



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Sathairn, 17 Nollaig 2022

Saturday, 17 December 2022

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Éirí as Oifig an Taoisigh - Resignation of Taoiseach

An Ceann Comhairle: A Theachtaí, ag an suí fíor-iontasach seo, tá stair le déanamh againn inniu. Glaoim ar an Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Before we begin, I would like to express my deepest sympathies and those of the Government to the family and loved ones of Private Seán Rooney. In addition, our thoughts and prayers today are also with Trooper Shane Kearney, who was critically injured in the attack. We think also of their colleagues who are deeply shocked and saddened at the loss of their comrade.

In my conversation with President Higgins just now concerning the attack on Wednesday last, we talked about the remarkable service that Óglaigh na hÉireann has always provided. In his capacity as Commander in Chief, the President has always spoken of his deep appreciation for the men and women from all parts of our society who serve in our armed forces. They have protected our democracy at home and brought honour to our country by representing our values abroad.

The loss of Private Rooney is truly shocking. He was a very committed young man who had many plans for the full life he had ahead of him. His family has, over many years, built a deep tradition of service in our armed forces. Private Seán Rooney served his country proudly and with honour. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Ba mhian liom a chur in iúl don Teach gur thug mé fógra don Uachtarán ar maidin go raibh mé ag éirí as oifig an Taoisigh de réir Bhunreacht na hÉireann. This morning I visited the President and, pursuant to the relevant provisions of Bunreacht na hÉireann, I have tendered my resignation from the office of Taoiseach.

Today's sitting will, quite reasonably, be very political in nature. The democratic mandate of this Dáil remains and we have much work left to do. Diverse views are represented here. All sides of the House will express themselves in strong terms in support of and opposition to

the proposals which we will vote on. However, before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments.

We unfortunately live in an increasingly polarised world. Everybody who participates in public life knows the impact of the ever-faster rush to judge others and the rising sharpness with which comments are made. I believe that we must not let this become the dominant way in which our public discourse is conducted. Within this, we must make time to acknowledge the good faith, dedication and achievements of the many thousands in public service who work on behalf of the Irish people. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to serve as head of Government in a free and democratic Republic. I have been deeply conscious of this every day that I have held the office of Taoiseach. I have sought always to work on behalf of all the Irish people and not just those who support my party and our colleagues in Government.

June 2020 was a time unlike any other in the modern history of our country. Ireland, just like the rest of the world, was grappling with a terrible pandemic which was touching every part of our society. The fastest moving recession ever recorded was under way. Both fear and uncertainty were the daily reality for people concerned about the health and livelihoods of their loved ones. The dramatic situation we were confronted with was reflected in the day when I and my colleagues secured the confidence of Dáil Éireann. Exceptional measures were undertaken by the Ceann Comhairle and the staff of the Oireachtas to make sure that the basic structures of our Parliament could function. For the first time, the Dáil met away from this Chamber to elect a Taoiseach. Sitting apart and sharing little of the intimacy which distinguishes this place, we were also obliged to meet without our families, friends and supporters who normally define such an important day in our democracy.

The weeks and months which followed were intense and challenging as we worked to both build new working relationships and respond to the rapidly evolving emergencies on hand. Tremendous dedication was shown by every person who was involved in not only keeping the work of Government going but also in helping us to understand and react to new threats. In this, we saw the true spirit of public service which lies at the heart of the Irish Government. Our public servants showed yet again their unmatched commitment to the well-being of the Irish people.

I would in particular like to acknowledge the support and excellent work of my staff and the staff of the Department of An Taoiseach. This was critical in ensuring that the Government managed the intensity of the challenges we were addressing. We did not, nor could we, get everything right in responding to the pandemic, but the facts show that Ireland was able to limit the terrible impact of the virus well below that seen in most comparable countries. The implementation of one of the most successful vaccine programmes in the world required enormous co-ordination, ranging from our negotiations to secure supplies, to the thousands of medical professionals and support staff who administered vaccines in every community.

On various occasions during the pandemic, and particularly at the gravest moments, I spoke directly to the Irish people. I sought to be open and clear about what we knew and about what we were proposing. At even the hardest moments I tried to show that there was hope and my absolute belief that we would get through it together. The sense of community and resilience of those days is something I will never forget. It will always inspire me.

This Government of three democratic parties came to office with a detailed, agreed programme. It respects our distinct priorities but creates common ground in a wide range of areas.

A Government can only work if people trust each other and respect each others mandates. As Taoiseach, I have tried to treat all office holders fairly and been available to consult and help whenever needed. I want to thank the Tánaiste, Deputy Varadkar, and the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, for the close and highly constructive way in which they have worked to ensure co-operation across Government. The new system of Cabinet committees put in place has required Ministers to be more engaged with each others work and to address both the urgent and the long-term issues on our agenda. I want to thank each Minister and Minister of State for their dedication and their co-operation.

In accordance with the agreement made between the parties, the Attorney General, Paul Gallagher, will be leaving his role. I believe that he has been one of the great Attorneys General. The range and depth of his legal knowledge is unmatched. His drive in ensuring that legislation was drafted as fast and as well as possible has been critical to action in areas as diverse as controlling the pandemic to addressing climate change. Most of all, he has fulfilled the most important role a Government should seek from an Attorney General. He has been direct and honest in his counsel, making sure that both the limits and possibilities of actions were understood. I thank him for his support, his advice and his service. Ó laethanta m'óige suas go dtí an lá atá inniu ann bhí meas agam ar agus grá ó chroí agam do shaibhreas na teanga Gaeilge agus do na codanna saibhre ar leith dár gcultúr dúchais náisiúnta.

Ba phribhléid agus onóir mhór dom mar Thaoiseach na hÉireann bualadh le daoine ó gach cearn den tír seo atá lárnach, gníomhach agus riachtanach sa ré nua bríomhar seo a cheapaim atá timpeall orainn i leith úsáid na Gaeilge, ní hamháin inár scoileanna ach i ngnáthshaol laethúil na tíre.

Ba mhaith liomsa mo mhórbhuíochas a ghabháil leo as a ndíograis agua a bhfonn agus an fuinneamh gan teorainn don teanga agus don chultúr a roinnt liom.

Ina theannta sin, caithfidh mé creidiúint agus aitheantas a thabhairt don ról a bhí ag na meáin Ghaeilge agus an pobal i réimse na healaíona chun a rá leo inniu, cé chomh buíoch is atáim as na naisc agus as na caidrimh le linn na ndúshlán go léir agus cora an tsaoil le dhá bhiaín go leith anuas.

Is í m'aidhm agus mo chuspóir láidir na naisc agus na ceangail seo a choimeád sna blianta atá romhainn.

At the European summit which concluded yesterday, I was very thankful for the kind words of the leaders. In filling this part of the role of Taoiseach I was at all times motivated to give voice to the very clear view of the vast majority of the Irish people that this is a European democracy, and that the success of the European Union is a priority for us. With the support of the Government, throughout the last two and half years I signalled to other leaders a renewed willingness on the part of Ireland to strengthen the Union - to help it to be more urgent and ambitious in its work. Ireland has been to the forefront in promoting shared action in Europe on critical issues like creating new funding possibilities for economic recovery, insisting on the rule of law as a condition for all member states, and helping Europe to achieve energy independence based on sustainable energy supplies.

Ireland will not stand on the sidelines as the destructive populism of the extreme right and left seeks to damage a Union which has been central to so much progress in the past half century. Europe's role in helping its citizens through the pandemic and becoming the world's

leader in sharing vaccines is a testament to how our Union remains strong and will continue to face down those who want to return to the days of destructive competition between states.

And today, we are living with the reality of a war against a European state by an imperial aggressor. The resolve of the Ukrainian people has been an inspiration, as has been the generosity of the Irish people in supporting them. This appalling war is the fault of one man, his Government and an ideology which seeks to destroy the very possibility of free democracy. The welcome which has been given to tens of thousands of refugees fleeing this war has been truly inspiring. It inevitably causes major pressures, but the values which are at stake are much bigger than the sacrifices which we must make while this assault on Ukraine is under way.

Undoubtedly one of the most important reasons the Irish people have reacted with such strength in supporting Ukraine is that they remember our own struggle for independence. During my time as Taoiseach, the centenaries of many of the critical moments which shaped our modern history were commemorated. These have included many events which were characterised by deep divisions. I believed it was important to engage in detail with these commemorations – to take the time to reflect on our past and how this influences our democracy.

Our history has often been used to try to justify current actions. Many have promoted the idea that history is about choosing sides in a single continuous narrative. What this misses is the diversity and change which has been central to Irish identity from the earliest times. The great generation which secured our independence did not subscribe to an inflexible view of Irishness or our ambitions. The founding charter of our freedom, the Proclamation of 1916, is unique when compared with the many such documents which emerged out of what was the greatest period of nation building ever seen in Europe. This uniqueness was because it spoke of wanting to establish a democratic republic – a republic where the nation was defined as inclusive of different traditions, a republic which sought friendship and co-operation with others, and a republic which demanded that all who served in its name do so with honour. This is a wonderful inheritance for us, and an inspiration as we face the historic challenge of seeking to overcome division on our island. If there is one thing we should all be able to acknowledge, it is that if we genuinely believe in an Ireland that includes and serves all, then we must be prepared to build new bridges. We must be prepared to reach across divides and do the hard work of learning to understand and respect each other far more than we have in the past. We must stop making assumptions about each other and get to know each other.

That is why I have put such an emphasis on the shared island initiative and why it has been established as a new unit, with dedicated funding, in the Department of the Taoiseach.

For the first time, the hard and vital work of building a detailed understanding of cross-Border links and differences is being done. We are investing in links that bring people together and in innovation, which is the key to addressing the legacy of disadvantage left behind by the years of conflict. I thank the thousands who have participated in the shared island dialogues and the often every direct conversations involved. I also thank those who have developed the many shared island projects that are now under way.

I have had the privilege to hold this office because of my parliamentary party and the thousands of Fianna Fáil activists throughout the country. I thank them and my colleagues here in the Oireachtas. Each of us here draws on different traditions. We continue to be inspired by the great generation who met 96 years ago, under Constance Markievicz as chairperson, to found our democratic republican party.

As I finish this term in office, I would like most of all to thank my wife, Mary, and our children, Micheál Aodh, Aoibhe and Cillian, for their unfailing advice, support and encouragement and for the occasional criticism they have given me. I particularly thank Mary, who has always tried to keep me on time throughout my life. We have been blessed by the wonderful community of Cork, which has looked out for us and given me the strongest possible reassurance that all would be well as I spent so much time away. Above all, my upbringing in Turners Cross in Cork, the values it imparted and the love of my late parents has guided me throughout.

Finally, I thank the Members of the Dáil. We have had many very robust exchanges here but I have never ceased to be honoured to be a Member of one of the democratic world's oldest parliamentary Chambers. We have much work ahead of us for the rest of this Dáil term. I look forward to that and to continuing our service on behalf of the Irish people.

Taoiseach a Ainmniú - Nomination of Taoiseach

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. Our first business is the nomination of a new Taoiseach, on which I will now receive motions. I understand Deputy Bruton has a proposal to put to the House.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Tairgim:

Go n-ainmneoidh Dáil Éireann an Teachta Leo Varadkar chun a cheaptha ag an Uachtarán mar Thaoiseach.

I move:

That Dáil Éireann nominates Deputy Leo Varadkar for appointment by the President to be Taoiseach.

It was Samuel Johnson who said, "The Irish are a fair people; they never speak well of one another." On most measures, this House would be particularly fair-minded. However, I think I detected a slight quiver in that fair-mindedness today, with genuine warmth for the job the Taoiseach has done. As we pass 100 years as a democracy, as the Ceann Comhairle pointed out recently, we have a very proud record of sustaining democracy throughout a very difficult period. Today, perhaps, we have a more modern and more discerning electorate than we have ever had before. It has high expectations of politicians and it demands the highest standards. That is really important.

When I entered this House, we did, indeed, have rotating taoisigh between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. They changed nearly every nine months and every change was punctuated by a costly and difficult election. It broke many of our colleagues here who wanted to contest those elections. Today, we have a very different transition. Deputy Micheál Martin has handed on his legacy in superb condition. His instinct for finding solutions in the face of Covid and then Ukraine have shown the quality of the leadership he has offered.

Today is the 15th time I have been involved in the election of a Taoiseach, but the first I have had the honour to make a nomination. The essential ingredients to do this job well are three things: strength of character, courage and restless curiosity. The Tánaiste, Deputy Varadkar, has exactly those features. His strong character has been formed by being the proud son of an Indian father and an Irish mother, by being part of a family devoted to care as doctors and

nurses and by his experience in five Departments, namely, health, social protection, enterprise, transport, tourism and sport, and defence; before becoming the youngest Taoiseach ever at the age of 38.

He has demonstrated his courage and resilience time and again, most notably in launching the campaign to repeal the eighth amendment. He held his nerve in the high-wire Brexit manoeuvring in which so much was at stake for our country and island. He provided reassurance as he led us on the uncharted path after Covid. Seldom if ever did an acting Taoiseach have to make decisions of such grave import.

As a Minister, I felt the value of his restless curiosity and foresight. Without him, we could not have had the national broadband plan that I was proud to be a part of. Without him we could not have had the first climate action plan in 2019. That could not have been put in place. One of the important capacities of someone holding the office of Taoiseach is to know when it is important to stretch people beyond their comfort zone to take on challenges they would perhaps prefer not to. In both those cases, he showed that capacity. That capacity will be so important as we face difficult challenges in the future.

Bernard Shaw said we are made wise not by the recollection of the past but by the responsibility for the future. Ireland continues to transform rapidly but faces grave challenges that we all know about in this House, and does so at a time of enormous global uncertainty. The challenge for the Government in the remainder of its term is to keep in harness together enterprise success, fairness in society and sustainability in our way of life. No one of those can find enduring success without each of the others. That is what the person taking on the role of Taoiseach must ensure. This Government offers the right partnership to confront those three challenges and the Tánaiste is the right person to step into the position of Taoiseach in the next phase of those challenges. It is with great pride that I nominate for the position of Taoiseach the name of the Tánaiste, Deputy Varadkar.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. I understand Deputy Higgins wants to second that proposal.

Deputy Emer Higgins: I do indeed. I thank the Ceann Comhairle.

In 2020 as the Covid crisis first hit our shores, the Tánaiste led our country through the most difficult months. He showed what a fine Taoiseach he was through his focus on the well-being of our citizens, his clear plan to deal with the crisis and, above all, his commitment to forming a Government to lead. Tomorrow people across the world will tune in to the World Cup final to find out who the winning team is but today we reaffirm in Ireland that in Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party we have our winning team.

The Tánaiste will take over as Taoiseach of an historic coalition, one which shows how far we have come since the Civil War. It is testament to both party leaders that we see the successors of these two sides share and pass on power. Today is an example of our country being at peace with its Civil War history and today proves that coalition works. This day next week, a certain someone will leave the North Pole to deliver to boys and girls and that is exactly what this Government has done - deliver. It has delivered through challenges that were absolutely unforeseeable back in 2020: a global pandemic, a war on European soil and a cost-of-living crisis. With strong, steady, stable leadership we are navigating through these uncharted waters. It is a Government Deputy Micheál Martin has led so responsibly and with such compas-

sion and one the Green Party has ensured always operates through a lens of action on climate change. People want a functioning, responsible Government that gets on with the work at hand and that is exactly what this Government has done. It supported businesses when they needed help most, protected workers through ground-breaking legislation, and delivered record employment against a global backdrop of uncertainty.

The Minister, Deputy Humphreys, has delivered for rural Ireland. She has invested in communities throughout the island and protected our most vulnerable and our over-70s. The €11 billion budget of the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, protected households and his influence has put us at the centre of Europe. The Minister, Deputy Coveney, led us through the choppy waters of Brexit with a whole-of-Ireland approach. The Minister, Deputy Harris, has made third level education more accessible and apprenticeships more attractive. The Minister, Deputy McEntee, has been creating stronger, safer communities throughout Ireland. Her second son, less than one week old, will shortly have lived through his second Taoiseach. He grows up in an Ireland that punches far above its weight on the international stage and in an Ireland that offers opportunity, not just to our own people, but to those who want to call here home.

It can be so easy to be blinded by the empty rhetoric of opposition politics that paints Ireland as a bleak country on the outskirts of Europe. Optimism is never the hallmark of opposition politics but this Opposition has been populist, pessimistic and divisive. Ireland is a reflection of its people. It is a nation of céad míle fáilte, decency and kindness, a hard-working ethos and fairness. It is our people that this Government serves and that Deputy Leo Varadkar will lead as Taoiseach, and serve them he will.

Some 28,000 new homes have been delivered this year and we will continue to build more. People will pay lower income tax next year than this year and we will continue to put more money back in people's pockets. Public transport costs have been slashed and we will continue to invest in our roads, buses and trainlines. Childcare costs will be reduced next year and we will continue to invest in those early years. Hospital inpatient charges have been abolished and we will tackle waiting lists. There are more gardaí on our streets today than last year and we will always prioritise law and order.

This Government will continue to focus on reality rather than populism; on hope rather than pessimism and on unity rather than division because that is how leadership looks. Ireland needs a leader that will provide stability and division. Deputy Leo Varadkar did that for us last time round and I know he will do that for us again. It is my absolutely honour to second Deputy Leo Varadkar's nomination for Taoiseach. I know he will do our party, our country and our people proud. Go n-éirí an bóthar leis.

The Taoiseach: I would like to share my time with the Minister, Deputy Michael McGrath.

Ar son pháirtí Fhianna Fáil, deimhneoidh mé go mbeimid de réir an chomhaontaithe daingnithe ag ár mbaill ag vótáil ar son ainmniúcháin an Tánaiste, an Teachta Varadkar, le dul os comhair an Uachtaráin le ceapadh go hoifig an Taoisigh. Is cinneadh agus gníomh tábhachtach agus daonlathach iad seo agus is céim eile í a léiríonn go fíorshoiléir tiomantas agus díograis na dtrí pháirtí sa Rialtas ár gclár oibre agus aidhmeanna aontaithe roinnte a chríochnú ar son mhuintir na hÉireann.

At the start of this Dáil, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party negotiated a detailed and ambitious programme of action for the full duration of the Dáil's term. The formation of this

Government was unique for Ireland but not internationally. It saw three parties with different traditions and priorities agree to work together.

11 o'clock

No party or Deputy in this House has a mandate to claim to represent the views of all Irish people or to demand exclusive control of public policies for themselves. The distinguishing feature of centrist democrats is the ability to respect differences, find points of agreement and co-operate. This is what we have done.

The programme for Government, which remains in place, and the arrangements that we are voting on today were put to free votes in our three parties. Within Fianna Fáil, every member received a copy of relevant documents and had an opportunity to participate in a widespread debate. The vote that we held was the largest vote ever held by an Irish political party, and the result was overwhelmingly in favour of this Government. Today represents the first time in Irish history that there is a change in the Office of An Taoiseach which was agreed well in advance and is supported by the membership of the parties involved. It reflects our shared commitment that each party be treated fairly, in light of its mandate, and that we build a Government defined by co-operation.

