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**Tuesday,
7 October
2025**

**DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)**

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 7 Deireadh Fómhair 2025

Tuesday, 7 October 2025

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 1 p.m.

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

1 o'clock

Financial Resolutions 2025

Budget Statement 2026

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Introduction

Budget 2026 will invest in our future while securing the jobs, prosperity and stability of today. It will tackle the serious challenges of meeting our housing and investment needs. At the same time, we are preparing for tomorrow. This budget builds up our resilience and will help us to adapt at a time of historic challenge and change for our economy and our society. This budget is the first of this Government's term. We will continue to deliver for our citizens over the course of the next four budgets and in the years ahead.

Transformation and Challenge

Our economy has proven to be remarkably resilient. This is due to the transformation of our country in recent decades. There are 2.8 million people at work in Ireland today; more than lived here in 1961. People are also living longer and healthier lives than ever before. Life expectancy today is 83 years of age; ten years above expectations just four decades ago. The number of adults with a third level qualification has tripled in a generation.

We have also made huge progress in restoring our public finances to health. Our debt ratio is moving in the right direction and has almost halved since I delivered my first budget to the House in 2016. While we should reflect on this progress, of which I believe we can be proud, we also clearly understand that not everyone feels the benefits of this in their daily lives. For many, concerns about their cost of living and access to a home remain paramount.

To make the case for the progress we have made is also to acknowledge that we need to achieve more and we need to achieve more in a world that is dramatically changing.

Uncertain Times

The certainties that have underpinned our transformation as a country are now being called into question. Uncertainty is the defining feature of the economy of the world this year. While the international order has been shifting for over a decade, this year saw greater fragmentation as widespread tariffs were introduced. The world has been pulling away from its near-universal commitment to free and open trade, a commitment that benefited many.

Our fortunes are connected to the world around us. Peace and partnership have been the drivers of our economic and social progress in recent years. Ireland will always be a global voice for, and champion of, co-operation and trade.

It is regrettable that tariffs were introduced but the recent EU-US trade agreement is still a better outcome than the alternative of higher tariffs and, ultimately, even greater uncertainty. Nonetheless, tariffs will, of course, impact growth in the coming years.

The question then arises as to how we respond to this challenge and how we respond to a changing, more difficult international environment, and rise to these challenges. How do we do this? We do this with a plan to strengthen the resilience we have shown in the past, underpinned by a sensible budget that will safeguard our future. That is how.

A Positive Future

It is more pressing than ever that this Government presents a budget that protects jobs and supports growth. My Department is projecting modified domestic demand - the best measurement for our domestic economy - to grow by 3.3% this year and by 2.3% next year. Domestic activity is expected to be supported by continued strength in our jobs market, which, thankfully, has proven remarkably resilient to our many and recent shocks. Since the onset of the pandemic, we have added more than 440,000 jobs to our economy. This is a historic achievement for Ireland. It has been driven by record levels of women at work, as well as people coming to work in Ireland. Our strong labour force, the backbone of our economy, is diverse and there is strength in that diversity.

This budget will protect jobs and build on our progress. Looking ahead, we expect to add a further 63,500 jobs by the end of next year, with our economy remaining at full employment in the coming period. Real incomes are also expected to grow, helped by lower inflation, which is forecast to remain at around 2% next year. All of these forecasts have been endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

However, I and the Government are still acutely aware that prices remain high. For many necessities, including food, prices are still going in the wrong direction. This budget seeks to address this through targeted supports for those most in need in a way that is affordable for Ireland.

We also need to invest. This is why the updated national development plan published and delivered by the Minister, Deputy Chambers, in July commits to €275 billion of capital expenditure over the next ten years. This strategic investment will support our energy, water, housing and transport sectors. These are areas that are critical to making Ireland a better place in which to live and work, while improving the competitiveness of our economy for domestic and foreign investment. This is about jobs; it is about stability at a time of global challenge. This investment will not alone increase the potential of our economy, it will boost growth and

job creation in the short and medium term. This, in turn, will further safeguard and improve the lives of our citizens.

Our Public Finances

Due to the hard work of the people of Ireland and the right policy choices, the Government is in a strong position to be able to protect our economy and the public services that underpin it. Our public finances are in good shape. Today's budgetary package is €9.4 billion, as set out in the summer economic statement. A total of €8.1 billion will be allocated for public spending and €1.3 billion will be allocated for taxation measures. I have reduced the tax package by €150 million to facilitate additional spending in targeted supports for the most vulnerable, while maintaining an unchanged total budgetary package. We must continue to control the rates of day-to-day spending on a level that is safe and affordable; one that reflects the reality of where we are today. Inflation has moderated; the size of our budgets must moderate too. Every budget is about choices. No budget can do everything, nor should it attempt to. The one-off measures of recent years must be replaced by more targeted and permanent supports, giving greater certainty to people.

The Minister, Deputy Chambers, and I are making the best possible use of the resources available to invest in our future and to strengthen our foundations. Similarly, we should have a tax package that does not put our economy at risk. To safeguard against risk, we are running budget surpluses, reducing public debt and building up funds so that we are prepared for the future. We have run general government surpluses over the past three years. For this year, the surplus will be €10.2 billion and next year the surplus will be €5.1 billion. The debt to GNI* ratio - the way we measure the ability of our economy to sustain a certain level of debt - has now declined by more than 40 percentage points relative to the pandemic-related peak. The Government will submit a medium-term fiscal and structural plan to the European Commission in the coming weeks to ensure that, like all EU countries, this and future budgets are sustainable and affordable and keep our public finances and people safe.

Reliance and Resilience

Our corporation tax revenues have allowed us to respond to challenges, such as the pandemic and the cost-of-living challenge. However, we all know the degree of our volatility in these receipts. We know over-reliance is a risk. In addition, international tax negotiations to design a system that achieves a fair and balanced approach to global minimum taxation and one that accommodates the US tax system, while maintaining a level playing field for all, are still ongoing. There is still considerable uncertainty. That is why we continue to put money aside in the two long-term savings funds – the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund - to help us to deal with the demographic and structural challenges that may await and the challenges we may not yet be aware of. By the end of next year, my Department projects these funds will have built up to around €24 billion - an investment to protect future generations. By the end of this Government's term, we expect to have more than €40 billion built up in these long-term funds. This will allow us to face the challenges of the future from the best possible position.

HOUSING

However, we must also be conscious of the challenges we face today, first among them being housing. In preparing this budget, it has been to the forefront of our minds. For first-time

buyers, for aspiring homeowners and for those attempting to negotiate and navigate the rental market increasing supply is key. The Government is determined to use all policies at its disposal to increase supply and alleviate pressure, so that more people can have access to a home. That is why we have committed over €5 billion in capital investment for housing delivery next year, in addition to investment by the Land Development Agency, LDA, and approved housing bodies. We have legislated for the biggest changes to the planning system for a generation. We are implementing the national planning framework, so that homes are built where they are needed. We have made significant changes to the design of homes to help them become more affordable.

Home Building Finance Ireland provides finance to home builders across the country and additional funding will be made available to SMEs. To ensure they have the capacity to fund such home builders, I have consented to €200 million of additional external funding to support this objective. I have also considered how our tax system can support additional supply, promote regeneration and tackle dereliction.

VAT on Apartments

I am reducing the VAT rate as applied to the sale of completed apartments to 9% from 13.5%, effective from tonight until 31 December 2030. This is to help address the viability gap in apartment construction as part of a social policy to deliver more and higher density apartments. I will introduce a financial resolution to give effect to this decision this evening.

Residential Zoned Land Tax

The residential zoned land tax introduced in budget 2022 came into effect on 1 February 2025. This was designed to increase the national stock - the amount - of zoned and serviced land to deliver homes across our country. So far, there have almost been 2,000 returns filed. Of these, 526 have requested the deferral of the tax because the land is being actively developed within planning timelines. This shows that the objective of the tax is being met. Today, I announce another opportunity for landowners to avail of an exemption in 2026 if they seek to have their land rezoned to reflect the genuine economic activity being carried out. The exemption will be considered by local authorities based on guidelines by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Further changes to enhance the operation of the tax will be brought forward in the finance Bill.

Cost-Rental Housing

In line with the Government's commitment to accelerate the delivery of affordable homes, I am exempting the rental profits arising from homes that fall within the cost-rental scheme from corporation tax. This exemption will apply to all developments that are designated as falling within the cost-rental scheme by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage from on or after 8 October 2025.

Construction Costs

To further incentivise the provision of new homes, I am also introducing an enhanced corporate tax deduction for certain costs incurred on the construction of apartment developments and for the conversion of non-residential buildings into apartments. This is to improve the viability of these developments. It will be available for projects where a

commencement notice is submitted on or after 8 October 2025, and on or before 31 December 2030.

Living City Initiative

Turning now to our larger cities, the living city initiative supports the enhancement of older housing and commercial properties in the designated special regeneration areas in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. I am making the following substantial changes to strengthen the scheme: I am extending it to the end of 2030; I am increasing its scope for residential properties from those built before 1915 to those built before 1975; furthermore, I am amending the scheme to support the use of "over the shop" premises for residential purposes; where the works are carried out by enterprises, the maximum amount of relief available will be increased from €200,000 to €300,000 and I am providing greater flexibility on the time period over which the relief can be claimed; and finally, over the coming period, I plan to add the five regional centres under the national planning framework to the scheme. These are Athlone, Drogheda, Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo. Adding special regeneration areas to these towns will require careful planning and preparation by the relevant local authorities.

Derelict Property Tax

We are also aware that dereliction continues to be a blight on our towns and cities. We need to bring those properties currently lying empty back into use. To target the activation of this housing stock, and in an attempt to breathe new life back into those towns and villages, I am today announcing the introduction of a new derelict property tax, which will be implemented and collected by the Revenue Commissioners. With the agreement of the Minister for housing, this new tax will replace the derelict sites levy, which is currently charged at a rate of 7% on the site market value. I do not intend for the new tax to be charged at a lower rate than this. I intend to bring forward legislation providing for the derelict property tax in 2026. Preliminary registers of dereliction will be published in 2027 and the tax will be implemented as soon as possible after that date.

Residential Development Stamp Duty Refund Scheme

The residential development stamp duty refund scheme is due to expire at the end of this year. In the Finance Bill, I will extend it until the end of 2030. This scheme provides for a partial repayment of the stamp duty paid on a deed of conveyance or transfer of land where the land is subsequently developed for residential purposes. To improve its effectiveness, I am also making a number of changes to the scheme, including extending the two time limits that apply - for acquisition to commencement and commencement to completion - from 30 months to 36 months where an application for a stamp duty refund is made in respect of a large-scale residential development. I am also providing for a full stamp duty refund to be claimed in respect of a multiphase development at the commencement of the first phase of that development.

Retrofitting Deduction for Landlords

To continue supporting the upgrading of rental housing stock, I will be rolling over the income tax deduction for small landlords who retrofit their properties for a further three years.

These measures are designed to encourage more stock into our housing market and to support the development of more and higher quality homes.

MEASURES TO SUPPORT HOUSEHOLDS

Personal Income Tax

As I have said previously, budgets are about choices. This budget boosts our economic resilience and keeps our public finances safe. It maintains our competitiveness and ability to protect jobs. It also means the challenges we face in housing and investment can be delivered for households and business across the country. The scope for significant personal tax changes is therefore limited. Government is committed to measures that will improve the overall standard of living, with a focus on affordable and permanent changes in the budget. However, over the lifetime of this Government, I will stand by our commitment to make progressive changes to income tax, if and when our economy remains strong.

Today, I am announcing targeted changes to USC. As of 1 January 2026, the national minimum wage will increase by 65 cent per hour to €14.15 per hour. Accordingly, I will be increasing the ceiling for the 2% rate band by €1,318 to €28,700. This increase will ensure that full-time workers on the minimum wage will remain outside the top rates of USC, while also giving a modest benefit to all workers whose incomes are above that amount. I am also extending the USC concession that applies to those who have a full medical card and earn less than €60,000 per year so that the reduced rate of USC continues to apply for a further two years until the end of 2027.

Rent Tax Credit

Where our renters are concerned, I am conscious of the cost pressures faced by so many individuals and families. The rent tax credit was introduced in budget 2023 and has proven to be a very meaningful support for renters, with almost 400,000 people benefiting from it in 2023. The credit is due to expire at the end of this year. I am announcing that I am extending it for a further three years, to the end of 2028, in a bid to alleviate the pressure through what is an important tax measure for many.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

To support homeowners, I am extending the mortgage interest tax relief for a further two years with a reduced value applying in the final year.

Extension of the 9% VAT Rate on Gas and Electricity

Conscious of the fact that energy prices remain high, I am extending the 9% rate of VAT on gas and electricity bills until 31 December 2030, with a Financial Resolution on this matter later this evening. This should go some way to alleviating energy cost pressures across the year for households.

JOBS & INVESTMENT

Promoting Investment and a Supportive Business Environment

Turning to our businesses, the Government has been proactive in its reaction to the challenging global environment. Along with our EU partners, we are committed to unlocking

the potential of the EU Single Market, which offers enormous opportunities. In February of this year, the Tánaiste convened the first meeting of the Government trade forum to help us better understand the changing trade landscape that impacts on many firms in many different sectors. Building on this, the recently published Government action plan on market diversification and the action plan on competitiveness and productivity lay out our strategy for ensuring the resilience of our economy while further boosting competitiveness. This budget represents a significant intervention by the Government to protect these jobs and businesses and to support them in the future.

Reduced 9% VAT Rate for Hospitality Sector and Hairdressers

In line with the commitment in the programme for Government to further support businesses and help them to retain jobs, I am reducing the VAT rate from 13.5% to 9% on food and catering businesses and for hairdressing services. The measure will come into effect from 1 July 2026. This will cost €232 million in 2026 and €681 million in a full year. It reflects our commitment to support businesses in the services sector that are facing increased cost pressures. Furthermore, it will support more than 150,000 jobs in these sectors right across the country.

Research and Development Tax Credit

As a key driver of economic growth and high value employment, research and development supports are critical to our continuing competitiveness in a challenging global environment. Recognising this, and following a review undertaken by my Department this year, I am making several improvements to the regime, including increasing the rate of the credit from 30% to 35%; and increasing the first-year payment threshold from €75,000 to €87,500 to support smaller research and development projects. I will also be publishing a research and development compass in the coming weeks, which will consider targeted changes to the research and development tax credit to better align with industry practices, for example, in the areas of outsourcing and qualifying expenditure definitions. It will also set a pathway for development of innovation supports.

Participation Exemption

I am committed to delivering tax simplification for businesses. Last year, a participation exemption for foreign dividends was introduced to simplify double tax relief and enhance our competitiveness for multinational companies. I will be updating and enhancing those rules by expanding their geographic scope to include jurisdictions where non-refundable withholding taxes apply, and to provide for a number of technical amendments to improve the scheme.

Ireland's Interest Regime

On that theme of competitiveness, it is crucial that our tax code is attractive to investment and is aligned with international best practice. Accordingly, I am publishing an action plan today to reform our tax regime for interest. This plan is informed by responses received to an extensive consultation on the tax treatment of interest in Ireland. The primary request arising from that consultation is for a fundamental reform of the underlying framework for the taxation and deductibility of interest. The phased approach of the plan will progress reforms to achieve a simplified regime that supports competitiveness and protects our tax base. In this regard, a feedback statement will be published in November for further consultation.

Visual Effects

To respond to specific competitive challenges being faced by the visual effects sector, I am today announcing an improvement to the section 481 film tax credit to provide for a new 40% rate of relief for productions with a minimum of €1 million of eligible expenditure on relevant visual effects work. This rate will apply up to a maximum of €10 million per production.

Digital Games

We have seen the creativity and success of our digital games sector. To provide certainty to that sector and encourage its continued growth, I am extending the digital games tax credit for six years to 31 December 2031. The credit will also allow for claims in respect of post-release content work where the original game availed of the digital games tax credit. Further detail of this will be in the Finance Bill. As the proposed changes to the visual effects and digital games incentives are approved State aids, they will be notified to the European Commission and introduced subject to commencement orders.

Revised Entrepreneur Relief

We also know that entrepreneurs are vital to the creation of jobs and to supporting economic activity across the country. The Government is maintaining and is committed to continuing to maintain a tax system that supports them. I am enhancing the existing capital gains tax revised entrepreneur relief by increasing the lifetime limit on gains to which the relief applies from €1 million to €1.5 million for disposals made from 1 January 2026. This change will help ensure the capital gains tax system supports entrepreneurs who are looking to grow their businesses and take on new challenges.

Key Employee Engagement Programme

The key employee engagement programme is also due to expire at the end of 2025. Following engagement with stakeholders in relation to this scheme, I will extend it until the end of 2028 subject to approval from the European Commission.

Special Assignee Relief Programme

I have already spoken about the important role that foreign direct investment plays in our economy through the creation of employment and the expansion of businesses. I am therefore extending the special assignee relief programme for five years, while also increasing the minimum qualifying income to €125,000 to ensure the relief is appropriately calibrated. I will also simplify the administrative requirements and will set that out in the Finance Bill.

Foreign Earnings Deduction

As an open economy, our economy is deeply integrated into global trade flows. We are exposed to external economic downturns or volatility. The foreign earnings deduction is an important incentive for employees that supports Irish firms in exploring and expanding into new export markets. I will extend the scheme for a further five years. I am also increasing the level of relief available to €50,000 and extending the scheme to include the Philippines and Türkiye.

VAT Modernisation and Electronic Invoicing

Recently agreed changes to EU VAT law will reshape our VAT administration environment to better recognise and facilitate how we trade, while strengthening the capacity of tax systems

across the EU to tackle VAT loss. To that end, the Revenue Commissioners will begin a phased roll-out of domestic electronic invoicing arrangements for business-to-business transactions. It will publish further details on this tomorrow.

Withholding Taxes

Withholding taxes are an important feature of our tax system. I wish to explore opportunities to modernise and digitalise them and further expand their scope as we continue to adapt and respond to new and developing business models. A joint public consultation on this topic between the Department of Finance and Revenue will be launched soon. All of these measures will contribute to the creation and retention of jobs. Better use of our savings can also contribute to this objective.

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FINANCIAL SERVICES

Savings and Investment

The EU savings and investments union aims to make it easier, safer and cheaper for people to invest. This gives citizens a better return and helps to fund businesses that can grow. In recognition of the importance of encouraging retail investment, today I am reducing the tax rate that applies to Irish and equivalent offshore funds and foreign life assurance products from 41% to 38%. Reflecting the complexity of the tax framework for retail investment and to facilitate due consideration of the Funds Sector 2030 report, I will publish a roadmap early next year setting out how we will simplify and adapt the tax framework to encourage investment. This will take into account the recent European Commission recommendation on savings and investment accounts. Of course, we will do this because Ireland is in a leading position in the investment funds and asset management industry globally and has a sector that supports almost 37,500 jobs across our country. We will publish an implementation plan for this sector today. That report recommended a public consultation on potential options for an entity level tax for Irish real estate funds, IREFs. I do not propose to progress that recommendation. However, my Department will undertake a public consultation on proposals to simplify the IREF regime without limiting its effectiveness.

Stamp Duty Measure for Irish SMEs and Start-ups Trading on Regulated Markets

In order to support these capital markets, I am introducing a new market cap exemption stamp duty threshold of €1 billion for Irish SMEs and start-ups trading on regulated markets. For companies below this threshold, the 1% stamp duty charge paid on share transactions will not apply. This change is essential to the growth of homegrown businesses, especially those that want to grow internationally.

Bank Levy

Finally, I believe it remains appropriate that the banking sector continues to make a contribution to the Irish economy. Therefore, I am extending the bank levy for one further year, with a target yield of €200 million.

AGRICULTURE

I have acknowledged that domestic and foreign investment are key to our economic growth. So too is the success of our farming sector. I acknowledge the report of the Commission on Generational Renewal in Farming. This report looked at farm succession in particular and made a series of recommendations, including the extension of four tax relief schemes that are specific to this sector and that were due to end this year. I have considered this matter and have decided to extend the farm consolidation stamp duty relief, the farm restructuring CGT relief, and the young trained farmer stamp duty relief to the end of 2029. I am also expanding the scope of farm restructuring relief to include woodlands and forestry.

In addition, in order to continue to help farmers to meet emission targets, and to address our shared environmental challenges, I am announcing an extension of the accelerated capital allowance scheme for slurry storage facilities for four more years. It continues to be important that these measures constitute state aid and, therefore, must comply with EU state aid rules.

CLIMATE

In support of climate policy, the Finance Act 2020 legislated for annual increases in the carbon tax out to 2030. This year's increase, which brings the tax to €71 per tonne of CO₂ emitted, will be applied to auto fuels with effect from tomorrow and to all other fuels from 1 May 2026.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: A cost to rural Ireland.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: The additional revenue arising from the carbon tax increase is estimated at €121 million in 2026 and a full-year additional yield-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: Surely, Michael Healy-Rae did not agree to that.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: -----of €157 million. These measures will be ring-fenced to ensure that carbon tax policy is progressive.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Hitting the rural communities again.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: We will spend this revenue on social welfare measures and other measures to prevent fuel poverty and to ensure a just transition, with a socially progressive national retrofitting programme, and to encourage and support our farmers to farm in a greener and more sustainable way.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: And yet there is no extra money for farmers.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: For example, the allocation for the warmer homes scheme, which provides completely funded retrofits to low-income households, has seen an eleven-fold increase relative to where we were in 2020.

We are also making huge progress on solar generation. Today, there are over 140,000 households with solar PV installed, providing greater energy affordability for these homes, both by reducing their own energy demand and allowing them to sell excess energy into the grid.

Support for the Adoption of Electric Vehicles

In support of increasing the number of electric vehicles on our roads, I am extending the €5,000 VRT relief for electric vehicles for a further one year until 31 December 2026.

In relation to the benefit-in-kind, BIK, regime for company cars, I am extending, on a tapered basis, the universal relief on the original market value of a vehicle, which was first introduced as a temporary measure in 2023. The relief will remain at €10,000 in 2026. It will reduce to €5,000 in 2027 and €2,500 in 2028, being abolished in 2029. I am also creating a new vehicle category for zero-emission cars only, where the lowest BIK rates will apply.

Accelerated Capital Allowances Schemes

To encourage further capital investment to help deliver a reduction in emissions, I am extending the accelerated capital allowances scheme for energy-efficient equipment and for gas vehicles and refuelling equipment for a further five years until 31 December 2030.

Micro-generation of Electricity

To help as many citizens as possible to play a role in the energy transition, I am extending the income tax disregard of €400 for income received by households who sell electricity from micro-generation back to the grid for a further three years to the end of 2028.

