto the market? The Western Development Commission was very successful in taking a punt and had more winners than losers. What does the Minister propose to do to ensure there is a steady flow of cash? There will be some losers and some winners, but there will be more winners than losers.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: We have some really good Irish companies. We are working with the SMEs on how to work collaboratively with foreign direct investment to leverage some of their talent, skills and experience. When both work together the results are better. Under the disruptive technologies innovation fund, another tranche of which I will be announcing soon, one of the qualifying criteria is the involvement of an SME. This is about disruptive technologies coming on stream into the future and collaboration in that regard between the universities, the foreign direct investment sector and indigenous companies. We have many innovation hubs in our universities. Enterprise Ireland is one of the largest investors in the world in terms of venture capital and one of the largest in Europe. We support our companies through Enterprise Ireland.

Corporation Tax Regime

47. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions taking place between her Department and the relevant development agencies to reposition enterprise policy in view of the changes in the tax regime of the United States of America and other changes taking place worldwide that could reduce the attractiveness of Ireland to foreign direct industrial investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49684/19]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Will the Minister accept that there are huge changes taking place worldwide in regard to those attractions that Ireland has, for example, on the taxation front? What discussions are taking place at a high level to reposition Irish foreign direct investment to meet the new challenges that are definitely coming down the road, such that in eight or nine years' time rather than relying on the past, we will be building a totally new future? Every 20 years, we need to reposition ourselves in this market.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue.

There is no doubt that the international tax landscape has seen much change in recent years. There has been real progress in global actions aimed at addressing international concerns around

the taxation of multinational companies. There have been significant changes in how companies are taxed internationally and how the taxation regimes of countries interact with each other. My colleague, the Minister for Finance, has ably steered a course for Ireland through this ongoing transition by providing transparency, stability and certainty to the greatest extent possible. These are the features of a tax code that businesses truly value.

The publication of Ireland's corporation tax roadmap in September 2018, outlining the steps taken to date and the timelines and options for future changes, demonstrated this commitment to transparency and certainty. Ireland's continued participation in OECD discussions on the future reforms of digital taxation is further evidence of our engagement in this reform process. Ireland has continued to attract foreign direct investments. In fact, since the US tax reforms were enacted almost two years ago, IDA Ireland reports that 2018 saw 134 new name investments compared to 111 in 2017, an increase of over 20%.

These successes illustrate that our corporation tax regime, while important, is only one element of Ireland's value proposition for FDI. Ireland has a number of key strengths that continue to make us a highly attractive destination for FDI. These include our highly-skilled workers, excellent education system and positive demographics. Our membership of the EU and eurozone and pro-enterprise policy environment are other significant selling points. These strengths help IDA Ireland to provide a strong case to investors considering investing in Ireland. They also help to explain our strong national performance in terms of FDI-driven investment and job creation, with over 230,000 people now employed here by IDA Ireland client firms.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We certainly have had a great run of it but towards the end of her reply, the Minister touched on changes taking place, particularly in the USA, over which we have no control. Does the Minister agree that the lead-in time for an industry setting up in Ireland from the first contact with IDA Ireland could be anything up to eight years? Therefore, we are currently getting decisions on situations that were initiated six to eight years ago. I do not expect all the multinationals which have invested here to move away. The problem is the pipeline of six to eight years time. Other than the obvious advantages outlined by the Minister, that of education, a growing population and so on, what repositioning is taking place because changes are occurring which change some of the advantages that Ireland had? We cannot deny it. We always claimed in the past that tax was part of the package and I have no doubt that it was.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I understand from IDA Ireland that the pipeline of FDI companies coming to Ireland is still strong. While we have been successful I agree that we cannot be complacent. IDA Ireland will publish its new 2020-24 strategy early in the new year. It will build on the success of the current strategy which has exceeded targets around investment and job creation and with inputs from a wide variety of stakeholders, aims to ensure that Ireland retains its attractiveness for FDI. Future Jobs Ireland is the Government's framework for preparing Ireland for the challenges it faces for the economy of tomorrow. Each year, a report is published which sets out the annual steps needed to deliver on the ultimate goal of increasing our economy's resilience and future-proofing it. It focuses on key policy areas and enablers such as innovation, technological change, productivity, skills, labour force participation and the transition to the low carbon economy. This will lead to the creation of productive, sustainable jobs by ensuring that we have skilled people working in quality jobs in sustainable sectors.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Minister has not really addressed the purpose of the question which was to examine events outside the island and ask how we are responding. We already

know that we are good in education, in demography and we are in the Single Market, so we have those advantages. Please God, we will also have access to the British market and will retain it. It is a big market. Tax regimes are changing, as the Minister pointed out, and have already changed quite substantially. Let us think beyond 2024; what about 2024-30? Are there serious discussions looking at what other countries are doing and what we should do to reposition ourselves to keep ahead of the game? The biggest danger in policy is always complacency with something that has succeeded up until now.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: We continue to increase our footprint in other areas of the world. I recently returned from a trade mission to South Africa and Kenya. The population there is expected to increase by 1 billion over the next 30 years, I think. There are huge opportunities there. We are increasing our footprint in China and there was a trade mission to Japan some weeks ago. It is about not being over-reliant on one particular region and spreading our footprint into emerging economies. IDA Ireland is in the process of finalising its new strategy which will take account of the developing international tax environment. We must also consider our indigenous companies. The most important thing is to ensure that we support our indigenous companies in investing in R&D and innovation so that they can compete, scale up and reach new markets. Being competitive is the most important thing.

Job Creation

48. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the efforts she is making in conjunction with the IDA to secure foreign direct investment to rural parts of south County Kildare. [49752/19]

78. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of recent activities by the IDA in County Kildare towards job creation and attracting new industry to the area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50044/19]

Deputy Martin Heydon: The Government's national planning framework and Project Ireland 2040 focus on making our counties, including Kildare, better places to live in, to work and to visit. In that context, what is the status of recent activity by IDA Ireland in County Kildare towards job creation and attracting new industry to our area so that we can provide more local employment opportunities for Kildare residents?

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 78 together.

Regional development remains a key priority for the 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 very positive that significant progress has already been made towards that objective. For example, 58% of all IDA Ireland client-supported employment is now situated outside Dublin. This figure represents the highest level of regional employment in the history of IDA Ireland and reflects the significant energy and resources invested in supporting regional development. We will seek to increase that number in 2020.

IDA Ireland continues to draw the attention of investors looking to locate in Kildare to every part of that county. There are 29 IDA Ireland-supported client companies in County Kildare, which collectively employ almost 8,900 people. This represents an increase of 4.5% over 2018 and I expect the final results for 2019 will show further employment growth. The county has a strong contingent of overseas firms in the technology, financial services and pharmaceuticals sectors. IDA Ireland clients such as Intel and Procter and Gamble are located in Kildare and continue to perform very well.

IDA Ireland's efforts to increase foreign direct investment, FDI, in Kildare is strengthened by the presence of Maynooth University. The university has been involved in a number of research projects with IDA Ireland client companies. The Hamilton Institute is a world leading research unit in ICT with a focus on drones, artificial intelligence and robotics and the Innovation Value Institute has been co-developed with Intel.

County Kildare remains a very attractive area in which to invest. We welcome the recent decision by An Bord Pleanála to grant planning permission to Intel for its proposed new €3.6 billion manufacturing fabrication, FAB, facility at Leixlip. This planning permission comes three years after Intel secured planning permission for the first phase of the FAB facility investment which was also valued at €3.6 billion. In total, these represent a €7.2 billion investment which will employ 6,000 construction workers at the peak of its development and 1,600 jobs on completion. This high calibre investment reflects Kildare's significant potential and we will be working hard to attract further investment from overseas companies to the county.

While progress has been made in helping to generate new economic opportunities, the Government remains determined to achieve more. That is why we are continuing to unlock the further future economic development of the county.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I thank the Minister of State for his comprehensive response. He is correct that many positive things are happening in Kildare around employment. As a Kildare South TD I must point out that most of that activity is in the northern end of the county which is closer to the Dublin metropolitan area. I want to see opportunities for people in south Kildare. The 2016 census data highlighted that Kildare has the sixth highest level of outbound commuters in the State at 39%. According to the census, 31,710 Kildare residents are employed in the Dublin metropolitan area and, according to interim results from Kildare County Council's commuter survey, Kildare commuters spend, on average, one hour and nine minutes getting to and from work each day. Over 12% of commuters spend between one and a half and two hours going to and from work each day.

I want to see more plentiful opportunities for these people and I raise this matter in the context of seeking better job opportunities for my constituents in south Kildare. I welcome the decision of IDA Ireland to purchase a significant landbank at Little Connell outside Newbridge. This 111-acre site is a really exciting prospect for us and the Minister of State might outline the next steps for IDA Ireland in trying to promote the landbank and the employment opportunities for Kildare residents.

Deputy Pat Breen: I thank the Deputy, who has been lobbying the Minister and me for more jobs into the Kildare region. I can confirm that IDA Ireland recently acquired a landbank measuring 85.5 ha. at Newbridge, County Kildare. The acquisition was a unique opportunity for IDA Ireland to acquire a strategic landbank of scale with the benefit of current and ongoing infrastructure delivery aligning with the organisational objectives of delivering high-quality

property solutions for future industrial development needs to both FDI and indigenous enterprises. The location and availability of the new strategic landbank in the mid-east region will assist in enhancing the regional spread of FDI.

The site in Kildare is a very attractive option for potential IDA Ireland clients, given the close proximity to Dublin city centre, Dublin airport and the port tunnel. The M7 motorway provides access to Cork, Limerick and Waterford, and Newbridge would be a central location for companies to work with key clients at these locations. The proximity of the wider eastern-based third level ecosystem and talent pool would also be attractive to client companies. Mixed-used opportunities could be attractive for collaboration and diversity of activity, including digital services, which we mentioned, and manufacturing. Small companies could be clustered around large life science players in the region. It is really good news for the region and I know the Deputy will welcome it.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I very much welcome this really important news, although the next steps are crucial. For many years, Kildare has lacked a strategic landbank that we could advertise and sell to FDI and even indigenous Irish companies with significant employment opportunities. We have looked with envy across our border at South Dublin County Council and Greenogue, as well as Carlow's MSD plant. They create plenty of employment for our residents in Kildare but we want those opportunities. This significant investment by IDA Ireland, using State funds to buy this landbank, is absolutely crucial to us.

The Minister of State is correct that this comes on the back of strategic investment by the Government in the upgrading of the M7 motorway, which cost €110 million, and the expansion of the Newbridge interceptor sewer. The Barrow abstraction scheme will give us a secure supply of water. We need a second bridge for Newbridge, which will help alleviate our traffic congestion problems in the town. The greatest asset we have, beyond all those pieces of infrastructure that have seen investment by the Government, is our residents in Kildare South, who are skilled and well-educated. They do not want to be stuck on the M7 and M50 commuting back and forth. We want that improved quality of life. Will the Minister of State encourage his Department and IDA Ireland to work directly with Kildare County Council, the local enterprise office and us as local public representatives to market this site and get the investment into Kildare as soon as possible?

Deputy Pat Breen: These are two pieces of good news for Deputy Heydon's constituency this week. The first is the decision of An Bord Pleanála on the Intel application. It is an innovative industry and Intel is a fantastic multinational company to have in the region. The availability of market servicing land and building in advance of demand remains a key element of IDA Ireland's ability to compete for mobile FDI. Not only does such a supply of properties help the agency to secure significant investment but it also allows projects to begin much earlier, as it diminishes the difficulties associated with land acquisition of a greenfield site, planning and construction. These are really important issues, particularly when we are trying to attract companies to Ireland. It is positive to have this in place for a company. One does not want matters associated with planning if looking at a site that has not yet been zoned. The Intel news and the announcement relating to the landbank will be great for County Kildare. I am sure there will be further investment in the region as we continue to attract FDI.

Question No. 49 replied to with Written Answers.

Job Creation

50. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to address the quality of jobs in the south east and the need for further investment there; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49749/19]

Deputy James Browne: Will the Minister address the quality of jobs in the south east and the need for further investment there? The south-east region has had the highest rate of unemployment on a consistent basis throughout the lifetime of this Government.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I call the Minister of State.

Deputy James Browne: On a point of order, last summer I asked a similar question and the senior Minister did not answer it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): That is not a point of order. It is a matter for the Department to determine who the appropriate Minister or Minister of State to answer a particular question is. It is the Minister of State who has indicated that he will answer.

Deputy James Browne: There is no senior Minister in the south east and it is consistently lagging in the context of this matter.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): That is not a point of order.

Deputy James Browne: The senior Minister should be taking this question.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy should take his seat. That is not a point of order.

Deputy James Browne: On what basis is the Minister allowed to delegate this question?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): That is not a point of order. It is not a matter for the Chair to determine which Minister or Minister of State should respond.

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): Enterprise development and sustainable job creation in the regions is a key policy priority of this Government. A total of 20,900 more people in the south east are in employment in 2019 than in 2015 when the Regional Action Plan for Jobs started and unemployment in the south east has reduced from 11.7% to 7.3% in the same period.

Although we have had very good success through the Regional Action Plan for Jobs in reducing unemployment, in the context of Brexit and other global challenges we also need to focus on the creation of quality and sustainable jobs in the area. Future Jobs Ireland, launched earlier this year, is our plan to meet these challenges. It includes ambitious targets and actions to drive this transformation of our economy.

The Minister and I launched the south-east regional enterprise plan last March, with strategic objectives focused on building enterprise resilience, marketing the region, a regional engagement strategy on key infrastructure priorities, ensuring that the south east is a learning region and an area of tourism growth. The plan has commenced implementation, led by the regional steering committee, involving the local authorities, enterprise agencies, local enterprise offices, tourism bodies, higher education institutions, education and training boards and others.

In the south east, there were 15,580 people employed across 76 IDA Ireland client companies in 2018. This was an increase of almost 7% on 2017. IDA Ireland will continue to work to identify opportunities for new investment or expansion in the south east, promoting the region's existing concentrations of pharmaceuticals, medical technology, financial services, agricultural technology and high value manufacturing activities.

In 2018, there were 25,214 people employed in Enterprise Ireland-supported companies in the south east, up 5% from 2017. Powering the Regions is Enterprise Ireland's new regional plan and it sets out the focus of its activities regionally, including for the south east. There was a net increase of 293 jobs supported by the five south-east local enterprise offices during 2018.

Deputy James Browne: The south east has consistently had the highest rate of unemployment of any region but there is no focus on it. For the second time in six months, the senior Minister will not even address this matter. That is the level of contempt this Government is showing the south east.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: That is not true.

Deputy James Browne: Some 20,000 people are leaving Wexford in their cars each day in order to go to jobs elsewhere, with 14,000 of them from the Gorey area alone. They are stuck in a car park on the N11 because the Government will not address public transport issues. Many new train carriages have just been ordered but not one is for the Rosslare to Dublin rail line. We are told it will take 15 years for the N11 to be upgraded. A few minutes ago, we heard that 80 ha of land had been purchased in Kildare for the purposes of enterprise development. The land in question is in addition to that already being used to foster development in the county. There are 4 ha available in County Wexford and the head of IDA Ireland stated in a letter that there is no intention to purchase any further land there.

The south east is the forgotten region and Wexford is the forgotten county in the south east. The rate of tax returns for people working in the south east is half that of the rest of the country, which reflects the low quality of jobs available there. A little focus must be brought to this matter. I want the senior Minister to address the question for once, please.

Deputy John Halligan: It is unfair to say that the Minister has not taken an interest in the south east.

Deputy James Browne: She is just sitting there.

Deputy John Halligan: The Minister has visited the south east on a number of occasions and I speak to her regularly on matters pertaining to the region.

Deputy James Browne: Why can the Minister not speak for herself?

Deputy John Halligan: I told the Deputy that IDA Ireland jobs in the region had increased by 7% and that both the Minister and I regularly met IDA Ireland's representatives in the south east, including the representatives of Wexford, Waterford, etc. In 2015, the unemployment rate stood at 11.7% and now stands at 5.3%. The national unemployment rate, which stood at 10.5%, has declined to 5.2% in the same period. The Deputy will note progress is being made in the south east driven by the Minister, Deputy Humphreys, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

A total of 20,900 more people in the south east are in employment. All the indications are that three out of every five new jobs created in 2018 and 2019 were outside Dublin. The

work done by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, in conjunction with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the local enterprise offices, and driven by the Minister, Deputy Humphreys, has delivered the reduction in unemployment in the south east. The Deputy cannot argue with the figures. I accept at one stage the unemployment rate in the south east was much higher than in other regions but it has substantially decreased. If the Deputy were to look back to 2013 and 2015 and then look forward to 2018 and 2019, he would note the substantial increase in employment in the south east.

Deputy James Browne: The Minister of State said the unemployment rate in the south east was 5.3%. It is not. The 5.3% figure is the national average. The unemployment rate in the south east is 7.3%, which is 40% above the national average and twice the unemployment rate of Dublin. The quality of jobs is also a factor. The rate of tax returns from employed people in the south east is barely half the national average. People in the south east are working in low-paid jobs in tourism and agriculture. Quality jobs are not being brought to the region. There have been two visits by IDA Ireland to Wexford in the past year. Where is the focus? Where is the determination to address an important part of the country that is not being given the focus it needs?

Legislation was proposed specifically to develop a university for the south east, yet it is nowhere near being further advanced four years into the life of this Government. Rosslare Europort is operating at 38% capacity while down the road from this House in Dublin, ships are being turned away. Not one senior Minister has bothered to bring up the ownership of Rosslare Europort with his or her UK counterpart. There is a total and utter failure to address issues in the south east, emphasised and exemplified by the fact that, for a second time in a row, the senior Minister has not addressed the issue.

Deputy John Halligan: The Deputy is incorrect again. I said the unemployment rate in the south east reduced from 11.7% to 7.3%. I said the national employment rate decreased from 10.5% to 5.2%. The Deputy mentioned legislation to provide university status for the institutes in the region. Negotiations are already taking place between Waterford and Carlow institutes of technology.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: They are working together.

Deputy John Halligan: Substantial money has been made available by the Government-----

Deputy James Browne: That has been going on since I went to Waterford Institute of Technology 20 years ago.

Deputy John Halligan: -----to join the Institute of Technology Carlow and Waterford Institute of Technology, WIT. Both entities are engaged in negotiations.

The Government has put several funding streams in place to support regional development in the south east, including the Department's regional enterprise development fund, REDF. As of June 2019, the south east region has secured a total of €10 million from the fund. The Minister announced a further €45 million of funding under call 3 of the REDF and she intends to announce the successful projects by the end of the year. The percentage of the funding being garnered by the south east is at least at the level, if not way ahead, of the funding being secured in other areas. The facts and figures are clear. Three out of every five jobs that have been created during the past nine months have been outside Dublin, with a substantial number created in the south east.

Harbours and Piers Development

51. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to proposals to establish a new enterprise at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50142/19]

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: My question relates to the former Stena terminal building in Dún Laoghaire Harbour and the moves by the council to develop some sort of new enterprise there. The problem is that elected representatives - councillors and I - and the wider public have no clue as to how the expressions of interest process was set up, how the council decided to pick a preferred bidder and what criteria were used in doing so given that it excluded some and included others. In addition, there was no public consultation as to how all this would contribute to enhancing Dún Laoghaire Harbour as a public amenity. I hope the Minister will be able to enlighten us as to what the hell is going on in Dún Laoghaire Harbour because the people of Dún Laoghaire do not know.