During the past two and a half years, I have worked closely with the Tánaiste, Deputy Leo Varadkar, and the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan. Our discussions have been open, honest and comprehensive. We have insisted on a constructive approach to the work of Government. To be a Government Deputy in Dáil Éireann brings with it practical challenges. I know that the often limited opportunities to contribute at key moments here in the Chamber can be a frustration. However, the opinions of those who do not hold office and those who they represent must be heard. I want to acknowledge the openness of the other party leaders in Government to hearing and acknowledging the views of our Deputies. Because of the system of Cabinet committees that has been put in place, there is detailed consultation and debate about the full range of issues that come before Government. I believe that this core respect has been a defining feature of the Government and it is one which will continue through our term.

During the debate on the nomination of Deputies for appointment as members of Government, I will go into more substantial detail about our work over the rest of our term. It is important, however, to say that we are fully conscious of the challenges which our country faces and how they continue to change. The dramatic increase in inflation, seen throughout the world because of Russia's war against Ukraine, and the disruption up many supply chains is not an abstract economic concern; it is hitting people very directly and their ability to pay for essential items. As we showed in the budget, we are determined to keep helping people with this critical new challenge. Addressing the deep impact of the pandemic in vital areas, such as hospital waiting times and the construction of new homes will remain central to our agenda. We have restored our economy faster than any country in Europe and we have helped people back to work. We have begun a new era in social and affordable housing and we are implementing a comprehensive strategy to address all elements of housing provision. We have put in place action on the existential threat of climate change and the loss of biodiversity. We have begun the development of new health services in every part of our country. We have reduced class sizes, increased supports for children with special needs, funded the largest investment programme in the history of Irish education and established a new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. We have begun the expansion of childcare and the introduction of new direct State support with childcare costs.

However, we have much further to go during the remaining period of our mandate. The reality of modern politics in Ireland is that there is a choice between those who work to exploit problems and those who work to solve them, between those who pretend that there are easy answers to even the most complex problems and those committed to the much harder work of action on many fronts. My party and the Government we belong to will continue to use every day of our mandate to work on behalf of all the people. When our programme is completed I have no doubt that we will be in a position to show sustained progress on the issues that matter most to the Irish people. In supporting the motion to nominate the Tánaiste, Deputy Leo Varadkar, I want to thank him for his co-operation over the last two and half years and for his dedicated work. The Government has worked under many enormous pressures, but we have succeeded in keeping our focus on moving our country forward. I look forward to maintaining this spirit during the rest of our term.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): At the outset, I wish to join with colleagues in conveying my own personal deepest sympathies to the family of the late Private Seán Rooney on their devastating loss, and to send my very best wishes to Private Shane Kearney and his family as his battle continues today.

Today's proceedings are an historic occasion in the history of our nation. It is the first time, during a Dáil term, where the Members of the House are being asked to approve the rotation of the Office of An Taoiseach between two parties within Government. It is symbolic of the diverse political landscape in which we now live and the maturity of the three parties which comprise this Government. That it is being undertaken without either drama or rancour is indicative of the stability and the unity of this Government.

Since coming to office almost two and a half years ago, the Government has been charged with the responsibility of taking the country through a set of extraordinary global challenges: a once-in-a-century pandemic, a terrible war in Europe and a consequential cost-of-living crisis facing our people. We have been deeply fortunate to have been led by a Taoiseach of the calibre of Micheál Martin.

At so many difficult moments in the past couple of years, Micheál Martin's integrity, experience and innate decency have shown through. When it came to work ethic, his commitment was absolute. When the Government he led was faced with major decisions, his guiding principle was to do what was right for the country and for its people, and this was never more evident than during Covid-19. On the international stage, his commitment to multilateral co-operation and finding solutions through dialogue is widely recognised and valued and I know his wife, Mary, Micheál Aodh, Aoibhe, Cillian and all of his siblings and extended family and, indeed, the community from which he comes, are so rightly proud of all that he has achieved as Taoiseach. On behalf of all of my colleagues in the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party and our party members all over the country, and on behalf of so many ordinary members of the public of every political persuasion and of none who respected his approach, I thank Micheál Martin for being an outstanding Taoiseach of this country.

I also wish Deputy Leo Varadkar all the very best as he embarks on his second term as Taoiseach. As leader of the Government, he will have our full support and the support of our coalition partners, the Green Party, as well, as we work collectively to tackle the issues that are most important to the people who we are privileged to served, first and foremost of which is building the homes our people need - social, affordable, cost-rental and private homes. This is a top priority for all of Government and we will leave no stone unturned to make tangible

progress over the next two years plus.

Thankfully, the speed and the depth of the recovery of the Irish economy after Covid has surpassed all expectations. Today, we have more people working than at any point in our country's history and an unemployment rate at an historic low. Last September, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, and I introduced a budget with €11 billion of new measures, primarily aimed at supporting businesses and supporting households through this exceptionally difficult period of high inflation. We did this while not taking on any additional borrowing as a country, committing €6 billion to a national reserve fund, and projecting a budget surplus this year and next. In addition, over a series of three budgets, we committed record investment in housing, health and childcare, more teachers and special needs assistants, SNAs, and historic levels of public capital investment to build more schools, hospitals and better public transport. Every day in this Chamber, we hear more calls for more investment and more spending and this is only possible where we have a strong economy and well-managed public finances. That is why this Government will continue to support business, support jobs and manage the nation's finances with care. As an open economy, we are not immune from the global economic downturn but we are better positioned than most to withstand its effects. While politics in many countries has been beset by the populism of the left and the right, I believe that Ireland has prospered through careful implementation of evidence-based policy.

The principles that underpinned this coalition for the first half of its term - trust, mutual respect, parity of esteem and good personal relationships - will continue in the second half. At a time of such uncertainty and turmoil in the world, Ireland needs a strong and stable Government that works day in and day out for the people of our country. With the support of this House, that is the commitment we make to the Irish people today.

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Today is an important day. For 100 years, we have operated as a democracy. It is important we follow the constitutional order today in electing a Taoiseach and a new Cabinet and Government. The metaphor I was using is that it is like half time. The captain's armband will be passed from one to the other but it will be a similar team and I am certain that on Monday morning Tánaiste Micheál Martin will be running out with the rest of us, determined to do everything we can to serve the people. I spoke in the Convention Centre two and a half years ago about the qualities he has that I believed would make him a good Taoiseach. Any assessment, historic or even current, will find that expectation to have been correct.

We have work to do. We retain and double down on the programme for Government we wrote two and a half years ago in a time of real crisis. Before I continue I will mention one person who, as the Taoiseach said, will not be continuing in that team but who has done an incredible job, namely, outgoing Attorney General, Paul Gallagher. We were joking at Cabinet on Tuesday. The Minister for Foreign Affairs was saying every time we get the Security Council the world is in crisis, from the Cuban Missile Crisis to 9/11 and now the war in Ukraine. I said that every time Paul Gallagher takes the Attorney General's office he has to deal with a crisis. During the financial crisis he served this State in a way that was hugely significant for the benefit of our people. Again, what he has done in the past two years to protect the constitutional rights but also to drive what we call the system to push for speed and flexibility in everything we do is a huge record of achievement he leaves behind. I thank him personally and on behalf of our party for the incredible work he has done.

We have work to do. If I was to simplify one of the key characteristics of what is in our pro-

gramme for Government and what we need to do now, I would say we need a bigger State. We need more of our Republic working collectively in this democratic, constitutional way. This is because we are beset by issues that require real effort, real commitment and real conviction and co-ordination of our efforts. We all know that first and foremost among those is housing our people and those who come to our shores seeking refuge or opportunity. That will not be easy but I am certain we will do everything we can to provide that housing. We have set up the mechanisms to allow the State step in where the market is not going to be able to succeed and while it is challenging and beset by all sorts of difficulties, we will deliver.

The second issue is health. The three key targets for this Government and the reform of our health service starts with the understanding the State is all of us. The State is every porter, nurse, consultant, clerk and every single person. The job of ourselves in Government, those in local government and the new CEO of the HSE is to allow each one of us to take up and step up our role in providing care for each other. It is to be creative and to do things differently. It is not just about how much money you throw at things but about how you make the best use of that money to deliver what we need.

In the next two years, the biggest change, the thing that is going to matter most, not just in those two years but for the next two or three decades, is what we do collectively as a country to tackle climate change, to improve our country as we do so, to tap into and rely on our own energy resources that protect us and give us greater security, as well as providing for a better environment. We must change Irish farming and forestry so we diversify and bring new income streams to encourage a whole new generation of people to come into this most important task of our time, which is to protect and restore nature, provide the food we need and maintain and restore the beautiful country we have the great joy to live in.

We must change. The biggest political challenge is going to be the very basic agreement at a local level in every council in the country about how we move around, how we avoid grid-lock and how we create a sense of community by what is going to be a complete pivot in our transport system. It will be a system change, as the OECD recommended in a report earlier this year, so that we build up that sense of community. We need to make Ireland a country which is socially just with everyone having access to the transport systems that we need.

Last but not least, in respect of climate change there is a new circular economy. We realise that the economy serves society and not the other way round. The root of the word “economy” is related to managing the home. As we all know, the home is not just about bricks and mortar; it is about having time to listen to the spirits in our hearts. How do we put an economic price on humour? We in government are committed to that.

I want to commend my Green Party colleagues, in particular. The protection of cultural institutions is as important as all of the other infrastructure that needs to be put in place. The value of caring work, which economics has never properly measured and priced, is central to what we need to do in providing this new economy.

How do we value and price the courage of protecting the peace? We all feel that this week, for Private Seán Rooney and his family and Trooper Shane Kearney. How do we measure that price? It is priceless. It is more important than everything else. It is what we stand for as a country and people. It is a path that carries real risks when people go out to uphold peace, but that is as important as any measure of economic success. That, more than anything else, is how we value ourselves as a country.

I mentioned the Taoiseach having done a good job. The baton is being passed on. I was slightly nervous when I met Leo's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Varadkar, coming in because I have been there in the past in terms of what were euphemistically described as robust exchanges with the Tánaiste, and please God, future Taoiseach. One thing Deputy Bruton said struck me. He said leaders need character, courage and curiosity. I thought of three other Cs. We need a Taoiseach to be clever and collegiate and, because cleverness alone does not work, to have compassion. I have worked closely with the Tánaiste in the past two and a half years and he has all those characteristics in spades.

What the Taoiseach said is true. We have worked on principles of trust. We have arguments. The attractive thing is that one does not always win the argument but one does not always lose. It is about the reasonableness of an argument, in my experience over the past two years. If one goes in with a willing case one has a good chance of winning one of the other two and carrying three over the line. We will continue that. We will come in for half-time, take a break tomorrow and hit the ground running again.

It is a time of real change in the world and an important time for our country. We will make mistakes. Lord knows, we are not without our flaws. This is a good functioning Government. We stand by our Constitution. We go with pride to Áras an Uachtaráin to seek our seals of office from the President and for two more years we will do everything we can to help and serve the Irish people, with Leo Varadkar as Taoiseach.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I begin by wishing Teachta Martin all the very best as he exits the Office of An Taoiseach and his role at Cabinet changes. I wish you and yours a very happy and peaceful Christmas. For the past two and half years, we have debated the important issues facing Ireland and our people, and I have no doubt that you will greatly miss our engagements here on a Tuesday and Wednesday. I wish you well.

In his speech, Teachta Martin argued that this Government is successful and delivering. The rest of us must live in a very different Ireland from him. We live in Ireland where, during his time leading Government, the housing emergency has gotten worse, the crisis in health has gotten worse and households struggle to get by. He now passes the baton to Deputy Varadkar at a time where more than 11,000 of our people are homeless, including more than 3,000 children. Close to 1 million people are on treatment waiting lists. Many working families queue at food banks to get a hot meal. Surely, this cannot count as success.

The Government said that there are no easy answers. However, that is not an acceptable response to those mothers frantic because their children wait for vital surgery, essential services and assessment of needs; to families distressed because they cannot pay the latest bill, the mortgage repayment or afford the rent; or to a child growing up in a bed and breakfast or a hotel room. There are no easy answers, but there are answers. There are solutions that a Government with the right priorities would grasp with both hands, but instead this Government chose to ignore them.

The policies of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, not only over the past two and half years but since they joined together in 2016 have driven these crises. To dress up their failure as progress is to insult ordinary people who live with the consequences of those failures. Rather than being accountable and facing up to reality, they point the fingers at others. They hide behind excuses and present alibis for not getting the work done. It is a cop-out so typical of the parties which have passed power between each other for a century.

Ireland is a great country – perhaps the greatest. Our people are great people who are achieving extraordinary things everyday, sometimes against all odds. What we need now is a Government worthy of them and worthy of their hopes and ambitions.

Sinn Féin does not support the nomination of Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach. The policies of Fine Gael have always been about ring-fencing the wealth and privilege of those at the top, pushing workers and families to the back of the queue, and the privatisation and hallowing out of public services. This has not changed under the leadership of Deputy Varadkar. Fine Gael and Deputy Varadkar have been in government now for 11 years. Fine Gael and Deputy Varadkar's policies are writ large across the crises in housing, healthcare and the deep economic inequalities in Ireland today.

It is no coincidence that during Fine Gael's time in power people desperately struggle to put a roof over their heads. A generation is locked out of home ownership and renters have been fleeced by extortionate rent – an 82% increase since 2012. Housing policy is written for big developers, wealthy investors and corporate landlords. Fine Gael, of course, is the party that rolled out the red carpet for the cuckoo funds and the vulture funds. It could not wait to get them in, and now look at the damage being done.

Fine Gael's refusal to accept housing as a basic right has seen the crisis escalate to an emergency so bad that it is now spread to impact education, healthcare and our economy. It is no coincidence either that our hospitals are under unprecedented strain, with a never-ending trolley crisis, record waiting lists and a struggle to recruit and retain staff. The chickens of Fine Gael's failure to invest in and resource our health service have come back to roost and it is patients who pay the price.

We must remember that Deputy Varadkar has been at the centre of these crises, sitting at the Cabinet table for more than a decade, contributing to these terrible decisions, and eventually ascending to the office of An Taoiseach in 2017. We should not forget that Deputy Varadkar's last Government ran out of road because of Fine Gael's disastrous performance in the areas of health and housing, eventually falling to the prospect of a no-confidence vote in the then Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris. Nor should we forget that the revolving door of former Government Ministers into cushy jobs as lobbyists for banks and the insurance industry continued and thrived during Deputy Varadkar's term leading Government; from Cabinet to lobbyist in the blink of an eye.

It is no coincidence that the Minister for Finance, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, is now ready to oversee the return of bumper pay to the top brass in the banks, backing the haves over the have-nots, showing up always for the insider class, looking after their friends in high places.

Deputy Simon Harris: What about friends in low places?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: This has always been the Fine Gael way. It is the Leo Varadkar way. The episode that defines Leo Varadkar's last term as Taoiseach is his leaking of a confidential Government document to a friend, something that he admitted to on the floor of this Dáil. While criminal proceedings were not pursued on this matter, serious questions remain.

Deputy Simon Harris: How is Jonathan?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: What was really worrying is that it is still Deputy Varad-

kar's stated belief that he is somehow above having his actions questioned by the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO. Deputy Varadkar believes that power puts him beyond accountability. This is the view held by the man who now returns to the office of An Taoiseach, the man who recently told young people who were forced away from Ireland by his policies that the grass is not always greener in other countries. This is the man who invited exploited renters to remember that one person's rent is another person's income. This is the man who advised a generation locked out of home ownership to borrow from their parents for a mortgage deposit, the bank of mammy and daddy. These are their views that emphasise loud and clear that Fine Gael and its friends in Fianna Fáil have been empowered for far too long-----

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----they are out of touch, out of ideas and out of time. Deputy Micheál Martin has resigned as Taoiseach and the Government is dissolved. We should now have a general election because we need a change of Government.

Tá a fhios againn cheana féin cad a fhaighimid leis an Teachta Varadkar mar Thaoiseach. Bhíomar anseo cheana. Diúltaíodh tithíocht agus cúram sláinte do dhaoine. Tá seirbhísí poiblí i ndroch-chaoi agus tá oibrithe agus teaghlaigh sáinnithe ag cúl na scuaine. Tá athrú Rialtais ag teastáil ag muintir na hÉireann, ní hamháin athrú Taoisigh.

We face real challenges but there is hope, positivity and ambition amongst our people. Ireland has big opportunities in the coming decades, namely, the re-unification of our country, the achievement of energy independence and the power of our young people. Capturing these opportunities is the key to Ireland reaching our greatest days. These days are on the horizon and will belong to everyone, but we will not get there with Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach. We will not get there on the watch of this Government, but we can get there with a change in leadership and with a change in direction. With a change in Government, we will get there. Today, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, essentially the one party now, backed to the hilt by the Green Party, cling to power not in a demonstration of diversity or maturity, but as a demonstration of the claustrophobic sense of entitlement that above all else will work might and main to keep change out and to keep others out.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: What of the mandate of the Dáil?

Deputy Simon Harris: It is called democracy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Make no mistake, they cannot prevent the new dawn breaking. The light of the better tomorrow burns brightly and they can stand in the way of change, they can refuse to budge, they can slow it down, they can make the people wait a little longer, but they cannot and they will not stop that change.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The touchpaper has been lit by the hopes of a new generation.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Simon Harris: With you in the hot seat.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The old ways are on borrowed time. Our future will be

defined by equality, prosperity, unity and opportunity for all, building a strong, modern, vibrant all-Ireland economy. That is the future worth fighting for. It is a future that a Sinn Féin Government would work night and day to achieve for workers, for families, for communities and for Ireland.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I begin by extending a personal tribute to Deputy Micheál Martin on his public service and thanking him for the courtesy he has extended to me since I became a Deputy. I appreciate it. We all acknowledge that he took office at an unprecedented time of challenge, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, we have faced the additional enormous challenge of the fallout from Russia's brutal war on Ukraine and we are also facing this existential climate catastrophe which must be acknowledged. It must also be acknowledged that very few people get to choose of their own free will their time of stepping down as Taoiseach. For that alone, today is unique.

However, we in the Labour Party cannot support the Fine Gael nomination at this change-over time. We do not believe that this so-called changeover represents anything but a cosmetic change at a time when we need a real and substantial change in the policies and solutions proposed by the Government. We in the Labour Party know, as people across the country know, that this Government is not delivering an Ireland that works for all - an Ireland of equality. In 1919, more than 100 years ago, one of our party's founders, Thomas Johnson, wrote in the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil, "It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter". Important words, yet nearly 250,000 children today live in deprivation, with 3,480 children homeless and, a week from Christmas, far too many parents will struggle to heat homes this winter, put food on the table for their children or ensure that Santa will bring a gift.