OTHER MEASURES

Pool Betting Duty

The new Gambling Regulatory Authority will be responsible for licensing and supervising the betting sector. Pool betting is restricted to just two entities currently, but under the new regime, a wide range of licenceholders may be authorised to engage in pool betting. I am concerned that betting operators may be incentivised to modify their business structures to avoid liability to betting duty, so I will legislate in budget 2027 for a separate pool betting duty charge. This will provide time for engagement between my Department and relevant stakeholders on the design and structure of this duty.

Tobacco

To support public health policy to reduce smoking in Irish society, I am increasing excise duty on a pack of 20 cigarettes by 50 cent, with a *pro rata* increase on other tobacco products.

Conclusion

A Cheann Comhairle, our public finances are in good shape overall. Our employment is at an historically high level. Our schools, our hospitals and our public services are responsible

for so much good in our society. But we must build more homes. We must help those who need our help in a more targeted way. The Minister, Deputy Chambers, and I make the case for that in this budget, for a budget that builds on what is good in our economy to achieve more for our country and for its citizens, today and in the future. This budget will boost our resilience. It will protect jobs. It puts us in the best possible position to create a stronger and more competitive economy while meeting the needs of our people today and in the time to come.

To achieve this, a budget must make choices. Any budget that attempts to achieve everything in a single go weakens our ability to be safe in a turbulent world. This is why we make the case for running budget surpluses and for setting up funds for the future. Not for some abstract reasons, but because this approach gave us the ability to help in the toughest of moments in recent years, and it will do so again. That is why we have to strike the right balance between increasing investment and moderating the growth in day-to-day spending. That is why our tax changes must be of a certain value, and no more.

That is why now is the time to steady ourselves on the path for the future. In this and future budgets, the Minister, Deputy Chambers, and I, with the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and Independent colleagues, will continue to stay on the path to support growth and to maintain safe public finances. We will do this because this, in turn, offers the best protection and best support for our people. Through our investment in people, jobs and homes, we are determined to meet the challenges that we face today and to realise our hopes and our ambitions for tomorrow. I commend budget 2026 to Dáil Éireann.

Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers): Introduction

Táimid ag teacht i dtír le fada ar na buntáistí a bhaineann le geilleagar oscailte sofhreagrúil a bheith againn. Cé go bhfónann sé sin go maith dúinn mar thír, ní mór dúinn aghaidh a thabhairt ar an timpeallacht eacnamaíoch agus polaitiúil atá ag titim amach níos faide i gcéin. Tá uair na cinniúna buailte le hÉirinn. Beidh tionchar ag an mbealach a roghnaímid le hinfheistíocht a dhéanamh inár gcuid gnóthaí eacnamaíocha inniu, mar aon leis an gcaoi ina ndéanaimid na gnóthaí eacnamaíocha sin a phleanáil agus a bhainistiú sa tír seo go ceann na ndeicheanna de bhlianta.

A Cheann Comhairle, for a long time we have traded on our advantages as a small, open, agile economy. While this continues to serve us well as a country, we must take every opportunity to strengthen the foundations of our economy and our society. Ireland stands at a crossroads. How we choose to invest, plan and manage our economic affairs today will shape our country's future.

Budget 2026, the first in this Government's term, represents an opportunity for a renewed economic and fiscal approach, an approach that places the long-term development of our country at its heart and that strives to deliver better outcomes for all. To improve people's lives, we need to ensure that the decisions we make today are grounded in the best interests of our nation. Our vision is to create a thriving country, where enterprise can flourish and people feel valued regardless of background, ethnicity, sexuality or gender. This is our opportunity to be a caring country defined by stability, tolerance and progress, for those who were born here and those who have chosen to make Ireland their home. We must challenge the voices who try to

use diversity to divide us. Instead, we will continue to celebrate the differences that elevate our cultural identity and our national heritage. This is the flag we must fly, moving forward together.

Economic outlook

In the face of many threats over recent years, our economy and our people have been remarkably resilient. While there are challenges we have yet to overcome, it is important to acknowledge that Ireland is a successful country. We have a strong economy with over 2.8 million people in employment. We have high living standards, long life expectancy, excellent educational outcomes and a progressive system of social supports that work to ensure the most vulnerable are protected. We must safeguard what we have worked so hard to build while striving to become more competitive, protect jobs and create new ones, invest in building more homes and excel as a country that is open for business, investment and opportunity.

Leagann buiséad an lae inniu bunsraith síos do na blianta atá amach romhainn. Tapaímis an deis anois tógáil ar an mbunsraith sin ar mhaithe le todhchaí rathúil a chinntiú do mhuintir na hÉireann.

Medium-term approach

Today's budget lays the foundations for our future. It shifts the focus from isolated departmental or sectoral needs to our country's broader strategic priorities, considering the trade-offs and choices we will face along the way. Reforming how we spend public money must be a priority. This is a key focus for me as a Minister and for this Government. It has been central in all my discussions with all Ministers through 2025 and in settling departmental allocations for 2026.

This Government has taken the decision to moderate spending increases, providing more targeted and permanent measures, making the best use of the resources that are available to us. We are doing this to secure the long-term sustainability of our public finances.

BUDGET 2026

The programme for Government is clear in its ambition to secure our country's future, and today's budget is an important milestone on this journey. While we cannot do everything in a single budget, the allocations I am setting out today will deliver permanent impacts that make a positive difference to people's lives while also investing, at record levels, in our future.

Budget 2026 is built on three priorities. First, we will ramp up our investment in vital infrastructure, which will boost productivity, protect jobs and support long-term growth. Second, we will make targeted improvements to public services, making sure that they are reliable, accessible and efficient. Third, as set out by the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, we will strengthen our economic foundations, so we are better prepared to weather future uncertainties.

To support delivery of these priorities, I am allocating €116.8 billion in 2026, an €8.1 billion increase on this year's allocation. An additional €6.1 billion will be allocated for current expenditure, with the budget for capital projects increasing by €2 billion. The current expenditure package will provide: €2 billion for social protection, to provide for our growing population, expand existing schemes and deliver a series of targeted new measures; €1.5 billion for health, to hire more front-line staff and enhance the level of service being provided; €1.2

billion for public service pay agreements; and a further €1.4 billion to broaden supports across many sectors. Overall, this will support an increase of 12,500 staff to deliver services directly to the public, including 3,370 in the health sector; 2,600 in the education sector; and up to 1,000 in An Garda Síochána. I will also be setting aside €1 billion in a contingency reserve to be held centrally. This will allow us to respond to exceptional in-year expenditure pressures in 2026 and will fund elements of the costs related to Ireland hosting the EU Presidency.

INFRASTRUCTURE

One hundred years ago this year, a fledgling State showed ambition and action. At that time, Ireland faced a very different set of challenges - a young State with scarce resources, emerging from war and conflict. Yet, the State had the courage to commit 20% of its national budget to build Ardnacrusha, one of the most ambitious engineering projects in the world at that time. In the way Ardnacrusha transformed the State then, we are again at the beginning of an infrastructure revolution that will require that bold ambition. We must embrace this opportunity with the belief and confidence that we can shape the destiny of the next generation. This is our duty to the children born here today. We must confront, head on, the systems and mindsets that have made delivery so difficult. Without change, we will see critical shortages of power and water within a few years. Congestion on transport networks will grow. Our ability to deliver more homes will be impacted, as will opportunities for investment and job creation.

To address our country's infrastructure deficit, we must be prepared to radically overhaul how we deliver public projects. Next month, I will publish a detailed action plan to tackle these barriers to delivery. This will include plans to progress legislative reforms to strike a better balance between the rights of individuals and the public good; simplify regulation and consenting systems to make it easier to deliver projects; and reduce the administrative burden and cut the red tape of our rules and guidelines, so that our own systems are not delaying much-needed investment.

Alongside these reforms, I have provided record levels of funding through the recent national development plan, the largest capital investment plan in the history of this State. Through this plan, Government will provide €275 billion over the period to 2035, prioritising funding for water, energy and transport, the building blocks to deliver more homes. In 2026, I will allocate €19.1 billion for capital investment, an increase of €2 billion on 2025. This will provide funding to progress thousands of new-build social homes and major water infrastructure projects and flood relief schemes; build sustainability and resilience in our electricity grid and boost our electricity supply; and for major projects across the transport, health, education, justice and arts sectors. Details of specific projects to be delivered in 2026 will be announced shortly with sectoral investment plans for the next five years to be published by Departments in the coming weeks. It is critical that we deliver these investments. The urgency with which we need to make progress can so clearly be seen when we look at housing.

Housing, Local Government and Heritage

This Government's absolute priority is to strengthen the foundations for housing delivery and build more homes for our people. In 2026, I am allocating a total of €11.3 billion in funding to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Almost €2 billion of this current funding will continue to meet the social housing needs of over 100,000 households,

through the housing assistance, rental accommodation and social housing current expenditure schemes.

Within this, I am allocating €7.2 billion in capital funding, the largest ever such allocation for housing. This will include €2.9 billion to support the delivery of thousands of new-build social homes and the second-hand acquisitions programme, and €1.2 billion for the starter homes programme to deliver thousands of starter homes through a range of affordability supports alongside the help-to-buy initiative. Some €300 million will support the regeneration of our towns and urban areas through the urban regeneration development fund, while €205 million will be allocated to a new housing activation infrastructure fund to support the work of the new Housing Activation Office. Some €140 million is being allocated to retrofit further social homes, and €130 million will fund up to 17,000 adaptation grants for the homes of older people and people with a disability. These measures, in addition to the tax changes announced by the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, will make a difference in the delivery of housing across our country but, to build these homes, we need to provide the critical building blocks of water and energy.

Water and Energy

In the national development plan, I have committed to providing €12.2 billion in capital funding to expand our water and wastewater services. Following through on this commitment, in 2026, I am providing €1.4 billion to Uisce Éireann to continue to build essential capacity to support new housing developments and to increase the resilience and sustainability of water supply. This will help to further progress development of wastewater treatment plants right across the country.

I am providing €3.5 billion to ESB and EirGrid to strengthen our energy security and accelerate our transition to renewable energy. Building on this, I am allocating €1.1 billion to the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment in 2026.

2 o'clock

This includes: €558 million in carbon tax revenue for residential and community energy upgrade schemes; continued investment in the retrofit of public buildings to support the delivery of our national retrofit plan; and €209 million for the climate action and environmental leadership programme to support our climate objectives and enhance biodiversity. Within this, €82 million has been prioritised to support a just transition for the wider midlands region. Projects include decarbonising rural bus routes, support for private bus operators to transition to electric vehicles, wetland restoration and support for nature and biodiversity. Just as our investment in energy lays the foundation for a sustainable future, our approach to transport must ensure that this future is accessible to all.

Transport

Our country's progress is driven by connectivity. Modern, efficient and effective transport systems unlock the full potential of our towns, cities and communities. Today, I am announcing a €4.7 billion allocation for the Department of Transport for 2026. This includes €940 million for our public transport public service obligation to support our public transport network, connecting communities and people's access to education, work and leisure.

We will continue: the roll-out of the DART+ and BusConnects programmes in Dublin and our regional cities, including the construction of two core bus corridors in Dublin; the Cork area commuter rail phase 1 and the Enterprise fleet replacement projects; several major national road projects, including the Adare bypass, the N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramogue and the M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy; and a number of major greenway and active travel projects will be funded and developed in 2026.

We will also continue to invest in aviation and maritime connectivity and to provide of a world-class search and rescue service, through the Irish Coast Guard. Additionally, as outlined in the national development plan this year, €2 billion from the infrastructure, climate and nature fund is being allocated to progress MetroLink. Planning for this transformational project has been approved - now it is time to deliver.

BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES

As our infrastructure brings us closer together as a country, our public services bind us as a society. The strength of our public services and what we choose to prioritise is a statement about what we value as a people. Ireland has a social welfare system that protects the most vulnerable, an education system that consistently delivers talent and a health service that contributes significantly to improved health outcomes for many people. This progress has been delivered through consistent investment and targeted decision-making across many years and has raised the standards and expectations for what can be delivered. While it is important to acknowledge what works well, we must continue to focus on improving our systems of social support.

Social Protection

The Government cares about our people and has designed a progressive budget that delivers permanent and targeted social welfare measures that will shield the most vulnerable against cost-of-living rises. I am pleased to be able to provide for a Christmas bonus for 1.5 million recipients of long-term social welfare schemes this year. This will be paid at a rate of 100% of the normal weekly payment and will provide much-needed support to families over the seasonal period. Next year, I am allocating €28.9 billion to the Department of Social Protection, an increase of over €2 billion. This allocation allows me to provide an increase of €10 per week for a person receiving a weekly social protection payment. This will benefit 1.5 million recipients, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers, jobseekers and lone parents.

To support people with disabilities and carers, I am increasing the carer's allowance income disregard to €1,000 for a single person and €2,000 for a couple. I am increasing the rate of domiciliary care allowance by €20 to €380 per month.

In the programme for Government, we have committed to lift more children out of poverty. Guided by a new child poverty target of no more than 3% of children living in consistent poverty by 2030, a multi-year programme of supports begins today. I am happy to announce a €300 million package of supports for children and families. As part of this, I am increasing the weekly rates of the child support payment by €8 for children under 12 and by €16 for children over 12, the largest ever increase in this rate.

The Taoiseach: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jack Chambers: This will bring the weekly payment to €58 for children under 12 and €78 for children over 12. I am also increasing the working family payment income thresholds by €60 per week for all families. I am extending the back-to-school clothing and footwear payment to two- and three-year-olds.

To support those at risk of energy poverty, I am increasing the weekly fuel allowance rate by €5 to €38. Following the recommendations of the national energy affordability task force, I am also extending fuel allowance eligibility to all households in receipt of the working family payment. This will help protect around 50,000 families from energy poverty.

Alongside these new measures, the 2026 allocation for the Department will provide for: an additional 30,000 recipients on pensions, illness, disability and carers schemes; the full-year cost of jobseeker's pay-related benefit, introduced earlier this year; and continued support for over 50,000 beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine, including lone parents, pensioners and other vulnerable cohorts.

In addition to this substantial social welfare package, the State will also deliver one of the most significant reforms in our history through the introduction of pension auto-enrolment from 1 January 2026. My Future Fund is designed to support workers who are not currently part of any pension plan. Over time, it is expected to benefit around 750,000 people, securing a higher income in retirement for workers. These measures ensure that we improve the lives of our people through sustained investment and better public services.

Health

One of the most essential services provided by the State is our public health system, which safeguards the well-being of individuals, families and communities across the country. Next year will see a total funding package of €27.4 billion going to the Department of Health. This record level of investment will deliver: an increase in acute hospital capacity of at least 220 beds and the expansion of diagnostic services; at least 280 community beds, continued investment in the community nursing units refurbishment programme and reductions in community waiting lists; an additional 1.7 million home support hours; 500 more nursing home places; increased staffing and expansion of mental health services, including suicide prevention, increased access to child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, and Traveller mental health initiatives; and enhanced community and primary care services, including the roll-out of the new pharmacy contract. The value of this record level of investment needs to be fully realised, with a focus on productivity, efficiency and better financial governance. These changes will create the basis to establish a more multi-annual structure of funding our health system.

Accordingly, this year's significant funding allocation will be accompanied by a programme of progressive reform in our health system. These reforms include: the ongoing decentralisation of service provision through the new regional health areas; rostering reform, which will see the extension of health services to evenings and weekends and a reduction in dependency on agency staffing; financial management reform which will allow for improved reporting, better use of procurement and increased expenditure control; and investment in digital health, including the HSE health app, the national shared care record and virtual wards.

Disability

Another area of investment relating to health is disability. The programme for Government contains a commitment to advancing the rights and improving the lives of people with disabilities. To progress these priorities, I am allocating €3.8 billion to the Department of Children, Disability and Equality for disability services in 2026. This includes funding for community-based disability services to ensure people with disabilities receive the right support, at the right time, in the right place. It will provide permanent and predictable funding, and deliver tangible impacts for people with disabilities. Over 9,000 people will receive the residential care they need, including 250 new placements next year. Some 1,400 young people finishing school will be supported with day service places, along with 50 additional places for older adults. Families waiting for assessments will see progress, with around 6,500 private assessments funded to reduce delays. More than 150,000 hours of home support and personal assistance will help people to live independently in their own homes. Some 10,000 overnight and 15,000 day respite sessions will be provided.

To drive reform, a dedicated unit has been established in the Department to lead a review of Ireland's disability service model. This unit will work hand in hand with people with disabilities, their families, and representative organisations to shape a long-term vision for services to 2030.

Childcare

Just as we strengthen support for people with disabilities, we are equally committed to delivering systems that support and protect our young people. To make progress in this area, I am increasing funding for early years by €125 million in 2026, bringing total investment in early learning and childcare to €1.5 billion. This will fund: the national childcare scheme with more than 285,000 children set to benefit from the scheme in 2026, an increase of approximately 35,000 children; universal early childhood care and education, ECCE, benefiting over 105,000 children in 2026; the access and inclusion model for an increasing cohort of children with a disability to access and meaningfully participate in formal childcare; a 10% increase in the capitation rate for AIM level 7; and year 4 of core funding, with enhancements in year 5 of the scheme to improve pay for educators and school-age childcare practitioners with the implementation of new employment regulation orders. The building blocks infrastructure programme will fund extensions of existing community centres and schools to deliver approximately 2,300 additional childcare places.

Investment in our child welfare services is also a key priority for this Government. This year, €1.3 billion is being provided to Tusla to provide for foster care, family support services and additional residential care placements.

Education

Ireland has one of the strongest education systems in the world, with some of the highest-ranking PISA scores for literacy. The programme for Government sets out concrete commitments to support our young people. To begin delivery on this, the Department of Education and Youth will receive a total of €13.1 billion in 2026. This allocation will provide for 1,717 additional SNAs for students with special educational needs in 2026 - the highest number of SNAs we have ever had in our education system, at almost 24,900; along with an increase of 1,042 teacher posts, including 860 additional teachers working across various special educational needs settings, including in mainstream, special classes and special schools;

and continued investment in the school transport scheme bringing 170,000 students to and from school. Additional funding is now being provided to support the implementation of DEIS plus and a new DEIS plan, supporting children at risk of educational disadvantage with targeted measure. The planned roll-out of the education therapy service will commence in special schools providing access to essential therapy services. Additional funding for young people through youth services is being provided, with an increased focus on capital investment.

I am also announcing an increase in the standard capitation rates paid to all schools. This will include, on a per pupil basis, €50 for primary and special schools, from €224 to €274, and €20 for post-primary schools, from €386 to €406.

In addition to this, the Department's €1.6 billion capital allocation for 2026 will progress the delivery of over 300 school building projects with the majority of these expected to be completed in 2026 and 2027. Within this, there will be a strong focus on delivery of additional capacity for approximately 2,800 places for special classes and special schools from the first tranche of projects under the climate action works scheme. It is important to remember that learning does not end with childhood - it can be a lifelong journey for us all.

Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science continues to foster adult learning, and the development of the skills and needs to support our workforce and enterprise sector. In 2026, the Department will receive an allocation of almost €5 billion. Some €4.1 billion will allow for: increased delivery of apprenticeships to support key infrastructure projects for the economy; the provision of 1,110 new places in key health and social care professions to meet the workforce needs of the health, disability and education sectors; and a permanent reduction of €500 in the student contribution fee-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: That is a €500 increase.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: It is an increase.

Deputy Jack Chambers: -----to support students facing rising living expenses-----

(Interruptions)

The Taoiseach: Keep going.

Deputy Jack Chambers: -----and an €810 million capital allocation will fund key infrastructure projects, including the following: the recently established Taighde Éireann will be supported to drive excellence in research, attract international research talent and promote knowledge transfer; student accommodation projects at Maynooth University and University College Dublin; development and operation of 11 technological university facilities covering 70,000 sq. m and supporting STEM and related disciplines; two new veterinary medicine colleges to almost double the number of veterinary graduates; and the progression of centres of excellence for retrofit skills, including near-zero energy buildings and the national demonstration park for modern methods of construction under Housing for All.

By nurturing talent, we can strengthen our nation's competitiveness on the global stage, ensuring that a thriving enterprise sector is at the heart of our economic resilience.

ENTERPRISE AND DIGITALISATION

A Cheann Comhairle, this Government is committed to supporting our businesses. I am allocating €1.3 billion to the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment in 2026. This will fund: Enterprise Ireland to strengthen its capacity to support Irish businesses in scaling innovation, accessing global markets and creating high-quality, sustainable jobs; the IDA to continue to attract world class foreign direct investment to our shores; the promotion of regional enterprise development through the local enterprise development offices; the establishment of a national artificial intelligence office to provide a focal point for the promotion and adoption of transparent and safe AI in Ireland; and delivery of action plans on market diversification, competitiveness and productivity. Some €233 million is also being provided under the tourism services programme, reflecting Government's commitment and recognition of tourism as a vital driver of regional development and employment. This range of supports will enable us to fully capture strategic opportunities and enhance our position as a trading economy on the world stage.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

We must also cement Ireland's diplomatic presence and place on the world stage. As we witness the horror of the ongoing genocide taking place in Gaza, we must recommit our State to continue to use all our considerable diplomatic resources to support peace in our world. To support the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to do this in 2026, I am allocating €1.3 billion. This will: ensure that Ireland continues to expand our global footprint, with the number of missions abroad reaching 107 next year; boost our official development aid by €30 million in 2026; and support the implementation of Government's action plan on market diversification.

Provision has been made in the overall budget ceiling for the requirements of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Specific funding allocations on this will be made available in due course.

As we enhance our role internationally, it is also important to consider our largest indigenous export sector, the agrifood sector.

Agriculture, Food and the Marine

At the heart of towns and villages across Ireland, agriculture and food production is a cornerstone of our economy. To continue to support this vital sector, I am allocating €2.3 billion to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. A sum of €85 million in additional funding will more than double the allocation for bovine TB eradication, enabling the roll-out of the bovine TB action plan and reducing the risk of outbreaks. Funding for the ACRES scheme will increase by €20 million, to reach €280 million in 2026, continuing to support over 53,000 farmers. Some €20 million will allow the continuation of the national sheep welfare scheme, which assists over 17,000 farmers; and €35 million will be provided to the World Food Programme, to support people affected by emergencies, conflict and climate change internationally.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Where is the suckler scheme you promised?

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Government is committed to continuing to support our fishing communities and aquaculture sector. A total of €7.4 million in increased funding is being provided to Bord Iascaigh Mhara programmes, to support and enable a sustainable Irish seafood sector.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: What about tillage?

Deputy Jack Chambers: Another area where Ireland thrives in the global arena is in culture and sport.