Deputy John Halligan: I may not be able to do that and I will tell Deputy the reason. I am aware of the proposal to which he referred. I understand the process is being led by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. I welcome the development of support infrastructures for enterprise development from any quarter. The development in this case does not fall under the jurisdiction of this Department. The reason is simple. The Deputy asked what we knew about this development. To date, the Department has not received any application. It would be foolish of me to give the Deputy a detailed analysis as to what is happening with regard to that particular development. My officials have informed me today that the Department has not received any application from the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown local authority.

The Deputy may be aware that the Minister has made available three successive rounds of funding under the Department's regional enterprise development fund, totalling €105 million. This fund is aimed at supporting the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at county, regional and national level. Applications to the fund must be from either a designated activity company, DAC, or a company limited by guarantee, CLG. I will explain that to the Deputy if wishes. To date, Dublin has received €9.3 million in funding through calls 1 and 2 of the REDF. The most recent round, a €45 million call 3 of the REDF, has closed and applications are being evaluated. The Minister will announce the successful projects on conclusion of the evaluation process in due course. Should the Government, through Enterprise Ireland, be in a position to launch further rounds of the REDF, the project promoters in this case may wish to consider applying for this competitive funding, subject to the project meeting the eligibility criteria for participation.

The Minister launched the Dublin regional enterprise plan last February, with strategic objectives focused on availability of skills and talent; increasing enterprise engagement in research, development and innovation; building a pipeline of sustainable start-ups; and enhancing the attractiveness of Dublin as a place to live and invest.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Minister of State's time is up. He will have an opportunity to contribute again.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: All I can say is the plot thickens. I would be delighted if there were funds available under the Department's regional enterprise development fund. What I find an absolute mystery is that Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council decided on a pre-

ferred bidder to set up a new enterprise in this central location in the middle of Dún Laoghaire Harbour and it has not even spoken to the Department about it. There is no more important site in Dún Laoghaire. The council will not tell local councillors or Deputies about this development and, needless to say, the public have been completely kept in the dark, even though the site in question is in public ownership. We discovered yesterday that the council decided it had a preferred bidder, a crowd called Lapetus Investments headed by Hilary Haydon. I took the trouble to go online to see who these people were and found they had an address in an accountancy firm on Amiens Street. That is all I could find out about them. They have now been given the green light by the unelected executive of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to take over the centre of Dún Laoghaire Harbour. This is unbelievable. I am not blaming the Minister of State for not knowing about it but it is shocking that this could be done without any engagement with the public as to what they might like in their harbour in their town.

Deputy John Halligan: As the development referred to by the Deputy is being led by the local authority in Dún Laoghaire, it does not fall within the remit of the Department. To be frank, the Minister and I have not been given any substantial information on the development.

As I stated, the Department's REDF, totalling €105 million, was made available to stimulate enterprise growth and job creation in Ireland, including in the Dublin region. It is up to the councillors in the region and the local authority in Dún Laoghaire to make contact with the Department. I can give the Deputy all sorts of information about Dublin and what is involved but this development does not come under my Department's remit. I have been told by the officials that no application has been made to the Department. Therefore, it is almost impossible for us to comment on the important issue the Deputy has raised regarding the site.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It should be a matter of concern to the Government that an unelected executive is making decisions about a very important site, which is of huge value to the people of the area and could generate significant employment and benefits for the area, without reference to anybody. I cannot get information in the House. In the email I have in my hand, councillors are told that a preferred bidder has been picked but that they cannot be told who that bidder is until such time as all negotiations are complete. They will be told after the decision has been made and the contracts signed. I am aware that at least five other companies submitted expressions of interest but these were dismissed by the executive of the council without any democratic discussion with either the Minister of State or the council. That is not the way to do business with public property. This site in Dún Laoghaire is beloved and absolutely critical to the future of the town. People wish to locate a national maritime and marine sports centre or a diaspora museum at the site. They want something that will create employment opportunities to the benefit of the town rather than a mystery development. No one has any knowledge about, or say in, what the hell is going on in our town and harbour.

Deputy John Halligan: We are aware of the proposals. That is all we are aware of. As I said in my initial response, we understand that this is being led by the local authority in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. Having been on a local authority for many years, as the Deputy also has, I imagine that, if he feels something is not right, it would be up to the councillors of that authority to hold people to account.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The executive will not tell us about it. It is a secret.

Deputy John Halligan: It would also be up to the Dún Laoghaire authority to make contact with the Department on the relevant issues, if it believes that is necessary. To be frank, the

Deputy and I have both sat on councils to which applications are consistently made which are not referred to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. This happens on many occasions. I will commit to investigating this matter to the best of the Department's ability and I will come back to the Deputy in that regard. If I say we will do that, we will do that. The current position, however, is that this matter is not within the Department's remit.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Court Sittings

Deputy John McGuinness: I raise the decision to cancel the High Court list in Kilkenny at short notice. When the High Court sits in Kilkenny each year it deals with quite a number of cases pretty efficiently. It was explained to the president of the Kilkenny Solicitors Bar Association that this cancellation resulted from a shortage of judges. The President of the High Court informed the local bar association of this. It is high-handed. This court serves the region very well and deals with a great number of cases. Many people who are listed for a hearing have been waiting for years. Having built themselves up emotionally to go to court and have their cases heard, they were told, at short notice, that the sitting would not proceed. The President of the High Court should have shown a little more consideration for the citizens who have to appear before that court.

The civil court list was also cancelled at very short notice. Again the reason given was that there are a shortage of judges. Is that the case? Is there such a shortage of judges that the provincial court sittings have to be cancelled at the last minute? Is the Courts Service, under the President of the High Court who wrote to the local association, so dysfunctional that it could not have arranged for matters to be dealt with differently? Is the system so out of touch with the people who appear before the courts that it could not, or would not, give consideration to the serious difficulties this has caused for the individuals in question? Who is in charge? Is this an issue of efficiency or, as was stated, a case of there not being enough judges available to hear these cases? What happened in the week in question? Was the backlog in the courts so great? I hope the Minister will tell me if that was the case because I want to understand the reason for the decision to cancel the list at short notice. I appreciate the separation of powers, before the Minister starts telling me about it. This is not about the separation of powers. This is about time management for judges and respecting members of the public and citizens whom we all represent.

What are the Minister's views on the excuse used, that is, the lack of judges? Is this an effort by the Judiciary to put pressure on the Minister to appoint even more judges? Is there a business case for the appointment of judges at which I can look? This decision is unsatisfactory in respect of both the High Court list and the civil case list. I want an explanation.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I thank Deputy McGuinness. I am standing in for the Minister for Justice and Equality who is unavoidably

absent. On his behalf, I note that under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. The assignment of judges and the scheduling and cancelling of lists is a matter for the presidents of the courts who are, under the Constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, the Minister has had inquiries made with the Courts Service and has been informed that a notice was recently published on the Courts Service website, as directed by the President of the High Court, setting out a decision to cancel the High Court personal injuries list in Kilkenny due to a shortage of judges. Interim arrangements have been set out whereby all cases in the list are adjourned to the next list. Any case which is required to be dealt with more urgently may be mentioned to Mr. Justice Cross with a view to seeking a hearing date in Dublin.

As the Deputy will be aware, judicial appointments are made by the President acting on the advice of the Government in accordance with Articles 13(9) and 35(1) of the Constitution. The Government is committed to ensuring that judicial vacancies across the courts are filled in a timely manner. The issues which gave rise to the cancellation of the High Court lists in Kilkenny will be resolved following the appointment by the President of five judges - Brian O'Moore, senior counsel; Mark Sanfey, senior counsel; Mary Rose Gearty, senior counsel; Niamh Hyland, senior counsel; and Mark Heslin, solicitor - to the High Court on 2 December 2019. The new judges will be sworn in by the Chief Justice on Friday, 6 December. It is intended that the new judges will take up their duties immediately thereafter.

With regard to the Circuit Court sittings in Kilkenny, the listing of cases and the cancellation of lists are matters for the President of the Circuit Court. A notice was published on the Courts Service website, as directed by the President of the Circuit Court, setting out recent decisions to cancel lists as well as the interim arrangements. The Courts Service has informed the Minister that the planned criminal and family law cases scheduled for next week in Kilkenny will proceed as arranged. All civil cases have been adjourned to a date early in the new year.

The Circuit Court is operating with a full complement of judges. At its Cabinet meeting of 26 November, the Government nominated Judge Rosemary Horgan, who had already been sitting in the Circuit Court in an *ex officio* capacity, for appointment to the Circuit Court. Judge Horgan's warrant for appointment is scheduled to be signed by the President this week and her swearing-in ceremony is scheduled to take place on 9 December.

Deputy John McGuinness: I have asked the Minister several questions, which he has not answered. I simply want to go back to those questions. Does the Minister believe that the President of the High Court, and thereafter the President of the Circuit Court, were using these cancellations to force the Minister to appoint more judges? Where is the business case showing the numbers required for these judges? Where is the information to inform me, as a Member of this House, that these judges were in fact needed? Is it time to review the 1998 Act so that we can have a better system to manage these cases? Is it not interesting that the President of the High Court cancelled the session in Kilkenny? The Minister's reply did not include an alternative date when that would happen. Urgent cases are to come to Dublin. The whole idea of provincial sittings is to deal with issues at that level and give people a chance. In my opinion they have not been given a chance. They have been shown a great discourtesy by the Judiciary.

7 o'clock

This comes at a time when the President of the High Court has decided that he does not need Mr. Edmund Honohan anymore. He took from him a body of work that he was doing very capably and gave it to several other judges. Is Mr. Edmund Honohan not being used to his full potential? Are the other judges so overworked that they cannot manage their caseloads? What is going on here? A serious cost to the State arises from all of this. For far too long we have left the management and functions of the Judiciary out of the loop. We should not be afraid to determine if it is giving value for money and if its members are actually needed. Maybe we should ask them to fob in. Then we will get a better picture of things.

Deputy Michael Creed: As I said in my opening remarks on behalf of the Minister, it is envisaged that the most recent appointments will address the issue of the High Court sittings in Kilkenny. I will not accept the Deputy's invitation to trespass on matters germane to the Judiciary or engage with his commentary on this business case. I will convey his remarks to the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Deputy will be aware that the principle of the separation of powers between the Executive and the Judiciary is long established and I do not intend to go down that road.

The Deputy made a point about whether it is time to review the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998 regarding the organisation and administration of the Courts Service. I will bring these comments to the attention of the Minister.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Táim iontach buíoch den Dáil go bhfuil seans againn é seo a phlé tráthnóna inniu. There is huge anger and disbelief within the communities of Cloughaneely, Gortahork, Cill Charthaigh and the surrounding areas over controversial plans to develop large-scale oyster farms at Ballyness Bay. This anger, disbelief and frustration are best exemplified by the attendance of up to 700 people at a public meeting at the end of the summer. Thousands of people have signed a local petition. They are aghast at what has been planned for an area of stunning beauty. I am not sure if the Minister, Deputy Creed, is familiar with that part of our island but it is worth seeing. It really is a jewel in the crown. It has breathtaking scenery, clear waters and relatively unspoilt marine life, and it has been a source of pride for the local community for many decades.

This community cannot understand why the Department is considering placing industrial-scale oyster farms along its strands. If approved, these would stretch from Drumnatinny, through Ballyness and on to Magheraroarty on the western side of the bay. The vast majority of people, myself included, only became aware that these applications were with the Department several weeks after the public consultation period had ended. How were we kept in the dark? The answer is very clear. This was advertised in an excellent local newspaper, the *Donegal Democrat*. However and unfortunately, the *Donegal Democrat* does not have a wide readership in that area. Members of the community inform me that only 15 copies of the *Donegal Democrat* are sold in the Falcarragh area, in contrast with two other papers with a bigger reach there. The advertisement was not published in Gaelic, though this is a Gaeltacht area. It was available to view in the local Garda station, but in rural Ireland Garda stations are only open three hours a day, and if gardaí are on call, a member of the public will not be seen. If it is not advertised in the local newspapers or radio, members of the public do not know to go to the local Garda station to view the application anyway.

There are huge issues here. We have seen this in other areas as well. Several decisions have been made by the Department in recent weeks to approve oyster farming in various parts of Donegal where there was no objection or opposition. However, this is a pristine area. It is a special area of conservation. The bay is protected. Just last week I was talking to the Minister of State, Deputy Moran, about coastal erosion and the need to invest in that area to protect the habitat there. I support aquaculture, but the idea of trestles running from Magheraroarty through to Ballyness is just not acceptable. We are talking about harvesting oysters in an area equivalent to 45 or 46 football pitches.

The spirit and principle of the legislation and the EU directive on public consultation make clear the need for public awareness of an application of such magnitude. The public should be consulted. This application was placed in a newspaper with a circulation of just 15 in a community of thousands. I repeat - thousands of people have signed a petition calling for this process to go back to the starting blocks. Will the Minister intervene and nullify these applications? If the promoters want to make the applications again, they can do so with the knowledge of the community. At the end of the day, it is the Minister who will grant this licence or reject it.

Deputy Michael Creed: I thank the Deputy. Decisions have recently been made in respect of several applications for licences for the cultivation of shellfish in Ballyness Bay. Public notice regarding these decisions is scheduled to be published in the *Donegal Democrat* on Thursday, 5 December. The public notice will be in Irish and English as the area in question is in the Gaeltacht.

Representations have been received from public representatives and members of the public raising objections to these applications and to the manner in which the Department communicated the information to the local community. In fact, in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, public notices were placed by the applicants in the *Donegal Democrat*. These public notices were placed by the applicants on the instruction of the Department as a necessary part of the licensing process. One of the complaints is that, as Ballyness Bay lies within a Gaeltacht area, the public notices should have been in Irish as well as in English. In fact, as the applications are placed in the newspaper by the applicant and not by the State, the requirement for Irish language notification does not apply. Notice of the ministerial decisions will be published in Irish and English as the Department is the publishing body in that case.

An aquaculture licence is required by law for the cultivation of finfish, shellfish and certain marine plants such as seaweed. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997, the Foreshore Act 1933 and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various statutory consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation. In addition, the Department must adhere to a wide range of regulatory requirements and other legislation that impacts on the licensing process.

A key component of the aquaculture licensing process is a series of measures designed to address the impact of aquaculture on the environment. This series of measures is known as appropriate assessment. The appropriate assessment process arose from a European Court of Justice, ECJ, case against Ireland in 2007. The European Court of Justice declared that by failing to take all the measures necessary to comply with the EU habitats directive in respect of authorisations of aquaculture programmes, Ireland had failed to fulfil its obligations under that directive. The EU habitats and birds directive has resulted in the designation of certain bays by

the National Parks and Wildlife Service as special areas of conservation or special protection areas for birds. These are known as Natura 2000 sites and most aquaculture takes place within them or adjacent to them. In the negotiations to address the ECJ judgment, the Department agreed a process with the European Commission and the National Parks and Wildlife Service that would govern the State's processing of aquaculture licence applications.

The appropriate assessment process is managed in the main by the Marine Institute via environmental and scientific contractors commissioned by the institute to carry out the necessary fieldwork and desk analysis. To date, the Marine Institute has submitted appropriate assessments on 32 bays to the Department, of which Ballyness Bay is one. Ballyness Bay in County Donegal is designated a special area of conservation. There are also a number of other special areas of conservation and special protected areas close to Ballyness Bay, and full consideration was given to the likely interaction between these areas and the proposed aquaculture activities. The appropriate assessment considered 20 applications for aquaculture operations in Ballyness Bay, which consisted of 14 for the cultivation of oysters only, five for the cultivation of oysters and clams, and one for the cultivation of clams only. The number of sites applied for has subsequently been reduced to 18 applications, with two sites for oyster cultivation having been withdrawn.

The legislation specifically provides for periods of statutory and public consultation in respect of aquaculture licence applications. All observations received within the consultation period are carefully considered by my Department. In accordance with applicable legislation, notice of the applications for Ballyness Bay were published by the applicants in the *Donegal Democrat* on various dates between 14 March and 26 March. From the date of the relevant notice, the public had four weeks to make written submissions or observations-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I thank the Minister.

Deputy Michael Creed: If I might beg the indulgence of the House, there is a legal process I would like to go through. I just have one more page.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Go ahead.

Deputy Michael Creed: In accordance with applicable legislation, notice of the applications in Ballyness Bay was published by the applicants in the *Donegal Democrat* on various dates between 14 March and 26 March. From the date of the relevant notice, the public had four weeks to make written submissions or observations to my Department on the applications specified in that notice. During that time the application documentation was available for inspection in the Garda stations specified in the public notices and on my Department's website. In accordance with the applicable legislation, one of the Garda stations was open on a 24-hour basis, in Letterkenny. The following statutory consultees were contacted with regard to these applications: Donegal County Council, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Fáilte Ireland, An Taisce, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Marine Institute.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism. Any member of the public who wishes to appeal a ministerial decision may do so by submitting an appeal to the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board, which is an independent body established by statute.

The Department has received a number of representations from members of the public and

public representatives around the licensing process as it affects Ballyness Bay. In addition to general complaints concerning the appropriateness or otherwise of intertidal aquaculture in Ballyness Bay, there have been specific concerns expressed around the consultation process, namely, the placement of public notices in the *Donegal Democrat* is regarded as inadequate by a number of members of the public and by public representatives. The procedures for the public notices, however, adhere fully to the legislative requirements. In addition to the public notices, the applications were available to view in specified local Garda stations and on the Department's website.

I will conclude now, and I appreciate the Acting Chairman's indulgence. The licensing process for Ballyness Bay conforms fully with all legislative requirements. A public notice in respect of the ministerial decision is scheduled to be published in the *Donegal Democrat* on Thursday, 5 December. Any person who is not satisfied with the ministerial decision can appeal the decision to the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board. As the period of time for submitting such appeals will commence from the date of publication of the decision and will continue for one month thereafter, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I do not know if the Minister feels it is appropriate. I buy the *Donegal Democrat* every week. It has two newspapers and excellent coverage. Does the Minister think it appropriate that the notices were in a newspaper with only 15 sales in the area being impacted in Falcarragh? I do not believe it was appropriate. That is the reality. The Minister can talk about a Garda station in Letterkenny being open for 24 hours, but this is like saying that the public notification for works to be carried out in Leinster House will be on view in the Garda station in Bray. It is the same distance from Gortahork to Letterkenny as it is for me to jump in a car from this House to Bray. People in the area did not know about this and did not have an opportunity to make a submission.

Generally, public meetings on different things are not well attended, but when 600 or 700 people turn out to a public meeting, then we know there is an issue in the community. When thousands of people sign a petition, then one really knows there are issues.

The core of the issue comes down to a question. What does the Minister do with the 18 applications in for this area? The area is one of unique beauty in our county and in our country. The Minister has the final decision on those 18 applications and he tells us that we must wait until they are published in the *Donegal Democrat*. Will the Minister tell this House of the Oireachtas what decision he has made on those 18 applications? Has he granted or refused them? Did the Minister grant the applications with or without amendments? The people listening to this debate at home are worried about what will happen in an area of huge unemployment but which is seeing an uplift in tourism with the Wild Atlantic Way. These people do not want to look out at a beautiful area such as Magheraroarty and Ballyness and, when the sea is out, be looking at trestles as far as the eye can see. They do not want to see that. They want to make sure that people will have employment in their community. They want to make sure that what they have grown up with will be there and that they can hand it down to the next generation.