A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, we have come through a once-in-a-century pandemic. We have seen the capacity of the State to pivot and deliver public services and radical change urgently. This Government, however, has failed to seize the opportunity to refashion housing provision, social infrastructure and the health service at a time of strong budget surpluses. The opportunity to transform our country and society has been squandered. Now is when we need a radical vision to bring about a real change in policy. A brutal war is being waged on our Continent, with tens of thousands killed in Ukraine and millions of refugees fleeing Russian aggression. A return of inflation is ravaging incomes and it is hitting those on low wages, pensions and social welfare the hardest. There are ominous signs of a slowdown, with job losses in the tech sector, while the stalling of construction projects is slowing down the building and delivery of new homes. Record heatwaves across Europe this summer are a sharp reminder of stalled progress and untenable delays on bringing about renewable energy and the action necessary to meet our ambitious climate targets. In 2020, we were told the programme for Government would invest in climate action and deliver a new energy system but, once again, a climate action plan for next year is delayed and there is no sign of the necessary reductions in emissions that need to be delivered now and next year.

When the outgoing Taoiseach was nominated two and a half years ago, we were told the test of the Government would be one of delivery. That is the right test but, on all the key measures of delivery and success, this Government has failed. Homelessness is up. Healthcare waiting lists are up and carbon emissions are up. Too many children have inadequate homes. Too many children with autism lack appropriate school places, or any school places. Too many parents are unable to find an affordable home or a suitable childcare or early years place, with no sign

of promised reductions in crèche fees and crèches closing. Too many workers remain on low and insecure pay or stuck in traffic jams without decent public transport options. As we face into winter, too many older people remain deeply anxious about heating their homes or getting the care they need. Ireland remains far too dependent on fossil fuels, with surging use of energy in data centres and the failure to build the offshore wind generation capacity that we have been promised for so long and which is so sorely needed.

The failure of delivery on so many fronts should have re-fashioned the agenda and policies of the Government. Instead, what we are seeing with today's cosmetic changeover is a programme for Government that is unchanged, with no new ambitions and the same complacency. At the midway point of this coalition, why is there no substantive revision in policy? Why are we seeing a programme for Government that remains out of step with the changed world? Why are the same Ministers being retained in Departments where they are simply not delivering the necessary change? Perhaps the new Taoiseach will surprise us later today with more dramatic changes than expected. However, unless the policies of the Government and the programme for Government are revised, there will be no change in the delivery and lack of delivery.

The Government has been plagued by resignations, instability and ethical concerns. We know, or we can predict at this stage, that the Tánaiste will return to the office of Taoiseach. On a personal level, I wish him very well. However, his party has spent too long in government and has run out of ideas. In the seven years Fine Gael has been in government since the 2016 general election, it has singularly failed to resolve the housing crisis. Indeed, it has made it worse, with an ideological insistence on an over-reliance on the private sector to deliver homes. It is a delivery that is simply not happening. We have seen a catalogue of unforced errors by Ministers, while talented backbenchers apparently remain blocked from taking high office.

The erosion of standards in public office has accelerated in more recent years under the Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil Government. A *laissez-faire* approach to ethics rules and appointment processes and the growing habit and tendency to centralise power with Ministers and to ram legislation through the Oireachtas, as was done this week with the planning legislation, points to a growing arrogance and complacency. There has been no progress on the Public Sector Standards Bill first developed by Deputy Howlin, which would have overhauled ethics legislation and standards in public office. Yesterday, we saw the outgoing Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform issue a press release announcing approval of a report on the ethics review. However, we still have no draft law, despite the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO, asking repeatedly for more powers and despite multiple scandals in recent years. Today, the Labour Party is putting the Government on notice of the need to act urgently on ethics reform. We will be pressing this in the new year.

When the Dáil last gathered to elect a Taoiseach, I was not a Member. The only electoral contest since the coalition was formed delivered a clear rebuke to the Punch and Judy politics of Fine Gael versus Sinn Féin. The Dublin Bay South by-election result in July 2021 showed the public desire for a more constructive, positive and left-wing alternative to the *status quo*. It was a demand for strong State intervention on housing, care, climate and jobs. That demand is the reason the Labour Party, in 2020, made clear we could not support or form part of the Government formation. The permanent improvements in public services and increased State investment we wanted to see would require commitment to a change in tax policy, particularly on wealth. Our view of this was confirmed by the recent report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare. Yet, in 2020 and since then, both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have consistently ruled out changes in tax policy, thereby limiting scope for the Government to deliver transfor-

mational change. In particular, they have consistently ruled out the necessary increase in State investment in services. We know, therefore, that they cannot deliver the necessary change, particularly on housing but also on care, climate and building communities.

Throughout the course of this Dáil, the Labour Party has put forward constructive, social democratic and socialist alternative policies. We have worked to deliver change from the Opposition and we will continue to outline our vision of an Ireland that works for all. On workers' rights, we proposed legislation on sick pay, a living wage, a real right to flexible working and pay rises for workers. On housing, our renters' rights Bill would have limited the grounds for eviction and would have frozen rents. Our Bill to implement the Kenny report would end land speculation and hoarding. On care, we have championed student nurses, community and care workers and a public universal childcare scheme. On climate, we have argued for radical measures, including a €9 a month climate ticket and genuinely ambitious State action on emissions. More generally on reform, we have argued for a ban on gambling advertising, reform of our citizenship rules, rights for co-habiting couples and a national autism strategy.

On the economy, our fully costed budgets and cost-of-living measures would have put this country on a pathway to delivering real equality. That is the sort of Ireland the Labour Party wants to see - an Ireland that works for all. That is why, in the next election, we will offer a clear vision and alternative to both narrow nationalism and right-wing orthodoxy and ideology. We will offer a social democratic, socialist alternative to the Punch and Judy show. It is a show that may grab headlines but it will not deliver change. I have always believed that social and economic rights and social and economic equality are two sides of the same coin. That is why I joined the Labour Party. Campaigning for economic justice and standing up for those struggling to make ends meet are core to the vision and values of our party.

Today, as we see the failure of the market-knows-all policies of the Government, we know the Labour Party values of equality, solidarity and fairness are needed more than ever. That is why today we will not be supporting the Fine Gael nomination for Taoiseach and why we believe that, instead of cosmetic change, we need to see real and substantial change in Ireland.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I start my contribution by going back in time to 27 June 2020, the day Deputy Micheál Martin became Taoiseach. Back then the Dáil business was conducted in the convention centre, as we well remember, and the country was in strict lockdown. It was so strict his family were not able to be with him on that important day for them and for him. I acknowledge he led by example on that occasion and throughout the crisis. We are all grateful for that.

Deputy Martin has always viewed the office of Taoiseach and the awesome responsibility it entails with the respect and reverence it deserves and has undoubtedly worked very hard as Taoiseach. That hard work and gruelling schedule necessitated many personal sacrifices for him and his family, which he spoke about earlier. It is important to acknowledge that. Politics is all-consuming and family life and personal relationships can sometimes bear the brunt of that.

Usually when a Taoiseach steps down, the exit route is clear and the door closes behind a life in full-time politics. The role of rotating Taoiseach is very different, as we see today. Instead of an exit route, it is more like a roundabout with the Government going around in circles. Crucially, there is no real change in direction and there will not be after today. The new Taoiseach, when appointed, will not veer from the course set by the programme for Government. That is why the Social Democrats will not be supporting the nomination for Taoiseach of Deputy

Varadkar. We cannot support the programme for Government, which is a failure and has failed to deliver for people who most need support. This is especially true when it comes to housing.

A statistic which exemplifies the Fianna Fáil and Fine-Gael failure when it comes to the housing disaster is that between 2004 and 2021 the proportion of young people in their late 20s still living in their childhood bedrooms increased from 36% to 61%, the highest increase in young people being forced to continue to live at home anywhere in the European Union. That is a fact. Is it any wonder, then, that the recent EUROSTAT poll revealed that Irish young people are among those who express the most dissatisfaction with life anywhere in the EU? In the majority of EU countries, life satisfaction is higher among young people than older people, but the reverse is true in Ireland. It gives me no pleasure to say this, but Ireland is no country for young people. We all know the reasons for that. Young people cannot afford the exorbitant cost of living in Ireland and the Government has not helped with that.

Rents in Dublin are now at an astronomical €2,300 per month, or €28,000 per year. In the rest of the country, rents have also climbed to record highs of €1,600 per month, or €19,200 per year. The minimum wage is €21,294. If you are living outside of Dublin, you have the grand total of €2,094 per annum to live on after rent. That is €40 per week. It is now impossible for young people living in Dublin to survive on the minimum wage, or even, for many people, on very good wages.

Throughout his tenure, the outgoing Taoiseach repeatedly said the housing disaster is the biggest societal problem we face. I wholeheartedly agree with that sentiment but I prefer to deal with facts and not sentiment. It is not evident the Government is treating the housing disaster as the emergency it is. All it has to cling to is a list of targets that were set in the Housing for All plan and which are now, as we all know, woefully inadequate and out of date. People cannot live in or on targets. They need houses they can afford, whether those houses are to rent or to buy.

It is not just about bricks and mortar. The price of the housing crisis is being paid by 3,480 children losing their childhoods as they grow up in emergency accommodation, by the relationships that breakdown because of the stress of housing insecurity, by the couples who postpone having a family and by those disconnected communities that result when people are unable to put down roots. What kind of society are we building when affordability is now defined by the Government as being €450,000 in Dublin and €400,000 in Cork or Galway? Do you know a mortgage on those amounts is at least €114,000? Increasingly, Ireland has become a country of haves and have-nots.

The most vulnerable are being left behind without so much as a second glance by this Government. The cost-of-living crisis is decimating workers and their families throughout the country who are now struggling to survive. The supports offered by the Government have not been enough to keep people's heads over water. In an indictment of the Government's failure to protect the most vulnerable, elderly people - we heard it this week on the radio - are presenting to hospital with hypothermia because they are not heating their homes.

In the absence of leadership from this Government, civil society has stepped into the breach. It was reported yesterday that primary schools throughout the country are now distributing food vouchers to help the struggling families put food on the table this Christmas. On Wednesday the Capuchin Day Centre had to stop handing out tickets for its Christmas hamper due to safety concerns after thousands of people turned up seeking help. According to one man who had

volunteered with that service since 1972, it was the worst he had ever seen. State supports for those who need them most are threadbare and disintegrating.

Children with disabilities are being denied basic healthcare and their educational entitlements and, with them, the right to reach their full potential. More than 110,000 children are now on waiting lists for therapies such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and disability services. It is not acceptable for the Government to blame recruitment problems for a failure to provide essential services. If services were properly planned and prioritised, crucial staff would be in place. Waiting lists are now a feature, not a flaw, of the health service. How else does one explain how there are more than 900,000 people on some form of waiting list for care? Waiting lists have soared despite record investments in the health service in recent years. Why? It is because pumping money into a broken system will not produce the desired results. We need a reform of the health service. Reform was set out in the Sláintecare plan but has not been properly implemented.

The Green Party has maintained its presence in Government because it says it wants to deliver on climate action. However, the people who supported the Green Party are now learning that its climate rhetoric does not match climate action. The figures speak for themselves. Our emissions last year went up by 5.4%. The target reduction was 4.8%. Just last week we had another damning report from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, which warned that our emissions have contributed to an increase this year of 6%. We have just eight years to stop the worst impacts of the climate crisis and an irreversible climate catastrophe. Under this Government, our chances of reaching that climate target are becoming increasingly remote.

The potential and desire for change is huge in Ireland. People have great belief that we can do better. However, people want genuine change, not a repackaging of stale parties or policies as something new. This handing-over of the baton from the Taoiseach to the Tánaiste does not represent real change. This rotation of Taoiseach will not serve the people out there who need new politics informed by the values of social democracy that delivers for them. The only thing it will achieve is finally sounding the death knell for the Civil War politics after a century, and the pretence that there ever any real difference between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I do not wish to be ungracious, but this is not a time for standing ovations or self-congratulation. We are living in one of the richest countries in the world and yet, one in five of our population is living at risk of poverty. As we head into Christmas, there are 3,400 children who are going to go through Christmas in emergency accommodation. There are a total of 11,000 people who are homeless and in emergency accommodation, many of whom are children who will suffer their second, third or fourth Christmas in homeless accommodation. One in five of our population suffers deprivation. A whole generation of young people have no prospect of being able to afford the rents that are being charged or the house prices that have all reached record levels. This is happening not because it is necessary, but because Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have protected the interests of the few over the many. At the same time that we are seeing that shocking level of homelessness, deprivation and people suffering the cruel blows of an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis, corporate profits have soared through the roof. They are up 159% over the last decade. The ESB and the energy companies saw their profits treble in the first six months of this year. At the same time, there are people on pitiful incomes who do not know if they will have enough money to pay for electricity.

Yesterday, I got a message from a young woman in Wexford named Jill, who is a single parent with a child with special needs. In the last week she has had to put €200 into her pay-as-

you-go electricity meter. When she rang up Electric Ireland to ask if someone would come out to check whether the meter was faulty, because she simply could not believe that this is what she was being charged when she has an income of €268, she was told someone would come out, but if there was no problem with the meter she would be charged a €200 call-out fee. Earlier this week I read out a letter from a mother who, along with her husband and her two teenage children, is facing the courts and the prospect of being evicted from the home where they have lived all their lives in February, even though the Government claimed it was going to prevent this stuff. They are people who have paid their taxes, have done nothing wrong and have always paid the rent. They, along with thousands of others, are going into this Christmas facing the prospect that they will be homeless in the new year. That is the legacy of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael - a society for the few while the many suffer homelessness, deprivation and struggle to survive day to day.

In our view, this is not a time to change the Taoiseach; it is the time to change Government. We need a different type of society where people are put before the profits and wealth of a tiny few. We need a government of the left, a socialist government that will use the wealth and resources that exist in our society to eliminate homelessness and to end the scandal of people waiting on trolleys and nearly 900,000 people waiting for essential procedures in our hospitals. I say to our colleagues in the Opposition that if, as many of us are saying, it is time after more than 100 years to break the cycle of Fianna Fáil - they have had their chance and they have let us down - then they also need to give a pledge to the people out there that they will not prop up a Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael Government come the next election. It is time for a different type of Government in this country that puts the needs of working people for basic services, such as the right to housing and a secure dignified existence for everybody, first. That is perfectly possible in one of the wealthiest societies in the world but it will not happen unless we remove Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael from power.

Deputy Bríd Smith: According to Bon Jovi's song:

The more things change the more the stay the same

... it's just reality

It's the same damn song with a different melody

That is what is happening here today. The change of Taoiseach will mean nothing for the majority of people in this country. More than that, the election of the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Varadkar, as Taoiseach will guarantee a doubling down and a continuation of the past policies.

Deputy Varadkar has been always the most ideological of the Tweedledum-Tweedledee choices we have. The Deputy notoriously targeted the so-called "welfare cheats" but, in reality, he targets the most marginalised people. At the same time, the Deputy seeks always to double down on the justification for the growing gap between wealth and poverty in this country. The Commission on Taxation recently pointed out that the direction of travel is only going in one way. The share of the wealth for the top 20% is increasing while all other groups have an increasing lower share. No doubt this trend will continue under the Taoiseach nua's watch.

Deputy Varadkar is truly a safe pair of hands for that section of Irish society and the guarantor that there will be no change in policy for the next two years. There will be no change for the hundreds of thousands of people in housing need and no change for those on the wrong side of

a private-versus-public healthcare service. Oddly enough, one area where we are likely to see a change is in climate, but it will not be for the better. I say that because the change under Deputy Varadkar, with the Greens in power with him, which is an utter disaster for the environment and the climate movement, will mean the neoliberal bandwagon will ensure that climate issues will get worse and environmental disasters will widen. I say that because Deputy Varadkar will guarantee that liquefied natural gases, LNGs, will come into this country - he recently met with New Fortress Energy - data centres will flourish and targets will be missed. We can expect plenty of rhetoric around this but, like housing, we will see utter failure on delivery.

The slogan for today should be adopted from the school students' climate strike movement that we need system change, not climate change. Today, we need system change, not Taoiseach change.

Deputy Mick Barry: Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice Found There*, published in 1871, featured the characters Tweedledum and Tweedledee. According to Wikipedia, "The Tweedle brothers never contradict each other ... they complement each other's words, which led John Tenniel to portray them as twins in his illustrations for the book." Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of Irish politics. As if to prove the point this morning, they swap around the top jobs and the policy of the Government will stay more or less exactly the same.

On Wednesday morning, at 4 a.m., queues began to form outside the Capuchin Day Centre here in Dublin for tickets for Christmas hampers for those in need. By 11 a.m., gardaí had to intervene to stop the distribution of tickets amid what was described by the centre's co-ordinator as, "absolutely chaotic scenes". This happened in the capital city of a wealthy, First World country - a country which Deputy Varadkar has helped to shape having been a Minister for 11 years now.

My colleague, Councillor Leah Whelan, 25 years of age, is in a WhatsApp group with 21 of her friends. Since the start of the year, 20 of Leah's friends have emigrated. In a State led for 100 years by Governments headed by Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil, a State from which many more than 1 million people have been forced to emigrate, youth emigration is starting up again in earnest. Back in the day, emigration was driven by mass unemployment. Today, it is driven by the housing emergency. No party in this House is more responsible for this crisis than Deputy Varadkar's party, which has been in power as it was allowed to develop all along the line.

12 o'clock

If the people had a vote today they would vote for change and Deputy McDonald would probably be the one heading off to the Park. As this Dáil enters its second half, I say to Deputy McDonald the change the people need will not be found in Governments that include Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, nor will it be found in discussions with the likes of Mary Harney or the big property developers. We need an alternative to the capitalist market and its representatives, not a second 11 for it. I will be voting against the nomination of Deputy Varadkar.

Deputy Michael Lowry: At this time in 1994 the Fianna Fáil-Labour Party coalition collapsed. This month, exactly 28 years ago, during negotiations for a new Government, I was sent on a mission by John Bruton. The objective was to find a solution to a key Labour demand for a rotating Taoiseach. The Labour Party was in a strong position with 32 seats. It had the option of going back into Government with Fianna Fáil under a new leader. Fine Gael had lost

the 1987, 1989 and 1992 elections. The opportunity to return to power had to be grasped. The compromise was the appointment of the first-ever Labour Party Minister for Finance, Ruairí Quinn. Incidentally, that time also saw the introduction of what we called “the high chair” and is now known as the “super-junior” Minister.

It is with a great sense of satisfaction I am here to participate in the notion of a rotating Taoiseach becoming a reality. Due to the unwavering loyalty of the people of Tipperary, I am here to endorse this historic event. Once bitter rivals, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are now combining out of national interest and self-interest to rotate the position of Taoiseach and restructure a Cabinet. Sinn Féin can take comfort from the fact that change does happen, even if it takes 100 years. Today’s event shows all things are possible. Nothing is certain in politics. The uncertainty of the current times has informed my decision to support the transition of Government today. There are several pessimists in this Chamber. They continually bark and bite. They rail against Government and the working of the institutions of the State. That approach gathers headlines but does nothing to achieve progress. I prefer to be fair, to give credit when it is due and to criticise failings objectively. It is my experience a positive, constructive approach to politics yields results, in particular for my constituents.