Culture, Communications and Sport

For a small country, Ireland offers an extraordinary wealth of talent and entertainment. Our artists, writers and athletes are now leading the way on the world stage, while our media keep us connected to each other and to global stories as they unfold. To build on the progress we have made, the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport will receive an allocation of €1.5 billion in 2026. This provides for a €10.7 million increase in current expenditure for Sport Ireland, €3 million of which will support the establishment of League of Ireland football academies.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jack Chambers: Ireland has a proud footballing history at both domestic and international level. However, despite the enthusiasm for the game here, our youth development structures have not kept pace with those in other countries. In addition, rule changes following Brexit mean many more young players are staying in our domestic system for longer. This presents us with a responsibility, but also an enormous opportunity, to nurture our brightest young talents here at home and provide them with the best environment to fulfil their potential. The investment I am announcing here today is the start of a multi-annual commitment from this Government to focus on grassroots and build a new era for football in our country. I am also allocating an additional €1.6 million to support intercounty Gaelic games players-----

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jack Chambers: -----and funding to the Irish Rugby Football Union to strengthen high-performance pathways for women in rugby.

The success and achievements of our sporting heroes inspire us all and bring that collective ambition to be better. When our sports men and women succeed, our nation rises.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Just not in the presidential election.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The same can be said of our artists. Throughout our history, our arts community and the world-class talent it boasts has ensured Ireland has always been a home of creativity.

In recognition of the essential role of the arts and artists in our society, the previous Government introduced a pilot basic income for the arts scheme and this Government is now committing to deliver a successor scheme to begin next year. In addition to this, I am allocating €84.9 million for arts and culture in 2026 to provide for increased funding for major projects, such as the Crawford Art Gallery. I am also allocating €433 million to support the completion of the national broadband plan, while €5 million in additional funding will strengthen the post office network to enhance its role at the very heart of rural and community life.

The 2026 allocation of €357 million to broadcasting will include provision for: €65.4 milliún do TG4, lena n-áirítear méadú €5.4 milliún chun ábhair Ghaeilge ar ardchaighdeán, cláir do pháistí agus seirbhísí nuachta níos leithne a chinntiú, that is, €65.4 million for TG4, including a €5.4 million increase to ensure high-quality Irish language content, children's programming and expanded news services; and support for the continued delivery of the reform and transformation agenda in RTÉ. Celebrating our culture means celebrating the people living in the towns, villages and communities right across our island.

Shared Island, Rural & Community Development & the Gaeltacht

This Government is committed to supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland where people can live, work and connect. We will continue to support the shared island initiative, doubling resources by a further €1 billion out to 2035. In 2026, this will see: the major Narrow Water Bridge and Ulster Canal restoration projects forging ahead; a new Dublin-Derry air link commencing, enabling regular air travel between the two cities; and programmes to develop the bioeconomy, support green capital investment by firms, grow tourism across our Border regions, and enable world-leading research collaborations. This important work will allow us to continue to develop consensus around a shared future on our island.

This Government is committed to supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland where people can live and connect. Today, I am allocating €611 million to the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. This funding will support a range of targeted initiatives. I am allocating €192 million to rural development and regional affairs in 2026. This includes an increase of €5 million for rural supports and the rural regeneration and development fund. An increase in the current allocation of €9 million for community development supports brings the total allocation in 2026 to €260 million. This includes: €4 million in increased funding for the community services programme, bringing total funding to over €59 million; €3 million in additional capital funding for the community centre investment fund to support refurbishment grants for community centres; and €3.8 million in increased funding for the PEACEPLUS programme to support the drawdown of committed cross-Border projects in 2026.

Tá sé ríthábhachtach go ndéanfaimis na réigiúin Ghaeltachta a fhorbairt agus a chosaint, lena chinntiú go mbeidh na moil teanga agus chultúir seo ábalta fás agus forbairt. Táim ag leithdháileadh €159 milliún don Ghaeltacht agus do na hoileáin. Is méadú €36 milliún é sin le haghaidh 2026. San áireamh sa mhéadú sin beidh: €11.5 milliún de mhaoiniú caipitil do

bhonneagar na n-oileán, lena n-áirítear tús a chur leis an obair fheabhsúcháin ar an gcé ar Inis Oírr; €12 milliún de mhaoiniú caipitil do shaoráidí Gaeilge agus cultúir; agus €3.5 milliún de mhaoiniú caipitil méadaithe do scéimeanna tacaíochta Gaeltachta agus Gaeilge. Strong communities thrive when people feel safe, protected and supported.

SECURITY AND SAFETY

Justice

A Cheann Comhairle, everyone who lives in this country should feel safe in his or her home and community. With this in mind, I am announcing €6.17 billion for the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. This will fund a range of measures, including: the recruitment of up to 1,000 trainee gardaí in 2026, an additional 200 civilian staff, further intakes into the Garda Reserve and €19 million to increase the budget for Garda overtime; an additional €39 million for the Irish Prison Service to respond to demand trends; an increase of €11 million for the Courts Service; over €6.7 million of additional funding for the Irish Probation Service and additional funding to complete the roll-out of local community safety partnerships; €11.5 million of additional funding to provide for domestic and gender-based violence initiatives in 2026; and a further €7.3 million will continue significant progress in youth justice interventions. Further investment will support international protection processing to increase capacity as well as providing for costs associated with international protection and temporary protection accommodation.

In the area of reform, the Courts Service will continue its modernisation programme, implementing and rolling out eProbate and a range of other measures to significantly reduce processing timelines and improve the service to the public. Targeted investment through the Probation Service and youth justice schemes will help to divert young people away from crime, tackle recidivism and reduce the need for detention, where appropriate. In addition, work will continue to free up Garda members to spend less time on administration and more time on the front line and in our communities, in addition to a focus on developing the Garda Reserve.

Defence

Ireland is committed to safeguarding our national security while contributing to international peace and stability. To support these goals, I am announcing €1.49 billion in funding for the Department of Defence for 2026. This represents an 11% increase and will provide for: a net increase of 400 Defence Forces members; the creation of 50 new civilian posts next year; the recruitment of an additional 70 civil servants to work in critically important areas, such as cybersecurity; and a range of non-pay measures, including a new Defence Forces uniform, equipment and maintenance projects, enhanced recruitment advertising, additional funding to progress maritime security, digital transformation, and training and healthcare supports for the Defence Forces. This investment will also enable the progression of ongoing reforms arising from the Commission on the Defence Forces and the independent review group's recommendations.

I am also funding a range of infrastructure projects in defence in 2026, including: progression of the military radar programme; procurement of a modern software-defined radio system; roll-out of a new general service body armour system for the Defence Forces; the ongoing upgrade of armoured personnel carriers; and further modernisation and renovation of military installations throughout the country.

Conclusion

A Cheann Comhairle, the success of our State and its people over the last 100 years can be seen in our ability to adapt and thrive. For all the challenges we have faced, we have persevered; we have always found a way. Time and time again, we have turned uncertainty into opportunity, challenge into success. Budget 2026 is our country's collective step forward towards a fairer, better and more resilient future. We know what our challenges are, and we must now grasp the opportunity to overcome them. We must build the foundation for our future: homes, communities and a country connected by a clear vision of a bigger and brighter future for ourselves and for our children. Is é seo an bóthar ceart dár dtír agus dár mhuintir. This is the right path for our country and our people.

I commend this budget to the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: I now call from the Opposition Sinn Féin's Minister for-----

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Not yet, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Pearse Doherty.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Before I begin my response to the budget, I want to take this moment to remember all those who lost their lives in the Creeslough tragedy three years ago today, very close to this time. Three years on, that tragedy has still left many scars and pains, and the families are still searching for answers. The Minister for justice has refused to meet the families until the end of the criminal investigation.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy-----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I think that is the wrong decision, and I ask him to reflect on that decision, particularly this day.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: An teachtaireacht mhór anseo atá ag an Aire do na ghnáthdhaoine ná go bhfuil siad tréigthe agus fágtha leo féin. Budget atá anseo atá scríofa ag Fine Gael. Tréigeann sé oibrithe agus teaghlaigh chun aire a thabhairt dóibh siúd atá ar bharr an dréimire. Cuidiú ar bith do chostais maireachtála, gníomh ar bith chun an sáinn a stopadh nó faoiseamh ar bith ar cháin. Is dréachtphean é chun leanúint go deo le géarchéim tithíochta agus sláinte agus geallúintí toghcháin scriosta agus caite sa bhosca bruscair. An chéad cinneadh agus an chéad impleacht a bhéas ag an budget seo ná go rachaidh praghas petrol agus diesel in airde. Tá sé seo scannalach. Is é seo ceann de na Rialtais is measa a chonaic muid ariamh.

As generations of Irish parents remind their children, is deas do do bhéal a mholtar é - self-praise is no praise at all. That is what just echoed loudly right across these benches of the Dáil

- self-congratulatory applause and backslapping that would make you all blush with embarrassment and shame. When all the clapping is done and all the backslapping is over, when the Government benches die down and the dust settles on all of the spin we have heard and on the bluster and deluded arrogance that has come dripping from both Ministers' speeches, where are ordinary people? They are left in the cold. Harsh reality is written here in the black and white of this budget. The Government's big message in this budget, and people have heard it loud and clear, is that people are on their own. This is a budget written by Fine Gael that abandons workers and families to look after those at the top. There is no help with the cost-of-living crisis, no action to end the rip-off, no break on taxes, a blueprint for the continuation of the never-ending crises in our housing and health, and election promises torn up, one after the other, and thrown in the bin.

The first decision and impact of this budget will be that petrol and diesel will go up tonight, hitting hard-pressed families already. It is one of the worst Government decisions we have had. I am shocked at what is in this budget. I was asked earlier by somebody in the media what I thought. I said that I did not believe it, that there would be something the Government would pull out of the hat, and there was no way it would abandon workers in the way that was suggested but, by God, it did that. It gave them nothing. This budget reads as a catalogue of hand-outs for those at the top. If you are a big corporate landlord, a wealthy property developer or one of the bailed-out banks, this budget is a mighty sweet package for you. However, if you are one of the hundreds of thousands of ordinary households impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, or one of the people facing the avalanche of rip-off bills and struggling to make ends meet at the end of the week, then this budget screws you over. It is empty, hollow and a dead end.

The only applause or kudos that should have been offered to members of the Government today are for the warped fiction they created in their own heads that enabled them to write this budget because it bears no connection whatsoever with what is actually going on out there in the real world. It has no connection with what is happening in the everyday lives of working people throughout Ireland. I have to hand it to you, lads. In fairness, bravo to them. Only Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil could look at a cost-of-living crisis staring everybody in the face, with households hanging on by their fingernails, and say to themselves, "You know what is needed here? Big tax breaks for our wealthy pals and more help to feather the nests of the privileged few at the expense of the many." Well done. Only you guys, the parties that have been messing things up for ordinary people for over a century, could have come up with that one.

This should have been a cost-of-living budget. What was needed and what people were demanding was a budget that would make life affordable. The dogs in the street could tell you that. It is far and away the biggest issue impacting people right across the State. Households are being hit by out-of-control prices right across the board. Costs keep rising. They go up and up, the bills keep on coming and working families, and parents who work hard all week, are coming under severe pressure to take care of the basics, including to put food on the table, to keep the heating and lights on, to put clothes on their children's backs and to keep a car on the road. Yet, you lads have the brass neck to waltz in here, puff out your chests, smile at each other and backslap and applaud each other when there is no measure in this budget to help ordinary workers stay afloat under the wave of rising costs, where people cannot catch their breath without being hit by another price hike.

How out of touch does the Government need to get? Was there nobody on the backbenches? We have heard a lot about the backbenchers and parties not listening to them. Was there nobody on the backbenches who told these lads that there is a cost-of-living crisis out there and people needed to be looked after? The big question today is what has happened. During the general election, Government parties told everybody that the cost of living was the number one issue and would be dealt with by those parties. Simon Harris went everywhere. Everywhere a mic or camera could be found, he said the cost-of-living issue was his number priority and if he got elected, he would deal with that. The Government delivered nothing for them in this budget. It screwed workers over royally in this budget. It will not be lost on anybody that in last year's budget, just ahead of the election, there was no problem about providing a cost-of-living package. It is now clear that was just a sweetener, bribing people with their own money for votes. What the Government has got is what it wanted. What we have is a situation where things are worse, where more people are feeling under pressure, more people cannot pay their bills, prices continue to rise and the Government decides that a cost-of-living package is not necessary.

What does the Government say to the renter who is already forking out €2,000 a month and knows that more crippling hikes are on the way because it refuses to introduce a rent increase ban? The Minister stated it is providing a renter's tax relief, but he knows and I know that providing a renter's tax credit without stopping rent increases means that money does not go into the tenant's pocket; it goes into the landlord's back pocket. That is the reality of it. What does the Government say to the stressed-out couple, when Paschal Donohoe and Simon Harris promised a plan to deliver €200 a month in childcare within the first 100 days of Government? What does it say to the motorist who is being ripped off by greedy insurance companies that are jacking up prices and premiums non-stop? There is nothing in this budget to help them. Indeed, they will be hit worse by pushing up the price of petrol and diesel. What does it say to the people who are fleeced week in, week out in their food shopping? If you were to read this budget, you would swear the Government believes that is not happening. It has very little to say to them because it has left them high and dry.

The Government is not stopping there because it is kicking people when they are already down. It has hit people again and again. Today, it is delivering a huge volume of tax cuts - no doubt about it - but ordinary workers get nothing. Zero, zilch, not a cent. The squeezed middle are not getting anything. Who is getting it? There are tax cuts in this budget. Who is getting them? If you are one of the persons, for example, on the SARP, then Paschal Donohoe has made sure there is €60 million in taxpayers' money to help you. What do they get? People at home will not even believe this. They get a tax cut of over €100,000. This is for people who have to be earning over €125,000 and up to €1 million. Those are the priorities of this Government but the families I talk to in my constituency, who are out there working, earning €30,000, €40,000 or €50,000, get nothing in this budget in terms of tax breaks. Others get tax breaks as well. Developers and landlords will get tax breaks and, of course, the sweetheart deals for the banks remain.

You could not make this up if you tried. At a time when households are watching every single euro and need support from the Government, it sticks its hand in their pocket to pickpocket them for the money to fatten the coffers of the wealthy. That says it all about this Government's priorities. It says it all about what we get after nearly 15 years of Fine Gael in power. Is it any wonder that one in five children now lives in poverty in this State? Is it any wonder that more

than 5,000 children are homeless under Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael? You only have to look at the Government's limp response in relation to the big energy rip-off. A record number of households, 300,000, cannot pay their electricity. Nearly 200,000 cannot pay their gas bills and, starting tomorrow, they will see double-digit electricity price rises but no energy credits in this budget. The Ministers walked in here today and told those households the Government is cancelling the energy credits they relied on for the past number of years. That is shameful even for Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

The Government has presented a budget as if it is all rosy in the garden out there and the cost-of-living crisis has gone away. It has not. We know that prices are going up and up. In this budget, families have been left hammered. It leaves people in no doubt whose side Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are on. Let me be clear: energy credits were never the full answer. They were supposed to buy this Government time to get energy costs down for households but it is time it has squandered. It has refused to take on the big energy companies, which are making bumper profits out of people's hardship. They squeeze and gouge their customers but the Government sits there and does nothing. These companies know they have nothing at all to fear from this Government, so they have free rein to keep jacking up prices, and to keep squeezing and gouging, because Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil will do nothing about it. As we now enter into the winter, when households have to put on their heating for longer and their lights for even longer, people will now be fleeced when they do not have energy credits to shield them. That is on both of the Ministers. That is on the Cabinet that signed off on this budget. There is no doubt about it, but there will be more families this winter who cannot pay their electricity and gas bills as a direct consequence of the decision the Ministers have taken here today.

It is not just energy companies that are gouging people. The Government is turning a blind eye to price gouging right across the board. Insurance companies, banks and large supermarkets all make obscene profits off the backs of ordinary workers. By any measure, this Government has failed to get a grip on the cost of living and the rip-off rolls on. Prices are still out of control and the Government is nowhere to be seen. Insurance companies have made the point many times that they are making profits that are two or three times what they make anywhere else, yet the Government allows them to do it. Bailed out banks are making billions - not millions, billions - of euro of profit but pay no tax. That is acceptable under the Minister for Finance's plans. There is no oversight whatsoever of supermarket pricing and profits.

Workers and families are looking on today and will be asking how we can have a surplus this year of more than €10 billion and next year of more than €5 billion and there is not any real help for them in this budget. The answer is clear - Fine Gael, with a typical nod from Fianna Fáil, is cheating them at every turn. The sly, sleeven way of doing business is written all over this budget, presented on every page. For one thing, the Government takes the students of Ireland for fools. That is what it is doing here.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: That is right.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Only in this Government's twisted world could it present a hike in student fees as a cut. The Government is literally trying to convince people that up is down. Whatever way the Minister tries to muddy the water with this, students, parents and others understand it is costing €500 more in fees this year than last year.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Does the Minister think the students of Ireland cannot do the maths?

Deputy Michael Murphy: How much are student fees in Northern Ireland?

Deputy James Lawless: They are €6,000.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: They know Fine Gael are screwing them over and over and making out that it is trying to do them a favour. That is the reality of it. The Minister should come off the stage. The Tánaiste should come off the stage.

The Tánaiste: The Deputy's party should reduce them in the North.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: The Minister is jacking up student fees. Be a man, own it, be proud of it, declare it and stop trying to pull the con job he tried earlier on.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Tánaiste: The Deputy's party should reduce them in the North.

Deputy John Cummins: They are €5,000 in the North.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Sinn Féin has called on the Government to give working people the break they deserve. We called on it in this budget to scrap the USC on the first €40,000 that people earn. That is the fair way to cut taxes. That would put nearly €750 into workers' pockets this budget. We told the Government to scrap carbon tax increases but it plans to put them up tonight and for the next number of years, all with the support of Michael Healy-Rae and Danny Healy-Rae, who could not stop talking about it when they were on this side of the House.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: It is reckless to drive up the cost of living at a time when so many people are just hanging on. It is reckless to drive more people into energy poverty but that is exactly what this budget will do. We called on the Government to increase pensions and core social welfare payments by €15 to reflect the reality of prices that were rising and putting serious pressure on those families. We asked the Government to deliver a €20 increase for disability payments to recognise the additional cost of living with a disability. In the budget today, the Government has short-changed pensioners and those on social welfare. The rate increase of €10 does not even cover the cost of food inflation. That is the reality of it.

We called on the Government to enhance and increase the renter's tax credit. Indeed, the Government committed to increasing the renter's tax credit, but it is not there. A ban on rent increases is nowhere to be seen. We saw skyrocketing rents. Instead of banning rent increases, the Government is letting landlords jack up rent right across the board. Instead of increasing the renter's tax relief, it chose to increase tax relief for landlords. Next year, landlords are getting tax relief. They get €1,000 from Paschal Donohoe because landlords are the priority and renters, even though the Government committed to an increase, continue to get the same. They do not even get it because the landlord will pocket it as their rents go up. The Minister's own officials warned him that the landlord tax relief was one of the worst ideas there was. A former ESRI economist called it the stupidest tax relief of recent times. Every single year, including next year, the Government is increasing it. The world keeps spinning but one can always count on Fine Gael to come up trumps for the golden circle and the vested interests.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: It is ordinary people who pay the price over and over again. It is like the Government does not believe workers and families are deserving of an affordable life. In every budget, it produces - in fairness to the Government - a master class in delivering for the few at the expense of the many. This budget is no different at all. The Government has no appetite for delivering a better deal for working people. It is too hard for it, too much effort and too much work to change direction to put ordinary people first once and for all. None of that was a problem when it came to striking the grubby deal with Michael Lowry and his band of merry followers. No effort was spared on that score. No bridge was too far to cross. What we have today is the budget of that grubby deal, a budget that cheats and screws over ordinary people. That is exactly what it is.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: The people of Ireland have had enough of all of that. They deserve so much better than being cheated year after year in every empty budget the Government has served up. We have a situation here where we have spending overruns in the billions. When one looks at the budget the Government produces, one wonders what the point is. Last year, the overruns were €4.6 billion or thereabouts.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy wanted us to spend more.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: We have overruns over and over again. The fact the contingency fund of €1 billion is so large is an acknowledgement that the two Ministers have put up the white flag and said it is now a feature of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael that overruns are out of control and we cannot curtail them, so let us put a wee pot of €1 billion there to deal with these overruns in the future.

Deputy Helen McEntee: We are planning for the future.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: During the year, spending runs out of control and the Government acts like it is normal. There are billions more spent but no more houses built. There are overruns and overruns but no improvement in services. There is a breakdown in financial management in this State, from the hundreds of thousands of euro on bike sheds to the tens of millions spent renting empty offices to the billions of euro on the national children's hospital that still is not even open. The IPAS system, which is like the wild west, has seen the Government make a small number of individuals multimillionaires overnight, with billions of euro being spent without any checks or oversight. Huge sums of taxpayers' money are handed over to operators where there is no signed contract, proof of ownership or leases. This is mad stuff but this is now normal under Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The Government has time and again been exposed as a serial waster and nobody takes responsibility. Nobody is held to account.

That waste has real consequences, particularly when the Government deliberately underfunds other areas. For too long, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have failed the children right across this State. One in five children now lives in poverty. That is the Government's record. One in five children now lives in poverty as a result of the Government. There is a surplus of €10 billion this year and there will be one of €5 billion next year. One in five children live in poverty in this State. It is shocking the Government has allowed this to happen. That is more than 200,000 children. It is a national disgrace, and it did not happen by chance. It is happening because of the budgets the Government has introduced in this House, year after year.

We called on the Government to deliver effective measures to tackle child poverty. That means targeted and universal measures. The cost-of-living crisis has brought so many pressures on so many households. Many who never thought they would be in this situation now find themselves there because of the Government. Once again, we see no increase in child benefit rates. There is no increase to child benefits. The child benefit was higher in 2008 than it is today. Talk to any parent and he or she will say it is dearer to raise a child today than it was in 2008. However, there is nothing for child benefit. That means no relief for many families.

We need support for families and this budget should have provided it. We need to make sure that every child sees an improvement in their situation. We called on the Government to increase child benefit by €10 and provide a double payment this year, along with other targeted supports. The Government should have doubled the back to school payments. It should have extended the fuel allowance by nine weeks. That would have given people an extra €297. Instead, the Government has only increased fuel allowance by €5. That is worth just €140, less than half of what is needed.