I will warn the Minister. This is my last opportunity here. If the Minister has granted those applications, this community will fight tooth and nail, and I will be with them every step of the way. I will appeal this, and I am sure there will be hundreds if not thousands of others too. Will the Minister clarify what the decision has been so that people will know? Has he granted these applications, has he refused them or has he granted them with alterations?

Deputy Michael Creed: Deputy Pearse Doherty has raised a number of points. With regard to the advertisement of the applications in the media, the applicants are compliant with the law as it is by virtue of having advertised in the *Donegal Democrat* and having made the application details available at the local Garda stations, including one that was open for access for 24 hours. We can have debates about how widely read these applications are and so on, but in that context the applications comply with the statutory process.

I also made the point that in complying with the statutory process, there are a number of notice bodies invited to make submissions, and I listed those, including Donegal County Council, An Taisce, the National Parks and Wildlife service and so on. They were all notified and their observations, views and reports are taken into account, including the views that are available to me through my Department and other agencies that are involved in the decision-making process. Ultimately, I must make the decision. I do not mean to be in any way circumspect here, but there is a process and I will comply entirely with the process. Once the process is in the public realm I can discuss the matter. The process requires me to put the decision in the first instance into the *Donegal Democrat* later this week and I will be complying with the law on this.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Will the information go onto the Internet via the Department's website at the same time? What time will that be?

Deputy Michael Creed: I would have to clarify that. It is going into the *Donegal Democrat*.

Pharmacy Services

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I am glad to have the opportunity to raise this important matter. I, and I am sure most Deputies, have had recent discussions with their community pharmacies, particularly over the weekend. I have been inundated with phone calls, emails and letters, and I have some of them with me. I intend to pass them on to the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, at the earliest possible convenience.

Alarm bells have been sounded as a result of the recent proposal by the Department of Health that outlined changes to pharmacy fees to commence next year. It has been calculated that the cuts will result in a reduction in income of at least €12,000 per annum if the proposals for changes to the dispensing fee per item, the reduction of the number of items paid at €5, and the abolition of high-tech patient care fees are imposed in January. This is the polar opposite of what was expected by the Irish Pharmacy Union, IPU, and pharmacy owners. They believed that, rather than the imposition of additional cuts, the cuts imposed under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest, FEMPI, Acts would be unwound.

Concerns have been raised with me about the impact on rural, isolated, disadvantaged communities and independent pharmacies. That impact will be disproportionate on those in large population centres. Concerns have also been raised about the sustainability of community pharmacies where margins are as low as 4%. Some believe that they will not survive, especially with no alternative funding stream identified. One cannot but support their assessment of the situation. Curtailing services to patients will cause significant issues for GPs, hospitals and the HSE. The pharmacy is often the first port of call for patients and they retain a high level of trust with the public.

Pharmacists are mystified as to how this proposal has come about. During our period of financial austerity, they took the required cuts in the national interest. I am told that they are the only profession not to have had fee restoration. Increased investment, not cuts, was expected at this stage, especially in light of Sláintecare. A new pharmacy contract and investment in improved pharmacy services to benefit our people were expected.

There are 2,300 community pharmacies across the country. In my county of Offaly, 29 pharmacies are providing support for over 800,000 patient visits, with more than 250 jobs required to do so. I understand that the Minister, Deputy Harris, has prioritised a meeting with the IPU this week. I ask the Minister of State to convey to him how urgent it is to find a solution to this matter, which is causing unnecessary worry for pharmacists across the country and their staff. It is crucial that negotiations be entered into in 2020 as expected and in good faith.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I thank Deputy Corcoran Kennedy for raising this important matter, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Health. The Minister values the important role that community pharmacists play in the delivery of holistic patient care in the health service. He has given a clear commitment to commencing a thorough review of the pharmacy contract in 2020. It will address the role to be played by community pharmacies in the context of Sláintecare and consider all aspects of pharmacy service provision, including delivery of a multidisciplinary model of service delivery for patients, ensuring clarity of roles and achieving optimum value for money.

A new agreement that is fit for purpose and seeks to strengthen our primary care system is required. The vision and approach that underpins Sláintecare needs to be mapped out for the community pharmacy sector. This primary care model will be integrated with other health policies that will require the expansion of the scope of practice and the range of public services provided in community pharmacy. Any publicly funded pharmacy service expansion should address unmet public health needs, improve access to existing public health services or provide better value for money or patient outcomes. Accordingly, the decision to provide such services should be evidence based.

The Minister expects to see discussions on a new contract begin early in the new year because he fully believes that community pharmacy contractors have an important contribution to make to realising the future vision for community care, which needs to be enabled by a modern and fit-for-purpose contractual relationship with the HSE.

The Minister addressed the IPU at its national pharmacy conference in May and gave a clear commitment to move beyond the arrangements underpinned by the FEMPI Act 2009 with a view to optimising the role of pharmacists in the years ahead. In the meantime, however, the Minister is obliged to put in place before the end of this year a new framework to maintain a statutory basis for contractor fees, as the existing regulations will be revoked from the end of this year in accordance with the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017.

Prior to the making of the new regulations, the Minister is required to consult the representative body for pharmacy contractors, the IPU. In that respect, departmental officials wrote to the IPU on 10 October inviting it to discussions on the making of the new regulations. Subsequently, meetings were held in the Department on 24 October and 7 November, following which a detailed submission was received from the IPU. That submission is being considered by the Department in the context of the statutory fee-setting process referred to previously. The Minister is due to meet the IPU this week to discuss these matters further.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I thank the Minister of State. It is welcome that the Minister is to meet the IPU this week. The conference was mentioned. The comments that the Minister made there have left pharmacists feeling let down and betrayed because they had the impression that the FEMPI measures would be unwound. They also believed that their submission to Sláintecare could save the State €90 million or more on biologic medicines. This contrasts with the proposed cuts, which would take €50 million out of the service.

This situation is causing significant worry. If we are to succeed with Sláintecare and in delivering at community level, it is crucial that the concerns raised by the IPU and pharmacists more widely are addressed as soon as possible so that they will not have this issue hanging over them going into the Christmas period. There will be a knock-on effect on their staff, who feel that they will be impacted, particularly in rural areas, by what they have seen from the Department to date.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I take the Deputy's points. I reiterate the Minister's appreciation for community pharmacists in delivering care to patients and I restate his desire for contractual discussions to commence early in the new year so as to enable their role to be further developed in the context of health service reform and modernisation. However, the Minister is also cognisant of the fact that regulations made under the FEMPI Act 2009 expire at the end of 2019 and that a new set of fee regulations will need to come into effect in order to maintain a statutory basis for pharmacy payments from 1 January 2020. Prior to finalising these regulations, a consultation process is under way with the IPU and further discussions will take place this Thursday in Leinster House. The Minister will keep the Dáil informed as that process develops.

I take the Deputy's points regarding pharmacists, fee restoration and investment. She mentioned the 29 pharmacies in her county. I will bring her concerns to the Minister over the next couple of days.

School Enrolments

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister for taking this Topical Issue debate, which deals with the crisis in the number of secondary school places in Dublin Fingal. The Minister recently paid a visit to Skerries community college in advance of polling in the by-election. There is a more fundamental issue in north Dublin and I am glad of the opportunity to address it with the Minister. We are the fastest growing and youngest constituency in the country and a great deal of work has been done by successive Governments to provide additional places at primary school level, but some of our towns are struggling to provide secondary school places. For the first time in a long while, for example, Malahide community school has a waiting list of people in its catchment area to whom it will not be able to offer places. The same applies at Portmarnock community school. The Minister visited Skerries community college where parents are concerned about places for their sons and daughters. More than 100 people who applied to St. Joseph's secondary school in Rush could not get a place. There are also issues in Swords and throughout the county. I have tabled a series of parliamentary questions in this regard and the responses I have received from the Department deal with the capital programme and what will happen. While that is fine, and we will keep the pressure on, for 2020 we have a specific issue. To take Portmarnock, for argument's sake, there are issues with the ongoing delay with the extension and refurbishment of the school. There is no additional capacity in Malahide. There was a delay with opening the Malahide-Portmarnock Educate Together sec-

ondary school in Kinsealy. It was planned to accommodate 1,000 people but the intake is only 48 pupils a year. We have a very specific issue in north Dublin.

I have spent the past couple of weeks speaking to parents and I know some of them have corresponded with the Minister's office. The lack of alternatives is a real concern and I have not even mentioned Lusk, where there are also issues, about which I have written to the Minister. The Department needs urgently to review the number of students who have not been able to secure a place for September 2020. We have time to rectify the situation. Most of the schools have set a deadline of 2 December for acceptance of offers, and I hope the lists will be worked through, but there is no doubt in my mind that we are still over capacity. As I have said, it is a very particular issue.

Where this matter becomes particularly acute is with regard to students with special needs. One mother emailed me and I have spoken to her. She has applied to nine schools. Her son has autism and requires assistance in school. I know this has come up previously in the Minister's brief. This child is No. 78 on one list, category 10 on another and No. 43 on another list. I know the Minister knows the stress for the parents and students of not knowing whether they will secure a place next year and, in particular, whether they will be able to secure a place with their peers and the children they have grown up with and been with through the primary system.

We need this issue addressed. It is at crisis point in north Dublin. I am sure the Acting Chairman, Deputy Farrell, will also confirm this. The numbers are significant and growing further with the new developments that are happening. There is a real concern that this year is bad but it will get worse year by year. We need to expedite the delivery of the promised schools. Will the Minister in particular look favourably at carrying out a specific review on the Dublin Fingal area to deal with the lack of availability of secondary school places?

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I thank the Deputy for raising the question. I am aware of the pressures in the area. I reassure the parents who may be listening that we have put specific focus on this issue through the Department in Tullamore. I know the Acting Chairman is very interested in this issue.

The Deputy made a point on doing analysis as part of planning for school provision. We constantly do this. We have a team in this school planning area and it uses geographical information systems and data from a range of sources to identify from where the pressure for school places comes. The Department uses this information and offers a determination on where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. The case the Deputy has raised is with regard to post-primary places.

As the Deputy is aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans to establish 42 new schools over the four-year period from 2019 to 2022, including five new primary schools and three new post-primary schools in the north County Dublin Fingal area. In addition, four new primary and seven new post-primary schools were established in recent years in the area. The requirement for new schools will be kept under ongoing review and, in particular, will have regard to the increased roll-out of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. Sometimes it is difficult to make this calculation. Even though planning permission could be sought for 400 houses, it is not say that those 400 houses will go in immediately as they could be built on a phased basis. It is a difficult enough exercise in itself, but at the same time communication between the local authority and the Department is very important because it can provide a proper determination.

In addition, the Department's capital programme provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms. Where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed, there is a fast-track process. At the beginning of this year, Ennis and Ashbourne were faced with a similar situation. The Deputy has pointed out we are at an earlier stage now and this is the time to have this conversation and debate.

When I was in Skerries a couple of weeks ago, I was able to hear firsthand the stories and pressures. In the Dublin Fingal area the Department is particularly aware of the enrolment issues in Skerries for 2020. In this context, the Department is in ongoing direct contact with the patron of Skerries community college in respect of the capacity in the school. Skerries community college has expressed a willingness to increase its long-term projected enrolment to 1,000 pupils. While visiting Skerries, I was able to inform the school that the Department was working on a proposal for a devolved build of three 49 sq. m general classrooms, three 15 sq. m special education teaching rooms and offices, a science laboratory and preparatory area, an art room, toilets and circulation space.

In addition, interim accommodation has been approved for Skerries community college pending the delivery of future accommodation needs. The patron of Skerries community college is tendering for the approved interim accommodation, and it is expected to have all interim accommodation in place for September 2020. While I understand the enrolment situation may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice, the Department's main responsibility is to ensure the existing schools in the area can, between them, cater for the demand for school places in September 2020. It is a matter for the board of management as to which selection criteria are included in enrolment policy and in what priority the criteria are applied. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Schools in the Fingal area can apply for additional accommodation under the Department's additional accommodation scheme if they believe there is a shortfall in their current accommodation. Applications will be assessed by the Department, and if it is found that additional accommodation is required, funding will be provided for a devolved build to the school.

I assure the Deputy and the Acting Chairman that our officials are examining the area and there is engagement with regard to finding solutions. At all times when interim temporary applications are submitted, we are open to prioritising those applications.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister for his response and I welcome what he has said with regard to Skerries. I hope those moves will deal with the students in Skerries who have not been able to obtain a place. The reason we are here and that we do not have enough capacity is because of delays in delivering schools. Take St. Joseph's secondary school in Rush as an example. The Minister speaks about additional accommodation, but it cannot take any more. A site was supposed to have been acquired but it still has not been acquired and is on the way. This needs to happen. I mentioned the Malahide-Portmarnock Educate Together secondary school, which will accommodate another 1,000 pupils but can only take in 48 students. There is a very specific issue with regard to capacity in our area. As I mentioned to the Minister, it becomes even more acute for children with certain special needs and requirements.

The Minister mentioned that schools could apply for additional accommodation. The Minister visited Portmarnock community school, just in advance of the by-election, coincidentally.

I believe the Taoiseach was also there. The school has been promised an extension and refurbishment for years. It cannot take any more pupils and could not take additional temporary accommodation.

The Minister mentioned that the Department's main responsibility was to ensure the existing schools in the area can between them cater for the demand for school places in September 2020. Right now, many of them cannot do so. This is the problem. This evening, there are parents who have no school place secured for their children next year. We have time to fix this. The long-term planning was done and the delivery is where it was let down. We need to make sure there are school places for these students next September. The Minister's reply goes some part of the way and I thank him for it, particularly with regard to Skerries. It does not deal with Swords, Rush, Lusk, Malahide or Portmarnock. Parents have asked me to raise these specific issues with the Minister directly because we need the intervention of the Department. While I recognise schools can apply for additional accommodation, in many instances they have nowhere to put that additional accommodation, and I referenced St. Joseph's secondary school in Rush in that regard. We had a delay with the delivery of phase two of Lusk community college. That meant we had further delays and a lack of capacity in the area.

I specifically ask the Minister to ask the officials in his Department to look particularly at Dublin Fingal and the towns I have mentioned and to work with the schools to rectify this problem.

Deputy Joe McHugh: We will continue to give it the focus it needs. It is about ensuring that once we have the information and once we know there are demand issues, we get in early. Engagement from the principals is critical here, and without singling any of those schools in the areas the Deputy mentioned out, I have met the majority of the principals. The Deputy is correct in saying I was in Portmarnock community school but it was not in recent weeks.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): It was.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: That is why I talk about a lack of delivery. The Minister was there a while ago and it still does not have its extension.

Deputy Joe McHugh: In St. Joseph's secondary school in Rush, I was able to hear firsthand about the pressures and the frustrations with the processes involved in acquiring sites. There are external factors outside of the Department's control. One matter we are committed to as a Department is that where there is extra demand, we try to provide solutions. We have to work towards the long-term and we will put those measures in place, but there are short-term needs now. We are focused on September 2020. We will continue the dialogue with the principals to ensure whatever short-term temporary provision we can bring in fits the needs. I understand some sites, such as St. Joseph's secondary school in Rush, will not have adequate space for additional accommodation, but we have to look at other ways of satisfying that demand. I emphasise again that a lot of the demand can be skewed in some instances. I am not using the example of this area, but in a different area in a different part of the country it was a school of choice and it was skewed because everybody wanted to go to this school. When it was pared back, it became clear that when the duplication of applications was taken away, there were still school places available. I know this is acutely sensitive in terms of the demographics, the increased population and further housing developments. I will keep this on the radar and no doubt the Deputies will keep me on my toes as well.

Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill 2019: Order for Report Stage

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I move: “That Report Stage be taken now.”

Question put and agreed to.

Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill 2019: Report and Final Stages

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): There are a number of amendments, some of which are grouped. Amendments Nos. 1, 3, 5 to 7, inclusive, and 11 are grouped and may be discussed together.

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I move amendment No. 1:

In page 8, to delete line 11.

The issue of fees was discussed at length on Committee Stage, and I am pleased to bring these amendments forward to reflect the positive engagement we had. As was said on Committee Stage, registration fees for deemed approved housing bodies, AHBs, under section 35 was deleted, but I also undertook to bring forward an amendment to delete fees under section 28(2)(e), and that is proposed in amendment No. 7. If amendment No. 7 is accepted, fees may only be charged under section 27(3), which is on making a copy of an entry in the register that would be available on request and the payment of an appropriate fee, and under section 63(2), which is on the making of an appeal that can be accompanied by an appropriate fee as well. In this case, many of the provisions provided for in section 11 are redundant, so I am proposing under amendment No. 3 to delete the section and to account for the fees, where they should arise, in sections 27 and 63. Amendments Nos. 1, 5, 6 and 11 are the necessary amendments to account for this. To recap with the Deputies who were present on Committee Stage, this is as was agreed.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 9, to delete line 34.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 13, to delete lines 33 to 39, and in page 14, to delete lines 1 to 39.

Amendment agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): Amendments Nos. 4 and 8 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 26, between lines 20 and 21, to insert the following:

“(4) Where an AHB provides ‘special needs accommodation’ for tenants with additional needs beyond an inability to provide for their housing from their own resources, “special needs accommodation” shall be defined as accommodation provided to persons who by reason of old age, physical or mental disability or other cause require special accommodation and support to enable them to live in the community.”.

I will not delay the proceedings by repeating what we said on Committee Stage. I will not press amendment No. 4 but I tabled it because I want the Minister to look at it again between now and the Bill proceeding to the Seanad. In addition to outlining the other categories of housing such as social housing etc., there is a need for this section of the Bill to have a robust definition of special needs housing because it is one of the central factors of all approved housing bodies. While I am not pressing the amendment, it is there for the Minister and his officials to take a look at it and to consider if something similar could be inserted by the Minister when the Bill proceeds to the Seanad.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I assume the Deputy has seen amendment No. 8 from the Government. There is nothing wrong with the definition in and of itself. I have an issue with the definition’s placement within this section and with whether it is the right place to put such a definition in terms of the different legislation we have on housing. Amendment No. 8 is offered to try to capture that, and perhaps the definition the Deputy is looking for might be better placed in another Bill. Amendment No. 8 was seen as a compromise between those two positions, noting that a big part of the remit of AHBs, depending on the AHB, is to make sure the different accommodation needs of the different categories of tenants are catered to without spelling it out as precisely as the Deputy does in his amendment. I am not against that definition. It is a good definition but this section or this Bill was not necessarily the place for it and that is why we have offered amendment No. 8.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 26, line 33, to delete “the appropriate fee” and substitute “such fee (if any) as may be determined by the Regulator”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 27, line 2, after “applicant,” to insert “and”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 27, to delete line 3.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 35, line 17, after “AHB” to insert the following:

“, including the types of dwellings provided or managed, or both, as the case may be, by each category of AHB to meet the different accommodation needs of different categories of tenants”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 35, line 31, after “Minister” to insert the following:

“, following consultation with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government,”.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: We discussed this on Committee Stage. Insofar as what the Deputy is considering with consultation, I know we discussed this happening with certain planning changes. That is when it comes with an exemption and it is something specific. It is one of a few cases where the obligation to consult is there. The point I was making on Committee Stage was that should the direction be made, I would be accountable to the committee to answer on that direction. However, we have to draw a line, where we can, between executive responsibility and the responsibility of the Houses, and therefore I cannot accept the amendment.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 10:

In page 51, line 31, to delete “(1) ‘dwelling’, ‘approved housing body’ and ‘Regulator’” and substitute “ ‘approved housing body’, ‘dwelling’ and ‘Regulator’ ”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 59, line 19, to delete “the appropriate fee” and substitute “such fee (if any) as may be determined by the Regulator with the approval of the Minister”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I move amendment No. 12:

In page 62, between lines 6 and 7, to insert the following:

“Report of Minister

67. (1) The Minister shall, not later than 12 months after the coming into operation of this section, following consultation with the Regulator, AHBs and housing authorities, arrange for the preparation of a report relating to the transfer of dwellings provided by AHBs for the purpose specified in *section 25(2)(b)(i)* and any matters arising on such transfer, including legal and financial matters and matters relating to consultation, for the purposes of such transfer, with the Regulator, the Residential Tenancies Board and the AHBs, housing authorities and any third party concerned (including tenants of the dwellings to be transferred and any mortgagee or other person who is the owner of any security or charge affecting those dwellings).