Our country and its people are once again facing dangerous times. This is an Administration that has experience of dealing with difficult times. Its first task was to deal with the worst pandemic since the Spanish flu of 1918. This was followed by the worst energy crisis since 1970s and the first major European land war since 1945. The coalition has had a difficult birth. It faced many challenges in a resolute and cool-headed fashion. Of course it got things wrong but it has had enough success to merit the retention of the confidence of the membership of this House. Our finances have been well managed and are in relatively good order. The Government has kept the lights on and business open. It has strived to look after those who need help. Our welfare system is one of the most generous in Europe. The majority of people want this Government to run its term before casting ultimate judgment at the ballot box. For now, people recognise the centre of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have held this country together. This is a stable team. It is not spectacular but is modestly effective. By contrast, the option at this time is a Sinn Féin-led Government dependent on People Before Profit, with a few others from the left. This is not a coherent alternative. It does not have the confidence of business. It does not have the confidence of rural Ireland. It does not have the confidence of those who work. A combination of Sinn Féin and the left is untried and untested. We need only remember it took Liz Truss one month to send the UK economy into a tailspin. The next few years are going to be exceptionally tough. We need an experienced team to lead us. It is not a time for experiments. The coalition has done some good work. There are many things that it can do better.

The tasks of Government are clear. People need homes and shelter. They need good hospitals and healthcare. They need schools, colleges and centres of educational excellence. In an increasingly modern economy and society, they need good and affordable childcare. People need to be feel safe and secure their homes and communities. This renewed Administration also needs to find a better way to talk about climate change. The Green Party, in particular, has to learn to talk more respectfully to rural Ireland.

In conclusion, I thank the outgoing Taoiseach, Deputy Martin, for his accessibility and courtesy. I commend him on the job he has done in guiding the country through a difficult period. Deputy Martin has governed with honesty, collegiality and grit. His successor, Deputy Leo Varadkar, has his own style. He has skill and ability. He is forthright and open to new ideas. He is not afraid to have an opinion and take a stand. I wish him every possible success in tackling

the priority issues for this Government and the people of our country.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: In October 2019, Deputy Varadkar, as Taoiseach, apologised to the women wronged by the CervicalCheck scandal and promised that no woman would ever have to go through courts again to get justice. Despite that promise, three years later more than 170 women have done just that and have gone through the court system to get justice. Deputy Varadkar was Minister for Health at the time the CervicalCheck scandal happened. However, he said he has no recollection of being informed of it.

As Minister for Health, Deputy Varadkar said, short of an asteroid hitting this planet, the national children's hospital would be built for €750 million and open by 2020. It is currently double that cost - the cost could reach €2 billion before it is open - and will not be open until 2025. It is an incredible situation that a party which prides itself as a party of prudence is actually the party that is presiding over serious cost overruns across capital projects.

When Deputy Varadkar was in his last year as Taoiseach, 35 of the 38 most significant capital projects in the State were over budget, including the national broadband plan, the national maternity hospital and others. It seems that when one puts the word "national" beside a capital project in this country, it adds hundreds of millions of euro to the cost and puts the project way over time.

On his way out of health, Deputy Varadkar cut the mental health budget in the State by a third. He kept a strong interest in health, however, when Taoiseach and leaked a confidential document which was negotiated with the IMO to his friend, who was president of a rival GP group. I asked Deputy Varadkar in the Dáil whether he had ever leaked from Cabinet. After a long and awkward pause, he responded, "Nothing of this nature. All politicians leak from time to time".

During the Covid crisis when lives were extremely restricted and ordinary men and women could not book a table in a bar or restaurant and funeral undertakers, brides and grooms and the hospitality industry were abiding by one set of rules, Deputy Varadkar, along with dozens of others, partied with Katherine Zappone. Similar actions would have led to resignations in other western countries. He was saved because the Attorney General broke a traditional silence and said the rules everybody else was abiding by the time were not actually the rules at all.

Deputy Varadkar presided over the longest and most restrictive lockdowns in Europe. He presided over the only Government in the whole of Europe that closed down the building of homes at that time. Despite the rising number of excess deaths at the moment, he is part of a Government that is still refusing to investigate the high level of excess deaths occurring in this State at the moment.

While Deputy Varadkar has been in power, the North of Ireland has staggered from crisis to crisis. The North is dealt with really only as a crisis by this Government instead of an opportunity for the freedom that Michael Collins once spoke about. As Deputy Varadkar is taking the position of Taoiseach 100 years since the foundation of the Free State and the shocking State executions of republicans by the State, I ask that he use his position to finally put an end to Civil War politics and offer a State apology for those executions that happened more than 100 years ago.

Deputy Varadkar has been part of a Cabinet that has seen one of the worst housing crises in history. There is record homelessness and incredible numbers of deaths of homeless people

on the streets. There are record local authority housing waiting lists, record rents and record house prices. He has been part of a Government that has seen record overcrowding in accident and emergency departments and waiting times and hospital waiting lists have become worse for many people across the country.

The party of so-called law and order has seen many parts of this State start to live in fear as the country has become more dangerous for them. More gardaí have been attacked while Deputy Varadkar has been in government, more gardaí have resigned and fewer are joining the ranks over the past ten years.

Deputy Varadkar is not solely responsible, obviously, for all of these issues, and no political leader can get it right on every single occasion. However, Deputy Varadkar has been the most senior party in government for the past ten years and has to take responsibility for these issues. It gives me no pleasure to list this litany of disasters, but there has been poor judgment, a lack of trust and a harsh Tory political instinct behind many of these decisions. For those reasons, I cannot support his nomination as Taoiseach.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Ar an chéad dul síos, I would like to wish the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and every Member of this House a happy, holy and peaceful Christmas.

I am reminded of a late evening and we were all down in the Round Room or somewhere. This is more like “Lanagan’s Ball” – I stepped out and you stepped in again and I stepped out and we had Lanagan’s Ball.

However, the people of Ireland have questions they want answered. I have spoken here on many occasions and mentioned powerful globalist forces who are having a huge impact on the way our country is being run. Probably the most powerful of all these globalists organisations is the World Economic Forum, WEF, which is based in Geneva, Switzerland. It is fronted by an individual, Mr. Klaus Schwab. Mr. Schwab has written many controversial books about how he believes the world should be governed, including *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, *Stakeholder Capitalism* and *Covid-19: The Great Reset*.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Could I get some silence? He has written and spoken openly about what he calls “the great reset”. He describes it as an opportunity to reset our world to create a healthier and more equitable and prosperous Europe and future. This sounds fantastic initially, but on closer examination of this cabal, as I call it, it is strange. One of his most famous quotes from 2016 gives us a little insight. He said that by 2030 one will own nothing and be happy about it. He is also quoted as saying “The sovereign state has become obsolete.” I remember some top people here said this about our sovereignty recently as well. He speaks about a system called stakeholder capitalism, which he and the WEF see as a replacement for the current financial system of shareholder capitalism. This system, as quoted on the WEF website, “is one where government, business and individuals collaborate”. It is a system which would see corporations, wealthy, powerful elites and citizens being given an equal stake in the running of their countries. This sounds the very much the same as what the Italian fascist dictator, Mussolini, described as the “corporate state”. In fact, this sounds the very same as Mussolini’s very definition of fascism when he said that fascism is equal to corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power.

This all might sound like some sort of conspiracy and I wish it was, but it is not.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: All right, we will see who will have the last laugh, gáire. Santy might come to ye.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is not, thank God, no. May I continue, with the Leas-Cheann Comhairle's permission?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: There are certain things that we cannot discuss in this Chamber anymore because one is shouted down. As I said, we have several books from Mr. Schwab of the WEF and I will quote again from him. In 2016, he said:

What we are very proud of now is that the young generation, like Prime Minister Trudeau and the president of Argentina and so on, is that we penetrated the cabinets. Yesterday, I was at a reception for Prime Minister Trudeau and I would know that half of his cabinet or even more than half of his cabinet are actually young global leaders of the World Economic Forum.

This brings me to the nub of the question for the Taoiseach-elect.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They are one in the same. As I said, "I stepped out and you stepped in again." It is on the Government website now if anyone wants to look it up. The website is being touted as the WEF's young global leaders. Can Deputy Varadkar explain to me and to the people of Ireland - even if Members here do not want to hear it - why the Young Global Leaders organisation is looking to destroy the power of the people and is destroying our democracy? They rested on that-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I never heard of it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is funny all right. Why is the Young Global Leaders an organisation that sets out to take and to destroy our sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of other countries? Can Deputy Varadkar explain to the Irish people how his position of Taoiseach will endure and how it does not present a conflict of interest? I believe it does. The Irish people and individuals are very worried about this. Deputy Varadkar might not want to know about this but they are worried about it. Do the World Economic Forum, WEF, members have any other supporters? I spoke to one of the Ministers-to-be during the week who told me it was a great organisation and that there was nothing wrong with it. I rest my case and I will point out that I will not be voting for Deputy Varadkar as Taoiseach today.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: At the outset, I would like to pay my heartfelt sympathies to the family of the late Private Seán Rooney and to send our concern and our wishes to Trooper Shane Kearney. I thank them, and we are standing in solidarity with the Defence Forces. Today it is only right and proper that we also think of other people, like our own members of An Garda Síochána, who put themselves in harm's way on a daily basis to protect and uphold the

law and the rule of our land, whether that is at home or abroad. I send a very special word to the members of the Defence Forces who are abroad today. We are thinking of them, we are praying for them and we are so sorry that at this time of the year this has happened to one lovely young man who had his whole life in front of him and who laid it down to work for our State and to help other people. That is so important in the interest of peace.

First, I want to say to the outgoing Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, and to his wife Mary and to his family that I wish him nothing but good luck and happiness always and I wish him well on this day. To the incoming Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, and to his family, he knows that I wish him nothing but good luck every day and good fortune. It is a good day for him and his family, but I want to speak up on behalf of the people of County Kerry, because that is what I am here to do.

I want to talk about who it is not a good day for. I want to remind Deputy Varadkar of this on this special day. It is not a good day for the thousands of homeless people and the people on the housing waiting list. It is not a good day for the million people who are waiting on a list to have medical procedures. It is not a good day for the almost blind people who take a bus to Belfast on a regular basis to have a simple operation to have cataracts removed from their eyes when it should be done here. It is not a good day for the elderly who are cold in their homes and who were recently told by Green Party representatives in County Kerry, “Whatever you do, do not go lighting cosy fires because you might damage the environment around Tralee”. They were told that in the last couple of days. That is an awful thing to tell people. It is not a good day for the fishermen who have been sold out by this and successive Governments. It is not a good day for farmers who are time and time again being put to the pin of their collars to survive. It is not a good day for the horticultural industry who are forgotten by this Government. There are 17,000 of them. There are 6,600 employed directly and 11,000 indirectly employed in horticulture. They were completely forgotten about when the Government shut down the peat industry. It is not a good day for the people who have been allocated home help hours but that help is not arriving to them because it is not available. It is not a good day for cancer patients, in particular, those who I represent and who I deal with on a daily basis, who should receive full medical cards automatically. The diagnosis of cancer should equal the allocation of a full medical card for the duration of their illness. It is not a good day for farmers who now realise their lands will be taxed, a new tax. This is not a good day for those farmers. It is not a good day for those who work in the hospitality sector which I represent in county Kerry. They are worried about the VAT increase that the new incoming Government is going to put on them next year.

I got this very straight and I will give it straight to the Government on the floor of Dáil Éireann. This is from the people of the Kerry Hotel Federation, who I met with during the week. They are concerned for their sector. It is not a good day for the ordinary working man and woman who time and time again are left to pay for everything and who are worried about the mismanagement that Deputy Varadkar has done in the past and are afraid about what he will do in the future. It is not a good day because these days of the election of new taoisigh have come and gone before, but nothing seems to change.

What I would ask of the new Taoiseach, in a very straightforward and open way, is to listen to the people. I am asking him to do that for his own good. I am trying to be helpful. He should take it from the ground up. If his ears and his mind are open to what is wrong in the country, it will make him and his Government a better Government. I and others on this side of the House will remind him of that in the best and most constructive way we can. When we do so, it is not personal - it is us doing our job and speaking up for the people. As long as I live, I will never

understand why people alongside Deputy Varadkar think it is a good idea to stop people from cutting turf. I will remember those people the same as he will remember other people.

Deputy Joan Collins: This must be the longest game of musical chairs anyone could have imagined. Tweedledum replaces Tweedledee, or maybe Tweedledee replaces Tweedledum - who knows? Quite honestly, it will make very little difference to many people. Nothing will change and the record of failure will continue.

It is hard to find a single area of policy where this Government has not failed. A Government that cannot provide its citizens with one of the most basic needs - an affordable home - is a failure, full stop. Some 90,000 families are on lists for public housing, which does not exist. More than 11,000 individuals and families, including more than 3,000 children, have been in emergency accommodation for years, with all that entails for people's health and mental health due to stress, as well as the development of children who have to travel long distances to school. Young, educated and reasonably paid people cannot afford to live in urban areas, especially in Dublin, and that is now a key factor in the recruitment and retention crisis in the health service and schools.

There has been a complete failure to implement Sláintecare as a total package of reforms to transform the public health service. When the Sláintecare report was produced, it was pointed out that a piecemeal approach to its introduction would be the worst way to go about its implementation, yet that is what the Government has done and there has been no improvement. In fact, the public health service has gone from bad to worse and is now in complete crisis despite the great commitment and work of healthcare workers in the system. This is yet another failure to provide a basic need for citizens - access to high quality healthcare when you need it, not when you can afford it. There are many failings in the public health system but the failures in mental health, especially for young people, are an absolute scandal.

More than 100 years after the founding of the State, we still do not have genuinely free education. It speaks volumes that there is a State-funded scheme to help struggling parents with the cost of sending their children to school. Just stop and think about that. In what other wealthy modern society would that be tolerated? We do not provide our children with public transport to get to school in areas where it is required. The expansion of the free school transport scheme was a fiasco. There was an utter failure to plan and put in the necessary resources. Yet again, we have a scheme, not a right or an entitlement, for which one must qualify. That is what public services amount to - not properly funded universal services to meet needs but a series of schemes. This is again a failure to provide places in schools for children with special needs and provide the services those children need. I could go on.

The Government has failed to come anywhere near meeting its climate emission targets. In the past three budgets there has been a failure to ensure welfare payments keep pace with inflation, resulting in an actual cut. The one progressive measure announced by this Government was the promise to end direct provision, through which asylum seekers are, in effect, imprisoned for years, but it now looks like that promise has gone on the long finger.

We have this rigamarole today where one failure will be replaced by another, who has already been there and done that. I call it the Lanigan's Ball day - you step in again, I step out again, I step in and you step out, learning to dance for political power. We need real change - a left change, a socialist change - and we need it badly.

Deputy Marian Harkin: On a personal basis, I wish the outgoing Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, all that is good and thank him for his service, especially during the pandemic, and his stance on Brexit and Ukraine. I also wish the incoming Taoiseach all that is good. I do so not just because it is Christmas but because when our Taoiseach and Government do well, it is better for the country.

In my short contribution, I will draw a parallel with that statement. When our regions do well, it is better for the country. When the outgoing Tánaiste's party was in office nearly eight years ago, the northern and western region was classified by the European Commission as a developed region. It slipped back to a region in transition and is now classified as a lagging industrial region, which means it is caught in a development trap. When the Commission raised a red flag about this, how did the Government respond? The northern and western region received just €217 million of the €900 million given under the European Regional Development Fund, ERDF. In countries like Spain, Portugal and Greece, which include lagging regions, by far the greatest amount of this funding is being invested in those regions. That is not being done here. To add insult to injury, when the Northern and Western Regional Assembly negotiated €250 million deal with the Commission, the reluctance of Departments to spend money in the region meant €33 million of that money had to be given back. This is cohesion funding, which is meant to close the gaps nationally and within the EU.

The Government could have ensured the extra money given was spent in the region. It could have reduced the co-financing rate to 10%, as it was asked to do. It did not do so and therein is the core of the problem. There is no accountable and responsible Department, person or group of persons tasked with delivering balanced regional development. That is not because anybody in the Government is saying, "We will not try to achieve a balance of development between regions." It is because the Government, like previous Governments, has allowed regional development to slip through the cracks, which means it just does not get done. Yes, there has been progress in some areas, including, for example, the establishment of the Atlantic Technological University. However, the gap is so great that unless there is positive discrimination and a whole-of-government approach to closing it, the slippage will happen again and again.

Another example of that gap is in respect of the connectivity of the region, including its rail, road and air services. On accessibility and proximity criteria, according to the OECD, the region scores well below the EU average. Just in the past five weeks, we learned that not one of the designated five surgical hubs is to be located north of a line from Dublin to Galway. Hospitals like Sligo University Hospital, having lost part of its cancer services and having been told there is to be no catheterisation laboratory for the north west, now must continue to wait for its surgical block. Without it, as we all know, there can be no guarantee of the long-term viability of there being an acute hospital in the north west.

The region is at a tipping point. I see little or no evidence of a co-ordinated and properly funded plan to close the economic gap. As my colleague, Deputy Fitzmaurice, will outline, there is a real threat to agriculture and rural development in the region, without, so far, an adequate response from the Government. Therefore, I cannot support the nomination of the outgoing Tánaiste as Taoiseach.

Deputy Michael McNamara: Governments have to deal with the crises of the day and this Government has probably faced more crises than most. Regardless of the magnitude of those crises, governments must put in place a strategy for tomorrow. To borrow a phrase, some people look at the world as it is and ask "Why?"; others look at the world as it could be and ask,

“Why not?”. Unfortunately, the Government has done neither.

We have reached the end of the era of hydrocarbons but we have no alternative in place. Exploration off our west coast has been banned and, instead, we import gas in tankers, thereby increasing its carbon footprint. We talk about offshore wind energy but, as yet, there is no strategy in place into which investors can buy. A Minister in one Department talks about solar energy, while a Minister of State in the same Department wants to start a trade war with the only country in which solar technology is manufactured. We talk about anaerobic digestion, which the EU tells us we are well suited to, but we missed the deadline to apply for funding. We have also reached the end of the era when we can use corporation tax to fund our economy. Those taxes are, rightly or wrongly but increasingly successfully, claimed by others as theirs. Instead of using that bounty to develop health infrastructure, we failed to do so and the trolleys mount up.

We failed to put public transport infrastructure in place to take people out of cars, which is what we want to do. As we celebrate the centenary of the State, we must acknowledge the reality that there was better public transport infrastructure in place a century ago relative to its time and, perhaps, it was better in actual effect. If and when the Government starts to put a strategy in place to deal with tomorrow and the next decade, it will have my support; until it does, I cannot support this Government.

Cuireadh an cheist.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 87; Níl, 62; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Andrews, Chris.</i>	<i>Murphy, Verona.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>	<i>Daly, Pa.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Cathal.</i>	<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	

<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>	<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>	
<i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>	

<i>Noonan, Malcolm.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connor, James.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers; Níl, Deputies Denise Mitchell and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhtas tar éis glacadh leis an gceist.

1 o'clock

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A Thaoisigh, comhghairdeas. Guím gach rath ort i do ról nua.