The Government has increased core social welfare payments by €10 but as I said, that does not even keep up with food inflation. We called on the Government to increase them by €15 to reflect the reality of rising costs. What the Government should have announced was a conscious decision to deal with the issue of child poverty. However, the reality is - and we will see the statistics in a couple of years, Micheál - that the decision here is a deliberate one to continue to leave children in this State in poverty. That is the reality of it. You can shake your head all you want. You have been the architect of the fact that one in five children is in poverty in this State, Micheál. That is the reality. Above anybody else, you have been the architect of that.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael committed to cap childcare costs. Remember that one, Simon. That was the policy that you copied from Sinn Féin and you are welcome to it but we want to see it implemented. Before the election, Simon Harris said that he would produce a roadmap within the first 100 days and that it was a priority for his Government. The 100 days came and went, 200 days came and went but still no roadmap. He said earlier this year "Reducing the cost of childcare is a priority for me and I can tell you as leader of Fine Gael we will make real progress on the cost of childcare in this budget". Where is it? There is no reduction in the cost of childcare for people in this budget. Where is the progress on the €200 a month, Simon? Instead of delivering a cap of €200 a month, what you have delivered is a cap of €200 per week. That is what you have delivered, Simon.

The Tánaiste: You are reading last year's speech.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: You should be red with embarrassment instead of trying to heckle me across the Chamber.

The Tánaiste: You are out of ideas. This is our 16th budget.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Another election promise broken. You have been involved in government for about 16 years and you have made a balls of it, I agree. Just like childcare, you have copied Sinn Féin's plan to abolish the means test for carers. Again, you are welcome to that policy, but let us get it implemented. What Government has done in this budget would mean it would take it more than a decade to abolish the means test for carers in relation to the amount of money that has been set aside, and that is not acceptable to us or indeed the carers of Ireland.

Let us get to the issue of housing because the housing crisis continues to deepen. It is dragging people down with it, and it is over a year since the Housing Commission, the Government's own commission, said that we need to see a radical reset in relation to housing. What did the Government do in that year? It built fewer houses than in the previous year. You could not make it up. The Government's response to the commission was to build fewer houses than in the previous year. The Government cannot even deliver on abysmally low targets. Why has this happened? It has happened because the Government is stuck to the same old failed policies and this budget will not fix the housing crisis. For many years now, I have been of the view that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael will never fix the housing crisis-----

Deputy Thomas Gould: They do not want to.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----because soaring house prices and rip-off rents are hard-wired into Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's housing plan. It is not a bug in the system; it is a feature. Incompetence alone does not explain the housing crisis. It is not by accident that we are in this situation; it is by design. Over a decade into this housing crisis, and we have politicians in government wringing their hands, saying that they are doing all they can to solve it while the crisis gets worse. Every single year the crisis is getting worse. What are we being told now again? It is the old Fianna Fáil tune. We are being told now that we need to give more money to investors and developers and that if we just give them a little bit more, then the housing crisis

will be solved. Tax cuts are the big idea from Paschal. We are going to vote tonight, with no information really, on a quarter of a billion euro in tax cuts to developers for the sale of apartments. It is going to cost us a quarter of a billion euro next year. If the apartments are not being built at the minute, then they cannot be sold by next year, so this is dead money. This is money for apartments that are already under construction, and I am sure the developers are laughing their heads off and looking at what they are going to do with this huge bonanza they are getting for apartments that are already under construction. The idea of bringing in a quarter of a billion euro tax cut with no information and no detail and to be voted on tonight is absolutely ridiculous.

I engaged extensively on this issue a number of years ago and we were told - we had briefings from the Department and we engaged with industry - that it would be difficult to administer but, crucially, it would not move the dial on house prices and it would just get pocketed by developers. If this cut is applied to apartments that are already being built, then what is the point of this next year? There is no provision in the resolution that it only applies to apartments that are being built from tonight on - that start or commence. It seems that it is available to ones that are nearly finished now, but maybe that is the intention because we have seen the priorities of this Government over and over again.

The Government comes in here every single year and says that this is the budget that is going to fix the housing crisis, that this is a housing budget and all the rest. What happens? Every year the crisis gets worse. House prices, rents and homelessness figures increase and more and more people lose hope for the future of this State.

On health, we now have a health system where people are afraid to go into the hospital. We have loved ones who are left for hours on end on trolleys or in chairs, where places of healing are described as war zones and where a person goes through the doors of University Hospital Limerick or St. James's Hospital or many of the other hospitals, and they are expected to stay 12 or 14 hours on a chair before they are even seen, before they even can get onto a trolley or before they are discharged home. People should not be afraid to go into hospital or to bring their loved ones to hospital, but that is the reality. Despite the huge effort of our healthcare staff, that is the reality. That is why the first thing this budget should have done in health is to provide the €2 billion in capital funding to make our hospitals safe, to drive on the elective hospitals and to guarantee a second emergency department in the mid west. However, this budget again falls way short in relation to all of that.

Níl meas madaidh ag an Rialtas seo don phobal teanga nó don Ghaeltacht agus ní raibh le fada an lá. Is í an tAire Gaeltachta is measa a bhí againn riamh atá Fine Gael ag cur suas le haghaidh Uachtaránacht na tíre seo. Shíleamar uilig go mbeadh athrú intinne nuair a tháinig Aire ó Fhianna Fáil chun tosaigh, ach feicimid sa cháinaisnéis seo go bhfuil Gaeltacht arís fágtha ar leataobh.

The Taoiseach: Níor léigh an Teachta an buiséad in aon chor.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Gabh mo leithscéal?

The Taoiseach: Tá 14% níos mó sa Ghaeltacht.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: An raibh an Taoiseach ar na sráideanna nuair a tháinig na mílte daoine agus 130 eagraíocht Ghaeltachta amach le rá go bhfuil €55 milliún sa bhreis de dhíth orthu don Ghaeltacht? Tá an Rialtas ag déanamh neamhaird agus damáiste don Ghaeltacht arís agus arís eile agus sin fírinne an scéil.

This budget is going to come and go like the rest of them. Nothing I have heard here gives me hope that the crisis we face will be addressed. I fear that many people are in for a long and hard winter. When we were growing up, our parents taught us important lessons. We were told that if we showed up and worked hard, we could build and secure a good life for ourselves and our family. We were told that life would be affordable and we would have a fair chance to achieve the future we wanted. After 15 years of Fine Gael in government, that lesson, that expectation and that bedrock of life has been shattered for an entire generation. The Government has made the extortionate cost of living the new normal, crushing people's hopes and even aspirations. That is what this budget is about. It is not normal and it can never be acceptable that people who go out to work every single day are skirting inches from the poverty line. It can never be acceptable that households even two-incomes are borrowing from parents, just to pay the bills. It can never be acceptable that our young people are forced to the airports to go to Australia or Canada to seek the opportunity they should have here at home.

I have never seen election promises abandoned so quickly and so completely. In this budget, the Government made a conscious decision to prioritise the well-off, the landlords, the developers and the investors at the expense of ordinary workers. The Government has really shown its true colours. It has taken a calculated risk. It hopes that people will forget this by the time the next election comes around but I fear the people are going to remember this one because the Government has shafted them royally.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Today the Government has made it very clear that nothing will change for working people who are absolutely put to the pin of their collar trying to make ends meet. Rents will continue to rise. Childcare will still be unaffordable and unattainable for many and the income of working people will fall in real terms because the Government's tax package does nothing for ordinary workers. The Government tells us that its budget is pro-investment. However, what it actually means is that it is cutting taxes for the elites, all the while failing to deliver the public investment that our economy desperately needs.

The reality is that none of this will surprise many of us because the first actions of this Government told us exactly who it sought to represent in this new Dáil term and that was themselves.

3 o'clock

The very first actions of this Government showed it was here to feather its own nest, and that it did. The very first actions it took and the very first Bill it brought forward in this Dáil was to increase the number of super junior Ministers and the wages of Ministers of State. Clearly the cost-of-living crisis was biting on the poor Ministers of State.

This time last year, we were preparing for a general election and, my God, what a different time that was. The Government had so many promises of all the things it would do, how many houses it would build and deliver - all empty promises and all leading to very little action. Fine Gael told us that it would be giving our children the best start in life. With one in five children

in poverty and over 5,000 children in homelessness, it is an absolute disgrace not to deliver on that. The Fianna Fáil manifesto told us that it would help families cope with high prices. Instead, there is no cost-of-living package and, in fact, it is increasing their costs. Some 300,000 households are already in debt over electricity prices and the removal of energy supports will only increase that further.

Of course, this time last year we did not have the Lowry party - it was not even in existence - but I do not recall any of those Independents campaigning for increases in the carbon tax. In fact, Michael Lowry blamed the imposition of carbon tax on the insistence of the Green Party. The Government cannot blame the Green Party for that now. It is the Government that is implementing those increases now.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Let us look at what the Ministers have presented here today. This €9.4 billion budget package is a rip-off. There is nothing in this budget for working people and families. It ends energy credit supports, increases income taxes in real terms and hikes student fees. At the same time, this budget has one of the biggest tax packages in history, giving away lavish tax cuts to the richest in our society. Instead, the Government could be guaranteeing that working people and families had access to affordable housing, groceries and childcare. That would be the sign of a strong and functioning economy. It is increasing costs on workers and families while refusing to provide the supports they need and continuing to waste their tax money. From bike shelters to security huts that cost more than homes to a children's hospital, still not delivered and costing more and more with every passing month, the wastage of public money is seen across every Department. This includes the colossal sums being spent on a dysfunctional IPAS system, a system that has seen costs soar from the millions of euro to the hundreds of millions and into the billions, enriching a new crony class at the expense of local communities and the taxpayers whom the Government has kicked in the teeth with today's budget.

Housing is the biggest crisis facing all families across the State. The Government continually insists that housing is its number one priority but its actions speak far louder than words. Its first action after feathering its nest was to raise rents. In the middle of a housing emergency, that is absolutely unforgivable. At times, I really wonder if it is actually trying to make this housing crisis worse. I have been an elected representative for 11 years and I have never seen it as bad as I see it today. If that is what the Government's aim is, then it is actually succeeding, so maith sibh ar sin. Every year, this crisis gets worse under the policies and budgetary decisions that it implements. Before the general election, it was hell bent telling us that it would hit the target of 40,000 houses last year, knowing fine well from information that was given to it that this target would be missed. The Central Bank predicts that it will continue to miss housing targets for the next three years. Not only are the targets not being met, but there is no real ambition in the targets that it set and there is no increase in affordable or social housing targets today.

The Government's Housing Commission has acknowledged that only a radical strategic reset of housing policy will work, but what does this budget deliver? It delivers more of the same policy solutions that have worsened the housing crisis, a pathetic package of ineffective tax cuts and minor regulatory changes that waste millions of euro of public money. Our alternative

budget and housing strategy offer real ambition and investment to arrest the housing crisis. They detail a concrete plan for the radical reset of housing policy so desperately needed. What we needed from the Ministers today was an increase in affordable and social homes so that, finally, people could access secure, affordable accommodation. What we and renters needed was a three-year ban on rent increases so that the renter's tax credit did not continue to be inflationary.

Instead, the Government's entire housing policy is written with and for landlords and developers. It has given landlords free rein to set rent prices. It has slashed the design standards for apartments and is now cutting tax on apartments. These changes are only creating one kind of home: built-to-rent apartment blocks with flats that are smaller, darker and increasingly more expensive. These high-density, high-cost and low-quality blocks of apartments owned by international investment funds are a symptom of a broken housing system. They are the manifestation of a rudimentary understanding of economics where housing delivery is only viewed in terms of supply and demand, and housing is now a financial asset, not a home.

People having a home of their own should not be a luxury; it should be a fundamental human right. We need good-quality, secure and affordable homes that meet people's needs in terms of size, space, light, accessibility and proximity to work. We desperately need a balanced housing system, one with an adequate number of social and affordable homes alongside a private rental sector and home ownership within reach of working people. The Government should be building enough public homes to meet the need for social and affordable housing. It should be freezing rents for three years alongside increasing renters' tax relief. It should activate the small- and medium-sized builder-developer sector to deliver more quality homes for working people to buy at moderate prices. That is what a sound economy is built on.

Homelessness is at shocking levels. There are 5,000 children in homelessness and neither of the Ministers mentioned homelessness in his speech today.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: That is outrageous. How that can be done is unconscionable. The fact that the two Ministers delivered the policies of today and did not mention homelessness is beyond belief, but it is probably not beyond the belief of all those people who are in homelessness because that is what they expect. Homelessness is not an inevitability; it is the result of having a weak, broken housing system that fails to meet the basic needs and fundamental human rights of our people. It should not be seen as inevitable. It should not be something that we become desensitised to. It is not good enough that even more children will be in emergency accommodation this Christmas.

To our great shame, we have an epidemic when it comes to domestic abuse in this country. Every week in my clinics, women disclose domestic violence to me. While it is good that more women are coming forward, I am repeatedly shocked at the institutional barriers that are placed in the way of women leaving domestic abuse. There are still nine counties in this State that do not have a domestic violence refuge. The reality is that our refuges are bursting at the seams because it is nearly impossible to find an alternative safe secure home when trying to leave those shelters. That is the reality despite knowing that there is an increase in demand. We know that from Women's Aid, which has told us that there was a 12% increase in demand for

front-line services. That block in terms of housing is huge. Progress is slow and without the urgency that is essential, one in three women will continue to experience, psychological, physical and-or sexual abuse from an intimate partner. That figure just shows that this is everywhere. We all know people who have been impacted by this. We need to take a leadership role in tackling this and calling it out.

We need increased funding but we also need to make legislative changes that would make a world of a difference. There are simple changes that can be made. Many councils do not deal with women who have left abusive relationships as a category under their hardship terms. That should be a no-brainer. I have dealt with a woman who spent years on the council list in one county and when she moved to her home county as a direct result of domestic violence, her years were wiped because people cannot bring their years across county boundaries even in cases where their lives are literally on the line due to domestic violence. She had to start from the beginning and now she and her children are in emergency accommodation with no prospect of being offered a home. These are things the Government could and should change, but it has chosen not to.

Tá an Ghaeltacht fágtha arís eile in áit na leathphingine ag an Rialtas. Tá géarchéim sa Ghaeltacht. Tá easpa tithíochta inti agus buninfreastruchtúr atá i ndrochchaoi. Níl áit le ceannach, le tógáil nó ar fáil ar cíós sa Ghaeltacht. Tá ar ár ndaoine óga an Ghaeltacht a fhágáil mar nach bhfuil áit ar bith le cónaí acu. Is daoine muiníneacha iad seo atá ag iarraidh saol a chaitheamh trí mheán na Gaeilge agus a gcuid teaghlach a thógáil sa chaoi céanna, ach níl aon rud ag athrú i dtéarmaí tithíochta. Níl an toil ann. Níl na dréacht-treoirilínte pleanála don Ghaeltacht foilsithe fiú. Cé go raibh sé seo geallta roinnt uaireanta le blianta anuas, níl siad foilsithe. Caithfear iad a fhoilsiú agus a phlé.

Tá an Rialtas ag maíomh as €36 milliún sa bhreis a sholáthar do bhuiséad na Gaeltachta. Nuair a dhéantar tochailt air sin, áfach, níl ach €11 milliún breise do bheartais nua luaite ag an Rialtas, i bhfad níos lú ná an méid a theastaíonn ón phlean fáis don teanga de chuid Chonradh na Gaeilge. Is cosúil gur cur i gcéill atá sna milliúin eile. Tá an Rialtas ag déanamh athrá ar thograí caipitil a bhí geallta cheana féin. Níl ach €2.5 milliún suarach le dul i dtreo Údarás na Gaeltachta. Teastaíonn infheistíocht de €11 milliún don údarás chun dul i ngleic le cúrsaí tithíochta agus an fhadhb infreastruchtúir, chomh maith le forbairt na Gaeilge mar theanga phobail. Tá an fhadhb infreastruchtúir chomh mór sin nach bhfuil suíomhanna ar fáil leis na seirbhísí cuí a sholáthar chun tithe a thógáil. Tá bóithre ag titim as a chéile de bharr creimthe, cáblaí fós ar an dtalamh tar éis na Stoirme Éowyn agus droichid atá dainséarach de bharr easpa infheistíochta.

Chun ár dteanga a chaomhnú, caithfidh an chéad ghlúin eile a bheith in ann cónaí sa Ghaeltacht. Ciallaíonn sé sin go dteastaíonn tithíocht, ach tá cúnamh eile de dhíth freisin. Caithfear scéim labhairt na Gaeilge a thabhairt ar ais agus tá sé thar am go dtabharfar an t-airgead atá tuilte ag mná tí dóibh. Teastaíonn tithíocht, buninfreastruchtúr agus poist mhaithe sa Ghaeltacht. Is iad sin atá ag teastáil chun an Ghaeltacht a fhás agus a choinneáil bríomhar.

Today, there are 510 people lying on hospital trolleys, 84 of whom are in University Hospital Limerick, with 64 in my local hospital in Galway. I am sure many of us have been in accident and emergency departments recently and we have seen what it is like. Many of those people are lying in corridors that are bright, cramped and noisy. They are in conditions with zero privacy. I always think it would be difficult enough for people who are in the prime of their

health to sleep in such conditions but for those who are not feeling well, who are in pain and who are extremely worried about their health, it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible. People and families are tired of having to fight for things they should be entitled to, things that would make their health journey just that bit easier - for example, people struggling for years with high medical costs trying to get a medical card but being refused time and again.

While all parties have signed up to Sláintecare, it is clear from budget to budget that there is just no consensus on universal healthcare. This budget will not deliver affordable and accessible public healthcare. The reality is that families cannot wait any longer. We need better and more affordable access to medical care. That, if anything, should be a basic fundamental right. When a person becomes ill, he or she should have access to healthcare.

Unfortunately, every year, Ministers stand here and promise us more and more. They act like the penny has finally dropped, that they will change things and that it is going to be better. The reality is that the reason things do not change is because of the decisions made here today but also because sums tend not to add up. Last year the Government launched a plan for 3,000 additional hospital beds by 2031 but it has not accounted for them. It promised elective hospitals again and again but where are they being accounted for? What the Government has laid out in capital falls short and will continue to fall short.

What the Government should be telling us today is what it has decided not to deliver. Is it the elective hospital in Galway that will not make the cut this decade? While we are blessed with fantastic staff, they are working in very difficult conditions. We need to invest in those conditions. We have staff who work in the most difficult conditions in our hospitals and they need to be supported.

The Government's recruitment embargo did exactly what it said on the tin. It halted recruitment and we are still unable to catch up as a result, with recruitment figures being half of what they were before the embargo. We need to be ambitious in our targets. We must increase the number of university places, abolish graduate entry medicine fees, double the health and social care places at third level and make it far easier and more attractive for young people, our young medical professionals, who are abroad to come home, work in our health service and build a life here.

To be honest, what I was expecting today was to see a clear commitment to women with endometriosis but it seems the Government has committed nothing to endometriosis care in the budget. Let me repeat that the Government seems to have committed nothing to the women who are in pain and are suffering with endometriosis and who are without access to adequate services. There should have been a clear commitment of €20 million to develop world-class endometriosis services. The Government is treating women's healthcare as an item for export. This needs to end. We need to be serious about women's healthcare. We need to ensure women are supported from adolescence to menopause and beyond. We need to structure and tailor healthcare needs based on each individual woman and their healthcare requirements. Women should not feel forced to campaign about their endometriosis and tell their very personal stories to get the Government to invest in endometriosis care; it should be doing that anyway. The only message this budget seems to send is that they will still have to continue campaigning. This should be from a different time, not from now.

Every family has been touched by mental health difficulties and illnesses. Physical and mental health need to be treated equally. We need to treat it as the emergency that it is and move to universal access to community-based therapy, counselling and support, alongside addressing the crisis in emergency and acute services. If people want to know how much the Government cares about mental health, they will only need to see that it copied and pasted the mental health section from last year's budget and changed seven words. No one in crisis should be turned away or told to wait until the morning for access to emergency mental healthcare. Mental health is 24-7; it is not just from nine to five. Our services must reflect that reality.

The Taoiseach: It is in the budget.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: There is no clarity in this budget about what the Government will actually do to improve mental health services, both for older and younger people.

The Taoiseach: There is.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Access to services should be based on need and not where people live or their ability to pay privately. That is not the case for so many, however.

It is certainly not the case for the people who have an eating disorder and need inpatient care. We still only have three specialist public inpatient beds for adults, and they are largely based on where a person lives. Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental health illness. Sending people abroad or relying on private healthcare is not the solution we need. People need inpatient beds. All that this budget delivered was a token reference to eating disorders, nothing more than those words.

We must also provide perinatal care, a place where a mother and baby can be together in cases of post-natal psychosis. Currently, there is no dedicated mother and baby perinatal mental health unit on this island. This means that mothers, North and South, who need to be admitted for inpatient care are separated from their newborns. We need a specialist all-island unit.

There is so much talk of the economy today, although there is also talk about other things. When we talk about the economy, we need to think about what the economy is. An economy is made up of the people who live in it. The future of that economy is the children who are raised in it, and they are being failed. Childcare is an essential service, not just for families but also for the economy. Almost half of one-parent households with children live in deprivation. Access to affordable, quality childcare is one of the key factors to take children out of poverty. Parents in this State pay among the highest costs for childcare in the OECD. These high childcare costs are forcing families into poverty. They are forcing women out of the workforce or preventing them from returning to it. The Government presumably recognises this given the fact that both parties promised to deliver €10 per day childcare in the run-up to last year's general election. There has been no mention of that today, however, and the Government has squandered the opportunity to deliver it. The Government has done very little to increase capacity at a time when tens of thousands of children have no childcare place. The Government could have adopted Sinn Féin's detailed childcare plan that would cap childcare costs at €10 per day, which it seemed to think was absolutely fantastic last year, but not so much this year. Such a policy would transform the lives of thousands of families up and down the country.

Investing in childcare is good for the economy, parents and the educational outcomes of our children.

When we look at the here and now and what our economy will bring, we have to look at our young people and what kind of society we are giving them. It is outrageous, when the State is as wealthy as it is now, that three out of five young people are considering emigrating, with more than 80% of young people saying they believe they would actually have a higher standard of living abroad. Given the wealth in this State, that is outrageous. Young people deserve the opportunity to build a good, secure life in their own country. The Government has forced a generation to choose between living with their parents well into adulthood or moving abroad and leaving their families, friends - although a lot of their friends are abroad - and communities behind. This is a national disgrace.

Most young people will watch today in the hope that maybe they have been listened to and that there is something in the budget for them because the Government has seen that they are struggling and that it is not fair that they are forced to go to Australia or other countries. Can the Ministers imagine how deflating and frustrating it is for people to think they will never be able to afford their own home?

Students will look at this budget and see that it will make life harder for them by increasing the cost of higher education while continuing to rely on expensive, luxury student accommodation owned by international investment funds rather than simple, good-quality homes, which is what is needed.