(2) A copy of the report prepared under *subsection (1)* shall be laid by the Minister before each House of the Oireachtas.

(3) The Minister shall arrange for a report laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas in accordance with *subsection (2)* to be published on the internet as soon as practicable after a copy of the report is so laid.”.

Deputy Sean Fleming: This is a significant amendment from the Minister in that he will present a report to the Houses of the Oireachtas not later than 12 months after this section’s coming into operation, following consultation with the new regulator, which is welcome, the approved housing bodies and the housing authorities. The Minister will also arrange for the preparation of a report on the transfer of dwellings provided by the approved housing bodies etc. The Acting Chairman will be aware we discussed the issue of the approved housing bodies and the housing policy at the Committee of Public Accounts earlier this year and we issued the report in July 2019, before the legislation on the regulator was published. We called for such a regulator to be established and we are happy we are here now with the legislation.

There were two main points in the report and I want to read out one relevant paragraph of it. I ask that the Minister considers changing the amendment before the regulator is established. Paragraph B44 of the July report of the Committee of Public Accounts outlined four statutory agencies, separate from the regulator that will now come into being, with relevant oversight for various aspects of AHBs. The first is the local authorities, which provide funding to the AHBs to ensure they meet the criteria to receive State funds. The second is the Residential Tenancies Board, RTB. Tenants in AHBs are entitled to tenancy rights, which are overseen by the RTB. The third is the Charities Regulator. All AHBs are charities, which requires them to meet certain criteria, including having a memorandum to provide social housing and a clause to prevent them from selling such property. The fourth is HIQA. AHBs involved in the provision of social housing for tenants with specific medical needs or disabilities come under HIQA to ensure that the property meets the needs of the tenant, which is probably what Deputy Ó Broin was referring to earlier in respect of special accommodation needs.

On the passing of the legislation, five State agencies will have oversight of AHBs, namely, the new regulator, the local authorities, the RTB, the Charities Regulator and HIQA, each of whose roles I have explained. In preparing the report proposed in the amendment, however, the Minister will consult only the regulator, the AHBs and the relevant local authority, but not the RTB. The review is for tenants but the organisation that looks after tenants will not be included in it. As for the Charities Regulator, such bodies would not be AHBs unless they were approved charities and, therefore, it should be involved. Above all, for people with special accommodation needs, whom Deputy Ó Broin mentioned, HIQA has a specific role in legislation to ensure that accommodation meets the requirements of the tenant.

The Minister has omitted three important groups that, along with the Department, the regulator, the AHBs and the local authorities, should be involved in the review, namely, HIQA, the Charities Regulator and the RTB. Will he respond to what I consider to be an omission in respect of the review?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Stage as I have significant experience in the voluntary sector, both through my local AHB, Caisleán Nua voluntary housing association in Caisleán Nua, County Tipperary, of which I am vice chairman and was chairman for ten or 12 years, and through the proactive works the housing associations under-

take throughout the country to provide housing for families, older people, people with disabilities and the homeless, as well as the wide range of other social and community activities. They do that work in many areas, as the Minister will be aware. In my involvement in the sector over the past 25 years, it has grown fourfold and now plays an important role in complementing the role of local authorities, although in some cases it shows them up. When we were building houses, we received little support from our local authority and in fact many obstacles were put in the way.

Although housing associations in the past have often been overlooked, they now play an essential role in the revitalisation and redevelopment of both urban and rural communities. The sheer volume of unpaid hours - I stress unpaid - that voluntary board members of housing associations undertake has to be acknowledged, whether the work is in sourcing land locally or developing and managing housing projects, as well as providing local social health services. It has saved the State millions of euro. More often than not, local bodies and voluntary groups can acquire sites and get the goodwill of the community behind them more than can county councils or whatever.

The sector will have provided close to 40,000 homes by the end of 2019. The work has been ongoing for more than 100 years, despite some dedicated housing regulations. The sector has been regulated by a range of statutory regulators and regulatory requirements over the years, as Deputy Fleming noted. I welcome the changes made since the Bill was published, which now reflects more accurately the activities of the sector. I welcome the proposal to delete section 11 on the registration of fees for AHBs, which was unnecessary and counterproductive for the development of the sector, especially given that the sector has been hit with costs for annual tenancy registration, local property tax and, in some cases in recent years, HIQA registration. There is only so much the sector can be asked to do before it will have a negative impact on delivery and I believe that impact has arrived-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): I have no willingness to interrupt the Deputy but we are speaking to the amendment.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I was speaking to the amendment.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Alan Farrell): The Deputy will have an opportunity to address the specifics of the Bill at a later point. I ask him to speak to the amendment, please.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I respect that, but there is only so much that volunteers can take and they have had it up to here. They are brilliant people. In the case of my local AHB, the board comprises voluntary lay people and not one professional. The AHB has delivered 17 houses, which is a large number. If every small voluntary group did likewise, many houses would be built. Nevertheless, many challenges have been placed before the AHB, some of which are unnecessary.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: The provision for “any third party concerned” is the cover for what Deputy Fleming outlined. The regulator provided for in the amendment will be the primary regulator and will have memorandums of understanding, MOUs, with all the relevant bodies he mentioned. The amendment relates to the transfer of assets, which has happened only on occasion. We do not necessarily expect a review to happen but we consider it necessary to state what, after 12 months of establishment, would need to be done.

I agree with many of the points Deputy Mattie McGrath made in respect of the important

role of volunteers in the housing body sector.

Deputy Sean Fleming: If the Minister is satisfied that the points I made are covered in the “third party” provision, I will accept his assurances.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill, as amended, received for final consideration and passed.

Confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I move:

“That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— the most recently published homeless figures stand at a record 10,397, with 6,524 adults and 3,873 children classified as homeless;

— the number of homeless families has increased by 354 per cent since September 2014, and more than one in three people in emergency accommodation is a child;

— these figures do not account for the thousands of people living with housing uncertainty, living back with parents, staying with friends or with no security of tenure;

— the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness has been published for almost three years and for the third year in a row the Government will fail to meet 2811 the targets set out in the plan;

— with a stated target of 121,000 homes built by the end of 2021, given current failures to meet annual targets, Rebuilding Ireland has completely failed and will not achieve its stated objectives;

— the latest Daft.ie report on the private rental sector showed just 3,500 rental properties available nationally;

— the average cost of renting a property in Dublin now exceeds €2,000 a month, the 32nd quarter in a row there has been an increase;

— average rents nationally are 8 per cent higher than the same period last year;

— as a result of the consistent failings of this Government and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, there is an entire generation of people locked out of affordable and secure housing options; and

— the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has been in his position for two years and has completely failed to address the housing and homelessness emergency, and the consistent growth in the homelessness figures coupled with the fail-

ure to meet the Rebuilding Ireland targets underlines that fact;

has no confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy T.D., and calls for him to be removed from office; and

calls on the Government to:

- urgently introduce an affordable housing scheme;
- immediately expand the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme;
- implement an immediate nationwide rent freeze; and
- accept that the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is not fit for purpose and commit to urgently implementing a new housing plan tackling security of tenure and affordability for all.”

When Rebuilding Ireland was published in 2016, it had several aims, the first of which was to address the homelessness crisis. At the time, the number of homeless people was 6,107, including 2,206 children. According to the belatedly announced figures for October, 10,514 people were classified as homeless, comprising 6,688 adults and 3,826 children in emergency accommodation. The disgraceful figures do not take account of the many thousands of so-called hidden homeless, that is, those who have returned home to live with their parents or who sleep on a friend’s couch. We come across such people all the time. Two or three families under the one roof is not unusual. The stress and tension it causes is obvious to those who constantly deal with the issue. According to Fine Gael, the great silver bullet to solve the problem is Rebuilding Ireland, a document so mired in spin and ambiguous language that one would need a translator to find the numbers. In 2016, the then Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Coveney, promised to fix the homelessness and housing emergency in one fell swoop.

He said he would stake his career on it. The then Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, said the goals were ambitious but achievable. Not only has this Government not eradicated homelessness, the situation has become far worse.

The second stated aim of Rebuilding Ireland was to improve the rental sector. As we stand here, we are currently in the 32nd quarter in a row where rents have risen. The average rent in Dublin is now 100% higher than in 2010, and in one part of Dublin it is 125% higher. Those figures have not been plucked out of thin air; they are all from the *daft.ie* quarter 3 report.

Another aim of Rebuilding Ireland was to address housing waiting lists. In excess of 100,000 individuals and families were on the list when Rebuilding Ireland was published. According to it, HAP and RAS will deliver 58,560 housing solutions over the period 2018 to 2021. We keep pointing out that they are not new houses. The question that must be asked is what exactly is being rebuilt. Across all local authorities the target for 2019 is to build 6,545 houses and acquire 1,325 leases, but the big number is HAP. To reach the target, 17,360 units are needed. The HAP element of the plan is expected to cost €423 million in 2019, with a further €80 million allocated in 2020, bringing the total spend on HAP to 2022 to over €500 million. The more this approach is pursued, the more difficult it is to row back on it. HAP does not provide a secure form of housing, nor is it cost efficient. HAP is the single biggest transfer of public funds to private landlords in the history of the State and has been used to effectively confuse the

numbers in terms of units being delivered.

The Committee of Public Accounts, of which I am a member, did extensive work to try to decode the Rebuilding Ireland spin. In the committee's sixth report, published in July, the housing waiting list totalled 114,858 which, of course, includes those in receipt of HAP. That figure includes individuals and families and represents an actual figure of in the region of 330,000 people in need of housing or on waiting lists. Let us be clear. HAP is not units being delivered; rather, people and families are being put at the mercy of the private market and left to fend for themselves. It is a means of massaging the social housing waiting list numbers and the delivery of housing units.

During the hearings of the Committee of Public Accounts on housing, an official from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government said: "HAP tends to provide for shorter leases". The dread of a notice to quit is something that renters in general experience, but is an extra complication for those in receipt of HAP because it is more difficult to find accommodation within the specified price range. I have raised the issue on Leaders' Questions and in a recent Topical Issue debate about the administration of HAP which is causing long delays and making it even more difficult to secure accommodation.

The Minister apparently does not recall the Social Democrats ever tabling questions, amendments or proposed legislation, or attending the housing committee. That is funny because a simple fact check would reveal that he is wrong on all counts. The reality is that we have tabled hundreds of questions, have repeatedly used Leaders' Questions and Topical Issue debates to raise issues and brought forward a piece of proposed legislation on rents that the Minister welcomed. Why let the facts get in the way of spin?

In this era of fake news, I urge those in the media who have a responsibility to report impartially to do just that. Let the facts speak for themselves. Some have trotted out Government spin verbatim, and they need to look at themselves. Whenever the general election happens, I can confidently predict that housing will be a central issue. People have already made up their minds that the approach to housing is not working and must change. We are days away from yet another cold weather initiative being announced. This year, more people than ever will be in need. We can count the rows of tents in our parks and along the canal banks. We can understand the level of need. This initiative is not a solution.

The Government's business as usual approach and dismissive attitude that the problem will not be solved overnight has sought to normalise children missing developmental milestones because they are stuck in unsuitable homeless accommodation. This approach has sought to normalise two or three generations living under one roof and, ultimately, a society without empathy or compassion. That is not who we are. Irish people have an inherent sense of decency and are appalled at the trauma we are inflicting on those who find themselves unable to keep up with the property and rental markets that make no room for those on average or below average incomes.

When cuckoo funds buy large blocks of houses or apartments we are told that will provide housing. What kind of communities are we building? They are transient and such housing is only available to those who can afford it. Our use of public land is dictated by the Minister's Department. One only has to look at the O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor sites to see the approach. They should have been a major opportunity to deliver affordable housing for sale or rent, but the Minister's approach is to have private developers who want to make a healthy profit build units, which works against delivering affordability.

We need to focus on a State-based approach to the project management of sites under public ownership to ensure the maximum use is delivered effectively and in an affordable way for sale and rent. The underlying philosophy of Rebuilding Ireland is that the market is the solution, but the people I come across do not talk to me about getting on the property ladder. Rather, they talk to me about wanting a home. I hear parents asking where their children are going to live. I hear from their adult children who are embarrassed to still be dependent on their parents. I hear from a generation of renters who are working hard but paying large rents, which means they cannot save money for a house they can call home. I hear from people who have received eviction notices who crave the security of a home. I cannot tell the Minister how often I have had people in my office in tears saying the same words, “I never thought homelessness was something that happens to people like us”.

The narrative has to change and affordability has to be central to housing delivery. That requires a vision, a vision that I do not believe the Minister or the Government has. The Government has spent years saying no money is available and things take time. This completely ignores the fact that as far back as 2012 the European Investment Bank told us funding was available for housing. Myriad other options were put forward, but all were rejected because they ran contrary to the Government’s determination to rely on the private market to deliver solutions to the problems it created. It has not and it will not. The longer the Government fails to realise that, the worse the emergency becomes.

Rents are running significantly above the monthly cost of a mortgage, yet an entire generation is locked out of accessing mortgages because they cannot afford to save a deposit while paying rent. The solutions are there. The Minister appears to have memory difficulties. It is to be hoped that by now his memory will have been jogged enough to recall the many pieces of proposed legislation tabled by the Opposition on these issues. Perhaps he might also remember our call two years ago for a national rent freeze, something the Fine Gael by-election candidate in Dublin Mid-West said she supported as she mounted a campaign about how her party and director of elections were failing renters and to provide affordable homes for purchase.

I am glad that over the past three or four weeks during the by-election campaign Fianna Fáil has finally woken up to the scale of the housing crisis. Its words have been laudable over the past number of weeks. Deputy Micheál Martin has repeatedly used Leaders’ Questions to decry the state of affairs and excoriate the Minister for failing in his job. The two new Fianna Fáil Deputies in the House this evening will no doubt have lambasted the Minister and his track record while on the election stump in recent weeks. Yet, it would appear now that those words are really all hot air and Fianna Fáil will continue to do what it has done since the outset of this silent partner arrangement. Brexit has been used as an excuse to dumb down many pressing domestic issues, including the housing and homelessness emergency. Not one of those Deputies, however, wants to talk about how this housing and homelessness emergency will make Brexit, and the fallout from Brexit, even worse for Ireland and the individuals stuck in this situation.

How will companies look at this country, where their employees cannot afford to live and are considering the prospects of relocation? We are already hearing of people moving because they cannot afford to live here. Those are people with good jobs and a good education. The Expat City Ranking 2019 report, published today, unfortunately ranks Dublin last of some 82 cities. Some 86% of people surveyed stated that they found it difficult to get housing and 88% responded that they did not find housing in Dublin affordable.

The Government, and its silent partners in Fianna Fáil, want to pretend that this motion is

reckless and that a general election so close to Christmas is ill advised and a political game-playing stunt. It seems, however, that nobody on those benches cares to recall a no confidence motion that the Fianna Fáil Party tabled in respect of the former Deputy and Minister, Frances Fitzgerald, when the heat became too much for that party to bear back in 2017. That motion did not require a general election and neither does this one. The Government knows that, the Fianna Fáil Party knows that and most observers know that as well. The Government, however, will spin, obfuscate and attack. We make no apology for tabling this motion and we will not be silenced by the use of the age-old trope of attack as the best line of defence.

We are using this opportunity, one of the few we get on Private Members' business, to do what is morally and politically right. I refer to acknowledging that the Minister has utterly failed in his job and that we have no confidence in his ability to solve this housing and homelessness emergency. For that reason, regardless of any election timing arguments, we have no option but to state that we have no confidence in the Minister. We are not only seeking to have this motion passed, we are asking the Minister to resign. Our society can no longer afford him or Fine Gael.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I support this motion of no confidence in the Minister. He is presiding over a housing and homelessness emergency. This is no accident and no error, but the result of deliberate policy pursued by this Government and previous Governments. This policy sees housing as a commodity and the market as a solution to the housing and homelessness crisis. That policy has failed, was always going to fail and will continue to fail. The reason the Minister refuses to tackle this housing and homelessness emergency, the reason he will not commence a large-scale construction of public housing on public lands, the reason he will not provide significant affordable purchase and rental schemes and the reason he refuses to freeze rents or to stop families being evicted into homelessness is that he is part of an extreme free market, pro-super rich Government.

The right to housing is a human right. This Minister and the Government, however, are treating housing as a commodity on the market, and that has resulted in the biggest housing and homelessness crisis since the Famine. The policy of the Minister and the Government on housing has been criticised by the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, who has said housing is stability, security, dignity and, crucially, housing is not a commodity. The Minister's policy is damaging children, families and society in general. Indeed, the result of the Minister's policies, as we have seen only this afternoon, is another increase in the homelessness numbers for October. There are now 10,514 people homeless, and one in three of those is a child. Homelessness has increased by 354% since September 2014. Since the appointment of the Minister, the number of people homelessness has increased from 7,300 to 10,300.

Rents have also skyrocketed during this Minister's tenure. In Dublin, average rent is now more than €2,000 and rent nationally is up 8% compared with the same period last year. One in five renters pays more than 40% of income on rent. Housing assistance payment, HAP, tenants pay an average top-up to landlords of some €200 monthly in addition to their local authority rents. These figures are unsustainable and mean these tenants do not have 2 cents to put together at the end of a week. An illness, bereavement, communion, confirmation or an unexpected bill can and does drive these families into debt and, indeed, into long-term debt.

A generation of young families are locked out of ever having a family home. Thousands of these families are just above the limit to get on a local authority waiting list for a home. At

the same time, those families will not qualify for a mortgage. They are condemned to paying long-term exorbitant rents. Even families lucky enough to get on the local authority housing list face reviews and removal from those lists if their income has crept over the income limit. I have seen cases where families with only social welfare income have been removed from local authority housing lists. We have the 77,000 people on those lists and 37,000 families on HAP, with no security of tenure and paying exorbitant rents.