The Taoiseach: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le baill Dháil Éireann don onóir mhór a thug sibh dom inniu. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuilim ag déanamh mar a rinne na daoine ar éirigh leo a ainmniú mar Thaoiseach don dara huair. Glacaim go humhal leis an ainmniúchán seo. Ba mhór an onóir dom a bheith mar Thaoiseach agus céad bliain mar Stáit á gcomóradh againn.

Céad bliain ó shin, tháinig aisling na Saoirse i gcrích de réir mar a bhaineamar státacht amach. D’aithin an domhan ár neamhspleáchas. Ba cheart go mbeadh sé mar mhisean againn anois iarracht a dhéanamh cabhrú lenár dtír go ceann céad bliain chun na fadhbanna atá roimh mhuintir na hÉireann a réitigh agus chun dóchas a sholáthar in áit a bhfuil éiginnteacht agus éadóchas.

I am very proud of the State that was created 100 years ago under most extreme pressure. Throughout difficult crises and challenges, our democracy endured, survived and prospered. We won the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, as Michael Collins predicted. We owe a debt to men and women of all political parties and all traditions.

A crucial year in the history of our State was 1932, because that is when the wishes of the people were respected, the democratic principle was put ahead of all others and there was a peaceful transfer of power. The coming together of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil in a shared Government with the Green Party in 2020 was less significant, but was nonetheless another important moment in our history.

I want to take this opportunity to commend Deputy Micheál Martin on the leadership that he showed as Taoiseach, for putting the country before politics and for providing reassurance and hope during difficult times. In 2020, the incoming Taoiseach was unable to have his wife and family with him at the Convention Centre as he received the greatest honour of his life. That, too, was leadership and I am glad that they are with us today.

During the pandemic, we all saw the best of each other and it meant that the new coalition was born in a spirit of togetherness and hope. I intend that spirit to continue as we implement, with our partners in the Green Party, the agreed programme for Government.

I would also like to thank my family, friends and staff for their work, love and support. When we enter public life, we choose that path; our loved ones do not. I want them to know that my work as Taoiseach is driven by their example and I intend to honour their confidence in me. I also want to thank, in particular, my constituents in Dublin West for giving me the opportunity to serve as a Deputy and electing me on four occasions. All of us, whether we are Minister, leaders or Opposition spokespeople, know that our mandate ultimately derives from the people who vote for us on election day and for that I remain eternally grateful. I also want to thank all of the Deputies who supported my nomination from Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and Independents.

When I became Taoiseach in June 2017, so much of the focus was on my election and what it represented and symbolised, which was understandable at the time. However, we should focus on where our country is now and what needs to be done as we prepare for our next century of statehood. Our history of the past 100 years has been about winning the additional freedoms that were denied to us or which we were unable to imagine at the time, such as becoming a Republic, becoming a place where people are not limited by their gender, religion, race, background or sexual orientation and becoming a country where you are free to be yourself.

So what are the challenges for the next 100 years? We have many and some of them we need to fix now, otherwise we will be betraying the current generation and the generations who come after us. I am thinking in particular of housing and how we have to go all out to turn to the corner on rising homelessness and falling home ownership. We need to accelerate our plan, Housing for All, making home ownership a reality for the many again. I am thinking of how

we need to tame inflation and to bring the cost of living under control, especially when it comes to the cost of energy, childcare, education, rent and healthcare. I am thinking about climate and biodiversity, the challenges facing our planet and the need to set ourselves the ambition of becoming energy independent and to develop the ideas, systems and mechanisms to make sure that happens. I believe we can harness our massive, untapped renewable natural resources providing greater energy security, stable prices, more jobs and regional development. I am also thinking, as we all are, about the unprovoked war that has brought death and devastation to Ukraine. Today, I re-affirm our commitment to stand with our fellow Europeans in this harsh winter and to help them in every way we possibly can.

I am thinking of the Defence forces and of the men and women who put the safety of others above their own and, in particular, Private Seán Rooney. We offer our condolences to his fiancé, his family and his friends and our thoughts and prayers are also with Trooper Shane Kearney. We wish him a speedy recovery.

I am thinking of the Good Friday Agreement, which was agreed nearly 25 years ago, although fundamental elements of that agreement, of the Assembly and the Executive are still suspended. Dreams of the better future are not built on stalemates and *status quo*. I want to work with all parties in this House and in Northern Ireland as well as with the British Government and with our partners in the European Union to make progress on the Protocol and to restore the institutions of the Agreement.

I am also thinking of the most vulnerable in our society and especially children. We need to improve access to therapies, to provide better special needs education and to do more for those who need it the most. We also need to do more about child poverty and disadvantage. We know that poverty restricts child opportunity and it casts a long shadow over their lives. The number of children who are experiencing consistent poverty has fallen by 45,000. We are making progress but it still means that too many children are missing out on the everyday opportunities they deserve. I will speak more about these matters later on.

Ireland has never been a failed State and it is grotesque and dishonest to claim that we are or that we ever were. However, we are failing some of our citizens and it is essential to our success as a country that we spend the next two years doing all we can to put this right. In eight days' time, most homes around the country will celebrate Christmas with presents and good cheer. Most, but not all. For some families and for some children, Christmas is a time of fear and uncertainty and a time of great unhappiness. The greatest resource of any country is its people so let us try to make sure that all our people have a fair chance, starting with our youngest, their health, continuing with their education and staying with their young people until they are able to create the future they want, providing them with the stepping stones to their ultimate freedom.

Our ambition is to make Ireland the best country in Europe in which to be a child. As Taoiseach, my mission will be to build on the achievement of 100 years ago and to work on what needs to be done for this generation and the next, providing hope and housing, economic opportunities and a fair start for all.

I accept this nomination by the Dáil with humility and resolve, with a burning desire to make good the promise of 100 years ago and to provide new hope and new opportunities for all of our citizens. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

17 December 2022

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.09 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 5.10 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 1.09 p.m. and resumed at 5.10 p.m.

Ceapachán an Taoiseach agus Ainmniú Chomhaltai an Rialtais

Appointment of Taoiseach and Nomination of Members of Government

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on the Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, to confirm his appointment by the President as Taoiseach and to move the motion. Ar ais chugat arís, a Thaoisigh.

The Taoiseach: B'áil liom cead a chur in iúl, mar eolas don Dáil, gur chuir mé m'ainmniú mar Thaoiseach in iúl don Uachtarán agus gur cheap sé mé dá réir. I have informed the President of my nomination as Taoiseach and he has appointed me accordingly.

A Cheann Comhairle, when I became Taoiseach for the first time five and a half years ago, I used this speech to set out the direction for the Government. Back then, Brexit was the biggest challenge facing us as a country. We also faced significant problems in housing and health. By the time I stood down as Taoiseach in the summer of 2020, the biggest challenge facing us was Covid, a pandemic which brought the world to a standstill but from which we emerged united and stronger as a country.

I learned a lot from my first term as Taoiseach, especially during that painful time, and it showed me what was really possible when we mobilise the real power of the State - the true capacity of Government. Things that seemed impossible were achieved in a short amount of time as immovable obstacles were removed with the private, public and voluntary sectors working together for the common good. I believe that offers a blueprint for how we can overcome the great challenges of today, a direction of travel for this State in the 21st century.

A Cheann Comhairle, we are living in an age of emergencies - climate, the war in Ukraine, housing, the cost of living and child poverty. There are also threats to the economy and employment and to peace and partnership on our island. We are facing deep political and social crises and they affect every community in our country. We need to treat each of them as a national emergency and deploy the full resources of the State, the full machinery of Government, to make an immediate and real difference and that is what we are committed to do as a Government.

When the life of our nation was in peril, we joined together to protect one another. Today, the hopes and dreams of our nation depend on us fixing the problems we face. To do so, we need to be all out - to be radical or redundant. We must continue to act as a Government decisively, with both eyes focused on improving the lives of our citizens and serving the interests of our communities.

With that in mind,

Tairigim:

Go gcomhaontóidh Dáil Éireann leis an Taoiseach d'ainmniú na dTeachtaí seo a

leanas chun a gceaptha ag an Uachtarán mar chomhaltaí den Rialtas:

I move:

That Dáil Éireann approve the nomination by the Taoiseach of the following Deputies for appointment by the President to be members of the Government:

As Tánaiste and to the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence, Micheál Martin.

To the Department of Environment, Climate, Communications and Transport, Eamon Ryan.

To the Department of Finance, Michael McGrath.

To the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, Paschal Donohoe.

To the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Simon Coveney.

To the Department of Education, Norma Foley.

To the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin.

To the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien.

To the Department of Social Protection, Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys.

To the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue.

To the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman.

To the Department of Health, Stephen Donnelly

To the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and to the Department of Justice, Simon Harris.

As Minister without portfolio, Helen McEntee, who it is anticipated will return as Minister for Justice when she returns from maternity leave next summer.

I propose to nominate Rossa Fanning SC for appointment by the President to be the Attorney General. I propose to nominate Deputy Hildegard Naughton as Minister of State in the Department of the Taoiseach and as Government Chief Whip. I also propose to nominate the following to continue as Ministers of State in attendance at Government meetings: Deputy Jack Chambers as Minister for international and road transport and logistics at the Department of Transport, as well as Minister of State for postal policy at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications; and Senator Pippa Hackett as Minister of State for land use and biodiversity at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Tánaiste will chair the Cabinet sub-committee on economic recovery and investment and may attend meetings of the British-Irish Council.

In changing the name of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, I am doing so for a particular purpose. Far too many important public capital projects are taking far too long, including schools, social housing, hospitals, Garda stations and public transport projects, among others. I want this Department to bring about a step change when it comes to the execution and delivery of the national development plan, Project Ireland 2040.

Next week, the Government will meet as usual and I will present the names of Ministers of State for approval.

There are a number of pressing challenges that will define the rest of our term in office. First among these is housing. We must do whatever it takes to solve this social crisis and reverse the trend of rising homelessness and falling home ownership. We must apply the same spirit of determination, action and immediacy that we saw during the pandemic to this great challenge of today. We will leave no stone unturned. No option will be taken off the table without due consideration. Housing for All is a comprehensive plan and, working with the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, I will do all I can to drive it forward. We need to clear bottlenecks to turn the tens of thousands of unactivated planning permissions into new homes over the next two years. We need to reduce dereliction dramatically and bring down rents in real terms.

The second challenge is taming inflation and bringing the cost of living under control. In the months ahead, we will assess the challenges facing our citizens, whether to do with the cost of energy, childcare, education, rent or healthcare. We will take account of price developments and adjust policies accordingly.

The third part of our collective mission must be ensuring the best start in life for every child. As I outlined earlier, our focus must be on reducing child poverty and improving well-being. Our vision is to make Ireland the best country in which to be a child. We must give everyone the best start in life, empowering them to make the most of that start through education, equal opportunities and good jobs to work towards a better future. As a Government, our energy and ideas will be used to improve access to therapies and provide more special needs education. I will put in place a new unit in the Department of the Taoiseach to co-ordinate this approach, working closely with the Ministers, Deputies O'Gorman, Foley, Humphreys, Harris and Stephen Donnelly, among others.

Our fourth ambition is to become energy independent by harnessing our untapped renewable energy resources. This will be our moonshot for the 21st century - something to strive for, not because it is easy but because it is hard. Recalling Ardnacrusha and the spirit of the Free State, this will be our Shannon scheme 2.0. I will work very closely with the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, to do what needs to be done, including the timeframe, the resources needed to make it happen and developing the capacity of the Department of the Taoiseach on climate action. It is a project that will go beyond the life span of this Government and into that of the next Government and the one after that. It will be worth doing and it will bring enormous benefits to our economy, environment and regions.

Another ambition is to build safer communities and safer streets and improve our national security. We will build on the work under way to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour. We will provide additional resources to the Garda and the Defence Forces, as well as passing new laws to ensure we apprehend criminals and deal with them appropriately.

We also need to ensure balanced regional development, whether through the national broadband plan, the regeneration of our rural communities or ensuring a better future for those involved in farming and fishing. We will continue to adopt a town-and-village-first approach. All of these ambitions are achievable, but only because of our economic policies, our pro-enterprise, pro-trade and tax-competitive approach, our sound management of the public finances and our decision to be at the heart of the European Union. With the steady leadership of the Ministers, Deputies Michael McGrath, Paschal Donohoe and Simon Coveney, I am confident this will remain the case. Ireland must once again become a place where it is possible to dream of home ownership, of a better life and of a better Ireland. More importantly, it must be a place where these dreams can be realised.

Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, an historic agreement that brought peace to our island and gave hope to people who were living in constant uncertainty and fear. In recent years, various things, some foreseen and some not, have weakened relationships crucial to the maintenance and strengthening of that peace. The efforts of the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs will be crucial to this work, which is something I will share responsibility for in the weeks and months ahead. We must work together to re-establish the Good Friday Agreement institutions in the North. We must set aside our differences, forgive past mistakes on all sides and seek a new beginning in a spirit of friendship and understanding.

New Year's Day marks the 50th anniversary of Ireland becoming a member of the EEC, now the European Union. It is the greatest peace process and most successful economic project in history and today is helping to protect democracy, enhance workers' and women's rights and protect our environment. Our commemoration of this event should recognise the benefits EU membership brought to Ireland, and what we do to help others today. We will also recommit to wider enlargement, deeper integration and new areas of co-operation.

In the coming months, the Government will also respond to the recommendations of the citizens' assemblies on gender equality, biodiversity and local government in Dublin.

Next year marks an important centenary, namely, the 100th anniversary of Ireland joining the League of Nations and finally taking her place among the nations of the world. It was the fulfilment of a dream that inspired generations of patriots and marks a fitting end to the decade of centenaries.

The final Secretary General of the League of Nations was an Irish man and diplomat, Seán Lester. A courageous friend of refugees, Lester should inspire us to show courage and initiative in how we welcome refugees today. We are living through a time of great conflict and crisis, where the brutal aggression of a world power against its smaller neighbour has made history itself pause in uncertainty. We promised the people of Ukraine we would stand with them when it was easy to make such promises. Today we renew that promise and tell the people of Ukraine that we will stand with them even when it is very hard.

Next year also marks the centenary of some of the worst events of the Civil War, following on from some dark times in 1922. As a people we have done much in recent years to come to terms with the terrible events of that time; we have remembered the shared trauma with empathy and respect for all sides and all traditions. As a State we need to acknowledge and atone for the wrongs done on all sides, so we can finally heal the wounds and scars from that time. I look forward to working with the Minister, Deputy Catherine Martin, and the expert advisory group to find an appropriate way of ending a century of hurt on both sides and allowing us finally to

move to reconciliation.

We will work to strengthen relations with our major partners, the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, as we face these challenges head-on. Throughout our history our greatest resource has been our people. Let us give everyone a fair chance. Let us make sure that when it comes to the best start in life, the chance to own a home and the opportunity to achieve something meaningful, we are making it possible to dream big dreams and make them a reality.

The Tánaiste: On behalf of the Fianna Fáil Party, I am pleased to confirm that we will vote to support the Taoiseach's proposal to nominate members of the Government. The Government reflects the shared commitment of our three parties to an ambitious programme across the full term of this Dáil. Tugann na hainmníúcháin agus na moltaí de bhaill an Rialtais léiriú ar dhíograis roinnte na bpáirtithe Rialtais an obair chuimsitheach uailmhianach atá idir lámha againn a thabhairt chun críche. I gcodarsnacht leis an bhFreasúra, creidimid go bhfuil ár dtír láidir agus gur féidir léi a bheith níos fearr fós fad is nach nglacann an Freasúra go bhfuil aon dul chun cinn déanta in aon ghné de shaol na tíre seo. Tá gach duine ainmnithe agus molta le haghaidh oifige i ndiaidh a gcumais agus a ndúthracht a thaispeáint chun Éire níos láidre agus cothroime a chinntiú agus a sholáthar. Oibreoidh gach duine díobh le chéile ar chlár soiléir gníomhach a sheasann i gcodarsnacht le polasaithe diúltacha millteacha daoine agus páirtithe eile.

To be returned as a Member of this House and nominated to high office is an honour and a responsibility. We are in government not to keep things as they are but to help our country to progress; to address the needs both of today and the years ahead and to be both honest and ambitious in serving our growing and diverse society. This was reflected in our agreed programme and in the priorities of each Minister in government. Time is not available to go into every element of the Government's work and repeat many of the debates we have here each day. I will, however, address a number of special priorities.

My decision to take up the roles of Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Defence reflects the fact my party and the Government view these as critical to our nation. At this moment of ongoing threat against European democracy, maintaining and building on Ireland's role will be central to my work. Many vital discussions will be held in the next two years and Ireland will be advocating for a Europe, which works with urgency and ambition to expand its role. We will support democracy and the rule of law, leaving no doubt where our country stands on these fundamental issues. It is my intention to strengthen our support for Ireland's international, economic, cultural and academic impact, ensuring we go further in reaching out to both existing and new networks of individuals of groups who wish to engage with Ireland in its modern diversity. I look forward to working with our excellent diplomatic corps in the work ahead.

Nearly a quarter of a century after the victory of democratic politics represented by the Good Friday Agreement and the referendums, we have done too little to fulfil the promise of what Seamus Mallon so wisely termed, "a new dispensation". The restoration of the democratic institutions in Belfast is a core priority for us. We will continue to work in good faith and urgency to resolve the blockages to restoration. I have no doubt but that our colleagues in the European Union will continue in their commitment to finding a way of implementing agreements between the United Kingdom and the European Union. It is in the interests of everyone for us to move on to the more important work of delivering economic development for the benefit of all.

It is an honour to take the position of Minister for Defence. The loss of Private Seán Rooney and the injuries to Trooper Shane Kearney this week are another reminder to us of the service of Óglaigh na hÉireann to our democracy and values. At our toughest moments, they stood against those who would destroy our democracy and, internationally, they have brought great honour to our country. I am very conscious of the many issues facing our Defence Forces and I will work with my colleagues to focus on improving the quality of working life for those who wear the uniforms of Óglaigh na hÉireann. I look forward to working with the leadership of our Defence Forces, the various representative bodies and the wider community in helping to modernise and strengthen their work.

By every available measure, our economic situation today is dramatically better than it was two and a half years ago. Ireland has moved into a recovery faster and more comprehensively than any comparable country. The very reason we are in a position to invest in public services is that our work to limit job losses and support recovery has been highly successful. The exchange of roles by Deputies Michael McGrath and Donohoe reflects the agreement of our parties to respect balance within the Government, once the Office of An Taoiseach rotated. Our core fiscal policy will continue to be to support a strong economy and use the resources it generates to implement sustainable improvements in critical public services and investments. We are going to continue with urgent work to address issues such as insurance costs and other costs which impact on every business and household. We are also going to move forward with reforms to significantly speed up delivery of critical infrastructure central to supporting to our economy, combatting climate change, and building new homes. The Ministers, Deputies Michael McGrath and Donohoe, have worked well together. This particularly showed itself both in the preparation of budgets and in the development of the economic recovery measures which have helped so many through the pandemic and in the months afterwards. I have no doubt that this strong co-operation will continue.