So often in recent years I have heard it stated by those on the benches opposite that student fees would be scrapped. Instead, the Government has chosen to hike them by €500. We are clear that student fees must be abolished. While there is often big talk about apprenticeships by the Government, the reality is that apprentices have to wait too long to get their off-the-job training. As a result, it takes them months or even years longer to complete apprenticeships than should be the case. At the same time, their wages stagnate. Apprenticeship fees must be abolished.

Our farms are part of the fabric of rural Ireland and a critical piece of our economy. Recent developments in agriculture, particularly in the context of the EU's deal with Mercosur coming down the line and a 22% cut to the CAP budget, will have a negative effect on future farm incomes. One of the biggest challenges for Irish farming is generational renewal. The Government had an opportunity to show the next generation of farmers that there is a future in Irish agriculture by funding a generational renewal scheme, but it failed to do that. It has not done enough to support farmers, particularly smaller farmers and those with family farms, who have faced a crisis regarding the spread of tuberculosis. The Government should investigate anti-competitive practices to ensure fair and stable prices for farmers, increase suckler and sheep improvement scheme payments and invest in an accelerated testing and vaccination programme to tackle TB, which is at its highest level since the 1990s.

Last weekend, we had Storm Amy. When you come from the west of Ireland, a storm means something serious. We all experienced Storm Éowyn and its aftermath. One thing we know for certain is that the climate crisis is worsening and that the frequency of climate-induced natural disasters is increasing. Storm Éowyn brought the west of Ireland to a halt. That happened after decades of neglect on the part of successive Governments. That results of that

neglect came home to roost, with basic infrastructure not fit for purpose. It is certainly not fit for the changing weather. To be clear, there are still cables on the ground as a result of Storm Éowyn and Storm Darragh. Last weekend, we saw a strong weather event in the form of Storm Amy. There is little doubt we will see more such storms over the coming months. Instead of assisting the communities that have been affected, the Government has chosen to place the burden of bearing the cost of those storms directly on the people.

In this budget, the Government had the opportunity to stand up to the big polluters. It could have introduced a pollution tax on private jets and ended our reliance on fossil fuels by investing in strong public renewable energy infrastructure. Instead, it has pushed the cost of climate measures onto workers and families through regressive and divisive policies such as carbon taxation. The carbon taxes outlined in the budget are inherently unjust. They increase the cost of essential travel without providing any alternative vital public transport infrastructure. They represent an unjust, failed and technocratic approach to environmental policy and make existing social and economic inequalities worse.

Climate and environmental policies should benefit all of society. Realistically, we will only achieve our climate goals if all working people and families are part of the just transition. Instead, the Government - surprisingly backed by Independents from rural areas - has made it more expensive for people in rural areas to travel to work, to make essential appointments and simply to live.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: As the Government well knows, its exclusive retrofit scheme is out of the reach of many, particularly people who are living in energy poverty and all those with homes that were seriously damaged during Storm Éowyn and that remain extremely cold as a result. The Government should replace the current scheme with a tiered and targeted vision that would allow people on middle and low incomes to retrofit their homes and reduce their energy bills.

Since I have been elected to this House, one of the big things that happens every winter is that we discuss the horrific situation of how energy poverty is impacting on our pensioners. I previously related the story of a man who came to me and explained that he was sleeping in his kitchen because it was the only room in the house he could afford to heat. Rightly, there is outrage when that story is told. What changes? Nothing actually changes, and I am sure we will hear similar stories again. Outrage without implementing anything to change things is faux outrage. We can all see through it.

One of the favoured phrases that I hear every week at Leaders' Questions, particularly from An Taoiseach, is that we do not have ownership of compassion. No, we do not. However, the Government has the power to change things and it chooses not to.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Households continue to subsidise data centres' electricity bills through the PSO levy. The burden is due to get bigger because the Government refuses to change its unfair approach. This budget is a missed opportunity to end our over-reliance on

fossil fuels. Renewable sources such as offshore wind provide cheaper, more reliable and sustainable energy that will protect us in a volatile global market, but this needs to be done collaboratively with local communities and to the benefit of those communities. The idea there is no knock-on impact on a local area makes no sense. Like many of the Government's policies, this has become divisive. I sometimes begin to think that this may be on purpose.

In just over two weeks' time, we will elect a new Uachtarán na hÉireann, a President of Ireland. There are now just two continuing candidates on the ballot paper. Thousands of Irish citizens will not be able to vote because they live in the Six Counties. How there has been no attempt on the part of the Government to right this wrong in time for this election is beyond me. That those who are Irish citizens and who live in Ireland are unable to vote in an election for Irish President is simply wrong. Bunreacht na hÉireann makes it clear that unity is the will of the nation, yet the Government refuses to plan, prepare or advocate for it.

The Good Friday Agreement enshrines the right to national self-determination, placing the democratic future of the island in the hands of the people. By refusing to engage in the discussion, the Government is undermining the democratic promise of the agreement and failing to progress the will of the nation. Building a new and united Ireland is the most important task for a generation. We should not under any circumstances allow our society to sleepwalk into referendums we are not fully prepared for. We are clear that citizens' assemblies on a united Ireland must be established immediately.

Just as the Government seems blind to the realities of today, it is also blind to the opportunities of our future. The prospect that all of us can collaboratively build a new Ireland should excite those in government. It should get them out of bed in the morning and make them think "What can we achieve?" Doing as I describe can benefit all the people of Ireland, our society and our economy. All these are positive things, but those in government seem to have blinkers on. Today's budget was an opportunity to build on that and to tackle head-on the issues of the day in order that this State can fully realise its potential.

The housing crisis can be solved and we can ensure a place to live for all the children of this nation. We can ensure that our people can access healthcare when and where they need it. Children do not have to continue to live in poverty. These are all things that can and should be tackled, but, unfortunately, a *Airí*, I am beginning to realise it is not that you are unable to tackle these crises, it is that you are unwilling to.

Deputy Ged Nash: I will be sharing time with my colleague Deputy Sherlock. The story of Ireland over the past decade has been a story of missed opportunities. There was a catastrophic failure to build the homes we need when we could and should have done. The Government is so crippled by caution and conservatism that we are only now, a decade into a unprecedented spell of uninterrupted growth, facing up to the chronic infrastructure deficits in transport, health, education and energy that put our economic model and our society at risk. I have said it before and I will say again: Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael combined are the single biggest threat to Ireland's economy, not Donald Trump and his tariffs. Together, they have delivered a budget of broken promises for workers and dreams that have come true for developers.

Ireland in 2025 is a country of contradictions - rich and poor, all at the same time. We have: record corporation tax takes, but also record numbers of children without homes; record numbers of people in work, with one in five of us on low pay; budget surpluses that are the

envy of Europe, with poor public services and infrastructure that belies our status as a rich country; growing wealth at the top alongside shameful levels of child poverty; high food prices that just keep climbing; the second highest energy costs in the European Union; a housing supply and affordability crisis; rising rents; and regulation that fails citizens. All of this has not happened by accident. It is the logical outcome of policies pursued by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil for a decade. It is a Government that has wasted a boom and is happy to throw money at problems that instead require novel thinking, imagination, courage and real reform.

There is a faint whiff of 2008 around the place. The Government can be fiscally responsible and investment focused, too, but Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil let their old ideology get in the way. Recent history shows us that the Government cannot keep cutting taxes and ramp up spending at the same time and expect a good outcome for our country. I am one of three survivors still in this House from the Government that marshalled Ireland back to economic growth. Another is the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, and my colleague, Deputy Kelly. The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, should know the risks. Nobody should want to be there again. We are duty bound to remind this Government.

We have to ponder some facts. Public spending has gone up by over half since 2019, with Covid-19 revealing dangerous gaps in our health service and welfare and employment model. In recent years, we have had dishonest budgets that were works of pure fiction, with Ministers trotting in here year after year seeking Dáil approval for billions of euro more in spending after the event. There are dizzying spending overruns that are now routine with less, not more, transparency on how budgets are put together. There was a summer economic statement that could have been written by a transition year work experience student in the Department of public expenditure. A medium-term framework was published a month ago with no departmental spending ceilings, and what is more, it is all being paid for by dipping into the well of unreliable windfall corporation taxes from a handful of firms while the Ministers, Deputies Donohoe and Chambers, go about hollowing out and narrowing the tax base ever more. This never ends well.

It is unprecedented that, as the Government presents next year's budget, we did not even know the composition of the capital budget for 2025. In no other country would a government get away with this. It is a direct undermining of the powers and responsibilities of Dáil Éireann under the Constitution. It is why Labour has proposed that the Dáil needs its own independent Estimates commissioners to keep the Government in check. The threadbare revised national development plan did not include capital Vote ceilings for 2025. A total of two Supplementary Estimates for housing have already added over €1.4 billion to the budget for social and affordable housing in 2025. It took analysis by the Labour Party of the gross capital allocation to uncover that over €500 million of capital spending still had not been allocated to spending Departments at this time of the year. This is not an insignificant matter and it is no way to do business.

The national development plan and the summer economic statement were predicated on a capital investment spending increase of €2 billion next year from a base of €17.1 billion to €19.1 billion. The White Paper published on Friday miraculously included a capital spending figure of €17.05 billion this year. However, following all the extra Estimates to date, nearly €500 million of capital spending remains unallocated and unaccounted for in 2025. We will have to go through a detailed expenditure report to figure out where €500 million extra will be

allocated, but this is an extraordinary way to plan for investment and indicates a lack of credibility and transparency from the Government. There are no detailed answers on demographics and existing levels of service - the details we need to keep the show on the road - and nothing much on carryover costs. We also have no clarity on how equity invested in EirGrid, ESB and Uisce Éireann will be accounted for under European rules. It is simply listed as €5.5 billion of strategic capital investment in the White Paper. In short, we have a Government with a credibility problem. This is a dangerous game.

Our public services need investment. Labour has shown how we would pay for that extra investment by raising revenue from, for example, restoring the bank levy and setting out €500 million, not €200 million as the Government has announced today, and other measures targeting wealth and assets. Where we spend more, we will raise in taxes. We need some honesty in the debate over tax and how we develop our country and the services on which we all rely. That debate, honesty and courage are not to be found in this budget. This is a budget for burger barons and big builders. That is the long and the short of it. Budgets are about choices, and this Government has made its and we are going to have to live with it. It has chosen Ronald McDonald over Joe and Joan Murphy, and your man from Supermac's over the man who gets up early in the morning. The Hamburglar from the 1980s McDonald's ad is back in town swiping hundreds of millions of euro in his swag bag from PAYE workers, who will see their wages increases next year swallowed up because bands and credits will not move to take account of their modest pay increases. This will come as a real surprise to those who have read the Fine Gael manifesto and would have expected an increase in the top band of €2,000 per year. That was the promise. This pledge is now in tatters. This will take some explaining, especially set against this budget's abject failure to support families through a cost-of-living crisis that for all too many has now become permanent.

To be fair to the Government, it does not pretend that this year's offering is anything but modest. God knows, this Government has a lot to be modest about. Of course, things were very different this time last year. First and foremost, there was an election to be won. The election is over, but the crisis in households most certainly is not. For the people I represent, there is too much month left after the end of the money. The struggles are real. The temporary respite of one-off measures is now history. Families with children who were over €2,000 better off thanks to 2025's budget will feel the difference come January. This will bite. This is on the Government. There are no energy supports this time out. There are limited, if any, improvements in terms of childcare. There is a €500 increase in college fees. What kind of Orwellian statement did the Minister make earlier on trying to claim that this was a cut to fees? It is not. We are nowhere close to free GP care for all kids. I could go on.

This time last year, the Government chose to buy the general election, and with our own money. A wad of €2 billion in so-called one-offs is the most abused and misused term in Irish politics. Money was sprayed around and, by coincidence, was hitting bank accounts around polling day. Imagine that. It was all melting away like a snow on a ditch almost as soon as the votes were counted and feet under the Cabinet table again soon after Christmas. Mission accomplished; job done. About €23 million per Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael TD elected was the bill for the biggest and most brazen batch of bribes in Irish electoral history. The thing is we can support families through this difficult time and be responsible at the same time. The reality is, with some small exceptions announced today, the Government has chosen not to.

Nowhere will the Government's refusal to deliver a cost-of-living package hurt more than for those who depend on the State for their income. The pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis exposed real inadequacies and gaps in our social protection, work and care systems. The temporary payments just papered over the cracks; that is all. The tide has gone out, and it is those citizens who are in most in need of help who are more vulnerable than ever. If a person is on a fixed income, how in God's name is an extra €10 a week going to help him or her make ends meet when the price of basics - the groceries and electricity bills – is getting out of hand?

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ged Nash: It will not help. It will make things worse. It is an insult. It is quite frankly offensive.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ged Nash: People I represent are handing back groceries at the till when they get there because they do not have the money to pay for them all. Where is the dignity in that? They are afraid to put on the radio in case they are told about another expected hike next month in their electricity or gas bills. It is frankly hard to accept the claim that the Government is all about targeting when the social protection package - the thing we use to target the most vulnerable - is so wide of the mark.

Here are some of the one-hit wonders the Government recorded last year that got it safely over the line in November: not one but two double payments of child benefit; a €400 lump sum for carers; €200 on the living alone allowance; and so much cash to toss around that the Government even had a €280 grant to wet new babies' heads. The Government was literally running out of gimmick giveaways. At the time, the Opposition could not even keep up. There was the country's biggest ever social welfare package with €2.6 billion in total. I knew the social welfare talks were not going well when the Sunday newspapers were being briefed that there would be a Christmas bonus this year. Well done. Wow, congratulations, that is incredible. What an achievement. Is this what you have been reduced to this year? Trumpeting the fact that there is going to be a Christmas bonus that is actually paid out of this year's spending in the Department of Social Protection, the savings in the Department literally found down the back of the couch. It is absolutely pathetic.

It is a pity there are no Fianna Fáil Ministers here, quite an insult to the Opposition, in fact.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ged Nash: I remember when Fianna Fáil used to care about the social protection system. Can someone do a welfare check on Willie O'Dea? Where is he? He must be mortified, absolutely embarrassed. When the Society of St. Vincent de Paul said €16 were needed to be added to every core weekly payment, we agreed. We made allowance for that in our costed alternative budget. As for Fine Gael, we had the usual pre-budget whining, pitting one section of welfare recipient against another, all for the headlines - nasty, unbecoming, divisive stuff. It never comes to pass, it is just for the headlines, shoring up their base. The

pathetic increase this year will see citizens who rely on social welfare payments fall back. The social welfare increases of €10 a week represents between a 3% and 4% increase, less than wage growth and certainly less than those who signed up to the pension promise would have delivered. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil signed up to that pension promise. They have a lot of picking up to do over the next few years to reach that and to make sure their promises to pensioners are kept. These are the working poor, the most exposed by the decision not to make any extra payments to cover the cost of living in 2026.

We did not hear from the Minister earlier about the household benefits package going up, for example. It has not gone up in 12 years. We would push it by €10 a week. The living alone allowance has not gone up in years. It should have gone up by at least a fiver to €27. We also believe child benefit should have gone up by €10. The core rates of child benefit have not gone up in a long, long time. We have had double payments in recent years but no permanent increases to the payment itself.

If we are targeting, let us decide, as Labour did years ago, thanks to our colleague, Deputy Mark Wall, who really got this matter on the national agenda, to go the whole way this year and allocate the €330 million needed to get rid of the means test for the carers' allowance.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ged Nash: Carers save the State €20 billion a year and for a fraction of that, we can ensure that every carer gets the financial recognition and support they need and that their selfless work deserves. Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil's manifestos have variations of commitments in that direction. Incremental increases to income disregards are all well and good, and welcome, but we need to do more. I acknowledge the progress announced today. Labour also agrees that there are additional costs to living with a disability. There was nothing about that today from the Minister, Deputy Chambers. There is plenty of guff in the Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil manifestos. We would ensure an additional payment of €25 is made, to be brought in over two years, to recognise that reality. I say it every single year. A sign of our maturity as a country would be to agree that social protection rates need to be benchmarked and increased every year based on a mix of wage growth and a measurement of inflation. We should legislate for this, make that decision and wear it as a badge of honour of a decent society that wants to do better. We should do the same on income tax, too.

For many years now, Ministers have been warning us about the vulnerabilities of our tax base. The concentration risks associated with corporation tax are well rehearsed. When we strip away the corporation tax froth, we are in the red to the tune of about €7 billion. When the music stops, as it inevitably will, it is not the well-heeled but the less well-off who will pay the price. The same Ministers again refuse to take their own advice. Looking at the budget presented today, several billion in windfall revenue will be spent next year. Corporation tax is actually bailing us out. Labour is a patriotic party. We want Ireland to succeed, but we must learn. We feel entitled to critique. We supported the setting up of the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund. These funds are important to insulate us against an uncertain future, but more can be done today to help protect our tomorrow.

Professor Barra Roantree said two years ago that among the stupidest of tax reliefs in a competitive field was help to buy. This year, thanks to the Tánaiste, Deputy Simon Harris, and

his solemn promise made on the stump, that stupid tax wheeze and others are now being extended to 2030 to provide "certainty to developers". The only certainty in all of this is that it will keep doing what it always does, add fuel to the house inflation fire. Well, this stupid relief has very serious competition this year. Say hello to the 9% reduced VAT rate for hospitality, a massive transfer of close to €700 million in a full year, from PAYE workers----

Deputy Conor Sheehan: To McDonald's.

Deputy Ged Nash: ----to a sector that is adding jobs, and can boast more openings than closures. As it happens, almost the exact same amount of money is needed for a targeted second tier of child support to the poorest of families. This will be rolled over every year and the Government will get no change out of about €3 billion by the time it is done. That is €3 billion less for tax adjustments for working people and service improvements. The only people who think this is a good idea seem to be the Tánaiste, Deputy Simon Harris, the Minister, Deputy Peter Burke, and industry lobbyists. If this is the emergency we are told it is, why delay it until half way through next year? This is nothing but an old-fashioned stroke. At the top end, this is an industry that is super-profitable and is addicted to low pay. The likes of Supermac's posted pre-tax profits of €42 million in 2024. Food industry data suggests that about 40% of the benefit will go to the fast food multiples, with less than half going to the local independent restaurants and cafes we all want to see survive and thrive. The evidence for this is thin or non-existent. Even the man who launched the election campaign of the Minister, Deputy Burke, the one and only Michael O'Leary, said "this is a scam". That is what it is.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ged Nash: IFAC, the usually demure, dismal scientists, waded in last week. They usually keep their mouths shut on policy pronouncements. They said that every tax cut or tax foregone comes at a cost. They set out alternative homes for this cash. Over 11,000 nurses could be hired, or 7,800 teachers. Critically, tax bands could be moved by €3,000, saving an average worker €600. As far as the Labour Party is concerned, IFAC is right, this money would be better spent supporting children and workers. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have made their bed. These measures are never temporary. The temporary help to buy scheme is still in, and will be extended. The special assignee relief programme, SARP, was supposed to sunset this year and is being brought back in. It was meant to be given a decent burial but it is still here. I sound like a broken record, but now, when the economy is running red hot, is the time to take counter-cyclical and not pro-cyclical measures to dampen things down.

Back in 2022 the Commission on Taxation and Welfare set out a menu of €14 billion of options for sustainable revenue-raising measures that would not harm jobs and enterprise. There are two reasons we should go for this. One, to broaden and diversify the tax base, and two, to help us meet the aging, climate and demographic challenges that are well and truly here. The simple fact is that once the plethora of performative reliefs and stunts like help to buy, the apartment VAT relief and hospitality are accounted for, only about a third of this year's €1.5 billion set aside on the tax front goes towards the common good via the renter's tax credit, which has been extended but the rate has not been increased, and the continuation of the VAT relief on energy bills.

The story of this winter will be ever rising energy bills. Without targeted action, the 170,000 in gas arrears and the 300,000 in electricity arrears will go up and up. This Government has made a rod for its own back. Even those who did not need them got its famously untargeted energy credits, when those who needed more were left to flounder. The credit papered over the cracks. The Government was throwing cash at a problem, never asking why we have the second highest energy costs in Europe, or why we have a regulator that routinely nods through savage price rises and fails miserably to honour its consumer protection role. The Government has failed to take a State-led approach like the Labour Party would in strategically investing €1 billion to make our moonshot moment in offshore wind a reality, weaning us off imported gas, which would be good for consumers and good for climate.

With families and small businesses reeling from unaffordable price rises, the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien's answer is "can anything be said for another task force?" Freezing families cannot heat their homes with reports from task forces. There are a few bits and pieces on SEAI and little improvements to grants and so on, but what has also been revealed is a failure to understand the scale of the home energy crisis in Ireland in 2025. Mark my words, this is the thing that will drive people over the edge this winter. Here is the problem: they cannot afford to pay the bill and neither can they afford to do the retrofitting that is still out of the reach of so many. I urge Government to take our advice. We have proposed further extending the fuel allowance to all of those on working family payments. There have been some moves in that direction today and we will look in detail at what has been proposed but more needs to be done in terms of extending the period for which the fuel allowance is available.

The Government is using the tax system to boost the bottom line of large takeaway businesses and the developers. Why not use it as we proposed, to providing an energy income tax credit to working families in draughty homes who are earning less than €80,000 a year? The Labour Party's idea would see €400 go back into the pockets of working people, in the same way that people are used to claiming annual medical relief, a carer's credit or the renter's credit. These are simple, straightforward and, most importantly, targeted reliefs. We have no difficulty saying we would put a 20% windfall levy on energy companies' profits and a levy on data centres to pay for them - cost neutral to the State. This is the kind of real action that will keep people warm this winter.

Nothing reeks of failure more than the numbers of children we have who are poor. This should have been a children's budget but it is far from it. Over the last 20 years, child poverty levels have averaged 18.5%. Now, it is a scandalous 21%. One in five of the children we meet are in poverty. Poverty in childhood, and the embarrassment, stigma and shame that go along with it, follows children around for the rest of their lives. However, the embarrassment and shame ought to be on the Government. For a dozen years now we have known the solution. It gets fixed with a second-tier of targeted child benefit, which happens to cost the same amount of money as a full year of VAT relief for the hospitality industry. I note there has been an announcement today from the Minister, Deputy Chambers, about a €300 million package for child poverty. You will find that is just rebranded. He has put together all of the initiatives we know are out there already and put a different label on them. That is insincere and indifferent. What is the difference between children in poverty and the hospitality sector? Poor kids do not have well-paid lobbyists and their families rarely vote for Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. I actually believed Leo Varadkar, when he became Taoiseach again, when he said he wanted to do the

business on child poverty. I was prepared to take that promise in good faith. I should have known better. The Labour Party would bite the bullet and allocate the €770 million for the second tier. We would go further than the Government has done this year in terms of the welcome increases in child support payments, but we would also ensure that we had a living wage, do more on DEIS plus, which is a pioneering Labour initiative, and we would end voluntary contributions - all of the things that go in to making child poverty history. We would make education truly free and invest in our Cinderella youth services like never before. This is not a time for incrementalism and crippling caution. The response to child poverty demands urgency, courage and single-mindedness. Anything else is indifference and an unforgivable moral failure. There has been one consistent political figure at the top of national politics since the first child poverty target was introduced in 2000, some 25 long years ago. Who is it? Micheál Martin. This target was in the first national children's strategy signed off by the then Minister for health, Deputy Micheál Martin.