There are also thousands on no lists. Those are the hidden homeless, living with family or friends or sleeping on couches. The Minister's housing policy is not only a failure, it is a disaster for families and for society. It has broken the social contract between the Government and the public. The housing and homelessness emergency can only be tackled successfully by the declaration of a statutory housing and homelessness emergency, by the building of an emergency large-scale public construction housing programme on public land, by large-scale affordable purchase and affordable rental programmes, by the freezing of rents at significantly reduced levels and by ensuring that sitting tenants have the right to remain on as tenants in situations where properties are being sold. To implement these measures requires the removal of the Minister and the Government and I support this motion.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Members of the Government now have ten minutes to respond.

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): We have a challenge with housing and homelessness in this country and it is a serious one. My concern tonight is that the motivation that has brought us to this debate is not a genuine one. Nevertheless, I am the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. I am responsible for housing and homelessness in this country and I am accountable to this House, as I always have been. I know all too well that people are hurting in this crisis because I meet them every week in my job. It is my determination, as Minister, to see them through this crisis and to see them right at the end of it.

Rebuilding Ireland is our housing plan and it is constantly being reformed and improved. That can only happen with the support of this House, because we are a minority Government. That support has been forthcoming quite often. For example, when I was appointed as Minister and I increased our social housing building targets by 30% and secured €500 million to do that, I was supported by this House. When I introduced some of the most progressive rent reforms earlier this year, I did so with the support of this House. Earlier today, we approved a new regulator for the approved housing bodies sector. Again, that was with the support of this House. Last year, I lifted the height cap on buildings like apartments, again with the support of this House. Reforms have been made under Rebuilding Ireland. Before we talk about all the challenges faced by renters, first-time buyers, people who are living in overcrowded accommodation and those who are at the sharpest end of this crisis, including people who are sleeping rough on the streets and families in emergency accommodation, we have to talk about supply, which is the fundamental problem we are facing. We are facing it because our housing sector was broken in the past. In 2013, only 4,500 homes were built in this State. In 2014, just over 400 social housing homes were built in this State. Like others, I can throw around facts and figures, but I suggest there are certain facts we cannot escape. When Rebuilding Ireland was launched in the middle of 2016, it contained a commitment to the delivery of 125,000 new places to live by the end of 2021. We still have two years to go, but we have already delivered 64,000 new places to live. In the last 12 months, 26,000 new homes started under construction on new sites. More than 30,000 homes have planning permission. These numbers are increas-

ing. Only 4,500 homes were built in 2013, as I have said, but this year we will build more than 20,000 homes. That will be the biggest number in a decade. Only 419 social housing homes were built five years ago, but this year we will build more than 6,000 such homes. Next year will be a record year. We will build more social housing homes next year than we have built in any year in the past two decades.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Is the Minister a magician?

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I invite Deputies to think about the fact that more than 6,000 social housing homes and more than 20,000 private homes are being built this year. One in three homes being built this year will be used for social housing. It is nonsense for people to say that we are reliant on the market for our solutions and that our targets are not ambitious. Next year, we will build more social housing homes than were built in any of the boom years. We cannot escape such facts. Rebuilding Ireland is working. As supply increases, we are locking in affordability. Since 2016, 50,000 new homes have been bought by first-time buyers. That number comes from the CSO and is not my own. The help-to-buy scheme has supported 15,000 households over the same period. The Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme has helped more than 1,000 households. Deputies have called for a shared equity affordability scheme and such a scheme now exists. It will help a couple on €55,000 - a teacher and a nurse, for example - to buy a new home in Dublin. It will help a single person on €36,000 to buy a new home in Cork. Our studies have shown that the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme is helping chefs, carpenters and lorry drivers to buy homes. We are helping people to buy homes. We are not relying on the market for these purposes. We are putting taxpayers' money in to drive delivery. These facts come from the CSO. Our work is not finished, but we are making progress.

The number of people in emergency accommodation - 10,514 - is also important. It was just under 8,000 when I came into office. I am answerable for that increase. I am also answerable for the more than 12,000 people who have left homelessness since I came into office because of the significant efforts that have been made in this area.

The solution of the Social Democrats is to propose a motion of no confidence and to say that Rebuilding Ireland is failing. Not once have the Deputies in question come into the joint committee to question me on Rebuilding Ireland.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Minister is wrong.

Deputy Paul Murphy: They are not even on the committee. This is ridiculous.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I have brought forward one of the most progressive rent Bills this year. Even though one of the biggest challenges we have when it comes to emergency accommodation relates to people leaving the private rented sector, the Social Democrats did not propose a single amendment to the Bill in question. Deputy Catherine Murphy wants to know what to say to people who are worried about people not being able to afford homes. I suggest that she should look at her colleague to her left, who has spoken against emergency accommodation, social housing and apartment building in her constituency.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I ask the Minister to produce the evidence.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: The greatest crime in public life is to say one thing in public while doing another. This debate is full of hypocrisies.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It sure is.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: Sinn Féin will be supporting the motion of no confidence even though it called it a stunt when it was first proposed. Sinn Féin should know what a stunt looks like when it comes to housing. Deputy McDonald has said that if she gets into government, she will have the most ambitious social housing programme in the State. I ask her to look at what we are doing. Next year will be a record year for social housing delivery. These are the types of reforms we are making under Rebuilding Ireland. Our work is not yet finished. We are continuing to make progress and to see our plans through. We recognise that people are hurting in this crisis. We recognise that two generations of people have been condemned by the housing failures of previous Governments. We are committed to not condemning any future generations to those types of failures through short-term thinking.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I thank the many Deputies who have rearranged their schedules to travel to be here for this debate and for tonight's vote.

Deputy Pat Casey: Is the Taoiseach referring to Deputy Dara Murphy?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They came from Brussels and all.

The Taoiseach: I am not going to speak at length, but I will make a few points. The first thing that needs to be said is that tonight's motion will not pass and was never going to pass. It was just a stunt to gain publicity and coverage for its proposers. It has succeeded in that respect because it secured precious airtime on television and radio, sometimes with a by-election candidate in the doughnut. I give the Deputies full marks in that regard. This motion is also a lost opportunity because those who have proposed it, and their Opposition colleagues who support it, could instead have put forward constructive proposals, new laws and new ideas that might have helped to alleviate homelessness and to increase the supply or affordability of housing.

Deputy Paul Murphy: There would be no point because the Government would refuse to provide a money message.

The Taoiseach: This motion does none of that. I give the Deputies no marks in that regard. I respect the views of Members of this House. I always try to reflect on what they say. I have not forgotten the advice provided by one of our colleagues two years ago last week, when it looked like the country would be plunged into an election before Christmas because of false allegations made against the then Tánaiste, Frances Fitzgerald.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Not again.

The Taoiseach: I do not need to remind anyone that the allegations in question were subsequently proven to be without foundation. Deputy Shortall advised me at that time that the country could not afford to have a general election and that a Christmas election would do huge damage to the country. I have not forgotten her wisdom or her certainty about what was needed for the country at that time. It is a pity that she has forgotten her own words and wise counsel at that time. She forgot them as soon as it was expedient to do so.

The housing crisis is very real. It affects our citizens in many ways. High rents are unaffordable for many people. The struggle to secure a mortgage, which involves raising a deposit, is followed by the struggle of finding somewhere to buy. The sharpest end of homelessness

is seen in the level of rough sleeping on our streets and the presence of families in emergency accommodation. It has become popular in some quarters to attribute all this to the policies or ideology of one party - my party. That is not accurate and does not stand up to scrutiny. The housing crisis in Ireland was a long time in the making. I will go back to that in a moment. My party has been in charge of the housing brief for three and a half years under the Tánaiste, Deputy Coveney, and the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. For the five years prior to that, the brief was held at Cabinet level by Deputies Kelly, Jan O'Sullivan and Penrose of the Labour Party. For the four years before that, it was held by John Gormley of the Green Party.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Unbelievable.

The Taoiseach: We are talking about six Cabinet Ministers from three parties with different ideologies, perspectives and personalities.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It was the same Department.

The Taoiseach: The housing crisis was not caused by any one party, ideology or person. Its roots lie in the economic crisis and crash that occurred ten years ago. The Government of the time was broke and could not afford to build houses for many years. The banks were bust and could not finance housing. The construction industry had gone bust and was unable to build anything. Some 100,000 construction workers emigrated during that period and most of them have not returned. In the normal course of events, a country with Ireland's demographics should build between 30,000 and 35,000 houses each year. For seven years, we built almost no houses. That left us with a deficit of approximately 200,000 homes. It is going to take time to recover that deficit. It was always going to take time.

As our five-year Rebuilding Ireland plan is now three and a half years old, it is reasonable to ask how we are doing and to look at some of the facts. In 2015, the year before Rebuilding Ireland, only 7,000 new homes were built in Ireland. More than 20,000 new homes will be built this year. Housing supply has more than trebled. House prices, which had been increasing by 7% a year, have now levelled off. Incomes are now rising faster than house prices. That is the best way to achieve affordability in the long term. The Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, has already mentioned that we have embarked on the largest social housing programme in many decades. Some 10,000 social houses have been added to the housing stock this year. This is more than any other year in this century, regardless of boom or bust. We know from today's figures that rough sleeping has fallen to its lowest level in many years. It is terrible and shameful that 10,000 people are living in emergency accommodation tonight, but we must not forget that we have lifted 14,000 people out of homelessness and provided them with secure housing.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Government put them into homelessness.

The Taoiseach: The help-to-buy scheme, which has helped 15,000 young people to purchase their own homes, will run for another two years. The Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme has enabled 2,600 people to get low-interest loans, thereby allowing them to afford new homes.

We are three and a half years into a five-year housing plan. It has got off to a slow start. That was always going to be the case. We are now making real and measurable progress. When we are making such progress, we do not abandon it. We see it through and allow the next Government, of which I hope we will be a part, to build on it.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I would like to share time with Deputies Casey and Cassells.

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

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I fully respect the right of any party to use its parliamentary time in whatever way it sees fit. Any party has the right to table a motion of no confidence in the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, or indeed in any other Minister. It is perfectly permissible under the procedures of this House. The question for many people, including the media and many of the people to whom I have spoken, is the timing of the motion. If we are honest with one another, most people saw it as a cynical manoeuvre to try to garner attention in advance of the by-elections. That is the truth of it.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: It is our Private Members' time.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall may have an opportunity to contribute later.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I did not interrupt Deputy Catherine Murphy.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall, please desist from interrupting.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I respect the right of the Member to speak. I did not interrupt her colleague. I am stating my own opinion and the opinion of thousands of other people across this country. That is the reality of it. In the first few minutes of this debate the Social Democrats, others and the Government have engaged in a blame game, the Taoiseach having given us a history of former housing Ministers and trying to blame former Labour Party Ministers, Green Party Ministers and others. He has a responsibility himself and we know that, as do the people watching this debate who know the country is in the grips of a housing crisis. People want to know how we propose to fix the crisis and what alternative measures we propose to bring forward.

As Fianna Fáil spokesperson on housing I have published 13 pieces of legislation in the last 14 months dealing with issues such as strengthening security of tenure, tenants' rights, student rents, affordable housing, owner management companies, multi-unit developments, an ombudsman for this area and strengthening the rights that people have in housing. This is what the people want to see us doing. This motion will not result in one person being housed or one person being taken off the homeless list. It will not do that. It will be seen for what it is, namely, a motion that does not put forward any solution.

Fianna Fáil would do things differently.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Fianna Fáil should do something.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We have said that and the public will get an opportunity to see that. Nobody watching this debate believes that it would be beneficial for this country to plunge itself into a general election in Christmas week or shortly thereafter in advance of another Brexit deadline of 31 January. The public are not on the side of the Social Democrats on this motion. Others have jumped on the bandwagon, including Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin has said that this motion need not bring down the Government, but voting no confidence in a Minister, of whom I have been highly critical, would bring down the Government. If Sinn Féin believes that is a good position for this country to be in prior to a Brexit deadline of 31 January and a UK

general election on 12 December, it is for Sinn Féin to put its case forward.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We will.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Sinn Féin has presided over the pulling down of the Government in the North of Ireland, such that it has not sat for three years. There is also the matter of the record of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland on housing. Deputy Ó Broin's book is a partitionist book because he never referred in it to Sinn Féin's track record on housing in the North of Ireland. I read it but it is not a great read. In the North, there were 37,859 applicants on the social housing lists at the end of March and seven of every ten households waiting for a social home were deemed to be in priority need of housing, officially described as in housing distress. Of the 26,387 applicants in housing distress, 74%, or almost 20,000, were officially considered homeless. That is Sinn Féin's record on housing and homelessness in the North of Ireland.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: What is Fianna Fáil's record in the North?

Deputy Alan Farrell: Deputy Ó Snodaigh should be careful, Deputy O'Brien might answer that question.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Sinn Féin walked away from its responsibilities in the North. They are the facts. What Fianna Fáil will not do-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Darragh O'Brien should make his remarks through the Chair.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Yes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If the Deputy wants to engage in a side debate there are other places he can do so. Please do not invite interruptions.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Unfortunately, that is the truth and the track record of Sinn Féin in the North.

Deputy John Brady: Fianna Fáil does not know the truth.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Fianna Fáil has put the national interest first by sticking with a confidence and supply arrangement that, frankly, in many instances has not suited and has been difficult to do politically. In doing so, we have put country ahead of narrow party political gain and that is what we will continue to do. The public will get an opportunity early in the new year to review what each party is putting forward in terms of solutions to fix the housing crisis and how to stall the fall in home ownership rates in this country. This Government has presided over the highest homelessness rates and it has condemned a generation of people into unaffordable renting. People want to know how the problem can be fixed and Fianna Fáil has alternatives to this type of motion, which will be seen for what it is, namely, an attempt to garner publicity and support for the Social Democrats. That is fine, but the Social Democrats should also have set out what it would do differently.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Did the Deputy read the motion?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Early next year the public will be insisting that parties and those who put themselves forward for election show them what they would do differently. Fianna Fáil will put home ownership at the centre of the solution to the housing crisis, increase

social housing build and control rents such that people will have a safe and secure home for themselves and their families.

Deputy Pat Casey: This is a political Groundhog Day. For the second time, we are engaged in Dáil time in populist political games. We do so in December, when a defeat for the Minister would plunge the country into a general election which would run through Christmas. A general election during Christmas when homelessness is at its most dangerous and homeless services are working flat out to provide food and shelter for families is almost beyond belief but that is what we are facing tonight.

I was elected to find solutions to the problems we face. As Vice Chairman of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government I have worked with colleagues from all parties and none to hold Government to account and to propose practical solutions to the continuing scandal of housing delivery. During the last confidence motion I remarked that the speeches and the dramatic outrage were about who got the political blame and who garnered votes from an angry electorate. The politics of housing that are again on display tonight are an example of what is wrong with politics and contributes to the increasing disillusionment with politicians and the political system. Was anyone listening? It seems not, unfortunately.

Poor turnout in the by-elections should inform us as to the mood of citizens. The message from the people to whom I spoke during the campaign was crystal clear, namely, politicians need to deliver solutions and not waste time on political points scoring. Playing political games with housing and homelessness is shameful. Many of the Members here tonight who have issued press statements never bothered to attend one of the 145 meetings of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. They are only concerned with getting media attention. Let us be clear, this motion will not result in the building of one home. It will not result in one policy idea and it will not offer hope to families desperate for a home. Can we honestly say, hand on heart, that this show tonight is helpful in solving the housing crisis?

There are only two possible results from tonight's motion. The first is no confidence being expressed in the Minister and the Taoiseach calling a general election, as he is entitled to do in such circumstances, following which we will all leave here and engage in a 21 to 28-day election campaign with all the noise and news cycle tailspin that goes with it. Will a Christmas general election help to put a roof over the heads of the thousands of homeless families? The answer should make us ashamed of this farce.

The second result is the Government narrowly winning the vote. The politicians whose sole purpose is to play the politics of housing and not the solutions for housing get their media fix and head off satisfied that their names will appear in tomorrow's newspapers and current affairs programmes. This motion takes up two hours of Dáil time to give the usual suspects their panto performance, when we could be introducing emergency housing measures. There are approximately 40 Dáil sitting days to an expected general election. We could be using those days to pass legislation that increases the delivery of homes,-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pat Casey: -----provides certainty for tenants and increases the whole-of-Government response that is needed to get on top of our housing and homelessness crisis. We could use those 40 days to work on housing solutions and get the entire apparatus of government to realise that Rebuilding Ireland is not working. There are 40 days to increase the State's role in

the provision of homes for all who need them; 40 days in which an entire suite of measures, on which many of us involved in housing have been working since 2016, could be brought into reality and 40 days to show the people who elected us to this House that politics can be a positive force for change, that politicians can disagree but can also take their responsibilities seriously, as well as to provide the parameters to allow the people to decide what policies need to be introduced that will ensure every man, woman and child in Ireland gets a home.

There will be time for appropriate judgment about the failures of this Government. That time will be in an orderly general election in the spring, when the vast majority of people actually want an election and are prepared to engage. The need for radical solutions in housing will demand the attention of the vast majority of the electorate. That time is not in the run up to Christmas. Let us end this farcical debate tonight and get back to work.

Deputy Shane Cassells: We are here yet again to debate a vote of no confidence in someone belonging to the Government, a Government so sick it is in need of home help, if only there were the staff to provide it with home help.

Deputy Martin Ferris: There will be plenty of that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on. If Deputies' parties give them time, they can contribute to the debate but they should please refrain otherwise.

Deputy Shane Cassells: It is okay, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I have a special fan club in Sinn Féin.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, hold on. It is not okay.

Deputy Martin Ferris: The Deputy has plenty of home help.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will decide what is okay or not. Please, Deputies.

Deputy Shane Cassells: It is a Government in need of some special tutoring to show it the errors of its ways, if only there were the special needs assistants to help it in that regard and to give it some moral guidance while they are at it. It is a Government in need of shelter from the storms it faces on a weekly basis but we all know there is no hope of roof over one's head. However, there is a festive mood around this place today. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle turned on the Christmas lights earlier and the Christmas movies are starting on television soon. No doubt the Taoiseach will be keeping a sharp eye on the TV listings for his favourite movie "Love Actually", relax on the couch and take in the lines of Hugh Grant. There is of course that famous scene where Hugh Grant, playing the Prime Minister, takes on Billy Bob Thornton, playing the US President and, having taken a series of kicks from him at various meetings, says that enough is enough and gives the US President a kick back. He speaks of their special relationship when he says -----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: This is a serious debate.

Deputy Shane Cassells: I am getting to the serious point.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: When I make an announcement, it is for all Members of the House, both Government and Opposition. Please refrain, Deputies.

Deputy Shane Cassells: Trust me, Patrick, I am getting to the serious point.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The Prime Minister speaks of their special relationship when-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Act like mature politicians.

Deputy Shane Cassells: -----he says: “I love that word ‘relationship’. Covers all manners of sins, doesn’t it? I fear that this has become a bad relationship.”

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That also goes for the Minister of State.

Deputy Shane Cassells: He continues: “A relationship based on the President taking exactly what he wants, and casually ignoring all those things that really matter to [us].” A bit like Hugh Grant and Billy Bob, there is no doubt that nights like tonight, for the Minister of State, Deputy O’Donovan, and the debate we are having make us examine our relationship.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: That is rubbish, actually.