Delivering a step change in the provision of new homes is an absolute priority for this Government. We have already initiated a new era in social and affordable housing. We will reform planning laws so that objections are dealt with both speedily and fairly, challenging the growing impact of unreasonable delays and blockages that prevent essential housing. During this week's confidence debate on the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, it was clear that there were not even the beginnings of a credible alternative to his plan. I have no doubt that in the rest of our term, he will continue to drive new construction and defeat Opposition representatives when they make themselves available for substantive debate rather than the sound bites they prefer.

The expansion of investment of education is a priority for us.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You should be over in the Gaiety.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As Minister for Education, Deputy Foley, has overseen a steady reduction in class sizes, a radical increase in the number of schools included in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, DEIS, programme, an expansion of supports for pupils with special needs and the beginning of the largest programme of school refurbishment and construction in our history. She will continue this work and will also bring forward a reform of the leaving certificate that reflects the challenges and opportunities that young people face in today's world.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Minister for Health, Deputy Stephen Donnelly,

his Ministers of State and the officials of the Department of Health in both responding to the pandemic and working to address longer-term concerns. Health will continue to be a priority for this Government and it will be a central concern for our work across the Government. We must address the impact of the pandemic on waiting times and move forward with developing critical new services throughout the country, in particular, in the fields of women's health services, mental health services and disability supports.

Our family farmers remain critical to rural and community life in our country. The wider food industry represents a sector which gives secure well-paid employment throughout the country, and is one area where our indigenous industries are world leaders. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy McConalogue, has led his Department in delivering important supports and reforms in the past two years. The new legislation for pricing transparency and fairness marks a new moment for farming. The commitment to support farmers in achieving secure and sustainable incomes will remain at the core of his work.

As everybody in this House will acknowledge, the Minister of State, Deputy Chambers, has been an extremely efficient and effective Chief Whip. He has ensured that we have enacted a major body of legislation and he has also been a very effective Minister of State in developing sporting facilities and support throughout the country. In moving to the role of Minister of State attending Cabinet with responsibility for transport, aviation and logistics, he will be responsible for a critical element of our commitment to both improve public services and infrastructure and decarbonise our economy. We need both public and private transport to make a major contribution to achieving the urgent climate targets which we have agreed. This includes the road haulage sector, which is so important to everything in our economy, but sometimes is overlooked.

I had not intended to respond directly to today's speeches, but it is important to address the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, Deputy McDonald, this morning. I think she has confirmed that according to Sinn Féin, it finds nothing positive to comment about in our country, nothing has ever been achieved, and there is no progress to be acknowledged.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Micheál Martin: There is a cold, harsh cynicism to be found in Sinn Féin's comments today. Today must seem quaint to them in comparison to the non-stop carousel we have seen from them-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Go and get a job in the Gaiety.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----in trading both elected and ministerial offices in Stormont. When Deputy McDonald claims, as she did with energy earlier today, that we claim everything is fine and want to change nothing, she is, of course, ignoring everything we have been saying. We very acutely understand the need to provide more housing for people to rent or buy. We see that people need help with rising bills or access to essential health services. However, unlike Deputy McDonald, we believe in taking action.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It is stand-up now.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Oliver Callan, eat your heart out.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The true divide in politics is between those who see problems and want to solve them and those who simply want to exploit them. This is a Government de-

terminated to take on even the most complex and difficult problems, to support a strong society and strong economy, to show respect for others and to work constructively with the mandate we have from the Irish people.

In two and a half years, we have helped our country in ways which any fair commentary would acknowledge and in doing so, we showed our commitment to the best values of public service. We understand how much more is still to be achieved and each of our parties, as well as every person nominated to serve as a Minister, is determined to deliver for the Irish people.

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I want to focus and concentrate in my contribution to the debate tonight on the role of the Green Party in this Government and what we intend doing in the next two years. I do so remembering, critically, two and a half years ago when we joined the Government and agreed a programme for Government, that the leader of the European Green Party, whose assessment would be well informed because we are in government in many countries in Europe, said that our programme for Government was the greenest programme that they had seen. Greens are not in government except in Europe and, therefore, we are at the centre of the green transition. They said it was the most extensive, most ambitious green programme that any Green party in government had promised to try and deliver.

In recent weeks when it came to discussion about ministerial places, we were clear in saying we want to retain the positions we have because I believe our Ministers are working effectively, are delivering and can do much good for the country in the next two years. It takes two and a half years even to learn the ropes of how a Department works and how the system works. My colleagues have done that and they now have to focus on using that experience to deliver. I want to set out some of the various aspects of the work that we have to do.

First, on climate, I listened with respect to Deputies Bacik, Paul Murphy and others who raised the issue of concern which I share that our climate emissions are still rising. Reading it in the media today, it is fair commentary. It is a concern. At a time when we need to be reducing them by approximately 5% per annum, last year they increased by that amount. That has to turn around. That will turn around.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It will not.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Yes, it will. We do not have an option.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Look at your colleagues.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We do not have an option in Irish law. The law we have written is one of the strongest climate laws in the world. We do not have an option. The Deputy will have heard the President of the European Commission, Dr. von der Leyen, speaking here only two or three weeks ago, saying this is the centre of the European strategy and a whole swathe of European law, which is steering us in that direction. We have to deliver on that ambition.

Deputy Paul Murphy: We have to, but the Government is not going to.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I believe that the Irish business community, but, more importantly, the Irish people, want to and will do this.

It takes time to turn this complete ship of State - all of it - around but we will do it. What is the best way? We learnt a great deal in Covid. We learnt that Government works best when

it works in teams outside of the normal silos of Departments. We are busy establishing task force teams that bring in academic expertise, the agencies and other Departments and that act transparently by going on a regular basis through our national climate dialogues where we share openly what is being done.

Offshore wind, which, as the Taoiseach said, is the moon-shot opportunity, provides the really big potential for us. It is equivalent to what happened when the State was founded and we set up Ardnacrusha.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: What of the marine consents?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: This week, we will start to see the consents being provided for the first phase of offshore projects. Next spring, subject to them going through an auction process that we are establishing now, they will go into the planning system. The planning constraint is the biggest. We have to expand An Bord Pleanála dramatically and speed up our whole planning process because it is killing us at present, in housing and environment in a range of different ways. I believe we can and will do that.

All this will happen in the lifetime of this Government. We will start to see the second phase of projects in the south east and further in the east and then also into Cork, as well as Shannon. It will be south and west. We will take into account the best environmental analysis. We must get the environmental planning of this right for it to work. It is the biggest risk and the biggest constraint. In the lifetime of this Government we will set the country on this course towards delivering what we call the enduring regime, which is the really large scale of power that particularly exists to the west and north west. We will design ways in which we can catch, store, share and ship that energy. We are right in the middle of doing that and it will be delivered. It is not just offshore. The scale of the challenge to meet the targets means we must deliver as much solar energy in the next three years as the amount of renewable power we rolled out in the last 20. I know that sounds impossible but it is what we have to do. It will involve every school building, tens of thousands of houses and the involvement of farmers. It will be backed up by batteries, pump storage and a whole range of other balancing capabilities and our business community will have a central role in being part of this new balancing energy system. We are not the only ones doing it. The Americans are going at it at speed. The Chinese are doing more than the rest of the world combined. All our colleagues in Europe are doing it. We are in a race to deliver this and we will and in our Department, in the agencies, in the companies and in the Irish people, we have the capability to do this.

In agriculture it is the same scale of change. It is diversification into agroforestry and new mechanisms of riparian forestry. Deputy McNamara is not here now but he mentioned anaerobic digestion earlier and we absolutely need to deliver that too.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You cannot get a felling licence.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: The Minister wants to rewet everything.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Yes, we need to change forestry. The felling licence system has been changed and we will deliver it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It has left a bad taste.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We switch to tillage and to organic. It is happening. Look at the

applications for the new environmental agri scheme - they have blown way beyond what was expected. Look at the farm visits that are taking place when organic farmers open their farms. There are hundreds of farmers going along because they realise they could save money by not having to spend so much on expensive fertiliser. To respond to what Deputy Lowry said earlier, we start by listening to everyone and by respecting everyone. I agree absolutely with the conviction that every place matters and every person matters. Country people want to do this just as much as city people, young and old.

On transport, our multi-agency task force met yesterday for the sixth or seventh time. We have 35 pathfinder projects that must be delivered by the end of 2025 because there has to be a dramatic shift, as our climate plan will show next week, towards public transport and especially to rural connecting bus services which are being rolled out around the country and are a huge success. Our young people are turning to the rural bus services in a way no-one could ever have expected. It is happening.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Those pathfinder projects are showing our local government system how we can act fast, use budgets well and get local support for what are going to be difficult decisions about reallocating space, doing things differently, taking out parking, creating high-quality bus corridors and other mechanisms to save us from gridlock as well as reducing our emissions. I am sorry for going on so long on climate but it is important.

I salute the incredible job my colleague the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Deputy O’Gorman, has been doing in managing how we look after 70,000 people

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: It is not easy. No-one wants anyone in a tent at all, least of all the Minister and his team, but they have done everything to do this in a compassionate way and we cannot stop. As President von der Leyen said, we need that stubborn optimism where we do take more. We do not know how long this war is going to go on and there is no certainty on this, but closing our door is not an option. I have every confidence in the Minister and his team to deliver on that and to take up what the Taoiseach said earlier about a focus on children in this country. The Minister, Deputy O’Gorman, is changing our childcare system and people will see that next month when the cuts in childcare fees come through, thanks to the work he has done. We will not stop there. As the Taoiseach said, let us focus on the original promise in our Constitution and get it right in how we help young families raise children.

I mentioned the critical job of the Minister, Deputy Catherine Martin. It is also about bricks and mortar, the National Concert Hall, the Abbey Theatre and getting institutions right all over the country. The institutions also have to include culture online. The cynicism the Taoiseach spoke about is currently fostered because our journalism system is in real crisis due to the fact that everything is online and there is a divisive and hostile form of politics. The work of the Minister, Deputy Catherine Martin, in some of the online and media commissions and work in support of the media industry will be critical.

The Minister of State, Deputy Pippa Hackett, has been a huge support for the Minister, Deputy McConalogue. We have worked well together. It is not easy because things are changing. We have a huge asset in the Minister of State, Deputy Hackett, who has already turned around

the forestry licensing system-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You cannot cut a bush.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: -----and shown how in government we could turn what was a disastrous system into a highly effective one. We need to do more work.

The most important project we have to do in government, which was in the programme for Government, is the land use review. It is a high-level overview of what is happening in our country in terms of the destruction of nature-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: What about the thistles?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: -----the pollution of our waters and ongoing carbon emissions.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: What about the county councils?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We now have to start planning. It is not just about climate. There are three ecological crises facing us, namely, climate, biodiversity loss and pollution. We have to face all three in our country.

The recent EPA figures from the south-east of our country show the water is saturated with nitrogen. That has to stop. Our waters should not only run free; they should be clean at the same time.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: What about the sewers?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: That is what we need to deliver. We are halfway through that project in this Government.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is socialist discrimination.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We have done the first phase in terms of an evidence base, and we will do the next phase working in the same way, whereby we listen to different communities, sectors and academics. The Minister of State, Deputy Malcolm Noonan, will deliver on marine protected areas. We will have a science-based ecological understanding at the centre of what we do. That is what we are going to deliver in the next two years.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is great to see the active interaction between Members, but maybe a little bit more order would help us get through the business more efficiently.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I begin by offering my good wishes to Deputy Leo Varadkar as he enters the Office of An Taoiseach for the second time. To lead Government is a huge honour and an even greater responsibility. We all want those who assume this responsibility to succeed on behalf of the people of Ireland.

Nearly three years ago, people voted for something new. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have passed power between themselves for a century and our people have paid a heavy price for this perpetual merry-go-round. There has been a financial crash and recession, jobs lost, livelihoods ruined, homes repossessed, austerity, vicious cuts to public services and communities made to carry the can for the mistakes of those at the top.

To break from the past, people reached hopefully for something they never had before,

namely a Government that would put workers, families and communities first, with the determination to match their ambitions and hopes, seize Ireland's opportunities for the future and that would do what is necessary to improve their lives by fixing a broken housing system, tackling the crisis in our hospitals and working to build a fairer, sustainable and modern economy. Our people had a glimpse of what that might be, namely the historic chance of a Government for change.

Following the 2020 general election, the Government's collective instinct was to come together to block that demand for change. After decades of pretence, all it took to bring Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael together was the threat to their power and positions. In the end, what mattered most to them was keeping others out.

With this coalition, the people have another Government that fits neatly into the pattern of 100 years. It is a tired Government that resorts again and again to excuses and alibis instead of bringing real leadership, ambition and fresh ideas. This coalition of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party has stuck to the age-old, worn-out playbook that sees workers and families failed, short-changed and left behind. It is a Government that persists with a way of doing business that prioritises insiders, the well-got and the well-connected. It is a system that keeps ordinary people on the outside looking in, that keeps children with scoliosis waiting in agony for life-changing surgery, that leaves elderly people on hospital trolleys for days and has working families relying on food banks for a decent meal.

Back in 2020, I said that this broken Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael way of doing business means that Governments come and Governments go, but nothing really changes, and so it has come to pass. On the watch of this Government, the housing crisis has become a housing emergency, the crisis in our health service has deepened and, despite working very hard, thousands struggle to afford the basic necessities.

Of all this Government's failures, its failure in housing is inexcusable. It has spent the past two and a half years recycling the very policies that created the housing emergency in the first place. We now see the impact of this emergency on education, health and our economy. As teachers and nurses cannot pay extortionate rent or save for a deposit, they are leaving. They are going to Britain and the Middle East and our schools and our hospitals struggle to recruit and retain staff.

Investment is threatened as workers are unable to take up good jobs with good salaries because they cannot afford secure housing. The human cost of the housing emergency is tragedy upon tragedy. It is now driving our young people out of Ireland in search of a better life. They look around and see houses they will never be able to afford to buy. They walk past fancy build-to-let apartments they will never live in. At hurling or camogie training or over a pint, they talk with their friends about their future and they just do not see one at home. Many parents will spend this Christmas watching their sons and daughters pack their bags to take long flights away from their families and home to live in Toronto, Boston or Sydney. Forced emigration is back with us again. Yet, this Government stands by and watches this happen.

There is no doubt that this Government's failure to fix housing has done real damage to our society. It threatens our international reputation and our competitiveness but so much worse, it smothers the chance of our country reaching its full potential. Governments are here to serve the people. Governments should be judged on their record, and the record of this Government is one of spectacular failure.

The changeover of Taoiseach and the swapping of ministerial office will not change anything. Some 100 years ago, a great republican leader by the name of Liam Mellows said “men who get into positions and hold power will desire to remain undisturbed and will not want to be removed, or will not take a step that will mean removal in case of failure”. Liam Mellows was right. The man sitting at the Taoiseach’s office is changing but there will be no change in policy, direction or delivery. Indeed, Deputy Varadkar’s first act as Taoiseach now is to reappoint Ministers who have failed to get the job done. He rewards incompetence and failure.

The truth is that we need a change of Government, not just a change of Taoiseach. Is dromchlach é an rud atá ag tarlú inniu. Tá an fear atá in Oifig an Taoisigh ag athrú, ach ní bheidh aon athrú ar pholasaí ná ar threo an Rialtais. Teastaíonn athrú Rialtais uainn, ní amháin athrú Thaoisigh.

Of course, there is the real danger that people looking on at this meaningless shuffling of positions may become disheartened, but I am asking people everywhere not to surrender your belief in change. I am asking you not to give up or to give in. Hold tightly to your hope. A new and united Ireland is about you. A new and united Ireland is for you. A new day is on the horizon. We have never been so close to achieving real change. This hope is especially important for our young people, young people who want to be given their chance, young people who will achieve great things if we give them their moment. We need a Government that will work for them and with them to change Ireland into an Ireland that gives our young people a life of opportunity, an opportunity to stay and build a good life. The opportunity to travel and experience the world without being forced out and the opportunity to come home.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Our people, particularly our young people, deserve an ambitious Government that says it can do it, how we will do it and that we will get the work done. Sinn Féin wants to lead a Government for change, a Government that will house our people, that will build strong public services, achieve energy independence and advance Ireland’s journey to full nationhood.

As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, it is now time to write the next chapter. It is time to plan, to prepare for democratic, constitutional change. It is time for the Government to establish a citizens’ assembly on Irish unity.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: As we move forward, we will look again to a spirit of partnership. The people of the North are entitled to a Government. We need the political institutions up and running, delivering for all communities. That is the best way to build progress and a better tomorrow. It is time to cast aside the small thinking of the past. It is time to do big things for Ireland and for our people. It is time to give those of us who are committed to change the chance to show what we can do. If I were given the chance to lead a Government of change, I would stand before the people and I would say this: we set out to end the housing emergency because we believe that every person has the right to a roof over their head and we will not stop until this is achieved.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: We set out to build a fair health service for all of Ireland

because we believe that every person has the right to treatment and to care and we will not stop until this is achieved. We set out to build our economy, our prosperity, because we believe all people are equal and are deserving of opportunity and we will not stop until this is achieved. We set out to end partition, to unite Ireland in our time, because we believe that we are stronger together and we will not stop until we achieve this. This is the type of ambition that Ireland needs and Sinn Féin is ready to lead, to govern and to deliver. We believe that people should be given a straight choice: the tired performance of this failed Government or Sinn Féin's positive, ambitious, achievable vision for Ireland.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Please.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: So much has changed in the last three years. If the Taoiseach is so confident that his Government and his policies command the support of the people, then he should give them this choice in a general election. Let the people have their say and let the people choose who leads.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I want to start by offering my personal good wishes to those who have been appointed or reappointed today to Cabinet, and of course to the incoming Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar. However, on behalf of the Labour Party, I want to say that we cannot support this Cabinet, because it is not in truth a new Cabinet and there are no new ideas.

6 o'clock

There is no change in the policies being offered by this Government. I am personally disappointed that there is no change in the gender balance of the Cabinet. We need more women in Cabinet, especially in a year when there will be a gender equality referendum, as we on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality have sought.

Above all else, we need real change and new vision in policies. Instead, what we heard from the incoming Taoiseach and, indeed, the new Tánaiste, Deputy Micheál Martin, and the Minister for Environment, Climate, Communications and Transport, Deputy Eamon Ryan, was an acknowledgement that the Government has failed to deliver. It has failed to deliver on housing, climate and addressing the challenge and scourge of child poverty. What we have seen from the Government through the first half of its term has been no shortage of ambitions, plans and targets, but a chronic lack of delivering outcomes. Halfway through the lifetime of this Government, this coalition of convenience, what we are seeing is a Government that appears content with serving up only half measures - on housing, climate, care and work.

With today's purely cosmetic changes in Cabinet at half time, we do not see any improvement. Like the World Cup final, whether it is Argentina or France that wins tomorrow, we know the reality is there will be no change in conditions for women, LGBT people or workers in Qatar, just as there is no change in the policies being offered by this Government whether it is Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael that holds the position of rotating Taoiseach. We will continue to see missed targets on housing and climate action and, shamefully, we will continue to see far too many children continuing to live in poverty or to be homeless, and this despite budget surpluses.