Our child poverty scandal would look a lot different if we did not have such a problem with family homelessness and insecure housing. For a Government that says housing is its number one priority, it has a funny way of showing it. We managed to hear from two Ministers earlier on and not one of them mentioned homelessness. What an outrage. Since Fianna Fáil brazened its way through the general election telling porkies on housing targets, this has been the Government's record. We have had garden sheds in lieu of homes; slashed apartments standards; rushed changes to RPZs; €1.4 billion of capital top-ups because the Government got the sums so wrong last year; cuts to the tenant in situ lifeline; not enough money for housing adaptation grants; and most disgraceful of all, over 5,000 children in homeless accommodation. We have a housing Minister who is the very definition of an empty suit, missing in action. Most people could not pick him out of a line-up. A Government that could stand over the new plan we are told to expect would publish it well before the budget because that would help them lay out the spending and policy ambitions in it. Instead, the plan is being suppressed and kept under lock and key until the slow bicycle race to the park is done and dusted. Of course, we only get advance leaks of good plans. It is telling that all we have heard from Government on housing before this budget is talk of tax cuts for builders and Robert Troy having a pop at people in social housing. You would think that with his record, the Rigsby of the Dail would have been best served keeping his thoughts to himself.

This budget contains little or nothing that will radically increase supply. The Government is simply all over the place on housing. You know you are in trouble when the Taoiseach launches an attack on councillors and officials for not zoning enough land. He needs to stop with the deflection and dishonesty that is his stock in trade. He needs to cop on and, for once in his political career, take some responsibility. Somehow with Micheál Martin, it is always somebody else's fault. Quite frankly, it is this nonsense that undermines faith in politics. Anything Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have tried has failed but of course they will never fail in their fealty to the demands of developers. Apartment builders and landlords asked for changes to unit sizes, other planning law changes and amendments to RPZs, which really exposed renters. As we know this week, exposing renters is par for the course for Fianna Fáil. The Government has delivered on all three requests and now we have a VAT cut and other tax adjustments that were never asked for, with no guarantee of more supply. This is bone lazy policy. I said here previously that the situation on housing is so desperate that if some form of tax incentive scheme, time-limited and with social conditions, that would focus on turning

around vacant and derelict sites was proposed, the Labour Party would be prepared to take a considered view of it, such is the emergency in our country. However, a VAT cut is just bananas. It will feather the nests and bottom lines of developers. I am looking forward to seeing the advice from the Department of Finance officials on this ill-conceived proposal. This is the very last policy lever that should be used and it is a sign of desperation. Let us be clear that neither party in government ever sought a mandate for tax cuts for developers for smaller apartments, or garden sheds as housing solutions. Of course, this is back-of-the-envelope stuff. The tax strategy group papers state that a cut to VAT on all residential construction would cost around €800 million. How would this be done for apartments only? Many projects, as we know, have a commercial and retail element too. How will that work? What about mixed-use multi-unit developments including duplexes? This will have to be thought through and it seems to me that it has not been.

Our housing crisis is a supply problem, plain and simple, and it is getting worse. The Labour Party, uniquely among the Opposition parties, actually supported the proposition of the Land Development Agency because we thought it had the prospect of evolving into what we have described as a State construction company. This is something that has been rejected by the Government and in this budget there is little sign of the kind of ambition we have been showing around investment in social housing, affordable housing and cost rental. However, I welcome two changes for which I have advocated for years. These are the extension of the living cities initiative to towns like Drogheda and Dundalk and the Government decision to answer our calls here in Labour and give Revenue the job of collecting derelict sites levies. Councils can be ignored-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If you are sharing time, Deputy, you should conclude.

Deputy Ged Nash: -----but a business cannot give Revenue the two fingers and get away with it.

Before handing over to my colleague, Deputy Sherlock, I will conclude on this. It is disgraceful that this Government has decided it will keep what it describes as its solemn promise on VAT for the hospitality sector but will break a solemn promise it made to workers about introducing a living wage in 2026. Workers in this country have waited long enough for the dignity and fairness that comes with the introduction of a living wage. They also require moves to a European model of sick pay but that has also been shelved by the Government. That is on this Government and it is unacceptable. This is a Government that prioritises the needs of business and builders over the wider common good.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: Beidh daoine ag féachaint ar an mbuiséad seo inniu agus á gceistiú féin cá bhfuil na gealltanais ó thoghchán 2024. Cá bhfuil an laghdú do theaghlaigh ar chúram leanaí nó na cúirteanna saor in aisce chuig an GP? Cá bhfuil na leabaí ospidéal bhreise agus na gealltanais eile? Beidh daoine ag rá leo féin conas gur féidir buiséad a fhoilsiú agus méid chomh beag sin a chur ar fháil do na daoine atá i mbun oibre sa tír seo.

4 o'clock

People are looking at this budget today and are asking where are the promises from election 2024, where are the childcare fee cuts, where is the free GP care, and where are the 4,000 extra

hospital beds. They will wonder how a Government that has so much manages to do so little for working people. They will ask how is it that a country that can boast of having the healthiest set of public finances in the EU, the highest rate of economic growth, the highest rate of domestic demand and a general government budget that is in surplus has a Government that has so much but manages to do so little for working people. They will ask how is it that well over half a million children, over 600,000 children, are either in poverty, at risk of poverty, or living in real deprivation. How is it that those families are living through an appalling paradox of plenty in a housing and cost-of-living crisis and a Government that has a target for children in poverty? No Government should ever have a target for children in poverty. No child should ever grow up in poverty. We are a wealthy country and there are hundreds of thousands of people out there who feel they are going backwards rather than forwards even though our public finances are surging ahead.

They will wonder where are the bold, tangible commitments to climate action - the existential crisis of our time - so that clean and cheap energy can be for the many and not for the few and so that everybody's fuel bills can be permanently lowered? It is shameful that today this Government has barely said anything about climate.

I put it to the Ministers who are in the Chamber that the question that hangs over the budget and the financial management by their Government of the public finances is not what has been spent but how it is being spent and on whom. We have to go back a long time in Irish politics to see so much being spent on so few people. That is the reality of the tax cuts we see today for developers and for the small number of business owners in the hospitality sector. A serious cut to commercial rates or other targeted supports to cafés and restaurants would have been a better bet to secure business and jobs but this Government took the other option and has handed a very serious tax cut to a small number of business owners.

The Labour Party in government would have made this first and foremost a children and young persons' budget by putting in place measures to support families who work, families who want to work and families that cannot, by supporting family income and the introduction of a second-tier child benefit payment, by supporting families' ability to work through the provision of affordable and available childcare, by supporting families' ability to deal with the cost of living by extending free GP care, by expanding free public transport travel and by a permanent cut to third level fees. Instead, what did we get today? There is no extension to free GP care even though this was a Fianna Fáil and a Fine Gael commitment in the programme for Government. There is nothing on expanding free public transport to younger people, nothing on the drug payment scheme, and nothing on prescription charges. There was a mention of DEIS Plus, but what good is it if we do not see any figures alongside it? A €500 increase in third level fees is an extraordinary indictment of the failings of this Government. It has abjectly failed to integrate the social welfare system and the Revenue Commissioners' system so we could have a second-tier targeted payment for families with young children in this country.

We have some of the biggest tech firms in the world and still the Government cannot get its act together on this. Not only would a second-tier child benefit payment lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty but it would also ensure that the State supports can go efficiently to low-income households without any wrinkles or disincentives to work. Efficiency is supposed to be the buzzword of this Government but it is in short supply when we see the detail.

A critical part of supporting families out of poverty, into work and into a decent standard of living is the availability of affordable and accessible childcare. During the election last year one could not open a newspaper without seeing Government parties in a bidding war for families, saying they would lower fees and provide more places. All Members in this Chamber are aware of parents who are telling us that they have to delay going back to work and that women, in particular, have to cut back their hours because of the lack of available childcare. It is now 12 months on and there is barely a peep out of the Government now. This Government has reneged on its election promises to parents and to providers and all the while the problems are getting worse and not better.

Aside from the tiny increase for the access and inclusion model, AIM, support today the Government has nothing new in this budget for parents and providers with regard to childcare. The Minister, Deputy Chambers, made an announcement of 2,300 additional childcare places but let us be clear that this is a mirage. No parent listening to this today should get their hopes up of more childcare places. Last year parents across this country were told that more places were coming. In fact, they were told that €25 million was being put in place under the building blocks scheme to grow the numbers from just short of 40,000 to 60,000 by 2028. What has happened since then? Not a single extra place has been delivered through the scheme. Applications closed in January, feedback was due in March and funding was to be spent in total by this December. Instead, the contracts only arrived last week, last Wednesday to be precise, and between all of the paperwork to be processed and the tendering not as sod will be turned this side of Christmas. To make matters worse, providers will not be able to access core funding for a whole 12 months if those works are not completed by August of next year. There is the prospect of rooms being built and funded by the State but lying empty. It is an absolute insult to those who are desperately searching for a childcare place and to the providers who want to expand.

The mark of a country is the dignity with which our most vulnerable are treated within our health system. Right now there are far too many people languishing for hours on end on trolleys.

Deputies: Hear. Hear.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: Some 750,000 people are waiting on outpatient waiting lists. Time and again children are being failed because of the huge shortage of therapies and supports to those with additional needs in this country. It is not clear to me that the health budget of €1.5 billion announced today is in any way sufficient to cover existing services, growing demand, a rising population and higher prices. The reality is that we have a health sector that is running to try to stand still. We have been here before with regard to works of fiction and then supplementary Votes were required. There is a presumption here that the €1.5 billion announced today, which is less than two thirds of last year's injection, will be enough. To me the sums do not add up. This Government can say all it wants about record investment into the sector and the need for productivity, which we in the Labour Party very much support, but we all know and we can see that the funding to the health sector is not keeping up with population growth and the rising intensity of demand.

There has been a 12% increase per thousand of population in presentations to accident and emergency departments over the past six years. Crucial to this is that it is not only the

population increase but also the rising need for healthcare among our population. This is not accounting for the people in the mid-west who are too afraid to go to the accident and emergency department in Limerick nor indeed to other emergency departments across the country.

With regard to mental health and the demand for care in the community, time and again we see a rising need and yet the staffing per thousand of population is falling behind. At the end of last year, the number of staff for child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, was lower than a year earlier. There are now fewer public health nurses across the country than five years ago. This Government can talk all it wants about preventing hospitalisation or about keeping people in their homes but demand is rising, staff numbers in certain sectors are barely moving, and the reality is that we have a serious capacity issue.

The Government put a lot of store this year on increasing productivity in hospitals and with regard to rostering, which we in the Labour Party very much support. There is, however, a reality that this project of productivity cannot be completed without electronic health records and without more beds. We did not see a peep out of the Government today about this massive project of electronic health records. We have to ask the question: where is the money for it?

In last year's budget Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were falling over themselves promising the electorate more hospital beds. Even though in 2024 the Department of Health identified a need of 3,378 extra beds by 2031, Fine Gael went out at election time and said it would deliver 5,000 if it was re-elected. Fianna Fáil was, uncharacteristically, more timid and went for 4,000 more beds. Then the programme for Government solemnly committed to 4,500 over the next five years. Of course, what has been happening? Far fewer than that have been delivered and today's announcement is even lower than what was committed to last year. Last year, we were told we would get 335 beds this year. Only 286 have been delivered. We know we need to have 453 beds per annum, according to the ESRI analysis, if we are to meet demand by 2040 and yet, today's announcement is less than half of that. The impact on the ground for patients is that more people will not be able to access hospital care and those within hospital care will not be able to access step-down and other appropriate beds.

The situation in community nursing home care is even more acute. There are fewer long- and short-stay beds available in 2025 than there were five years ago. The national development plan promised 4,500 long-term and short-term community nursing home beds by 2027. The promise for this year was 160 beds and yet, we know that less than half that number, just 68, will come on stream. Today, we have a commitment of 280 beds and we welcome that but I have no confidence in this wide earthly world that this Government will deliver on that. Earlier this year, the Government came out and promised us we would have more public nursing home beds following the crisis in Emeis Ireland. It is not clear from today's budget that we are going to see any progress on that. Those commitments made in the spring of this year are all beginning to ring a bit hollow now.

There are those watching on today with a disability who believe they have been betrayed by this Government, betrayed because over the past three budgets there has been a recognition of the cost of disability, there has been a disability support payment and there have been one-off payments to recognise the situation they are in, but the plug has been pulled on them today. Shame on this Government.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: I want to read back a piece of the Minister, Deputy Chambers' speech today because I found it fascinating he would go to the trouble of saying:

For a small country, Ireland offers an extraordinary wealth of talent and entertainment. Our artists, writers and athletes are now leading the way on the world stage...

He says all that and then cuts the budget to the arts and culture.

Deputy Ged Nash: Unbelievable.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: It is incredible. How are we supposed to see artists supported in this country if the Government is going to expand-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: It is all a mirage.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: -----the basic income for artists scheme, which we very much welcome, but cut supports to all other parts of the arts sector? I have to ask: is this the vengeance of the Minister, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, for the Arts Council and what happened earlier this year? There are very serious questions that have to be asked of the Minister today.

Mar fhocail scoir, climate action appears to have fallen off the political agenda for this Government. Already we see a massive underspend in the Department and today we see a miserly €89 million going to the energy upgrade scheme. The reality is the schemes are not working. We have seen only a 70% take-up of the schemes over the last number of years.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy should conclude.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: We have seen heat pumps with a take-up of only 30% of the targets, with only 47% of a take-up in local authorities. The reality is if we want clean, cheap energy for the many, not the few, and we want to see a permanent reduction in the cost of living and with regard to energy in particular, then we have to do things differently.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I am sharing time with my colleagues, Deputies Aidan Farrelly and Jen Cummins. First, it shows something about how the Government respects, or disrespects, this House that not one senior Government Minister is here for this.

Deputy Mark Wall: Hear, hear.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Indeed, Fianna Fáil Members are missing in their entirety. I wonder why they have gone into hiding.

Budgets are about choices and the choices made by this Government in this budget could not be any clearer. Look after large corporations and developers at the expense of ordinary people and those who are struggling. There is no hiding or disguising it and no way to spin it. This Government's choice is clear.

This has turned out to be a McBudget, a giveaway for fast food chains and developers that the public will find difficult to swallow. The Government's budget awards multinational companies like McDonald's and Starbucks millions in extra profits while families choosing between eating and heating are denied targeted energy credits and more and more children sink further into poverty. It really is outrageous. Last year, McDonald's Ireland made a profit of €42 million. This is not a business that is struggling but that does not matter to the Government. Slashing its VAT bill by 4.5% boosts its profits by millions and all of that money will go into the pockets of shareholders and wealthy investors. It will not lead to lower prices. There are some small, independent hospitality businesses that are struggling. The Social Democrats proposed targeted supports for these businesses but a blanket VAT cut across the sector means large profitable chains will disproportionately benefit, raking in huge sums because the Government is cutting their taxes.

It is not often I agree with Fianna Fáil TDs on Government budgets but then again, members of the Government do not usually appear on TV to slam the budget either. Last night, on Virgin Media, the Minister of State, Deputy Niall Collins, said slashing the VAT rate for hospitality was "not what I would do if I were Minister for Finance". Even Government Ministers are unwilling to defend this giveaway for big business, paid for by ordinary workers.

At a time when the Government has the gall to lecture the rest of us about protecting the national finances, in this budget it is eroding the tax take by €1.3 billion, a massive amount of public money that could be used in so many other ways, not least to introduce a second tier of child benefit that would lift 40,000 children out of poverty. Faced with the choice of tackling child poverty or dramatically boosting the profits of large corporations, this Government did not waver. It came down on the side of big business without hesitation.

They are not the only vested interests this Government is looking after. Fianna Fáil has long been a champion of tax cuts for developers and we all know the disastrous results of that obsession. Now, Fine Gael is on board, too. For the first time since the crash, tax cuts for developers are back on the agenda. VAT for developers of apartments is being slashed at a cost of €390 million a year, with no guarantee or even expectation that prices will come down because there are no affordability conditions attached to this gift.

No one in government is demanding prices come down or rents become more affordable. Instead, it is being done with one express purpose: boosting developer profits. This is further evidence that this Government is not on the side of struggling renters or those desperate to own a home of their own. At the same time, Government TDs intend to vote against the Social Democrats' Developer Profits Transparency Bill 2023 this evening. This Bill would clearly show how much of these tax cuts are going directly into the back pockets of developers. When millions of euro of public money is being gifted to developers there is absolutely no justification whatsoever to oppose this Bill.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Hear, hear.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The cost-of-living crisis did not end once the election was over last year. A recent report from Barnardos found that four out of ten parents skip meals or eat less to stop their children going hungry. This Government has forgotten about these families. This is a giveaway budget for property developers and owners of fast food chains. There are

handouts for millionaires while ordinary families struggle to get by. This is outrageously unjust.

We should not be surprised that Fianna Fáil is focused on looking after its buddies while failing to help those who need it most. It smacks of the time when Charlie Haughey told the nation to tighten the belt while he continued to live his lavish and opulent lifestyle. This double standard is part of the Fianna Fáil DNA.

Government spending has soared from €70 billion in 2020 to €116.8 billion now, but what do we have to show for it? A worsening housing disaster, threadbare disability services, antiquated infrastructure and rising poverty. That is the Government's legacy and this budget doubles down on this failure.

Anyone examining this budget would think the cost-of-living crisis was being felt most acutely by developers and the owners of fast food chains. They are the ones being singled out for special treatment. They are the ones getting a helping hand from this Government. When it comes to assisting workers and families struggling to keep their heads above water, this budget offers nothing. The Government says inflation has reduced, implying the cost-of-living crisis has receded, but there is no recognition that prices remain sky high and rising, especially for basics like groceries and energy.

So many out there, trying to feed children or keep the lights on, feel like they are enduring a daily battle. They are weary and exhausted and when they look around for support from the Government, they find none. A major problem is that the Government seems incapable of devising solutions which do not involve spraying money around at everyone indiscriminately, which is not sustainable. This is why the Government opted to scrap blanket energy credits, instead of doing what it should have done in the first place, adapting them so they are targeted at those who need them most. Under the Social Democrats' alternative budget, roughly 800,000 households would receive a €400 energy credit.

Many public services that are free or heavily subsidised in other countries are exorbitantly priced here. Childcare is just one example. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil made solemn commitments to families about the cost of childcare during the election. They promised to cap fees at €200 per month. This would be life-changing for many families who are paying €1,000 per month and even higher, but nobody in government has mentioned that cap in a while and this budget does nothing to reduce prices, which is another broken promise. If the Social Democrats were in government, we would live up to our commitments and reduce fees by €200 next year, as well as rolling out a public model to increase capacity.

One of the biggest betrayals by this Government is its decision to jack up college fees despite vowing throughout the election and in the programme for Government to cut them. Worse than that is the Government's attempt to spin this. It expects students and families who paid €2,000 last year to believe that fees of €2,500 are a reduction. Why can it not just be straight and admit what it is doing, reneging on yet another commitment and increasing fees for students and their families at a time when they are under huge pressure? It is shameful. If this Government was really interested in reducing the cost of living, it would prioritise investment in public services like education, high-quality housing, healthcare and childcare.

Can the Minister of State imagine how a parent feels to see his or her own child grow up in poverty while the country is awash with money? Ann, a mother from the south east, told *The*

Journal, "my husband and I often skip meals so our children can eat... Even child benefit, which we once used for extras for the children, now goes straight into the weekly food shop." This budget utterly fails to address the astonishing fact that nearly 200,000 children are living in poverty. It is important that we never forget the stress and hardship that poverty can cause a family.

There is a way to tackle this scandal head-on. The ESRI has proposed a second tier of child benefit that could lift 40,000 children out of poverty and significantly reduce the gap between the poverty line for most others. The Government has spent years talking about tackling child poverty but budget 2026 has yet again shown this just to be talk, not action. The ESRI introduced its proposal for second tier of child benefit in 2023, giving the Government ample time to act. Its absence from the budget shows up where this Government's priorities lie.

We know that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have utterly failed to get to grips with the housing crisis. This failure has devastating consequences. I want to tell the Minister of State about a constituent of mine named Arash. Arash and his family have been in emergency accommodation for over eight months. The children in the family must travel 21 km to school each day and they have no direct transport links. Arash has tried everything humanly possible to get his family a stable home, but to no avail.

Arash is just one of the more than 16,000 people stuck in homeless accommodation, which is an unprecedented disaster. In an hour and a half of speeches by the two senior Ministers today, there was no mention or recognition of homelessness at all. That speaks volumes. In this budget, there is a complete absence of the kind of vision and ambition that we need in housing.

The Social Democrats are clear that only a radical shift to a State-led approach will solve the crisis. The Social Democrats' alternative budget proposes fully costed and ambitious initiatives, including a €150 million fund to give the local authorities the resources to CPO vacant homes, increasing the vacant homes tax to bring empty buildings back into use, setting up a savings scheme to leverage some of the €160 billion on deposit in Irish banks to build affordable homes, establishing a State construction company, and investing €120 million to build a modular home factory which could produce up to 2,000 homes every year. Regrettably, these proposals have been ignored. Instead, the Government doubled down on its failed policy of handouts for private developers and tax cuts for investment funds.

Prolonged vacancy and derelictions of homes cannot be tolerated in the middle of a housing crisis. Refurbishing these homes is a cost-effective and environmentally-friendly way to bring these buildings back into use, yet the Government has chosen to leave the vacant homes tax at a measly 0.7%. At the same time, property prices increased by 7.5% in the past year. If the new derelict property tax can be set at 7%, why has there been no increase in the vacant homes tax? Under this Government, it pays to sit on a vacant property in the middle of a housing crisis. The Social Democrats would put a stop to this.