Deputy Shane Cassells: It is one that afforded the party opposite, with its Members who are heckling and ought to take stock of themselves-----

Deputy Brendan Griffin: This is a serious debate.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This is not the first time I have had to reprimand the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: The Government got its answer on Friday.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Listen Ministers. I ask the Ministers of State to listen to me and to act as mature politicians. That goes for all Members of the House. I hope that I do not have to interfere again.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The relationship is one that has afforded the party opposite that most trusted of positions of forming a Government to tackle the biggest issues of our day, and no issue has bedevilled our country more than that of housing. However, it has not lived up to that trust, it has failed our people and it has not delivered on that very basic issue of providing homes for people. If a State is failing its people on housing, it is not worth its salt on anything else. It should not surprise us because, as I said here during our housing debate last week, Fine Gael has been failing the people on housing as far back as 1924, when W.T. Cosgrave was grumbling to the *Irish Independent* that the private market would solve the housing issue and the problem of the slums. Nearly 100 years later and Fine Gael is desperately looking towards its buddies in the development game-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Shane Cassells: -----desperately hoping they will produce magic houses out of the

skies to tally with the magical figures they quote in here when they talk about houses built.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Shane Cassells: The houses these guys are building must be in Brigadoon, because they disappear as quickly as they appear in its reality.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: The Deputy can mention "Love Actually" now. All of his buddies in the Fianna Fáil tent.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The people know that when it comes to the big ticket items such as housing, it will only be Fianna Fáil that solve it. I opened my comments about relationships. Ultimately, for Fianna Fáil the only contract or relationship that matters is the one we have with the Irish people. No matter what slurs the buckos on the far side will try to hurl at us, we know that when it comes to delivery on the housing market there is nobody else other than a Fianna Fáil Administration who will have the drive to get things done-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies please.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The Government party's own councillors are even saying that to us.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: The houses were delivered by the people in Australia.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please. Deputy O'Donovan, please do not continue to interrupt. I may have to ask some Members to leave the House if they continue like that. It is not an appropriate time to do that.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on. Deputy O'Donovan, the very fact that you are a Minister of State does not give you the opportunity to keep referring to me. Please refrain. There might be somebody walking out tonight. It may be all of us. Please, Minister of State. The public are watching this. How can they have respect for politicians if they hear continuous interruptions? I also ask others who are speaking not to invite interruptions.

Deputy Shane Cassells: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. The fact that the dream of home ownership for those who have the wherewithal to actually purchase a home has evaporated should fill Deputy O'Donovan with shame. People at the start of the noughties could aspire to own their own home in their mid-20s, now it is in their mid-30s, if they are lucky enough to find a property that has not been swallowed up by an investment fund or a local authority.

The Government has taken the actual focus and drive out of local authorities to go and build homes. I listened to the Minister give facts and figures in his speech but he and his team are touring the country with approved housing bodies, opening schemes, hauling county managers and directors of housing from the council and giving them the praise when they had nothing to do with it. They have lost the drive and the impetus to even want to build homes. It is depressing that the Government has bred that culture. Why? It has opened a chequebook for the local authorities to just snap up homes from auctioneers. If one goes to the senior executive officers,

they are on their computers on a Monday morning looking at *myhome.ie* and trying to buy houses. That is the culture that the Government has nurtured. Officials of the State at county council level are in direct competition with young first-time buyers trying to get on the housing ladder. It is a depressing vista that has developed over the past decade but it will change.

The prospect of an election in the new year will give people a clear choice on properly costed alternatives between ourselves and Fine Gael, unlike the pantomime tonight where the Social Democrats and Sinn Féin think houses will drop from the sky following a Dáil motion. I may totally disagree with the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, but I will always say this for him - at least he has an ideology. It might be a failing one but at least he has one. The nonsense coming from the left here tonight is a Wendy house solution that would have us in an even worse scenario.

Deputy Mick Barry: You are a spoofer.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The Taoiseach said earlier that he needed time. He is out of time. The choice for the people of Ireland will come soon. The people of Ireland can make the choice to give their children a better future, where the basic principle of having a home is not the fairy tale told by the spoofers to my right, but an attainable reality because one party has always ensured that there were houses for our citizens and that party was Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Mick Barry: Spoofer.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind Members, including Deputy Cassells, to use parliamentary language.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle should remind the Shinnners of that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on. Listen, let all of us act in a mature fashion. I call Deputy Mary Lou McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: With all of the maturity that a Shinner can muster-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Do not be inviting interruptions.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----I welcome this motion. It is not populist. It is not designed to bring down the Government and force a Christmas election. It is to focus collective minds and efforts on the issue of housing. One would never think to listen to our esteemed colleague from Fianna Fáil that he will sit on his hands later and allow the chancers and hoodwinkers from Fine Gael, his partners in government, to have their way again with housing policy. When I say "the Government" I should be absolutely clear and say that I mean not just Fine Gael but Fianna Fáil also. The instinct of the Government has been to circle the wagons when it comes to housing, to learn speaking notes, engage in spin and, essentially, to send a message to the people that they do not matter. Those of us who offer solutions that will make a real and substantial difference to people's lives and put a roof over people's heads are routinely ignored, abused or disregarded.

This is because for this Government and the political establishment more generally, power trumps people every single time. In its greed for political power, Fine Gael is blind to the very real consequences of its policy failures. For its part, Fianna Fáil engages in shadow-boxing and makes much noise, as we have just heard. When push comes to shove, however, its Members will come in here, sit on their hands and support their buddies in Fine Gael. They back the

Government to the hilt and in reality, they are part of that Government. With his abstention here today, Deputy Micheál Martin and Fianna Fáil have shown clearly whose side they are on. They are on the side of the landlords and the property speculators at the expense of homeless children and struggling workers and families. It is that attitude that truly sums up just how out of touch all of those in government are.

Earlier, I asked the Taoiseach if he accepted that his Minister's housing policies had failed. Faced with the evidence of rents reaching highs of €2,000 per month, people spending years spent on waiting lists for a council house, children waiting for Santa Claus in bed and breakfasts and family hubs and of more than 10,500 homeless people, the very best the Taoiseach could offer was spin, deflection and an appalling inability to admit that on this one, he and his Minister had got it wrong. Let us use tonight's motion as an opportunity. Let us start from scratch. Let us ditch the spin and let us take this motion as an opportunity to do something right. First, the Minister must go. That is the long and short of it. His Rebuilding Ireland policy is now in its fourth year and is simply not delivering. The problem has got worse. Figures released tonight show more than 10,500 people are now homeless, so the Minister is incapable of dealing with this crisis. He has demonstrated that time and again. We cannot keep coming in here, day in and day out, recounting the suffering of our people. The Minister's time has run out.

We need to set in motion a radical plan of home building both in respect of council and affordable homes to buy and rent. In this case, "affordable" should mean affordable to ordinary people. Sinn Féin has a plan for a public housing programme that will be the biggest that this State has ever seen. It must come at a pace and rate that will meet current need, pent-up demand and future demographic trends. Building social and affordable housing is the only long-term policy solution that can address this crisis and that can be done.

In the short term, we must tackle sky-high rents. We have a plan that would reduce rents by €1,500 per year using a rent freeze and tax credit for renters. That is the kind of targeted action needed instead of spin and bull. These targeted and concrete actions will help people. We must introduce the provisions of the No Consent, No Sale Bill 2019, which has been advocated by my colleague, Deputy Pearse Doherty, to empower ordinary people against circling vulture funds. That would help. We must also introduce a redress scheme for homeowners living in defective Celtic tiger properties. We must increase investment in local authority housing for retrofitting to ensure sustainability of our housing stock. These are common-sense suggestions that can work.

More than anything else, we must face the fact that doing nothing or the same things all over again simply will not be good enough. It is not good enough to keep spinning or to continue with business as usual. The solutions are there and the only thing now standing in our way is political will. I ask the House not to squander this opportunity because people are struggling. Now is the time to stand up for them and make a difference.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Rebuilding Ireland was launched in July 2016. Three and a half years later, are things really any better? Homelessness is up by 67% and child homelessness has increased by a shocking 81%. The latest homeless figures released today indicate yet another significant rise and although the Minister may claim there has been a decrease in rough sleeping, it is likely that this is the result of a change of methodology on last year's count.

Social housing output remains glacial. Just over 7,000 real social homes were added to the stock in 2018. In the same year, more than 14,000 households went on council waiting

lists. The Minister says that those lists are decreasing but that is because more people are being moved into housing assistance payment, HAP, tenancies rather than into real social homes. Meanwhile, private sector output is way behind target. Rebuilding Ireland promised to ensure that an average of 25,000 homes are produced every year in the period to 2021 but nothing close to this has been achieved and we are 30% behind target. With output low, rents and house prices continue to soar. An entire generation has been locked out of renting or buying their own homes.

By every measure, Rebuilding Ireland has failed and yet the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, continues to defend the indefensible. He continues to claim that his plan is working and that alone is reason for him to go. Passing this motion tonight would force the Government to accept that Rebuilding Ireland has failed and it would open the way for a real change in housing policy, allowing us double capital investment in public housing on public land, freeze rents and put money back in renters' pockets. This could deliver genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy while protecting tenants and reducing homelessness.

Tonight, Deputies have a clear choice. They can choose to stand with thousands of homeless children and the hundreds of thousands of people in real housing need or they can stand with the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and his Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and Rebuilding Ireland. I know where I stand.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mark Ward: I am proud and humbled to stand and speak in Leinster House tonight. The housing crisis was the number one issue that came up at the doors right across the Dublin Mid-West in the recent by-election campaign. As we have heard, homeless figures have increased again.

The normalisation of this housing crisis is not normal. It is not normal for our family, friends, neighbours and fellow citizens not to have a safe and secure roof over their heads tonight. It is not normal for almost 4,000 children to spend another Christmas in a hub, a bed and breakfast or a hotel as temporary accommodation. It is not normal for adult children to be living in the back bedrooms of their parents' homes with their own children because they cannot afford the spiralling rents. It is not normal for three generations of one family to be living under the same roof. It is not normal for the residents I spoke to in Dublin Mid-West to be left waiting for the introduction of a real affordable housing scheme in order that they can put down roots in their communities. It is not normal for the continued failed policy of the Government to rely on the private market to supply public housing.

I thank the people of Dublin Mid-West for giving me a very clear mandate tonight. The Minister's housing policies have failed and his term as Minister must come to an end. I do not know if the two new Fianna Fáil Deputies who joined me in the House today are here tonight but I have a message for them. They did not get elected to sit on their hands. While replacing one failed Fine Gael Minister with another failed Fine Gael Minister will not resolve the housing crisis, it will send a very clear message that this House has not just listened to those affected by the housing crisis but that we have acted. I urge everyone to support a vote of no confidence in the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. That would be normal.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Well said.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: The Labour Party has no confidence in the Government and we particularly have no confidence in the Government with respect to its action or inaction relating to housing and homelessness. One need only look at the figures published today, unexpectedly late and into December. They normally come at the end of the month, which would have been November in this case.

More than 10,500 people, including almost 4,000 children are now homeless. Surely that in itself demonstrates the complete failure of the Government’s policy.

Many Members have said that Rebuilding Ireland has failed and the Minister has said this is the policy and it is working. I will quote from the summary published by the Government when it published Rebuilding Ireland: “The plan sets ambitious targets to double the annual level of residential construction to 25,000 homes and deliver 47,000 units of social housing in the period to 2021”. That clearly is not being delivered. The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, which gets its figures from the Department, now predicts only 45,000 completions by 2024, not by 2021. Clearly, Rebuilding Ireland is failing in that.

The second point in the summary document addresses the unacceptable number of households, particularly families, in emergency accommodation. Clearly, Rebuilding Ireland has failed in that regard. More than 10,500 people are in homelessness. There was a specific aim to take families out of hotels by a certain date and it is now two or three years later and families are still living in hotels. The next point in the summary relates to moderating rental and purchase price inflation, particularly in urban areas. Rebuilding Ireland has failed completely on that. Rental prices in Ireland are unaffordable, particularly in urban areas, and purchase prices are also increasing.

The summary then proposes to address a growing affordability gap for many households wishing to purchase their own homes. Clearly, Rebuilding Ireland has failed again on that. The next point in the summary is maturing 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. There is no doubt Rebuilding Ireland has failed in that regard. What we need now is a rent freeze because rents have become unaffordable, yet that is not something the Government is willing to contemplate.

The next point in the summary relates to ensuring housing’s contribution to the economy is steady and supportive of sustainable economic growth. Again, clearly, we do not have that. A report published yesterday shows that, for people looking at Ireland from outside, the unaffordability of housing is one of the main reasons they believe it is not an option for them to come and work in Ireland. Those were the points made on the launching of Rebuilding Ireland and it has failed completely in that regard.

The Minister and the Government need to admit this policy has failed and they need to change it. I agree with those who said the policy is primarily based on using the private sector, even on the publicly owned land. While the Minister refers to it as mixed tenure, his policy clearly is that the majority of homes on publicly owned land should be for private profit. That is fundamentally unacceptable.

I want to answer the point the Minister made, and others who referred to previous Ministers with responsibility for housing. I want to show him this document published by a former

Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly, which contains a detailed description of how the money that was to be spent when the man seated beside me, Deputy Brendan Howlin, was Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and allocated €4 billion for housing as soon as we were able to afford it. When I took up office as Minister of State with responsibility for housing, we were under the troika and, similarly, when Deputy Penrose took up the post, we did not have any money, but as soon as we had money, it was allocated for the building of public houses. That is what was meant to happen but that has not happened. There is a list of construction projects but most of them have simply not moved forward because of the Minister's policy of using public lands primarily for private profit, and that is a failure.

It is important to be clear that there is fundamental difference in the way in which we approach this issue, which is fundamental for people. The Minister said the Opposition had not put forward proposals. We have put forward a number of Bills, two of which have gone through pre-legislative scrutiny in committee, having passed through this House. We have put forward proposals. We have a comprehensive policy document entitled, *Affordable Housing for All*. I want to nail the lie that the Opposition parties have not put forward constructive proposals and do not have policies on these issues. The issue is about the failure to implement policies that work. We need a fundamental change of policy in that regard.

I refer again to the issue of children in homelessness. We have had many debates on homelessness in this House but the fundamental issue is their childhoods are being taken from them because they are living in homeless accommodation. The Royal College of Physicians in Ireland published a paper, entitled *The Impact of Homelessness and Inadequate Housing on Children's Health*, recently. The college called on the Government to urgently take action to address the serious harm to the health of thousands of children experiencing homelessness and inadequate housing. It states: "Children experiencing poor housing have a 25 per cent increased risk of severe physical and mental ill-health and disability during children and early adulthood." It cites the various effects on those children. We know the impact on a person's health and well-being of adverse experience in childhood lasts well beyond childhood. It refers specifically to a higher risk of preterm pregnancy and low birth weight; higher rates of asthma, respiratory illness and infectious diseases; poor nutrition and obesity; less access to developmental opportunities, play, recreation and social activities; poorer emotional and mental health, and increased behavioural difficulties; less access to preventive health care and lower rates of childhood immunisation; poorer education opportunities; and difficulties in the relationship between parents and their children.

Fundamentally, we need to think about those children who need a home. That is why we support this motion of no confidence. We need this most serious of issues to be addressed. There is publicly owned land. There is now money that there was not in the early stages of our time in government. We need the policy to change to ensure the housing that can be delivered is delivered. We need to send a message of hope that this can be done. It is wrong to say the policy is succeeding when, clearly, it is not. That is the change of tack we need and we do not appear to be getting it from this Government.

Deputy Mick Barry: I will share my time with Deputies Boyd Barrett and Paul Murphy.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is agreed.

Deputy Mick Barry: If the Minister wanted to measure the scale of his failure, he could do a lot worse than to look at the workload now placed on the shoulders of the volunteers at Penny

Dinners in Cork city. Penny Dinners has been feeding the poor and the homeless in Cork city since at least the 1880s - some say since the Famine times. This Christmas, these volunteers have to organise 2,000 food hampers. Each week they have to serve 2,000 meals, a twentyfold increase in the past decade. The volunteers serve meals to families with small children. More than 200 children are homeless now in the Cork-Kerry area alone. They serve food to people with jobs. Cork's homeless community now includes members of the working poor. Damn-ingly, Penny Dinners relatively recently had to keep its doors open at night for the first time since the 19th century to provide an alternative to people who otherwise would be forced to sleep out on the streets.

On Thursday, thousands will march on the streets of Cork and Dublin in solidarity with the homeless and to demand action on homelessness. There is a glaring need for a massive increase in social and affordable housing, drastic cuts in rent and a total ban on evictions into homelessness. The people who march know that they will not get these from the Minister. They have no confidence in him or in this Government. Many of them have no confidence in the entire system, a system which puts the profits of vulture funds and landlords above the needs of workers, young people and the homeless.

The Government may just about survive this vote later. If it does, it will be with the connivance of a Fianna Fáil Party that attacks the Government on the doorsteps but props it up in the Dáil. If it does survive, it will be with the votes of the Dáil's very own unmentionables, the likes of Deputy Lowry, Deputy Grealish and the invisible man himself, Deputy Dara Murphy. A Government that relies on votes such as these to survive is truly a bankrupt Government and a Government that is clearly on its very last legs.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: This is not personal. This is not about Deputy Eoghan Murphy as an individual; this is about a policy that has failed and the shameful consequences of that policy. Almost 4,000 children are suffering circumstances that no child should have to suffer. Indeed, the number is much higher because, while some eventually get out of homelessness, more enter it. Thousands of young people, children, mothers and families, thousands more who are couch-surfing, and tens of thousands more who are on waiting lists or who are in expensive rented accommodation where they are threatened with the possibility of eviction and have no security are being put through things that no family and no child should have to be put through. The Minister's policies have caused that.

He said that the Opposition did not put forward alternatives. That is dishonest so he should stop saying it. We have put forward Bills on the right to housing, which he voted against. We put forward Bills to stop evictions on the grounds of sale, which he voted against. We tabled a motion to stop land hoarding and property speculation and to introduce a genuinely affordable housing scheme, which he also voted against. Multiple motions and Bills to this effect have been tabled by the Opposition.

What needs to be done? We need at least 20,000 public and affordable houses to be built every year for the next five years. In addition, other measures are needed in the transition. Those transitional measures, however, must not be a substitute for building the public and affordable housing that we need. Sadly, these transitional measures are the Minister's policy. They are not temporary or transitional, but policy. That is why we have a housing crisis. One only has to read Rebuilding Ireland to see this. It is not just that the Minister is not meeting his targets; his targets are the problem. Three quarters of his plan to deal with the housing crisis relies on vulture funds and landlords who have no interest in solving that crisis but who are profiting

handsomely from it. In fact, the worse the crisis gets, the more money they make. That is the reality the Minister's policy has facilitated.

Is it slowly getting better? I refer to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. Does the Minister know how many council houses will be built in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in 2020? Two. That is considerably worse than this year, for which the figures are abysmal as well. It is getting worse in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. Rents are now averaging €2,000 a month. Who could afford that except very rich people? No ordinary working person can afford that. That is the mess the Minister has got us into because of his reliance on HAP and private landlords. It is not working. The policy has to go and that is why we will support this motion.