The Taoiseach's commitment to a new unit for child poverty will be meaningless unless there are adequate resources deployed and the sort of mobilisation of State capacity we saw

during Covid to tackle the scourge of poverty among children and the scourge of homelessness. We need more State action and urgent intervention to address the real and glaring problems with the childcare and early years education system. We need delivery of the promised reduction in fees for parents and a genuinely universal and publicly funded childcare system. We need the roll-out of free general practitioner, GP, care from the Department of Health, particularly for children, and we need the scandal of children with disabilities waiting long months and years for assessments to be given the attention it deserves.

On climate, despite the fine rhetoric of the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, what we see is a pattern of missed targets and delays, most recently in the publication of the climate action plan. It is still promised for next week but that will be after the Dáil has risen and we will no longer have the opportunity to hold the Minister to account on Ireland's missed targets on emissions. Across all Departments, what we need put in place are political structures to enable the repurposing of many large vacant buildings across the State to accommodate those fleeing war in Ukraine and elsewhere, rather than simply leaving this challenge to be addressed by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Deputy O'Gorman.

I hope the Taoiseach will continue the positive work of the shared island unit. The restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the resolution of the protocol will continue to be key priorities for all of us across the House as we mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. I know all parties will work together in that regard.

On the Government side, however, we are not seeing sufficient new vision and change to address the serious crises in and failures to deliver on housing, care, climate and work that have characterised the first half of the Government's term in office. It seems that will continue to characterise Government responses to these crises through the next half of its term. Beyond the cosmetic change offered by this so-called halftime Government reshuffle, we need the sort of radical and substantial vision for change that was embodied in Tom Johnson's words more than 100 years ago when he outlined the Labour programme for an equal Republic, a Republic in which children would have an equal early years start, all children would be able to achieve their full potential, everyone would get a home and the level of care they need, and the State would step up and deliver the supports that are necessary in that social democratic and socialist vision for change, a vision that we in the Labour Party will continue to offer.

My colleague, Deputy Nash, will take our remaining time.

Deputy Ged Nash: I congratulate the Taoiseach on his accession again to that office. I wish him and his ministerial colleagues well in their endeavours.

This year, we mark the centenary of the State. The Labour Party has always sought to put our country before the short-term interests of the party. Rarely has this been to our electoral reward. We helped to shape the institutions and stability of a young State under threat. In 1932, the transfer of power to Fianna Fáil, as mentioned earlier by the Taoiseach, was made possible by the Labour Party, in the national interest and the State's interest, at a very dangerous time for this democracy. The Labour Party is a patriotic party. Our contribution to the modernisation of Ireland is a proud one.

The Government, and its predecessor Administration, cannot be proud of these past six, almost seven, years of wasted prosperity and skewed priorities. In a country with bulging coffers, people ask why 250,000 children are experiencing deprivation and why owning a home is

beyond the reach of far too many hard-working people. We have record homelessness, record rents and record house prices, yet the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and everyone else in the previous Government are returning to office without any change in policy. Throughout the past three years, we in the Labour Party have put forward constructive proposals on housing that have been ignored. It is always too little, too late from the Government. It eventually implemented rent freezes and an eviction ban but the action is always taken half-heartedly and in a half-baked fashion. We have argued cogently for more direct State building and increased public investment. Instead, €700 million of capital allocated to the Department of the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, remained unspent at the end of November.

I offer the Taoiseach and his ministerial colleagues a challenge. The reason for our housing crisis is simple. It is caused by a lack of building and a lack of new homes. Rising inflation and supply shortages are impacting on the capacity of the private market to deliver. There is no shortage of planning permissions. In Dublin city alone, there is permission to build nearly 30,000 homes. There is permission to build 5,000 homes in my home town of Drogheda. Speculators and developers are sitting on sites. The market has clearly failed and the Government's plan is failing. Instead of dismantling An Bord Pleanála as its signature policy, trying to strip local authorities of more powers and making democratic participation in our planning system more difficult, I offer the Government the simple idea that the State should simply build more homes and do so quickly.

If we are to believe the Taoiseach's words that he believes in the State, he should use the Land Development Agency to purchase compulsorily the sites with planning permission that remain undeveloped. If he means it when he says he is committed to the State, he must put the full resources of the State into delivering public homes and then pursue the long-term changes necessary to break the cycle of over-reliance on the market. The Government must invest in skills and training and establish a State construction company. It must use the available resources of the State to deliver, once and for all, enough homes.

Only the State - an entrepreneurial State - has the scale and the tools to fix this biggest and most immediate of our problems. The Taoiseach talks about mobilising the State but policy shows that is merely a slogan. The Government's brand of conservatism, rebranded as centrism, is not up to meeting this challenge. Today, we have not a reshuffle but a modest reset from a conservative Government whose suffocating conservatism is so deep-seated that it simply will not be able to meet the biggest challenges of our time. That will be the Government's undoing.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: This is an historic day in a Chamber that has seen much history since the Dáil was first convened 100 years ago. While it is the first time the office of Taoiseach is rotating between coalition partners, this arrangement has been entered into for party political interest rather than the national interest. In truth, the changeover will barely be noticed by the people outside this House whom we serve. Without any accompanying fundamental changes in policy or political priorities, this is change for the sake of political expediency rather than political purpose.

I acknowledge that the outgoing Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, worked diligently during his tenure in office. In doing so, he has undoubtedly made many personal sacrifices. I want to recognise those sacrifices today in his service to public life. It is also important to recognise and acknowledge the sacrifices his wife and family have made in supporting him in that service to public life. I hope he will now be in a position, as Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, to accelerate the progress of the shared island initiative. I look forward to him bringing forward

proposals in that regard in the coming months. This is also a proud day for the incoming Taoiseach and his family and friends. On a personal basis, I wish him well. Nobody on this side of the House underestimates the depth and breadth of the challenges the country faces. Nobody thinks those challenges are easy to solve. It was a bit disingenuous of the outgoing Taoiseach to claim earlier that Opposition Members only want to exploit problems. Certainly we in the Social Democrats have consistently put forward solutions to the many big problems facing the country but too frequently they are rejected on ideological grounds.

Fine Gael has been in power for nearly 12 years, throughout which time there have been many promises to resolve the crises in housing and healthcare, in particular. Despite this, the problems have intensified. Those who bear the cost of the failure are ordinary working people and families who pay their taxes and should have a right to expect decent public services and that things actually work in this country. Too often, they simply do not work. It is the most vulnerable who especially bear this burden. These are, most shamefully, the growing numbers who are homeless, including the 3,500 children who will spend Christmas in hubs and hostels.

There are ever-increasing numbers in the locked-out generation, the first generation who will be worse off than their parents. In previous decades, single-income families with one worker on an average wage could aspire to lead a decent life, own a home, educate their children and have a secure job. Today, single people are forced to continue to live at home, house share or rent tiny apartments at exorbitant cost until they are in their 30s, 40s and even older. Older people worry about where they will live when they retire and how they will pay for it. Even couples on what were once considered decent wages are locked out of home ownership now. Many are again considering emigration.

The Taoiseach has desperately sought to evade responsibility for the housing disaster but even if we judge him not on the past 12 years but solely on the record of this Administration, it is clear the Government is failing. Since it assumed office in June 2020, two and a half years ago, house prices and rent have gone up steadily. How are people in the communities we all represent supposed to pay such prices? Today the Taoiseach told us his big plan on housing is to accelerate the implementation of Housing for All. He refuses to make any changes in the face of overwhelming evidence that his housing plan is simply not working. After nearly 12 years, Fine Gael still will not accept its housing plans have led to a housing disaster. The Taoiseach said he will do “whatever it takes”. That is not a policy. Saying he will do “whatever it takes” is simply not a sustainable policy.

For too long the Irish people have endured a situation in which healthcare is delayed, deferred and often denied with frequently devastating consequences. It is becoming more and more difficult to retain our excellent healthcare workers in a system that fails them too. Sláintecare can change that but implementation has been painfully slow. Why is there such resistance to reform? Who stands to benefit? It is not the Irish people. The Sláintecare plan is not radical. It sets out a blueprint to bring the health service into line with almost all other EU countries, where services are free at the point of delivery and people can attend a doctor, speech and language therapist or mental health service or access home care when they need to without worrying about cost or lengthy waiting lists. If that sounds revolutionary, it should not. Ireland’s two-tier model of healthcare is an outlier, not an exemplar.

Nowhere is that more evident than in our shamefully inadequate disability services. Children with disabilities and their families must battle from the day they are born. It is shocking that their biggest battle is often with the State for basic services like an assessment of need, es-

sential therapies or a school place. This abject neglect has disastrous consequences. Children's development is severely limited and they are prevented, of course, from reaching their full potential. I noted the Taoiseach namechecked this issue earlier but we need a Government that pays more than lip service to the rights of disabled people.

In much of Irish politics and public life, we see the corrosive effect of the golden circle; a fast track for insiders whose connections confer unfair advantage. We also regularly see a revolving door between politics and business with former Fine Gael Ministers, in particular, fans of reinventing themselves as lobbyists. The Social Democrats has consistently said that former Deputies and Senators who are now lobbyists should no longer have the run of this complex. Their automatic access-----

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The Deputy is making scandalous allegations against people.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: -----to the Leinster House complex-----

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The Deputy should say it outside the House.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: -----must be revoked.

(Interruptions).

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

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I hope the Taoiseach will support the Social Democrats in moving an amendment to this effect in the long-promised legislation we are due to get from the Minister, Deputy McGrath. It has also been more than two decades since our ethics legislation was updated. We are told there are plans for this Government to do so. However, there were also plans to strengthen our ethics laws back in 2015 and they, of course, ran into the sand. The Social Democrats will work constructively with the Government if the Taoiseach is serious about improving ethical standards. Part of that reform must entail removing any doubt at all about the ability of the Standards in Public Office Commission, SIPO, to investigate the decisions of Taoisigh when necessary.

Earlier, Deputy Emer Higgins surprised many of us by likening the Taoiseach to Santa. Maybe the Deputy was making reference to the rumours the number of Ministers of State will be increased by two - we will see about that. In any event, while I wish all of the newly-appointed Ministers well, even those Ministers would accept this was more the night of the blunt knives than the long knives. However, the reality is the country simply cannot afford the status quo. If we are to have any chance of meeting our climate targets, solving our housing disaster, reforming our health service and helping the most vulnerable in our communities cope with the rising cost of living, we need radical change, not more of the same.

We saw in recent years the best of what our society is capable of in an outpouring of support, empathy and solidarity as we faced unimaginable difficulties. Ireland is a great country with so much potential. I agree with the Taoiseach that we are not a failed State but we have failed policies being implemented by the Government that are simply exacerbating endemic societal problems which desperately need to be fixed. Instead of some cosmetic changes at the Cabinet table, we need real reform. We need to do things differently and we need a new politics informed by the principles and values of social democracy that prioritise prosperity and fairness for all of our citizens.

Deputy Paul Murphy: When Deputy Leo Varadkar was being proposed for Taoiseach earlier, Deputy Higgins compared him to Santa Claus. Dr. Maitiú Ó Tuathail, for one, agreed; he texted “Leo always delivers”. However, the truth is the Christmas figure that Varadkar most resembles is not Santa, but Ebenezer Scrooge. Varadkar famously told *The Irish Times* that Tiny Tim should get a job. That sums up the cold-hearted Thatcherite ideology of Fine Gael. This will be a Government that puts the corporate landlords and big developers before those who are homeless or struggling to pay rent. It will be a Government that puts the energy companies’ profits before the needs of people to heat their homes. It will be a Government that makes the right noises on ecological crisis abroad and then conveniently forgets about them in order to serve the interests of big agribusiness and big tech at home. It will be a Government which continues the campaign to undermine whatever is left of Irish neutrality in order to line Ireland up with NATO and European militarisation. We now have a Taoiseach who does not think that the ethics legislation or the Official Secrets Act apply to him. Richard Nixon said: “Well, when the President does it, that means it is not illegal.” Replace “President” with “Taoiseach” and that is Varadkar’s defence to leaking a confidential document to a political supporter. He thinks he can do whatever he likes as long as he says he did it while Taoiseach. While proposing Leo Varadkar for Taoiseach, Deputy Bruton said that he launched the campaign to repeal the eighth amendment. What an incredible rewriting of history to erase the campaigning of many heroic women, who were fighting for repeal while Varadkar was still opposing abortion even in cases of rape. That struggle for bodily autonomy will continue. It will not be led by right-wing neo-liberals, but by socialist feminists. It is movements from below that have delivered the positive change we have won over the past decade, from marriage equality to water charges to repeal.

This Scrooge Government will be haunted by major movement of opposition. The 20,000 people we saw on the streets a few months ago protesting about the cost-of-living crisis gives a glimpse of the movements that are possible, for action on the housing crisis, to shield people from the cost-of living crisis, for action to match words on climate and biodiversity, and in opposition to militarisation. Within those movements and among working-class people generally, attention is increasingly focusing on the next election and the need to clear out Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The parties of the establishment are in deep decline. The rearranging of a couple of deckchairs on the *Titanic* today is an expression of the weakness of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, not their strength. This could well be an historic day. We may have seen the last ever Fianna Fáil Taoiseach. An enormous opportunity is approaching; the chance to finally, after 100 years, have a government without Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. Enormous responsibility rests with Sinn Féin. More and more people are looking to that party for fundamental change. We have seen this sort of hope before. The Labour Party and the Green Party raised people’s hopes and then dashed them by going into coalition with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. We need to break the cycle of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael rule, and the cycle of betrayal of those who are looking for change. I appeal to Deputy McDonald to rule out coalition with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. I ask her to commit not to put them back in power, and instead fight for a left government, which can put the question of fundamental change on the agenda - one that serves working-class people, small farmers and young people, instead of the developers, big agribusiness and the energy companies. I ask her to fight for a government that is committed to eco-socialist change; to banning evictions, building public housing and reducing rents; to introducing price controls and nationalising the energy companies; to repealing the Industrial Relations Act and introducing a minimum wage of €15 an hour; to introducing free, frequent expanded public transport, a programme of retrofitting and quality green jobs; to ending Ireland’s tax haven status; and to using the enormous wealth in this country to guarantee a decent quality of living for all.

Deputy Gino Kenny: A number of very important debates will happen next year. These debates are on very complex and quite difficult issues, but I believe these difficulties are not impossible to overcome. Successive governments have failed to address them in any meaningful way. These debates surround the issues of drug reform and end-of-life choices. During this week the Joint Committee on Justice published a report recommending a different approach to drugs for personal use. It is in the Government's power to change policy that will have a profound effect on all our citizens. To except the *status quo* is to compound failure.

This Government still resides over a two-tier health system. It is a system in which hundreds of thousands of people still have to wait for medical procedures and intervention and in which 50% of citizens still have to get private insurance. That is not a system that works. I do not believe this Government is capable of ending the inequalities in health and in our society.

Today is largely cosmetic. It is a revolution we need, not a reshuffle.

Deputy Mick Barry: Reference was made in various speeches this morning to the global crises of Covid and cost of living with which this Government has had to contend. These were big shocks but the Government had some advantages in dealing with them. Economic buoyancy was one. Cheap money was another. These are advantages the Government will not be able to rely on in its second half. The backdrop in 2023 will be a backdrop of international capitalist recession - a recession from which Ireland will not be immune.

A glimpse of the challenges that will be presented was shown when the new Taoiseach stated that job losses in the tech sector will be measured in the thousands rather than in the hundreds. There are times in history when multiple private sufferings remain no longer as private sufferings but coalesce and burst to the surface as collective grief, collective action and collective resistance. In the past month, collective resistance against the effects of the cost-of-living crisis bearing down on working people has burst to the surface in the form of general strikes in both Belgium and Greece. On this island, it has burst to the surface in the form of a wave of strikes within the national health service in Northern Ireland. I do not know whether collective resistance will burst to the surface in this State in the remaining two years of the life of this Government. I know there is a multiplicity of private sufferings around the housing crisis, around the cost-of-living crisis and around the oppression of women which remains ever-present. I also know there are many people who will cast their votes against Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Greens come the next general election but who cannot afford to wait for change. I would encourage those people to get organised and to fight back to campaign for change. I wonder whether the arrival of the gas and electricity bills in the new year might be a time when people choose to do so. Either way, the commentators today will focus on the changes at the top as Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael swap the big jobs but I suspect that the leaders at the top will look on with some concern as 2022 changes to 2023 and the rumblings from below in Irish society that anyone with an ear to the ground can hear these days start up again against the backdrop of a very different economic situation.

Deputy Seán Canney: I welcome the opportunity to speak here this evening on this historic occasion. First, I offer my sincere congratulations personally to Leo Varadkar on his elevation to Taoiseach once again and compliment Micheál Martin on the work he did over the past two and a half years.

Listening to all the debate today, I will say at the outset we have a great country and we have great people but we have some real issues we need to resolve. I was taken by the remarks on

the appointment of the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, to the Department of Public Expenditure and NDP Delivery and Reform. We have a great national development plan but in the implementation and delivery of it we are failing the people. It is also coupled with the problems in housing and in health. We cannot move projects quickly enough to get them done to meet the demands there. I will give a few examples of where we could improve things. There was an announcement yesterday by the Minister for Health about the cancer centre for Galway. The previous week there was the announcement of an elective hospital for Galway and I think one for Cork as well. These have been in the pipeline for a good while. We also have an emergency department in Galway for which enabling works have been done, but for which no planning permission has been applied. The root cause of this slow process is the fact everything we do takes a year or 18 months of appraisal, cost analysis, or whatever before any real work gets done. The example I will give, which the Minister knows well, is the radiotherapy unit in Galway. It is a fine building but from inception to completion it will be a 17-year programme. I will wager that if we take 17 years to deliver the rest of that infrastructure, and I am only talking about Galway, we will be in right trouble in terms of delivering our health. We all know that, so we need to change something about the way we are doing our business.

I therefore say to the incoming Ministers that in doing something like this and making this change, we must also make a change to the way we do our business. Even if we must take shortcuts in the short term to get jobs going it is well worth the risk. Everybody tells me that with health delivery, it is not about money but infrastructure and if we have the proper infrastructure we will get the proper consultants, make a better job of it and have a better society as a result. Our patients deserve to be treated with dignity, especially in the Saolta Hospital Group where a person's chance of recovery from cancer are less than they are in any other part of Ireland. That is wrong. It is something we should prioritise and no spending code can justify delaying making that right. That is the first part.

I listened to the Minister, Deputy Ryan; he speaks passionately. The better energy, warmer homes scheme is a great initiative but it is taking an age to get it delivered. People are waiting up to 12 months for work to start once it is approved. We must do something about that. One of the causes of that is we are not using the potential we have within our local authority system because we are not financing it properly. All we are doing is foisting further and further schemes on them without giving them the funding to resource the people who need to deliver these schemes. They are all good schemes. The Croí Cónaithe scheme brought in by the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, is a great scheme. It is something we in the Regional Group of Independents have been advocating for for a long time. It is now in place but the resources in the local authorities are not there to actually deliver on it.