The Government's approach to the carer's allowance reflects a similar lack of compassion. Carers play an essential role in society, providing care for elderly, ill or disabled family members. Their hard work saves the State billions and allows their loved ones to remain in their homes or communities. Make no mistake that this is work and all carers should be paid properly. The means testing of carer's allowance based on income thresholds is unjust. Louise

Mac an Tsaoi is a full time carer for her son, Liam. She recently told the *Irish Farmers' Journal* of her experience of the means test. She said:

My husband Sean passed away four years ago which meant my Carer's Allowance was halved as I went on to the Lone Parent Allowance, both of which were means tested... We have had to rely on a fundraising effort by family, friends and the community because I couldn't get a loan because my income is so low... [P]eople like me shouldn't have to jump through hoops for a bit of financial security when we are saving the country so much by caring for our children at home.

The last thing carers need is the State rummaging through their personal details to decide if they deserve any payment for their hard work. The Government could and should abolish the means test for carers now. Irish banks are making record profits but still not contributing any corporation tax. It is therefore completely justified to triple the bank levy to fund the abolition of the means test for carers. Budget 2026 was a chance for the Government to deliver on its election commitment to carers by creating a system that treats them with fairness, dignity and respect. Unfortunately, it is another missed opportunity.

The Disability Federation of Ireland has described this budget as a betrayal of disabled people, stripping away vital supports and deepening poverty. It has estimated that disabled people stand to lose up to €1,400 because of the actions of this Government taken today. It is now nearly four years since the Government published the Indecon report on the cost of disability. That report estimated that the average annual cost of disability in Ireland ranges from €9,482 a year to €11,734 for a disabled person. The Social Democrats have backed the calls for a proposed weekly cost of disability payment, recognising that those with disabilities face extra costs, particularly in transport and healthcare. Disabled people should not be financially punished because they have a disability. This budget ensures that disabled people are left behind for yet another year.

We also believe that this budget could have introduced more significant pension and social welfare increases. Pensioners, disabled people and other welfare recipients have struggled to keep their heads above water as inflation soared. That is why the Social Democrats' alternative budget proposed an increase of €15. A €15 increase would start to close the gap between welfare rates and the minimum amount needed to achieve a decent standard of living. Hundreds of thousands of people live week to week on incomes that are not sufficient to live a dignified life.

Workers were promised a living wage by 2026 but where is that commitment now? If the Government wants to make a genuine effort to reach that target, we need a more substantial minimum wage increase than the 65 cent announced. It is not a radical idea that people working full-time should be able to live and not just survive.

High-quality early childhood education has a long-lasting and positive impact on children's outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children. This includes benefits to educational, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes in both the short and long term. We in the Social Democrats have set out a clear pathway to establish a public model of early childhood education and care. A public model of childcare would have the triple benefit of guaranteeing quality early years education for children, affordability for parents and decent pay for workers. We would then be able to keep skilled workers in the sector. The Social Democrats alternative

budget contains measures that would start us on the road to this public model. These include capital investment in the infrastructure needed, including acquiring existing and new sites, reducing average childcare fees by more than €200 per month and a move to transfer staff in the sector into a public model.

We are in a climate crisis, yet somehow Ireland is now producing less offshore wind energy than it did 20 years ago. That is an astonishing fact. With a bit of ambition, it would be possible not only to secure our own energy supply but also make Ireland a net exporter of clean, green energy. For the past five years, the Social Democrats have proposed using budget surpluses to invest in transforming Ireland's economy to make us carbon neutral. By fully harnessing our renewable energy resources, Ireland could enjoy both energy independence and sustained economic growth - cleaner air, cheaper bills, and less money wasted on EU fines. Once again, the budget is totally devoid of ambition in this area.

Ireland should be a republic in which every child and young person has the opportunity to achieve his or her potential. This can only happen if everybody, regardless of background, is able to participate fully in education. Investing in education creates a better life for each student but also acts as an investment in our economic future. The best place to start is by making primary and secondary schools genuinely free. Successive Oireachtas education committee reports have also raised concerns about the absence of specialist counsellors and therapists in all primary and secondary schools. The Social Democrats alternative budget ring-fenced funding for these supports in all of these schools.

As things stand, there are far too many who cannot access our health service when they need to. There are too many people on lengthy waiting lists for treatment. There are too few primary care centres working in our communities. The scandal of people languishing on trolleys persists. Critical programmes, like the cancer strategy, have been starved of funding and regional disparities continue in the availability of acute care. Unfortunately, I heard nothing from the Ministers to suggest that any of this will change. It should not be too much to expect a decent standard of healthcare, yet the sad reality is that we cannot fully depend on our public health system, and large parts of it have been broken for some time. The Sláintecare plan to create a single-tier universal healthcare system has been progressing at a glacial pace. No updated costings have been published in the last year. There is no ring-fenced budget for reform, and the Sláintecare 2025+ plan was published without any money pledged for implementation. The Social Democrats are calling on the Government to urgently lay out a five-year funding programme for Sláintecare. This must be included in the pre-committed element of the annual budget process.

Ireland's economy faces unprecedented risks and challenges. It is essential that we do everything in our power to protect our prosperity. Foreign direct investment is, and will continue to be, an important part of Ireland's industrial strategy. Multinational companies provide highly paid employment and contribute a disproportionately high share of our taxes. However, we cannot continue to rely on a handful of companies to fund so much of our tax base. To complement our multinational sector, Ireland needs to build up a thriving dynamic indigenous sector. We must provide greater supports for new innovation and Irish startups. This will be key to driving job creation, productivity and growth.

Ireland's investment in research and development lags behind our European neighbours. It is essential that we catch up. Too much of Ireland's investment in research and development

is based around tax breaks for large multinational firms. The Government's own economic evaluation service has criticised the refundable element of the research and development credit as having significant amounts of dead weight. This has wasted billions of euro over the years. Government investment should instead include a strong focus on direct spending at Ireland's traditional and technological universities. University-based investment would ensure the resulting innovations would be available for wider use and not confined to one firm.

It is also essential that Ireland become an attractive and affordable place to both live and do business. This means improving our social infrastructure, particularly housing, health, childcare and education, while also investing in our economic infrastructure, particularly the grid, transport and our ports.

When it comes to investment in our public services and infrastructure, Ireland is lagging behind. We need urgent and substantial investment. We face a myriad of challenges such as an ageing population, infrastructural deficits and climate change. It is simply not possible to invest in our future while eroding the tax base. The Fiscal Advisory Council, the ESRI, the Nevin Institute and the Commission on Taxation and Welfare all have the same clear message, namely, our tax base is too narrow and needs to be broadened. Just ten companies account for the majority of our corporation tax income. Our corporation tax dependence is reminiscent of 2008 when Fianna Fáil crashed the economy. An overreliance on property transaction taxes at that time left a gaping hole in the public finances when the property bubble burst. This Government is playing fast and loose with the country's finances, and this could have devastating consequences. The Social Democrats alternative budget includes a range of proposals to broaden the tax base. Instead, the Government has narrowed the tax take by €1.3 billion. This is reckless and irresponsible.

Decent public services are a key foundation to a successful economy and society. Privatisation by stealth is undermining public services. It is also hugely costly. Outsourcing of services makes the co-ordination of those public services more difficult and results in their increased commodification. It weakens the public sector, reducing the skills and the staffing levels available to provide high-quality services. This amounts to little more than wealth extraction, making a small number of people very rich from taxpayers' money. There are countless examples of this. We see this in our childcare system, which delivers neither affordability for parents nor good conditions for staff. Our housing system is characterised by profiteering. This comes at the financial expense of taxpayers and the social expense of the most vulnerable. We can see this when private developers build on public land and profit from it, when private landlords are paid billions of euro in rental subsidies, when private operators of emergency accommodation get rich while children grow up in totally unsuitable accommodation, and when local authorities enter into long-term leases with investment funds. Everywhere one looks, one sees the waste of taxpayers' money on a Government ideology that says the market is always king. It is time to bring these services back into public provision.

The State must provide a social floor below which no-one can fall. This should involve fully implementing Sláintecare - a single-tier, free-at-the-point-of-use healthcare system - building a public model of childcare, building a sustainable home care service and ending the current postcode lottery, more direct State involvement in the building of affordable homes for rent and purchase, and ending lucrative long-term leasing deals for social housing provision. Expanding the State's capacity is the only viable solution.

This budget will be remembered as one of bad choices and missed opportunities. The Government had a chance to take radical action to improve the lives of those who were struggling. It could have lifted 40,000 children out of poverty. It could have targeted energy credits at roughly 800,000 households who needed them most. It could have abolished the means test for carers and reduced the cost of childcare for families while rolling out a public model. It could have introduced a weekly cost of disability payment and turbocharged the delivery of affordable homes. Instead, the Government chose to side with vested interests. Instead of broadening the tax base, it has eroded it with giveaways and tax breaks for multimillion euro companies and developers, all done under the guise of fiscal responsibility by a Government trying to pull the wool over people's eyes and make fools of them. I have news for the Government, though. No one is buying it. This budget represents the Government reverting to type. It is prioritising the corrosive politics of the golden circle. It has given up on the people struggling to keep food on the table and instead just announced one big giveaway for vested interests. It is just the latest shameful chapter in this Government's legacy of failure.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: We have heard that housing is a priority, disability is a priority, child poverty is a priority and climate is a priority. They are all priorities until they are not. For this Government today, we have seen that, in fact, big business and protecting its profits are the Government's priority. The headlines in the run-up to this budget were consistent: an end to successive giveaway budgets. There is no election looming, after all. Despite the Social Democrats consistently appealing for investment in services that will outlast the impact of any universal payments, the Government has so disappointingly reverted to type because this is a giveaway budget. It has chosen to give to fast-food outlets and property developers and chosen to let the ordinary man, woman and child continue to struggle.

Faced with a choice of a radical measure to tackle child poverty or dramatically boost the profits of large corporations, for the Minister of State and this Government, it was a no-brainer. It has come down on the side of big business without hesitation. This budget awards multinational companies like McDonald's and Starbucks millions of euro in extra profits while families choosing between eating and heating are denied targeted energy credits. The Government could have lifted 40,000 children out of poverty, targeted energy credits at 800,000 households, abolished the means test for carers, reduced the cost of childcare for families while rolling out a public model, introduced a weekly cost of disability payment, and turbocharged the delivery of affordable housing. Instead, it of course chose to side with vested interests. There is something quite disingenuous about saying one thing and doing another, which is exactly what this Government has done in budget 2026. At election time, it promised the sun, moon and stars. Today, it has delivered nothing, and it will tell us it is our fault. Its words will not pay the bills, and now its actions continue to ignore the problems. What is regrettable is that it chose to ignore countless fully costed, evidence-informed alternatives.

"Ending child poverty is not just the right thing to do, but is essential if we are going to prepare for the future and build the society that we all want to live in." Those were the words of our Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, speaking in advance of a summit on child poverty, a summit to tell us about the cause and effect of child poverty as if we did not already know. One in five children in this country experiences poverty. Children, in fact, are the most likely cohort in our society to experience poverty in Ireland and despite Simon Harris telling the voters in September 2024 that there was a roadmap to get to a second tier of child benefit payment, we

have seen nothing today that will meaningfully address the problem. They say it is a priority for this Government, but they act in the opposite fashion.

We have seen that big business is the Government's priority. If it cared about child poverty, it would have implemented the proposed changes from the many experts who have been saying it, as we know that universal measures have been proven to leave no legacy for anybody. The effects of living in persistent poverty as a child last for life and affect everything from emotional development, mental health and physical well-being to educational attainment. No doubt over the next couple of days we will hear one of the Government's representatives say that the Opposition does not have a monopoly on care for children, and we do not. Right now, however, the Government has the monopoly on power and look what it is choosing to do with that. Small increases in universal payments have coincided with an unacceptable rise in child poverty in recent years. The Government's measures simply do not work. It could have implemented a second tier of child benefit payment. The Minister of State knows it; we know it. The Government even said it wanted to do it but, collectively, it baulked at the last minute. We proposed a costed, evidence-informed solution by investing €770 million to implement a second tier of child benefit payment. The Government could have done this. Today, its announced measures simply will not work.

When it comes to early years education and childcare, this budget is simply an abject failure. The Government has focused on one of the three Cs affecting the childcare sector. It has made a feeble attempt at addressing the issue of capacity with ghost places, which no one will find, but it has ignored the other two, those being, cost and the conditions for workers. Why would the Government abandon one of the most important occupations of the State? Early years education and childcare are an inherent public good - that is non-negotiable - yet the Government ignores the reality of the failures of core funding and watches as providers leave the programme in their droves. It is essential, at a time of budgetary surplus, that it invest in the necessary social infrastructure for families and communities to thrive. If the Government is not doing it now, then it is certainly not going to do it at a time of any sort of fiscal precarity.

On the eve of a general election last year, this Government was awash with promise. The Tánaiste, Simon Harris, said: "I want us to develop a childcare system that works for every parent." We know that the system does not work now. It is not working for families or providers, and it most certainly is not working for the workers. Once the election result was over, the Tánaiste's ambition completely dissipated. It simply does not cut it to say that the Government has a five-year term and progress can be measured at the end of that term. As Mr. Fintan O'Toole asked this morning, what is another year to a two-year-old who is starving? At the very least, the Government could today have made a start on the development of a public model of childcare. It could have done this in budget 2026 but, once again, this Government chose to forget its words. It chose to row back on its commitments and bury its head in the sand when it came to the major issues facing this sector.

The Social Democrats presented the Government with a pathway to achieving a public model of childcare. It begins by ambitiously acquiring all existing and new empty childcare facilities that lay idle in our communities as a vivid reminder of a failed Fine Gael planning policy that asked house builders to manage the future of childcare in Ireland. It commits to taking 20% of the staff wages of those working in the sector in each of the next five years. It would know this if it listened to the families. It does not listen to the providers, it does not listen to the

workers and it most certainly does not listen to us. If it did, it would see a clear, ambitious but costed way to make the system work. I appeal to the Minister of State once again. We have seen no financial commitment to a public model of childcare. Maybe the collective agreement is not there yet. The Government should establish a special Oireachtas committee on public childcare. That is where we could really get into the meat and bones of this.

Page 51 of the Government's expenditure report tells a very worrying story to the thousands of children waiting on an assessment of need in this country. It reads: "... legislative changes to the Disability Act will be advanced to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Assessment of Need (AON) process." That is only in a budget book to show what will be 25,000 families by the end of this year where the Government's priorities lie. At the first opportunity to show advocates like Cara Darmody or the thousands of parents waiting on a date of assessment that it is listening to them, the Government has told us that it is more committed to changing the law than changing the waiting list. That is shameful.

Today was an opportunity for this Government to show its dedication to children and young people and their families. It was an opportunity to fulfil its pre-election promises. I would love to be standing here applauding the Government for meaningful attempts, whether they be in childcare, child poverty or young people's rights. As sure as night turned to day, however, it reverted to its original playbook. It has still managed a giveaway budget. Not to children or hard-pressed working families - of course not - but obviously to big business and vested interests.

Deputy Jen Cummins: Education is the foundation of every society, and education has been spoken about in this Chamber and in committee rooms on numerous occasions. Ireland should have an education system that is inclusive, equitable and accessible to every child and young person regardless of his or her postcode, income, ability or background, yet day after day and week after week, the truth of the poor supports, exclusion and inequality are told to politicians and the media, and more and more support groups have been set up to advocate for children and young people and learners who are on the margins. Shamefully, this Government is attempting to spin a €500 increase in student fees as a reduction. No one is buying this, least of all the students and their families. The Government has betrayed students today. No one needs a PhD in maths to realise that a reduction of €500 is less than the €1,000 in reduced fees last year. I do not want to hear the excuse about it being a cost-of-living measure. The Government parties went to the voters last year promising this reduction. It misled them and now it is not keeping its promise. Students are our future. The Government has turned a very large active cohort against it. I hope they never forget how, when the country was very wealthy, the Government chose not to keep its promise.

In Ireland, investment in primary through to tertiary education stands at only 2.8% of GDP. That is below the OECD average of 4.7%. The provision of funding to third level institutions for the development of courses, research and student-priced accommodation should be at the forefront of investment in our education system. We have heard about the resourcing for occupational therapy and speech and language therapies at primary and post-primary level time and again, but those extra places have, unfortunately, been put in with additional health and medical courses instead of increasing support for what we see are threadbare supports. The future of student accommodation in our third level institutions is in jeopardy due to the lack of support being given. I know it was said that the Government would do something at Maynooth

and UCD but those projects already exist, so that is nothing new. What about the technological universities? Nothing. There is no mention of them. I am glad to see there will be an investment in apprenticeships because those are working very well. That is very welcome.

Community and adult education is a service not only to individuals but also our society. Investment in staffing, classrooms, resources and support to learners is vital to ensure this vulnerable cohort of learners thrive and love learning. Youthreach and community and training centres are the unsung heroes of our education system. They provide second-chance or alternative education to students who have often had a negative experience of mainstream school. They provide QQI qualifications. However, staff in community training centres have not been fully brought into the public sector pay agreements, despite being under the same umbrella as Youthreach, for training and education. Again, we do not even see that addressed in the budget this year.

This budget should have placed educational disadvantage at the core of its message but it did not. Free books for all are welcome, as are free hot school meals for everyone. These are big sellable items that will no doubt help many families. However, evidence shows that targeted support is far more effective for the most vulnerable in our society. Measures such as support for devices that are ever more common in schools are not mentioned. These devices cost a lot of money but books are still needed. Free books for students have a knock-on effect for the local economy. Local bookshops are now not stocking schoolbooks and businesses are being halted because people are going straight to the publishers. Costly uniforms are still an issue for parents annually, despite Circular 32/2017. For those not fluent in Department of education lingo, that was published in 2017. It requested that schools use generic uniforms that can have iron-on or sew-on crests. This does not seem to have come into effect in schools. Free hot meals are available to students, but the cost is enormous. The quality of meals, as reported to my office and to the offices of many of my colleagues, is not fit for purpose. There is massive waste on a daily basis. It does not seem to have been thought through properly. We have a review of it, from a nutritional point of view, but we are only now being issued with guidelines on how things are supposed to be going, despite the scheme running for a lengthy period.

The school completion programme, which I have long advocated and worked for, has the potential to prevent early school-leaving and re-engage very vulnerable students, but it remains plagued by outdated governance structures, inconsistent funding and precarious employment for its staff. The budget does not even mention the school completion programme but the local management committees and staff on these projects are used to being ignored. DEIS Plus is welcome but I have no doubt there will be pilots and evaluations, it will roll along, and then there will be a realisation that it was not properly monitored and there was not enough investment, another new idea will come along and we will pilot that one for a while. While I am very hopeful for it, and many schools I have worked with throughout my time in the school completion programme will be very happy to see DEIS Plus, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

With regard to evidence that shows our young people and children are under stress and their emotional and mental well-being needs to be supported, we need to have specialist carers for emotional support for young people in our schools. However, this is going at such a slow pace that by the time it is fully rolled out to special primary and secondary schools, those children currently in junior infants will probably not see it at all.

Not one person has mentioned class sizes. We have the largest class sizes in the EU. The EU average is 19 and ours is 23. Children cannot learn in overcrowded classrooms. They just cannot. This issue is constantly mentioned by students, teachers, parents and unions, so it is flabbergasting that it has not even been mentioned today.

Let us talk about the basics of school buildings. The physical condition of our schools matters. In too many cases, children are still being taught in prefabs without proper ventilation or accessibility. Sometimes, these are in terrible condition. This is a costly outlay on an annual basis. For a three-year period, it was €86 million. In 2024, 440 schools were renting prefabs to the tune of €28.8 million. What should not be forgotten is the impact on climate as well as the children. These buildings are costly to run and poorly insulated. We need a proper and comprehensive plan to phase out prefab classrooms and replace them with modern energy-efficient buildings that serve our students for the long term. The Government has plans to roll out a school buildings programme. Quite frankly, I wish that every success. I am not very hopeful because it is quite an ambitious target.

It is an utter disgrace that any school in this country needs to ask for voluntary contributions in order to cover the cost of rising insurance and energy bills, to put in ICT systems, to repair sports facilities and to do the basics of what any modern State school should have. I see that capitation grants have risen, but not to the tune that will really work and prevent parents having to go out to do fundraisers. It is not up to school leaders and parents to constantly have to do fundraisers for the basics. Of course, if they want to fundraise for a trip or other icing-on-the-cake things, that is fantastic, but we definitely should not have that for the basics.

The lack of special education places remains a huge concern, particularly for children with autism and complex needs. The Department continually operates on a reactive and not proactive basis. Its promises and plans for special education have not come to fruition. As of 1 October, 24 children were without an appropriate school place. A further 160 children have school places on paper but there is no physical school building for them to attend. Therefore, they do not have school places. Promising phantom school places for children with additional needs is where the reality versus the paper exercise that has been done by the Government can be seen. This is the reality of what has happened. The stress this has caused parents and those children is immense.

We welcome the announcement that there will be an additional 1,717 SNAs and 860 special education teachers. However, as of August this year, there were 600 vacant teacher posts. I am wondering where these additional 860 special educational teachers will be found. Perhaps, if I were asked, I would say they were probably in Dubai or Australia living the life they could have over there that they could not possibly wish to have here. Unless this Government wants to make the country affordable to young graduate teachers, these vacancies will continue. The additional SNAs are welcome but I am a little concerned that this is more fiddling of numbers. It seems to me a grandiose announcement that will take the heat off the Government for the current absolute confusion and fear it has caused due to the new SNA review, the SNA workforce development unit and the long-awaited clarification of the role of SNAs.

A world-class education system is not a utopian dream. It is a political choice. We have the resources and the expertise. What we need is political will.

Deputy Charles Ward: When the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, presented this budget, he said we were "making the best possible use of the resources available to invest in our future and to strengthen our foundations." I did not know whether to laugh or cry at that. As the House can imagine, coming from Donegal, we are living with foundations and houses that are crumbling down around us. We are totally abandoned. How can the Government invest in the future when it has left Donegal so far behind, with a defective concrete crisis and a fishing crisis? It has failed the people of Donegal completely with this short-sighted budget. It has failed to address the potential collapse of the entire fishing industry following the recommendation of a 70% cut to the mackerel quota, as well as significant cuts to blue whiting and boarfish quotas. Our fishing industry faces losing up to €200 million. Our fishing communities across Donegal face even further economic and social decline, yet this has not even been touched in the budget. It is not important enough. I come from an island community that has witnessed and been devastated by the severe decline in fishing.

5 o'clock

Our fishermen are forced to watch as countries thrive off of our fish and our waters without any punishment, while Irish boats struggle to get a minimal quota. If they go over the quota, they are treated like criminals. We are now facing even more cuts. The budget should have committed to financial assistance for the Irish fishing industry as fishing communities have suffered a huge blow. Instead of this, we see full support for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy. This very policy, which the Government is trying to implement, has caused irreparable damage to the fishing industry in Ireland and has to be called what it is.