Deputy Paul Murphy: By their friends shall ye know them. Let us look at the friends on whom the Minister and the Government are relying tonight to maintain their pro-landlord, pro-development policies in power. It is a verifiable rogues' gallery, including a liar and convicted tax cheat - Deputy Lowry; a landlord who has used racist-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy knows that that is inviting interruption.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It may be but it is a fact that has been found by the courts.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy not to use unparliamentary language.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: That is a disgrace.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That has been dealt with in another forum.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Cheating on taxes is fairly unparliamentary. The Minister is also relying on a landlord who has used dog whistling of a racist kind to distract from the true causes of the housing crisis, and the party of the Galway tent and the big developers - Fianna Fáil. This suits him because he represents the same developer and landlord interests. He has overseen an increase in the total rent going to landlords from €5.5 billion in 2009 to €13 billion a year. He stands over legalised tax dodging by the real estate investment trusts, REITs. IRES REIT paid nothing in corporation tax on profits of €120 million last year.

The Minister is engaging in spin and lies that are worthy of Boris Johnson when he speaks about delivering 10,000 social houses this year given his own plan involves leasing 2,000 of them from private developers rather than the State. Just 1,000 houses were built in the first six months of this year but the Minister expects us to believe that 5,000 will be built in the second half. This is just like Johnson's claims in respect of nurses and hospitals. The truth is that this crisis is going to get worse. Fianna Fáil supports it. It is time for the Minister and the Government to go. It is time for the Minister's neoliberal, pro-developer, pro-landlord policies to go.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I will support this motion. Social Justice Ireland states: "Rebuilding Ireland is defined by privatization and financialisation – private operators of emergency accommodation, private landlords receiving increasing amounts of rent subsidies for "social housing solutions", private developers building on State lands, short-term, high-cost lettings, and private property owners hoping to maximise a profit." Social Justice Ireland went to the trouble of writing a chapter on this. I would have expected the Minister or the Taoiseach to have come in here tonight with a written speech outlining where they think they have succeeded. I am taking part in debate on a day a figure was released to which the Minister did not

refer - 10,514. That is not 10,000 plus or 10,500 but 10,514. Of this figure, 6,688 are adults and 3,826 are children.

I have spoken on housing many times and have put forward many positive solutions. Almost a year ago, Sinn Féin tabled a motion of no confidence. Since then, 699 people have been added to the homeless list. A year before that, my colleague, Deputy Healy, who is sitting on the right although he is of the left, begged and implored the Government to declare a housing emergency. That did not happen either. I only mention one or two of the debates.

I stand here tonight and hear Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael trade insults, after which I will go to a hotel bed. On Thursday night, I will go home to my warm house while 10,514 people will not as a direct result of the Minister's policy and that of the Government before him. Unfortunately, Labour was instrumental in developing that policy. It was responsible for a most fundamental change in housing policy through the introduction of HAP. In Galway city, HAP was, and remains, the only provision for social housing. The local authority only reached 25% of its building targets. As I stand here tonight, 62 inexplicably empty houses remain on the local authority list. The only thing that has changed is that the column that says when they became empty has been removed.

I stand here tonight and listen to ideology from both the Government and Fianna Fáil. They accuse us of being beholden to ideology. I am a practical politician who is committed to public health, public housing and public education because I believe that these are essential ingredients of a democracy. Without them, we cannot have a democracy in which everyone is allowed to participate. This is not personal but the Minister's ideology has privatised the concept of a home. We have asked him to hold a referendum to enshrine in the Constitution that a home is the most basic necessity in allowing us to participate. That has not happened.

I can quote many people but perhaps the best way to proceed is to put the accommodation figures in context. They do not include people in refuges, people living with their families, and a list of others. A study commissioned by the European Commission said that the Minister's figures involved "statistical obfuscation if not 'corruption'". Many other organisations have commented on these issues. The UN rapporteur has commented on the utter failure of the housing policy and on how it has been privatised. Any sensible government, especially a minority government, would see sense after three and a half years of rebuilding Ireland in the image of developers. A sensible government might stop this policy. At what figure of homelessness will it be allowable to stop? What is the magic figure that might make the Minister, his Government and his colleagues on the other side of the House face reality?

Deputy Joan Collins: Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council recently signed an agreement with a German cuckoo fund called Realis which will see the council paying between €2,000 and €3,000 per unit for a 25-year lease on 87 apartments. The price of each of these apartments was in excess of €630,000. This is the reality of the housing policy of the Government and the Minister. It is absurd, insane and immoral. In fact it is criminal, given that while this is going on, 4,000 homeless children live in temporary emergency accommodation. Today we have seen homelessness figures increase to 10,514.

One of the solutions is to build public housing on public land. We have enough zoned public land to build 100,000 units of public housing. Rebuilding Ireland specifically puts forward the idea that the private market will solve our housing crisis by building private houses on public land. What recently happened in Dublin City Council with O'Devaney Gardens is also

criminal. The Government has handed precious public land over to a private developer to build a development of which 30% will be public housing. That land could be used for public housing and the cost rental model, which would allow mixed tenure. That is part of the solution.

The other part of the solution is to introduce a right to housing in the Constitution. The UN special rapporteur for adequate housing has explicitly said that this should be introduced all over the world, not just in Ireland. Housing should be recognised as a human right in the Constitution so that people are empowered to demand their right to housing. I support this motion of no confidence. Nobody has confidence in this Minister, and he is not the only one.

I have another reason to express no confidence in Deputy Eoghan Murphy. Three years ago, a Bill passed Second Stage without opposition. That Bill was the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016. The Minister has dilly-dallied and said he would bring forward amendments. In July he said he would have the wording of amendments ready in autumn of this year. We are still waiting. We are facing an election in about 40 days and we have still not received the Minister's amendments. The unions of the Right2Water Ireland movement are concerned about this, along with other organisations and the people themselves. I do not have confidence in the Minister on the housing issue and I do not have confidence that he will implement the will of the people. On paper, everybody in this Dáil agrees with keeping water in public ownership. If the Minister does not agree with it, he should bring the Bill into the Dáil, argue against it and let people know what his position is.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, was established in 2004 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. It has also advised successive Governments. This Government is causing evictions every day by supporting the vulture funds, which are in the courts during every sitting hour, getting court orders to evict tenants from rental properties. The vulture funds are not landlords so they can do what they like. This is a gaping hole in the Minister's policy. It is one of his major problems. He is not protecting tenants. Vulture evictions are happening daily, faster than one could even think of building a house. Why is the RTB not supporting these tenants when they end up in court? It offers no support whatsoever. Why does the RTB's legal team not support the tenants who are being evicted? Vulture funds are causing huge distress by putting them out on the side of the road.

The figures today are damning. Some 10,514 persons were in emergency accommodation in October. That is 117 more than in September and a new record high for the Minister. The game is up for him. He has failed, and so have five or six successive Ministers who were mentioned tonight. He will not deal with the vulture funds or the banks. He will not pass any legislation to stop them causing havoc and mayhem.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I welcome tonight's debate. It is good to have a debate on such an important issue. The people are fed up with reports and Government spin. The spin doctors always put out the message that the Minister is dealing with the crisis. The truth is that he is not. All he has to do is take a very short walk this evening and he will see the very sad sight of people queuing up for necessary services. These people do not have the simplest thing in the world - a secure place they can call their home, their bed, their corner of the world. People do not have that. I compliment our own local authority, Kerry County Council, and the people working in our housing section. I compliment the people working in the homeless unit in Kerry County Council. However, I truly believe we should not need a homeless unit. We should not have homeless people. We should be doing more to cater for those people. There are

thousands of units throughout this country that are not part of the available housing stock but should be. Government policies are keeping them out of it. There is a lack of Government will to take on this problem in a workmanlike way. I have put ways to help to tackle this crisis on the record of the Dáil over the years. Unfortunately the Minister did not listen, he is not listening now and it looks like he will not listen. I welcome this debate and I am grateful for having it, because it is good for democracy to thrash this out tonight.

Deputy Michael Collins: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of this motion. I have pleaded with the Minister time and time again for immediate action to tackle the housing problem. The Government is presiding over the worst homelessness crisis in the history of the State. The number of homeless families has increased by 354% since September 2014. More than a third of people in emergency accommodation are children. Moreover this number does not include the hidden homeless, people who are living in squats or sleeping on sofas in friends' homes.

This motion was moved by the Social Democrats, but they are no angels. In Dublin last month, councillors from Fianna Fáil, the Green Party, the Labour Party and the Social Democrats agreed to give land at O'Devaney Gardens to Bartra Capital Property. More than 700 houses and apartments are to be built, of which 20% are to be affordable. They are expected to sell for approximately €310,000. For the average worker this is far from affordable. Some 30% of these units are to be social housing but they are likely to cost the State much more than they should. This is what happens when the Government and some councils do not stand up for the taxpayer. I recently saw this in west Cork, when a motion to increase property tax was blindly brought forward by the Green Party and seconded by a councillor from the Social Democrats. The motion was later passed, adding an extra 5% to property tax in County Cork. This was an unforgivable act by the Social Democrats councillor in west Cork who seconded the motion and, to rub salt in the wound, voted against the motion when the vote was taken. This was too little too late for the hardworking taxpayers of west Cork, who now face an extra 5% thanks to the Social Democrats.

Rural resettlement must be explored and promoted. It is time the Government listened and took real action. If I saw real action being taken towards rural resettlement, I might be able to stand here with some degree of confidence in the Minister. Sadly, however, I will not be voting to keep him in his position.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I very much regret that the Minister blames the local authorities for failing to build houses. The fact is that the Minister and his Government have retained the four-stage process demanded by the Department. That is slowing down the building of social housing.

How many times have we asked the Minister to bring forward the tenant purchase scheme to allow pensioners to buy out the houses they have rented, in some cases for 40 years? In Kerry there is funding to build just 12 rural cottages from 2016 to 2021. Rent costs have reached €1,400 in the town of Killarney. I asked the Minister to do something about the tax that is being levied. In most cases the Government levies a tax worth 50% of the rent. The housing assistance payment is a disaster. It is €690, including the 20%. This is all that a tenant can get in the County of Kerry. On top of this the tenant has to pay money from that amount to the local authority. The Rebuilding Ireland loan is a disaster because it is so hard and there are so many hoops for people to jump through. It puts people through the mill, over and over again, before they actually get the funding.

I am aware of a case of a vulture fund demanding to put a man, his wife and their four children, with his mother and his brother who is in a wheelchair, out on the road. This is instead of the Government buying that house by giving funding to the local authority to buy it. This would give the family a chance to rent it back. We have asked to do that several times. Why will the local authority not do it? It could buy the house and give the people the dignity to stay in the house. I put it to the Minister that there will have to be a house somewhere. This is the truth. There will have to be a house somewhere-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: -----so I ask the Minister to allow the family the dignity to stay in that house-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We shall move on to the Social Democrats and the Green Party now, Deputy.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: -----until things get better again and they could buy back the house again. I am sorry, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is always the same.

Deputy Catherine Martin: Tá an Comhaontas Glas sásta tacaíocht aa thabhairt don rún seo. We have no confidence in the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. We have no confidence in him as the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. We have no confidence in this Government's ability to tackle this housing and homelessness crisis. It has shown time and again that its solutions are not working and that it has no willingness to change.

This motion is not just about a lack of confidence in the Minister. We had no confidence in his predecessor, or any of the Ministers with responsibility for housing who have been in office since Fine Gael entered government. Since 2014, Fine Gael has worn a set of ideological blinkers that prevented the party from recognising that our housing crisis is a result of market failures. It is clear that market solutions will not solve this problem. The obsession with market solutions is an article of faith among the Minister and his colleagues. No amount of suffering and no number of families spending Christmas in hotels or bed and breakfast accommodation seem able to convince the Government that its fundamental approach to this issue is flawed.

It seems to me that to call our current situation a housing "crisis" is an insult to those who have suffered and who continue to suffer under it. A crisis is something that occurs suddenly and demands immediate action. We have been told by Fine Gael every year since 2014 that houses cannot be built overnight and that its solution is just around the corner. I believe that the term housing "disaster" might be more apt than housing "crisis". The Minister and his colleagues stand for continuing to tolerate this disgrace, this *status quo*. We need change.

The Minister released the latest homelessness figures for the month of October mere hours before this debate tonight. The figures were not released at the end of the month, which was last week. Instead they conveniently arrived with a very limited timeframe for Opposition Deputies to study them before tonight's debate. We have, however, had a look at them and they are not easy reading. There are now 10,514 people in homeless emergency accommodation across the State. There was an increase of 117 people homeless in a single month this year. When homelessness figures are going up, week after week, month after month, and year after year it is a sign that something is not working. Nothing is working in the Minister's housing policy.

It is not as though the Opposition has been quiet with our alternative approaches. There is hardly a Deputy on this side of the House who has not put forward a constructive, practical, alternative solution to the housing and homelessness crisis and yet, almost without exception, these solutions have been ignored, dismissed and at times ridiculed by the Government. This Dáil passed a Green Party motion calling for the provision of cost rental public housing at scale on public land. In our pre-budget submission this year we provided for a huge investment in this sustainable form of housing, which will ensure a range of diverse tenants in stable, secure rental accommodation for decades. We provided for the same proposals last year but the Government ignored it. The Government is simply unwilling to build public housing on public land in the numbers needed to tackle this housing crisis. More than three years ago we introduced into this House legislative amendments on a cross-party basis with a number of Opposition parties for rental security for tenants. The previous Minister, Deputy Coveney, opposed it then and his successor has opposed these rights every time since, because it would decrease the property values of landlords. People are without homes. Agus muid ag smaoineamh ar choinneal a ladsadh san fhuinneog ar Oíche Nollag na bliana 2019, is scannalach an rud é go bhfuil beagnach 4,000 páiste ag fanacht in óstáin. This is 3,826 children, mar mháthair agus mar Theachta Dála, táim an-bhuartha faoi thodhchaí agus faoi mheabhair shláinte na bpáistí seo. This is a result of Fine Gael's housing policy. It is a result of Rebuilding Ireland. It is a result of favouring the powers of landlords to evict tenants for almost any reason over the rights of tenants to safe, secure and warm homes. It is a result of endorsing and transcribing every wish of the construction industry instead of listening to the horror and anguish of those families who are without a home as we stand here tonight, and who will be without a home this Christmas. Níl aon muinín againn as an Aire.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: When history looks back on this Government, one of the most severe criticisms will be that what was a very good national planning framework, which sought to bring life back into the centre, was abandoned in a national development plan that was all about sprawl. When we talk of housing and no confidence in the Government's housing policy, it is inexorably connected to transport; the two go together. Under this Government we are seeing a numbers game with regard to how many houses are being built, but some 25% of the houses are in counties surrounding Dublin and the same Government is spending all our money in widening every motorway. This traps us into an unsustainable form of housing and transport for decades to come.

If the Government was serious about the national planning framework, the last thing it would have done - which was the first thing done by the current Minister - would have been to lower all of the apartment standards. If we have to bring people back into the centre we must build high-quality housing and apartment living, including for families. We must not go with what we see everywhere currently, which is hotels, box apartments and the hostel-type accommodation that make up the numbers. This was a fundamental mistake. That was the time for us to build close to the centre with quality and properly sized apartments, with light and greenery around them to make an environment people would enjoy living in. This is what we have to do and this is what the national planning framework set out, but it was abandoned. For this reason, among all the other reasons my colleagues have set out, the Green Party will not be able to vote confidence in the Minister this evening.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: More than 10,500 people are homeless. Since 2014, the number of families that are homeless has increased by 354%. One in three persons living in emergency accommodation is a child. These figures do not include the people who live with families

and friends who, I can vouch, come in daily and weekly to my constituency office. The figures also do not include people who live in squats, those who live rough, or the women and children who live in domestic violence refuges. Some of these people are facing more than one year without a home. It could be two or three years. Babies are being born into homelessness. This causes serious damage to children, causes serious stress for families and results in many family break-ups.

If the Minister had been working in the private sector and spent the millions of euro, as he said, then he would be fired. I live in Louth, known as the “wee county”, where we have 4,763 people on the waiting list for social housing, 2,990 of whom are in receipt of HAP. This costs millions of euro but with nothing to show at the end. The council has plenty of land on which to build but has loans on the land. The council was requested by the Minister’s Department to buy the land and now cannot afford to pay the loans, only the interest. There are acres and acres of land in County Louth on which we cannot build. Louth County Council had hoped to build 347 units but only managed 37, just 10% of what it was asked to do. The council has no money. There are more than 100 unoccupied houses in the area. If the council had the money those houses could take 100 families off the waiting list. I am sure this is the same in other counties. This could take thousands of people off the waiting lists.

All I hear from the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, is the amount of money he has invested, but all I can see are the waiting lists going up and the homeless numbers going up. This has to stop. The Minister has said he is spending billions of euro, but I believe he does not have the right people with him in the context of his advisers and his Department. Something is seriously wrong. We have the land and the money, so I ask the Minister to please get the right people in the right place and start building affordable houses now. I worked in the private sector. Based on his current results, if the Minister worked in the private sector, he would be sacked. I see no reason for him to be working in the public sector. No one wants a general election at Christmas, but no one wants to end up homeless either. I will support the vote of no confidence in the Minister.

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to share my time with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, the Minister of State, Deputy English, and Deputy Heydon.

Like Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, I welcome this debate. It reveals just how threadbare the policies of the Opposition are and, indeed, how in complete contradiction they are of one another. This mix of an Opposition that will troop in later to vote against the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, cannot agree anything consistent on housing policy.

People have been fond of citing figures about living conditions. They should compare last year’s Survey on Income and Living Conditions to the 2013 one. It reveals that this Government has taken 262,000 families out of deprivation. That is nearly 500,000 people by the Central Statistics Office’s measure. Some 75,000 families have been removed from consistent poverty. This means that more than 120,000 children who were in consistent poverty in 2013 are no longer so.

Deputy John Brady: More than 120,000 still are.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We have a problem with housing, but have Deputies forgotten what created the crisis in housing? For a while under a previous regime, 90,000 houses were

being built. They were being built because of the toxic relationship that had developed between banking, housing and property.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: And Fine Gael's support for cutting the-----

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and the Tánaiste, Deputy Coveney, had to rebuild a model that was workable on the ashes of the previous approach. That is the reality that has had to be taken on.

Deputy Mick Barry: Eight years in government.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Deputies want to cite-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Homelessness is increasing every year.

Deputy Mick Barry: Ten thousand homeless.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----figures selectively, but the truth is that, under the Minister, we have seen for the past four years the number of houses built increasing by 25% per annum. That was 25% in 2016, 25% in 2017, 25% in 2018 and 25% in 2019. That is a housing policy that is delivering.

Deputy Mick Barry: Some 10,000 people are homeless, Minister.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Anyone who takes a moment to consider the question of what is needed in this country-----

Deputy Mick Barry: There are 10,000 homeless.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----will see that it is more housing supply. I heard my good friend from the Royal County, Deputy Cassells, saying that his party was the author of local authority housing. The truth is that, at that stage, 10% at most of housing was social housing. Under the Minister, 40% of housing built this year will be social housing, as it was last year.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The past does not count, so.

Deputy Mick Barry: Giving the money to landlords.