We are going to face perhaps €5 billion in costs for remediation of our housing stock and all that is going on there. We are talking about how we are going to do it and a levy on concrete products and all of that. However, we have missed out on how to ensure it does not happen again. We need to have a proper building control system in this country. We have the regulations, we have all the legislation, maybe too much, and we have all the certification but we have nobody dealing with building control. When I asked the Minister's office lately the number of building control officers in the country he did not know and I was told I would have to go back to each local authority to find out. In Galway there is probably one officer, or maybe one and a half, doing building control. If we are serious about not having another epidemic of problems within the construction industry going down the road and billions more of taxpayers' money having to be spent, now is the time to put it right. Now is the time to put the building control in

place. Now is the time to concentrate on ensuring it does not happen again. We must of course deal with the legacy issues we have; they need to be addressed.

Regional development has been mentioned as an aspiration, a vision or whatever. We need to deliver on it. In the last Government, I was lucky to have been involved in the development of broadband. I want to acknowledge the work of Deputies Bruton and Naughten, who worked with the Taoiseach and the Government in bringing it forward. It is taking a long time to deliver it. We need to fast track that for the regions.

In respect of transport, we talk about the difficulties in delivering things. One of my pet subjects is phases 2 and 3 of the western rail corridor. No planning permission or consent is required. Like the line that is being built between Limerick and Foynes, it can be done quickly. We do not need a Government in place in Northern Ireland for us to decide to build a railway line which will serve the western region to Foynes and Waterford. There are a lot of issues like that. We have the ingredients to put them right, but we need a solid implementation plan.

I think about the likes of the National Building Agency, which was established at a time we were building huge numbers of social housing. It built, took control of and programmed houses. It dealt with procurement, construction and certification. Housing was built to the highest standards. We need to peel back a lot of the layers we have built up, get back into the trenches and start building houses again. Local authorities have a key role in their reserve to help us do that around the country. We need to finance them to make sure they have the resources to deliver what we want them to deliver. We have an opportunity to have a great country again. We have problems, namely, housing and health.

Yesterday I met one of the Ukrainians who has come to this country, who is now working and delighted to be here. They have two daughters in school and everything is going great for them. However, at the start of the war we estimated we would take in 100,000 Ukrainians this year. When we reached 65,000, we were under so much pressure we did not know what to do. We need to do more planning in respect of emergency accommodation. We need to cut out the layers of bureaucracy so that we can get things done quickly. We have to bring in as many Ukrainians as need to come here. I know Ukrainians who are working all over the place, and we need them to work here. However, it is time to pull back the layers, be courageous and do some of the work immediately so that we can deliver as quickly as possible.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I too want to wish every Minister and the Taoiseach the very best. I will not support them in the vote, if one is called, but I wish them well. As I said, during this holy season of Advent I wish a happy and peaceful Christmas to everybody in the House, including the staff and families at home.

Today's announcement is a game of musical chairs, where the self-interest of every Government Deputy is prioritised. Incompetence gets rewarded. Not a single Minister is ever held accountable for not delivering, or for any form of wrongdoing or wasteful spending of taxpayers' money. The legacy of the children's hospital is an unbelievable scandal. Sick children are waiting for all kinds of procedures. It is being built in the wrong place and is taking a long time to complete. The Taoiseach said it would be built by 2020 for €800 million. He knew that would never happen, but he wanted to announce the site and did so. It is a shocking indictment.

All Government speakers referred to children. The Minister, Deputy Ryan, referred to young people taking up the TII rural link scheme with gusto. What else will they take? They

do not have the DART, Luas or anything else. The Minister told them they could all live in the country with ten cars in a village because people could carpool. He has been invited by many of us to visit our constituencies. I have nothing personal against him. He knows Tipperary well; his ancestors came from there. He should see the hills of Hollyford and Killinaule. He should visit west Cork, which Deputy Collins represents, and Kerry, which is represented by Deputies Michael and Danny Healy-Rae. It is just sheer inaccessibility for young people. They have to have a car, otherwise they cannot go to college, work or anywhere. You tell them to take up with gusto and of course they will, because they will take up anything. If my colleague from Waterford came along with his cargo bike and was with good friends, two or three of them would jump onto the front. They go any way to get somewhere because they cannot go anywhere. They are just forgotten about. Our young people are being left behind in every which way. I had two or three nurses in my office last week getting forms stamped, heading off to Australia. They are qualified young people with their lives ahead of them. That is what is wrong.

As I said, I spent some time in St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin recently. I had excellent care in the public hospital and I want to put that on record. The majority of the staff were from India and elsewhere. The nurses and all the rest were just tremendous. We are just in a brain drain and a swap-around. I have a qualified nurse at the moment back from Australia. They are making it so difficult for her – Joanna is her name – to get back registered as nurse. We are crying out for nurses and they are ran off their feet to keep wards and everything else committed. Why? She was told if she was from one of the agencies from India or wherever she would be straight in. She has to go through an arduous procedure. This country is tied up in bureaucracy.

We had three nice, ambitious speeches from the three new leaders. Today, I said it was like "Lanagan's Ball". It will be Hannigan's wake for a lot of people, if we are not careful. All we want is the snuff and for someone to do the caointe cáin and there are plenty of them here as well. The Tánaiste, Deputy Martin, would know the proper Irish spelling of caointe cáin. Plenty of them as well. All of the grim reapers will be coming. The Government is just squeezing the lifeblood out of people. The Irish people are energetic and they will not be knocked down. They are energetic, enthusiastic and vibrant like their leaders were in 1916, 1921 and 1922. We look forward to commemorating. The Tánaiste came to Tipperary to give the oration for the Liam Lynch's 100th anniversary in April. We look forward to commemorating the leader of the Irish Republican Army in the Knockmealdown Mountains close to homestead. We look forward to it, however it is with embarrassment.

I stood well back, out the backyard, last week celebrating the Free State because of issues that have happened linger with me. However, apart from that, we do not deserve to have the honour of celebrating because we are not fulfilling the roles, aims and objectives they spilled and gave their lifeblood away for. I talk about Collins and they are both below Collins. It is such a farce. The two of you are kind of a hybrid. I think the Minister, Deputy Ryan, told them to do hybrid on this and will get the mic every second word. It was farcical. He was spinning in his grave because they do not represent the values of what he and all the republicans gave their life for. That is my honest feeling and that is what people are telling me out on the street, in the laneways and in my clinics. They must be telling them, unless their cluaiseanna are dúnta completely, they wear earmuffs or they walk around with headphones on and do not want to meet anyone.

However, they will have to meet them soon enough. They will be waiting in the long grass. The grass is growing in Tipperary and it is growing well. This frost now will set it back a bit but I believe it will come back stronger and the roots will reach. We do not need the Minister

of State, Senator Hackett. As I said earlier, we are not allowed even to cut enough holly for the crib.

The Minister talked about reinvigorating forestry. Every farmer that has a 30-year contract has a long contract to wait for his or her money. I said this before. Any person who plants anything, whether it is potatoes - which my family were renowned for, McGrath's spuds - beets, which we had, or carrots have a long wait. I will get some big ones for the Minister if he would like. They are nice with a bit of butter and salt. I am just making the point that anyone who has entered into the contract for forestry and planted in good faith into the schemes have a bitter taste. They will never again grow a tree or anyone belonging to them or their neighbours because they cannot get the licence to cut them. Why should they have to get a licence? You reap what you sow. My God, the Government will reap what it sows too and that date is not far away either. But *sin scéal eile*. If they plant the trees, they should be allowed to cut them. Timber factories and industries are crying out. The price of timber is going up because we have to import it. It is a mockery that we cannot get through this. We brought in legislation, which I voted against, and my colleagues were annoyed with me. They said any legislation was better than none. That was bad legislation and it was useless, toothless and fruitless. It has not and will not deliver.

I refer to the hospital waiting lists and the housing lists. We are a wealthy country. Sorry if my remarks have been oppressive. Have they got permission from their masters in Europe? They did not have the gumption to stand up to them and or the interest in building the houses. The Tánaiste's party had a proud record of building houses in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, as well as in the noughties when people got naughty all over the place and they wanted money, money, money. They went off in Hally's trucks from Ardfinnan. I do not know how they would be travelling now, if Deputy Eamon Ryan was there, but there were 40 men in a back of a lorry in the cold. There were firms sitting in them, going down to Kilkenny and into Clonakilty to build schemes of houses under Fianna Fáil Governments. We have failed spectacularly to build them.

As for bureaucracy, now we talk about changing planning laws. The Minister, Deputy Ryan, talked about a 10% or a tenfold increase on the amount of renewables. We have heard it all before. It is so far away. I want renewables, renewable energy, including wind energy, solar energy and wind from wave power. When will it happen? It is all tied up in knots and reams. There are the mandarins and the Departments and the Minister's friends in An Taisce. He spoke of stopping people objecting but there was no mention of An Taisce, which is the biggest quango of all because it held up a factory in County Kilkenny. However, the former Taoiseach called it out in the Dáil one day in a reply to me and now the factory is under construction, thank God. It had no issues with the plant, the emissions or anything else, but it had a fundamental idea that we had too many cows, so it stopped a plant and 200 high-quality jobs. We were lucky to hold on to the Dutch cheese firm that was doing it.

The Government should listen and think when divides the Cabinet into subcommittees. It should think and it should get things moving, because they are not moving. They are moving in their heads. They are moving paper from office to office. They are back and forward, over and hither and nothing is happening. They are going from Billy, to Tom, to Ned, to Jack, to Mary.

Now the Government has a new Chief Whip, who I wish well. I look forward to working with her and I worked with all of the Whips. I do not know how hard she will be in terms of waving the whip but I wish her well. I thank Deputy Chambers for when he was the Whip,

because we co-operated on many issues. If the Government wants support, it will be from this side of the House but it has to have meaningful, realistic policies, not balderdash and poppy schemes, such as setting whatever the Minister said to set in the south-facing windows. They would be fairly well perished tonight on the south-facing windows, as they would have been last week.

I will go back to the issue of climate change before I finish. I am not a climate change denier but I will say again something I said last week. I remember breaking ice with my sister 48 years ago so that the cows could drink the water from the pond. We had to break it with a sledgehammer. We always have had climate change but now it is all about control of the people. It is an absolute con job. The Government just want to frighten the poor, misfortunate people out there tonight who cannot heat their homes-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: You are a denier-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Foreign stations are butting in again. Can they not turn off and get a different dial? Dial in some Al Jazeera or something else the Deputy is supporting. He was supporting Russia a few years ago.

Deputy Paul Murphy: That was blatant change denial.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He was supporting Russia a few years ago.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Paul Murphy: He says it is a con job one minute and then he says-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Please do not interrupt the Deputy.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I did not interrupt him. The Government is controlling the people. They cannot heat themselves tonight in their homes, given the price of home heating oil and then there is the carbon tax on top of that. It is such a time to put on carbon tax when people are under pressure anyway. Thankfully, we have seen oil prices go down and there has been a bit of relief. There is control there. They have the toolbox given to them by their masters in Europe but they would not open the damn thing and use the tools inside it.

Everyone is calling for an election. I am not looking for an election because that would be like Santa Claus voting for Christmas. However, I do not believe that the Government is Santa Clause because first we cannot get the holly for the crib----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: -----and the little presents under the Christmas tree would be very scarce. The bosca would be full inside only with a bit of wrapping paper. It might not even be Christmastime.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: First, on a personal level, I wish the Taoiseach well. During the week, I outlined that although I do not have a problem with some people in Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil, I do have a problem with some of the agenda that is being pushed in this country at the moment. I am not a person who is negative about everything. During the week, as the Taoiseach is well aware, I welcomed how the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, brought in a sewage scheme for towns that had no Irish Water and brought in the grant for refurbishment of

rural houses. In fairness to the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, she helped with the cancer hospital in Galway and I welcome that. However, I believe there is a big problem with the way this country is going because decisions that are being made are pulverising and decimating certain aspects of rural Ireland and we will not stand for that. It will cause abandonment. I am the very person who will always stand up when it is not popular, such as when the likes of the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, was being brought forward. I stood with the Minister and supported it. The CAP is not the only thing that will keep farmers in rural Ireland going, however. The one thing I ask of the Taoiseach is to get rid of this talk about culling the herd. At one time, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil always stood for rural Ireland, farmers and middle Ireland but they seem to have basically abandoned them. The Government should not do it in the sly way it is trying to do it at the moment. It used to be two cows to the hectare but now that the cow milks a bit more it is 1.6 of them. That is a sly way of doing things. The likes of sheep farmers on mountains are getting a derogatory type of extra grant. The Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, talks about the way forward on climate and designation and all that. Ironically, under this great ACRES scheme - I am not saying it is all bad; it does have good parts - most farmers in a designated area could not put anything into the riparian zone, so they lost €3,000. If that is good - and the Minister talking about climate - I am a Dutchman.

I listened to the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, and, to be honest, I was frothing at some of the things he came out with. Does the Government realise that by agreeing to what it is signing up to in Europe and under its future forestry policy, 1 million ha will be taken out of the equation? I will explain. When the Government talks about signing up to 30% under the new nature restoration, it is talking about farmers who went out and shored land and that made them viable in rural areas across the west, north west, midlands and south west. They shored it with their bare hands and a shovel and now the Government is telling them they had better rewet that land. The State forestry body was before the agriculture committee last Tuesday. It stated that it is going to get in a private entity that is based outside the country. There was reference to this earlier. The big word a few months ago was that 100,000 ha is going to be planted in the next 30 years by the private entity. Is the Government proud of that? That private entity is a vulture fund, to call it simple and straight. The Government should have learned enough about vulture funds through the housing market. It is going to buy the land and the State forestry company which owns 440,000 ha is now going to become the manager of that. Is that what the coalition parties want? Do they even know about it? They probably do not. It was announced the other night that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is aware of it. The Minister is aware of it. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil were friends of farmers at one time. What is that move going to do to small farmers in the west, north west, south west or midlands? Farmers with a 5, 10 or 15 acre farm will not be able to compete.

These are the consequences of what is being done by the Government. In fairness to Deputy Harkin, she spoke very well earlier about balanced regional development. Whatever about balanced regional development, we want to be able to live where we are first. We want to be able to work the land where we are. The proposals that have been agreed by the Government involve 100,000 ha in forestry and 850,000 acres of rewetting. Some of that land is in Listowel where dairy farmers are working. Does that give confidence to farmers?

As for the fear I have at the moment, the Government should have a look at the statistics. In the past ten years, we have lost 40% of livestock farmers in Europe. That is a fact. The Government can Google it. What we need to do is to encourage people to farm in rural Ireland in a sustainable way. I am not talking about destroying rivers or anything like that but I am saying

the Government should not drive farmers off the land.

There are certain parts of the country that will be worst affected by the policies that are being pursued. They include the west, north west, south west and parts of the midlands. They are areas in which the land is not of as good a quality as elsewhere, which means the vultures will buy it. Coillte has said it will be the manager. If we look at the statistics for the sale of land, the vultures will be competing for every parcel of 1 or 2 acres. How is any family farm to survive in that situation and how will anyone go forward?

The Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, talked earlier about transport. Yes, there are some new rural links. I do not deny that. However, the roads were bad this morning and there was no public transport option for me to get to Dublin and back home again tonight. It seems there are two capitals in Ireland now, namely, Cork and Dublin, because 12 out of the 15 Ministers are from there. There is the DART, Luas, taxi or bus to take people from those places home tonight. The rest of us were forced to take a car because we have no other way of getting home.

The Minister talks about transport and climate. There was low-hanging fruit to be taken last year and, to be fair, the Government did well at the beginning. It announced there was to be a free transport ticket for every youngster going to school. What did it do then? It left half of them without tickets. There was m1le murder about that and there still is. This is the problem. If the Minister wants to do some good on climate, he should take the low-hanging fruit by making sure all children have access to a bus to school and mammy does not have to bring them to school in the SUV. That is what I call going forward and doing things in a normal, rational way, rather than this wild talk we are hearing.

Speaking of wild talk, today we heard all about the number of turbines that are going to be put up across the country on every coast. There is a reality to be met here. I know there is a planning Bill coming forward but the reality is that every investor who was going to the west of Ireland has walked away because of the fear of how the planning process has worked up to now. We are not going to magic up those turbines overnight or even within the next two or three years.

Another concern is the photo opportunities we are seeing around battery storage. I have nothing against battery storage but the reality is it only does about two hours. In the past month, the wind did not blow. I do not know how the Jesus we are going to power the battery storage from the wind if it does not blow. As I said, I urge the Minister to look at the low-hanging fruit, including the likes of the school buses. I agree 100% with the move to solar energy. In fairness, there are good opportunities coming in that area and we need to go forward as best we can.

Unfortunately, when we talk to people in the farming community at this time, they say they do not know where they are going. They do not know what is happening with nitrates. They do not know whether there will be culls of cows. They see in the *Irish Farmers' Journal* that it is so much per cow. When there is a situation in which there are no decisions being made, it leaves a vacuum and room for speculation. When the communities that worked towards the €12.5 billion to €13 billion the agricultural sector contributed to this country in the past year are left in that situation, there will, first, be no machinery bought and, second, they will not spend money because they do not know where they are going. People need a roadmap and a path to the future for their children.

We have to live in those rural areas. The land and the roads might not be as good as in other

places but we are proud of where we are from. We are able to farm that land. We do not need someone coming along to tell us we must bring the water level up to a certain height or we will basically have to abandon the land. What will happen? People will be driven into the cities and the towns, where there are no houses at the moment. We are not going to magic up those homes. I ask the Taoiseach to listen to what I have said and keep it in mind over the next two and a half years. If something is good, I am always man enough to say it is good. I am not an Opposition Member who will criticise things for the sake of it, but I see what is happening in rural areas. I urge the Taoiseach, for the next two and a half years, to think of the people I have mentioned and to take on board that there is more to Ireland than Dublin and Cork. There is also Donegal, Kerry, Galway, Louth and all the other places around the country.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Yes, there is rural regeneration and things like that, which I welcome. I am not a naysayer. However, we are being forgotten in the bigger picture. My fear is that farmers will abandon the land. If the EU continues with the food policy it has adopted, we will be importing from Brazil and we will be like the birds in the nest with our mouths open trying to get food. That is not the future I want. It is not a good future for Europe.

7 o'clock

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. Maybe those are good words on which to conclude. I thank all Members for their contributions. We must now consider the question.

Cuireadh an cheist.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 57; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Andrews, Chris.</i>	<i>Murphy, Verona.</i>
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Daly, Pa.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	

<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Cathal.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>	<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i>		
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>		

<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Noonan, Malcolm.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connor, James.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Cormac Devlin and Hildegarde Naughton; Níl, Deputies Mattie McGrath and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

Faisnéiseadh go rabhthas tar éis glacadh leis an gceist.

An Ceann Comhairle: Bíodh Nollaig shona agaibh go léir.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 7.27 p.m. go dtí 2.00 p.m., Dé Céadaoin, an 18 Eanáir 2023.

The Dáil adjourned at 7.27 p.m. until 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 18 January 2023.