Deputy Paul Murphy: That is not true, Minister.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We are delivering a consistent strategy. Of course we realise that the number-----

Deputy Mick Barry: The landlords' government giving money to the landlords.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----that we need to reach is higher than was first thought. We must continue to pursue this policy so that we can deliver.

Deputy Mick Barry: Make the landlords richer.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Deputy Ó Broin, whom I respect greatly,-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The kiss of death.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----often lambasted the Government in the Chamber for failing to see new social housing being built. I did not hear him comment that the number of social houses being built now is seven times what it was in 2016. That is the reality.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Half of what is needed.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Half of zero is still zero.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Social housing is being transformed. We have a delivery pipeline that is now delivering for people.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Richard Bruton: My good friend, Deputy Eamon Ryan, stated that the Government was allowing for private developers and a collapse of the well-honed policy that he wanted to deliver. This is the first Government that introduced its own land development agency.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Not yet.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We have not even passed the legislation.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We now have a State developer that will shape the sorts of development we want to see and-----

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----accumulate sites in the cities of Waterford, Cork, Galway and Limerick where we want to see compact development and growth so that we can break the perverse regional balance from which we have suffered for many years.

Far from voting no confidence in the Minister, tonight is a night when we should be endorsing the work he is doing because it will deliver.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputies. Do not interrupt.

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): We have a manufactured debate in the Chamber tonight. Certain Deputies on the other side of the House would like to present this debate as the very caring Opposition against the big, nasty Government as if we did not care.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Hear, hear.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It is a cartoon version of politics that bears no relation to the reality of what Rebuilding Ireland is achieving. We do care. I am sure that everyone in the House cares. Like every other politician, we meet families week in, week out who are trying to get on

the property ladder.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: What do Ministers say to them?

Deputy Regina Doherty: We meet parents who are saving for their deposits no more than Opposition Members or we did-----

Deputy Mick Barry: Record homelessness.

Deputy Regina Doherty: -----when we were in our 20s and 30s. Owning a home, having a roof over one's head, is fundamental to the Irish psyche. That is why, when we entered into government in 2016, Fine Gael actually asked for the housing portfolio and developed a plan called Rebuilding Ireland. The Labour Party stated that its Government had no money. With respect, though, no foundations of a social housing plan were put in place when the Labour Party owned housing policy.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Absolutely wrong. Did the Minister not read this document?

Deputy Regina Doherty: The Deputies across from us tonight have trotted out loads and oodles of policies that they said they put forward but that we rejected. I would like to remind them all that we are a minority Government. The only way that this Government can get its policies passed is-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: With its mates.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Fianna Fáil.

Deputy David Cullinane: Absolutely.

Deputy Regina Doherty: -----by consensus, which clearly is something-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We got them passed.

Deputy Regina Doherty: -----that none of them has the ability to reach. They cannot work with one another.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, the Deputies might not like what the Minister is saying-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: Does the Leas-Cheann Comhairle know what we will do? We will slag one another off.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We got money messaged. We got Bills passed and then they got money messaged.

Deputy Regina Doherty: They have all stood up tonight, slagged one another off and told us that this is not personal to the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, but it is exactly that - it is very personal. Slagging is not a policy, though, and does not build houses.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We have heard the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, speaking.

Deputy Mick Barry: Record homelessness.

Deputy David Cullinane: There is a lot of slagging going on now.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Let us remind ourselves of why we were in a position in 2016 of having to devise the Rebuilding Ireland policy.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We forced Fine Gael to change its housing policy.

Deputy Regina Doherty: The housing organisations in this country - the people who were building - were shattered by the great recession caused by the mismanagement of this country for years before the Fine Gael-Labour Party Government took over.

Deputy Mick Barry: Fine Gael has been nearly nine years in office.

Deputy Regina Doherty: We have not run away from the policy. We are doing things that have shown tangible results in my own county of Meath. We had 1,000 houses built two years ago, 1,500 last year and 1,000 built this year already. I have every confidence not only in our Rebuilding Ireland project, but in the Minister who is steering the ship right now.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Let us call this what it is - an election stunt by the Social Democrats, who announced this motion ahead of the by-elections last Friday. The Social Democrats purposely held a photo opportunity outside the Dáil gates so that a by-election candidate could be included in the picture. We all know that an unelected representative would not have been allowed into the photo opportunity had it been held on the Dáil plinth as is normal.

The Government's plan to provide more houses and homes and to stabilise prices is working. More than 50,000 new homes have been built in the past three years. There was an 82% increase in the number of new homes completed between 2016 and 2018. That represents thousands of families and individuals who now have a place to call home when they did not at the start of this Dáil. As we near the end of this Dáil, the Opposition is getting more exercised and, dare I say, more excited. Opposition spin doctors decide that housing is a topic on which to win a few votes. The politics of housing excites the Opposition-----

Deputy Mick Barry: Record rent levels.

Deputy Martin Heydon: -----much more than the policy or its objectives.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Stop with the insults.

Deputy Martin Heydon: No confidence motions,-----

Deputy Mick Barry: Record homelessness.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Martin Heydon: -----personalised attacks and cheap shots are far more the order of the day from the Opposition-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: Hear, hear.

Deputy Martin Heydon: -----than any detailed discussion on policy.

Deputy Mick Barry: Record homelessness.

Deputy Martin Heydon: We have heard addresses from many Deputies this evening, including Fianna Fáil's housing spokesperson, who said that people would get to see Fianna Fáil's housing plan early next year. It has been 600 days since Fianna Fáil promised an alternative housing policy.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is true.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Sure, what is another few months?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Thirteen Bills, and the Government is lucky that it is still here.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Deputy Cassells all but invoked the spirit of de Valera-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Thirteen Bills in a year.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Martin Heydon: -----by stating that Fianna Fáil was the only party to be able to deliver houses.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Martin Heydon: Just because Fianna Fáil keeps saying something over and over does not mean it is true.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is true.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Deputy Cassells identified deficiencies in our local authorities' ability to build enough homes. We face challenges in that area because Fianna Fáil, when in power, privatised the housing sector. We have been trying to re-equip our local authorities ever since.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: The Government condemned them.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Fianna Fáil stripped our councils of their expertise and sold it off to the private sector. The only thing that Fianna Fáil knows about the housing sector is how to destroy it and then blame us for not fixing its mess quickly enough.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: True.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Voters can look at Sinn Féin's record in Northern Ireland to see what little impact and opportunity to influence policy the party has had there. It has had no impact. It runs from the homelessness crisis in the North like it ran from power sharing and government. Sinn Féin is a party that only a few weeks ago tried to vote down a proposal for 800 new homes less than 4 miles from here and close to Dublin city centre.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: With not a single affordable home on the site.

Deputy Martin Heydon: In places where Sinn Féin turns up to vote, it votes against housing.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There was not a single affordable home.

Deputy Martin Heydon: This is a time when the Government and all Members of the House should work together to address citizens' challenges. Alas, that will not happen because politics has taken over. Fine Gael will continue the work of government for the citizens. Fine Gael will continue to rebuild Ireland.

Deputy Mick Barry: Record levels of rent and homelessness.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I will make a few quick points.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State only has one minute.

Deputy Damien English: I accept that. We might criticise the Opposition for not having a plan. In all of these debates, we acknowledge that the Opposition might come forward with some ideas, one or two here and there.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Thanks very much.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Very generous.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Damien English: Some. No one is denying that,-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Deputy Heydon did.

Deputy Damien English: -----but the job is to put a plan in place,-----

Deputy Joan Collins: That would be a start.

Deputy David Cullinane: Is the Minister of State not very good?

Deputy Damien English: -----action by action, and drive it.

Deputy Paul Murphy: If the Government does not provide money messages for our Bills, we cannot.

Deputy Damien English: The job of the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, is to put a housing plan in place. Rebuilding Ireland is a five-year plan and we are in the third year. His job is to implement it and go site by site to ensure that the houses are being built. That is his job, not to make an odd statement in the Chamber calling for some kind of action. It is actually to drive the plan and make it happen. That plan is three years old. It has already helped 100,000 households into a home.

Deputy Mick Barry: You have been in government for nine years.

Deputy Damien English: If you do not mind.

Deputy Mick Barry: Nine long years.

Deputy Damien English: That plan is fully factual and not spin. Deputies can track it. I have a chart for each county for each scheme.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Is there one for everybody in the audience?

Deputy Mick Barry: Show it to the long-term homeless people.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Damien English: I would like to see every other party come in here with a full plan that goes site by site throughout the country.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Damien English: With respect, Sinn Féin talks about the ambitious plan it has. If the figures in that so-called ambitious plan are added up-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is not true. The Minister of State knows that is not true.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Broin, go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Damien English: -----they do not match the amount of money the Government has ring-fenced.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is not true.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Minister-----

Deputy Damien English: I was interrupted.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hold on now.

Deputy Damien English: I am happy to finish.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You got your minute and a half.

Deputy Damien English: If I can finish.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No.

Deputy Damien English: I did not get my minute.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: You can look to your colleagues.

Deputy Damien English: I did not get my minute.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State can look to his colleagues if he only got a minute. I gave him a minute and a half.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Hear, hear.

Deputy Damien English: I ask the Leas-Cheann Comhairle to protect my minute.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am moving on.

Deputy Damien English: I have one call to make.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are moving on.

Deputy Damien English: If everybody else here commits to our plan, ring-fences the same amount of money and makes sure to deliver over the coming years-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I want to make it clear that I gave the Minister of State almost two minutes.

Deputy Damien English: I was interrupted for one minute.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: His colleagues left him with one minute.

Deputy Damien English: I was interrupted.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Look inwardly and not at me.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I will start by thanking all of the contributors to the debate. I have to say I was somewhat amused by the similarity of scripts between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I did not have a script.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: It was the single transferable script. They do come from the same background and hold the same type of ideology. There is not a cigarette paper between them.

Deputy Heydon should know we were required to submit our Private Members' motion last Wednesday so it was not a question of looking for publicity.

Deputy Martin Heydon: It was before the by-election.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It was two days before the by-election.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: We were required to have it in last Wednesday and we did that.

I have to say I am somewhat concerned and I wonder about the memory of the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. This morning, I heard him having a right swipe at me on "Morning Ireland". He referred to hypocrisy. He said our party never tabled amendments on the rent reform Bill earlier this year. What is wrong with the Minister's memory? In January 2018, it was the Social Democrats that introduced the residential tenancies Bill. At that stage, the Minister thanked Deputy Catherine Murphy and me for bringing forward the Bill. He acknowledged the substance of the Bill and its genuine motivation to improve the situation for tenants at a time of undersupply in the residential sector. Does the Minister not remember that?

The Minister undertook to introduce legislation to do what our Bill would do. We had to wait a year for him to do it because it was a full year before he introduced the Government Bill to do what we had proposed a year earlier. The Minister said we did not propose amendments. Does he not remember us having a conversation across the floor of the housing committee on how we might improve his legislation? Does he not remember that when his Bill was brought to the floor of the House several of us signed an all-party Focus Ireland amendment to improve the legislation the Minister had introduced? Unfortunately, he had watered down the Social Democrats' Bill from a year earlier. Does the Minister not remember all of this? He should try to jog his memory because he owes us an apology.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: Stop objecting to housing.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: There is no doubt the housing crisis is one of the main challenges facing the country and the failure to address this crisis represents a major failure of responsibility on the part of the Minister. Ensuring an adequate supply of housing at affordable cost is a basic responsibility of any Government. The Minister has abdicated this responsibility by out-

sourcing it to the market. The market is only concerned with the profit margin and, therefore, takes no responsibility for the social and economic welfare of people. That should be the job of politics.

With regard to housing, the Minister speaks a lot about supply. While it is important to maintain a strong supply, the basic rules of supply and demand do not apply to housing. The reason for this is that the cost of land is the key determining factor when it comes to the cost of housing. While supply is obviously very important so too is affordability. This is a reality that is ignored by the Minister. We only have to recall what happened in the boom. There was an oversupply of housing but critically prices kept spiralling. More supply in the absence of affordability means many people overextend themselves with borrowing. We saw the awful consequences of this during the crash.

If the Minister were serious about the housing crisis he would set out to drive down the cost of housing for buyers and renters but this Government and the previous Government set out to do the very opposite. The former Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, admitted as much. Government policies set out to bolster house prices rather than drive them down. The help-to-buy scheme is a case in point. So too is the new affordable scheme. Both of them accept the inherent unaffordability of housing as a given and merely offer some discounting on these inflated prices so the root cause, the high land cost, is not tackled. It is quite clear the balance sheets of the banks have been of much more concern to the Government than ensuring people have homes.

The Minister is very fond of referring to the Opposition's criticism as ideological but his heavy reliance on the private sector is entirely ideological. Fine Gael never sees itself as having any responsibility for the public good or public provision. It sees housing as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit rather than an essential part of people's lives. Not only is Fine Gael leaving housing to the market but the policies it is pursuing are clearly designed to maintain the high cost of housing and there are umpteen examples of this. The Minister refuses to fund local authorities adequately and instead pours hundreds of millions of euro of public money into the pockets of landlords through the housing assistance payment. This in turn drives up rents. It means private renters must compete with housing assistance payment tenancies. It also means house buyers, particularly first-time buyers, are squeezed out as they cannot compete with landlords. The recent practice of local authorities being encouraged to buy rather than build social housing also squeezes first-time buyers. All of this conspires to keep house prices and rents high while guaranteeing high returns for investors.

Equally, the failure of the Minister to tackle land hoarding in any effective way means people struggling to buy a home are at the mercy of developers who bought land at inflated prices during the boom and are now slowly releasing it in a way that maintains high land values. The site cost is now a major factor in high house prices. This is a far greater factor than the cost of building. I do not recall the Minister ever identifying the high cost of land and the problem of land hoarding as a factor of the housing crisis. I wonder why this is the case.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: We doubled the vacant site levy.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The experience with the Ó Cualann housing co-operative in Ballymun has demonstrated how very good-quality, carbon-neutral, three-bedroom houses can be built for €200,000.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: Government funding.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That is what we are saying.

Deputy Regina Doherty: You just spent the past two hours saying we were not doing it. Make up your minds.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: There is no reason we cannot build large numbers of houses at that price on the very many publicly-owned sites available in Dublin and throughout the country. This is the type of approach taken by many Governments in the past, even when times were very hard. It is a cruel irony that at a time when the country was never wealthier, so many people are locked out of housing completely. There is now an entire generation of young people in their 20s and 30s who are denied human aspirations their parents took for granted.

They are denied the right to stay in this country, for example, the right to settle down and the right to consider starting a family - all due to the enormous struggle that faces them in trying to access decent housing. The cost of housing is the single greatest contributor to our high cost of living and employers cite it as a significant issue in attracting people to come to this country or to return here to fill key job vacancies. The lack of affordability has impacts beyond that generation, as their parents try to bail them out and support them financially, or try to accommodate them in an overcrowded home.

The tragedy is it does not have to be like this. If the Minister was serious about ensuring people could have access to a decent home, he would ensure we used public land for the public good. The Social Democrats has called for a housing delivery agency to develop well planned, mixed housing developments on all large public sites. This is the kind of sustainable and fair approach that is needed, unlike the Land Development Agency, LDA, as proposed by the Government, which would use public land to achieve private profit. It is clear that what the Minister has in mind for the LDA is not an agency that is socially focused, just as the National Asset Management Agency was not either. Claims by the Minister he is implementing the Kenny report are laughable. The State needs to take control of land prices and the Minister should stop hiding behind the Constitution in that regard.

10 o'clock

Having a place to call home is a fundamental issue to us all as humans. For that reason, it is the fundamental responsibility of a Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to ensure everyone can have access to a home at a reasonable cost. The Minister has failed to do that. It is time for him to go and it is time for change. I commend this motion to the House.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Before I put the question, I have been requested by Deputy Lowry, as is his right, to make a personal statement at an early date to address accusations by Deputy Paul Murphy. I advised Deputy Paul Murphy at the time he should be careful. Deputy Lowry will get that opportunity at an early date. He will not do so tonight but he will get an opportunity-----

Deputy Michael Lowry: It will only take me 30 seconds.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does the House agree to it? Agreed.

Debate adjourned.

Personal Statement by Member

Deputy Michael Lowry: I have been a Member of this House for 33 years and I have never heard such slanderous, vicious, malicious, vindictive and false allegations as have been made against me here tonight. I want to put on the record of this House that I am not a convicted tax cheat and I am not a convicted tax dodger. In fact, when I was brought to court, the main charges were withdrawn and the only mark against my reputation in relation to taxation was that in 2006 my company filed an incorrect corporation tax return. Let me clarify that it was incorrect because we had overpaid tax. In fact, the judge went on to comment to the effect that I was a very conscientious taxpayer and I would like the comments that were made in this House tonight to be withdrawn.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Paul Murphy has an opportunity, not to make a statement-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: I will not be withdrawing the remarks.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: -----but to withdraw his comments if he wishes.

Deputy Paul Murphy: No. Deputy Lowry also failed to keep proper sets of accounts and he was disqualified as a director. He is a convicted tax cheat.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: He was found guilty of tax corruption as well.

Confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Catherine Murphy on Tuesday, 3 December 2019:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— the most recently published homeless figures stand at a record 10,397, with 6,524 adults and 3,873 children classified as homeless;

— the number of homeless families has increased by 354 per cent since September 2014, and more than one in three people in emergency accommodation is a child;

— these figures do not account for the thousands of people living with housing uncertainty, living back with parents, staying with friends or with no security of tenure;

— the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness has been published for almost three years and for the third year in a row the Government will fail to meet the targets set out in the plan;

— with a stated target of 121,000 homes built by the end of 2021, given current failures to meet annual targets, Rebuilding Ireland has completely failed and will not

achieve its stated objectives;

— the latest Daft.ie report on the private rental sector showed just 3,500 rental properties available nationally;

— the average cost of renting a property in Dublin now exceeds €2,000 a month, the 32nd quarter in a row there has been an increase;

— average rents nationally are 8 per cent higher than the same period last year;

— as a result of the consistent failings of this Government and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, there is an entire generation of people locked out of affordable and secure housing options; and

— the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has been in his position for two years and has completely failed to address the housing and homelessness emergency, and the consistent growth in the homelessness figures coupled with the failure to meet the Rebuilding Ireland targets underlines that fact;

has no confidence in the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy T.D., and calls for him to be removed from office; and

calls on the Government to:

— urgently introduce an affordable housing scheme;

— immediately expand the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme;

— implement an immediate nationwide rent freeze; and

— accept that the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is not fit for purpose and commit to urgently implementing a new housing plan tackling security of tenure and affordability for all.

Question put.

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Given the seriousness of the issue and the thousands of children who will be in emergency accommodation over the Christmas period, under Standing Order 73(3)(b), I propose that the vote be taken by other than electronic means.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have Standing Orders and, under Standing Order 73(3), the Deputy has demanded a walk-through vote, as is his right. As he is not a teller, however, he requires the support of 20 Deputies. I ask Deputies who support the call to stand in their places.

More than 20 Members rose.

Question again put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 53; Níl, 56; Staon, 35.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>

<i>Adams, Gerry.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>
<i>Ferris, Martin.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>
<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>
<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Halligan, John.</i>	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Kenny, Enda.</i>	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>
<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>
<i>O'Brien, Jonathan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Murphy, Dara.</i>	

<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell; Níl, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin.

Question declared lost.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.40 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 4 December 2019.