Crucially, the Government has failed to address the humanitarian crisis in Donegal. The defective concrete crisis is a crisis beyond all. It is in every single county in Ireland as we speak. From Buncrana to Elm Park, all the way to Malin Head, it is non-stop. People are suffering and it is not being addressed. Funding for this crisis was only mentioned in a sentence. It is a complete insult that there was not a proper mention. There was one sentence. Families across the State, through no fault of their own, have built homes that are now crumbling around them while we just get on with life up in Donegal, where homes are destroyed and children go to bed at night not knowing if they will wake up in a house that is safe in the morning. It is scandalous.

The widespread use of defective concrete across the State has devastated entire communities. It is not just in Donegal. It is all through the country. The crisis has inflicted severe mental health issues in Donegal and in other parts of the country. It needs to be recognised for what it is; a complete humanitarian crisis. The Government has not only failed to properly address this through two failed schemes, victims of the defective concrete crisis are forced to pay a levy on concrete required to rebuild their homes while, at the same time, they are charged VAT on builds, despite having already paid VAT when they built their homes in the first place. There is double taxation of people who are already struggling to meet the rising cost. The Government reduced the VAT on apartments. Why can it not reduce the VAT on homeowners who are affected by defective concrete? It is a double standard and it is not good enough. Homeowners are left in dire situations through no fault of their own. It does not sound like accountability to me.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Charles Ward: The Government must abolish the concrete levy for families rebuilding their homes. This is a priority. Homeowners cannot be punished because it is not their fault. The level of injustice cannot be ignored, especially when we are faced with so many examples of Government overspend. The Government has handled this crisis in a completely fiscally irresponsible way. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence, the Government persists in offering remediation when only a full demolition will do. If we go back to remediation, these houses will need to be revisited. It is not good enough. It is simply scandalous to be treated like a second class citizen in your own country.

Until there is accountability at the highest level, this vicious circle will continue. This is not just a Donegal issue. This is an issue up and down the country. People from across the floor have come to me about it. As we speak right now, there is not a county in Ireland that is not affected and it will grow. I have talked about this every week and nobody listens but they will listen in five or six years' time when they experience the difficulties Donegal have faced. The budget has missed the opportunity to finally do the right thing but it does not surprise me. I urge the Government to act before this crisis worsens for families on the brink and before somebody gets seriously injured or killed.

Donegal bore the brunt of Storm Amy last week, a storm that sadly took a person's life. I want us to remember Tommy Connors today and send deepest sympathies to his families. Today, I will also mention the Creeslough families with whom I am working closely. That tragedy happened three years ago today and they are still waiting for answers.

I ask the Government to act. The defective concrete families in Donegal have had enough as have those in the rest of the country, in Mayo, Clare, Limerick and elsewhere. I apologise if I have excluded anybody.

Deputy Brian Stanley: The month of October is associated with Halloween and children play trick or treat at Halloween. However, the Government's budget is all trick and no treats. That is what we get from the Government. There was an election in the previous year and Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael literally went out and bought votes. There was money for everything, there were one-offs and there was helicopter money nearly falling out of the sky. There were grants for everything, grants for millionaires and grants for people who did not need them. I never argued against grants for those who need them but a lot of the money was not targeted and went all over the place. It did not have the effect it should have but it bought votes. That is what it was about.

This year, there is no general election and there is nothing for workers. There is nothing for low- and middle-income earners. There is nothing for renters. There is nothing to alleviate the cost of living. There is not a thing in this budget for that. On housing, there is no increase in the delivery of affordable or cost-rental housing. The Minister of State knows, and everybody in this Chamber knows, that the people who are just above the limit for social housing but not able to get on the ladder to get a mortgage or a loan to buy a house are the people who are caught here. Some of them are now passing middle age and some of them are nearly at retirement age. They have no option but to remain in private rented accommodation, many of whom are at the mercy of rack-renting landlords. All the Government has done for renters is throw away whatever controls were there. From March onwards, it is a free for all. They are already starting to evict people so they can get ready to put the rent increases in place.

Landlords and developers were looked after in this budget. Of course, they were well looked after. There were enhanced corporation tax deals. There were tax cuts, tax reductions and VAT reductions for those developing apartments, as if that would somehow turn on supply. McDonalds, Costa and Starbucks got VAT reductions. I put this to the Minister of State: if the Government wanted to assist small cafés and restaurants, why did it not reduce VAT on the first three or four million euro of turnover? That could have been done. The Minister of State's colleagues told me in this Chamber a few years ago that food could not be separated from accommodation. We were told it could not be done. Now it can be done. Of course, it can have been done. Why did the Government not reduce the VAT on the first €2 million to €4 million to help those small business that are under pressure to survive?

There are no rent caps for renters and no extra tax relief. There is nothing there. I will give the case of Laois. Recently the Residential Tenancy Board showed there was a 10% increase in rent there which was double the national average over the preceding year. That follows eight successive quarters of high rents. There are no extra tax credits and no caps. There is nothing but increases in rents.

Workers got no tax relief, particularly those who earn between €24,000 and €70,000. There was nothing for them. What they did get was more local property tax, more carbon tax, no increase to child benefit and an increase for third level fees. No matter which way the Government dresses it up, it is an increase in third level fees from €2,000 to €2,500 this year and it should not try to spin it any other way.

There is also the health situation and the dental crisis. I read what was done for health. There is no specific extra funding for dental services. There is no public dental system worth talking about in Laois. I have read the figures out here before on the school dental scheme, the dental treatment service scheme, DTSS, for medical card holders and the PRSI-based scheme. It is absolutely hopeless and is almost non-existent. There is nothing there for them. We are supposed to be almost on the threshold of achieving Sláintecare after ten years. There is no increase in the income threshold for medical cards. In the name of God, does the Government realise there are people who should have medical cards who cannot go to a doctor?

The Government has missed low income workers again. It has not bothered with them. It is nearly 20 years since that threshold was increased. It is two decades. I have highlighted in this Chamber for 14 or 15 years and the Government did not do anything for them. For low- and middle-income earners, there are no medical cards, no tax relief and no income increases. Instead, there is more tax, more local property tax, more carbon tax and higher electricity and gas prices.

On the farming sector, I looked at what is there for tillage support. I do not see anything there for the tillage sector, which is under the most pressure, unless the Minister of State can show me where it is buried somewhere in the document. It is operating on thin margins and if there is any tweak, or if there is bad weather, it will be in the red. There is no increase in supports for suckler farmers.

There was €10.4 billion headroom here. People will ask how did the Government get it so wrong but I think it got it so right. The Government has put money into the pockets of developers, landlords and large hoteliers. That is what the Government has done. That seems to be what this budget is all about. The budget looks after the wealthy. The Government is

taking ordinary people for mugs. With the general election taking place last year, there was money for everything. We were told the country was awash with money. There were several one-off payments. This year, there is nothing only hardship for people who are on middle and low incomes. That is the reality.

Deputy Seamus Healy: This is a budget for the rich and powerful in our society, namely developers, vulture funds, big landlords and millionaires. It is certainly not a budget for PAYE workers, the homeless, housing applicants, families, children, the disabled or even social welfare recipients. This Government is completely out of touch with ordinary people. Those in government live in a bubble here in Leinster House. Is it that they do not know or do not care that there is a cost-of-living crisis? Families are struggling to make ends meet. Grocery prices are through the roof. We have some of the highest energy prices in Europe, yet there is not a single cost-of-living support in this budget. Families are falling behind with rent, mortgage repayments and energy bills. Parents are constantly choosing between heating the home, if they have one, and feeding their children

. Budgets are about choices. We should always remember that the measure of a nation is how it looks after its most vulnerable. In this budget, the Government chosen to support the wealthy as opposed to the most vulnerable. Budgets must be about fairness. We are one of the wealthier countries. We are the wealthiest we have been at any time in our history, but there are 630,000 people living below the poverty line, 190,000 of whom are children. Approximately 16,000 people are homeless, 5,014 of whom are children.

The minimum wage and social welfare rates are inadequate to provide a minimum standard for living. That is on the basis of research carried out by various organisations. Last year's budget widened the rich-poor gap again, putting €1,214 per year into the pockets of people on incomes of over €100,000 a year. That was not the case for those on lower incomes. This budget makes the gap even greater. Ireland is now a deeply unequal society in which there is poverty, deprivation and homelessness. Families are under huge pressure to keep a roof over their heads and to stay above the waterline.

The budget continues the failed housing policy of previous Administrations. The Government is relying primarily on the private sector to deliver, which is something it has never done and never will do. We need an emergency programme for the building of social and affordable houses by local authorities on public land. There is no additional funding in this budget for the tenant in situ scheme, which prevents homelessness. This scheme has been vandalised by the Government. Tipperary County Council has not purchased a single house this year due to a lack of funding. The budget refers to grants to adapt homes for older people and persons with disabilities. Tipperary County Council had to stop its work on the scheme in this regard last month due to running out of funding. There is no multi-annual funding proposed in the budget for this scheme, which means that this will happen again and again.

While social welfare increases are welcome, they are nowhere near providing a minimum standard of living. Social Justice Ireland says that core social welfare rates must increase by €25 per week if there is to be any impact in the context of reducing poverty. Similarly, the living wage needs to be at €17 per hour rather than the €14.15 cent proposed. During the last general election campaign, all parties committed to abolishing the means test for carers. That is another promise that has been reneged on in this budget. Families were looking forward to

the implementation of a maximum payment of €200 per month for childcare, which was again promised by all parties. Another promise reneged on.

Clonmel, a major social and economic hub, has been forgotten again in this budget. In fact, it has been specifically and deliberately excluded. The special regeneration areas designated for the enhancement of older housing and commercial properties are being extended to include the towns of the Athlone, Drogheda, Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo. Kilkenny is already in the scheme. Clonmel has been excluded from this scheme by Fine Gael's Minister for Finance, Pascal Donohoe, in the budget. This is, of course, in keeping with the bad record of Fine Gael in relation to Clonmel. In government, Fine Gael closed Kickham Barracks, abolished Clonmel Corporation and South Tipperary County Council and closed St. Michael's acute psychiatric unit. The people of Clonmel will not accept either this decision or this snub. I am demanding that the Government Oireachtas Members in south Tipperary, namely Deputy Michael Murphy and Senator Garret Ahearn of Fine Gael and Senator Imelda Goldsboro of Fianna Fáil, make sure that this outrageous decision is revised and that Clonmel is included in the scheme.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I know we are a smaller group, but one of the Ministers should be here on budget day to hear what the smaller groups have to say. I mean no offence to the Minister of State.

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: It sounded like it.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The absence of the Ministers is not a sign that there is an interest in what we have to say.

An independent life is what we all aspire to. What hope can young people have of an independent life and a home of their own after this budget? Two thirds of people under the age of 35 live at home with their parents. What hope can a disabled person have? What hope can a family paying €3,000 euro on average more a year for their groceries since the cost-of-living crisis began have? It is highly ironic that we all scan our own groceries now because Tesco and the other big chains force us to do so. However, they still charge us the same amount for those groceries.

Real incomes have decreased as inflation and the cost of living have risen. Electricity, which every person uses and which should be considered an essential, is being profiteered off. The price of electricity has risen by 69%. Gas has gone up by 102%. The average gas bill is now €280 euros more. The supports provided previously in this regard have been taken away from people.

The budget is a great giveaway for the takeaways, if people will excuse the pun. The fast-food chains will benefit from the VAT reduction, from 13.5% to 9%, for hospitality sector. Next year, this will cost the Irish taxpayer €670 million. Who gains from this? It is McDonald's, Starbucks, Burger King and all of those huge multinational companies that are highly profitable as matters stand as opposed to the small cafes that communities need. Forty one per cent of this cut will go to the big fast-food sector and 20% will go to small cafés and restaurants. Some of the companies to which I refer are among the biggest and most profitable in the world. Given that we are marking two years of genocide, I take this opportunity to note that they are all at the top of the BDS list. McDonald's makes €41 million in profits in Ireland alone, so the

chicken mc nugget subsidy is very aptly named. Supermacs has profits of €46 million. Deloitte, the accounting firm, has told the Government time and again that this cut will not have a benefit in the areas in which the Government says it wants it to go to. The INMO has pointed out that the Government could have hired 11,000 additional nurses or that free public transport could have been introduced for the cost of this cut in VAT.

On housing, the Government is throwing money at developers yet again in so many different ways. The Government has still not said how much the VAT reduction to 9% for the construction of apartments will cost. However, we do know the cost of some of the other initiatives it has introduced today. The cost of the cut in corporation tax for cost rental is estimated at €20 million. The cost of the corporation tax cut on some construction goods and the conversion of non-residential buildings has been put in the Government's books at €125 million. There are a slew of other incentives. How many social and affordable homes could have been built for that amount on council land that is lying idle? In this regard, I refer, for example, to the landbank in Dublin West, at Ashtown and Dunsink, which has been identified as having the potential to be used to provide 7,000 houses. The cost of rent is strangling people. The Government has just provided a €200 increase in the rent credit as opposed to the real rent controls that are needed. This move will not attract back one teacher, nurse or other essential worker from abroad.

As we know, the disability sector has been very neglected. Some 93% of the disposable income of a household in which there is a disable child is spent on disability costs. The Government has increased the domiciliary care allowance by €20 a month, which is less than a fiver a week. The extra teachers and SNAs just cannot be found. Schools are closing due to costs. The Government has increased the standard capitation grant by €50 a year per child. The INTO asked for a €75 increase.

There are a couple of other things I noticed in the budget. In the context of justice, we have an epidemic of gender-based violence. There were four victims of male violence in two days last week, and the Government has increased the funding for the entire sector by €11 million. Once again, this is completely disproportionate to the need that is there for refuges, rape crisis centres and outreach services to help people get out of violent relationships.

In sport, the Minister mentioned a new era for football in our country. In that regard, he has allocated €3 million for the League of Ireland academies. A sum of €10 million was given to the NFL in order to get two teams to come here to play one game last week. That game will not benefit many thousands of people in the same way that football will. We need investment in grassroots sport, not this kind of investment in jingoistic sports and the super-wealthy.

This is a very wealthy country. By the Minister's own admission, the Government has a €10 billion surplus. Yet, students are going to pay €500 more for third level education than they did last year. Nothing has really been allocated to help people with childcare costs. Before this budget, the mantra from nearly every party was that the cost of childcare should be €200. We are absolutely nowhere near that. Of course, people cannot find childcare places. We need investment in a public childcare system that should, like primary and secondary education, be absolutely free. We do not need people completely ignoring the scale of the issue.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is a budget of austerity at a time of plenty, which is incredible. No exaggeration, but this budget is going to make life for ordinary people harder at a time when

we have a very large budget surplus and when €1.7 billion is being given to corporations in various forms of corporate welfare. If an alien had come down here at 1 o'clock today and listened to the budget speeches of the Ministers, they would have thought that this must be a country where ordinary people are doing great, where there is no cost-of-living crisis, where workers are getting on just fine and where companies must be really struggling, hence the need for a budget to help them out. Of course, that bears no relationship to reality.

The reality is that we have unprecedentedly high levels of corporate profits. The corporations are doing great. The developers are doing great. The corporate landlords are doing great. All these corporations are profiting from the crises affecting ordinary people, namely the housing crisis, the health crisis and the general cost-of-living crisis. It is ordinary people - workers, carers, disabled people, renters and young people - who are struggling. One in five children is growing up in enforced deprivation and having multiple experiences of deprivation in this State. One in three families struggle to pay their energy bills. Something like 50% of families find it hard to put enough food on the table to feed their children. Yet the Government, at a time of plenty, has decided to make their lives harder. That is not just some generality; it is based on the facts of what has been presented to us in the budget documents.

Let us take the case of a worker. Having checked the tax tables, a worker on an average income will be slightly worse off next year just in terms of income tax. When we take into account that all the once-off cost-of-living measures that were given last year in an attempt to buy the election are all gone, for an average working couple with two kids that is over €1,000 gone. The average family with both parents working will be worse off to the tune of well over €1,000. That is at a time of plenty. Students will be worse off next year. At a time of plenty, they will pay €2,500 - an additional €500 - for a supposedly free third level education. However, the Government has the gall to try to gaslight us and students - it is getting some headlines for this - by saying it is going to reduce student fees by €500. In reality, it is increasing those fees by €500. There is nothing for parents of young children in the budget. The Government parties ran in the most recent election on the promise of a cap of €200 a month on childcare fees. However, people are going to continue to be pay €200 a week in childcare fees. We hear that 2,300 new childcare places are promised at a time when 62,000 children are on childcare waiting lists.

There is nothing for renters in the budget, while the Government has legislation coming which will allow rents to be hiked faster, harder and higher. Life is going to get harder for renters. Possibly the worst and most disgusting element of this austerity budget package in a time of plenty is the attack on disabled people. It is an attack that will amount to about €1,400. The Government is stealing €1,400 from the pockets of disabled people. The Disability Federation of Ireland claims that this budget is a betrayal of disabled people and states that it will strip away vital supports and lead to a deepening of poverty. It points out that the past three budgets have recognised the extra cost of disability through the disability support grant, which is now gone. It is not spare cash; it is what keeps the lights on and the heating running for carers. A measly €10 is eaten up by the cost-of-living crisis, and there is no move to meet the election promise to scrap the means test for carers.

On the other hand, this is a great budget for fast-food giants and major hotel chains. How much is the Government giving to them? It is putting €681 million into the pockets of these in one of the greatest acts of corporate lobbying scammery that has ever been carried out. We

could call it "Operation get behind the small café", but the vast majority of this money is not going to small cafés. It will go to the big chains, which are already making big profits. This has been a big exercise in them lobbying and then getting their way, with ordinary workers paying about €200 from their own pockets to cover the cost of this cut.

Developers are also getting a VAT cut. That is great. This is the new way that corporate welfare is being done. There is a VAT cut for developers of €390 million. On top of that, they get an enhanced deduction for certain costs in the construction of apartments. The latter will cost another €125 million. There is also a tax break for corporate landlords in the form of an exemption from corporation tax on cost-rental income worth €20 million. I thought the whole idea of cost rental is that the rental is equivalent to the cost. Where exactly is the profit meant to be coming from this? It highlights that profiteering is happening in the cost-rental sector, which makes sense of why cost rental is so unaffordable.

Most people do not know this, but well-paid employees of multinational corporations here who earn up to €1 million a year get 30% of their tax back. That is great. There are nine people who are in receipt of that who are on more than €3 million a year. It is a tax break for some of the richest people in our country.

I am sure there are more measures of corporate welfare that I could go into. I will finish on this point, however. Heather Humphreys is not here today; she is no longer a Minister. If she was, I am sure she would be sitting over there nodding along and voting the budget through. She would be in favour of all these austerity measures; she did plenty of them herself. She would be happy enough. However, she is not here and I would say she is not happy enough now because she is standing in a presidential election. She is standing against one other candidate, an Opposition Independent candidate who has united the left behind her.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not canvassing, Deputy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is going to become an issue in the election. The budget has clarified who this Government represents.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up. I call Deputy Roderic O'Gorman.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This Government represents the burger joints, the developers and the corporate landlords, but not ordinary people.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Any government's first budget is so important. It is a map for how it is going to act over the next five years. It allows the Government to take the initial steps in areas it says it is going to prioritise. What today's budget tells us is that this Government has no sense of direction. The untargted VAT cut will benefit the biggest food businesses but is delayed for the small cafés that need it. There is no movement on the big commitments Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael made during the general election. There is no start on the public childcare model or the second tier of child benefit, nor is there an abolition of the means test for carers. When it comes to the environment, there is no ring-fenced funding for a national nature restoration plan. While these are long-term projects, the work needs to begin on them

in year one. Today's budget demonstrates that there is no seriousness on behalf of this Government about the commitments it made not even one year ago.

Looking at the VAT reduction, I am struck by the absolute lack of imagination on the Government's part in how it has designed this proposal. All of us know of cafés and small businesses that are struggling in our communities. The VAT cut will shift vast sums towards big businesses that are already highly profitable. At the same time, the Government has decided to delay it so it does not immediately benefit the small businesses, such as cafés and restaurants, which are the very sector on which the Government has justified this entire VAT cut in the first place. Instead of the Government recognising that its measure is untargeted and simply too expensive, it is pulling this accountancy trick and basically delaying the implementation of this cut for six months. It is asking small businesses, the ones it is justifying this whole measure on, to hold out for six more months before they get any help. We have welfare for big business but the small guy can wait.

The Green Party put forward an alternative proposal, one that could have been rolled out from 1 January to provide help quickly, and it was targeted so that the biggest proportional benefit would go to those small businesses that actually need our help. Our proposal would have only cost €256 million in a full year, compared with the Government's proposal.

Think of the opportunity cost of the €681 million this VAT cut is costing. Think of the items the Government told us were a priority for it in the general election and the programme for Government that it has not delivered. For example, there is no second tier of child benefit. In our budget submission, we costed this measure at €772 million. Not undertaking this costly VAT cut for big businesses could have almost entirely paid for that second tier of child benefit, which would raise 40,000 children out of poverty. The abolition of the means test for carers, which was a solemn pledge made by both Government parties during the general election, has been kicked down the road. There is also no start on a public model for childcare. Giving the State capacity to set up public childcare in areas where the spaces are not currently there is the only way the State is going to get to grips with the lack of capacity in the childcare sector. In our pre-budget submission, the Green Party estimated that €30 million in 2026 would allow the State to fund 50 new public childcare services, offering a total of 3,000 spaces in geographic areas where there is currently underprovision. While one year of investment will not solve the capacity challenge, it is about making a start and demonstrating that the Government is serious about making major change over its lifetime.

This budget demonstrates no commitment to change in the area of nature. The Government raided the climate and nature fund earlier this summer. All of that €3.15 billion, a significant proportion of which was to be used to support farmers and organisations implementing the nature restoration law, has been spent filling the gaps in the State's infrastructure bill. There was an expectation that this budget would contain a clear, ring-fenced fund that could be drawn down from so that we can protect our uplands areas and improve habitats, while at the same time guaranteeing farmers new sources of income. How will we persuade landowners to sign up to new commitments if there is no evidence that the Government has the money put aside to reward them? It is a wasted opportunity and it is a further signal of this Government's lack of seriousness.

The Government often celebrates our economic situation and the existence of the surpluses that we have. Compared with neighbouring economies right now, such as the UK, France and

Germany, our economic situation is favourable. If budget 2026 represents the best this Government can do and that, in the good times, this Government can fail to start making the big changes in year one and initiate change when we have big surpluses, it inspires absolutely no confidence in this Government's ability to handle the more challenging economic times that it likes to warn us are on the way.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I welcome the opportunity to say a few words. I absolutely agree with the contribution of Deputy Charles Ward. Nothing would have prepared me for the extent of, and the damage done by, the defective blocks issue in Donegal. I thought I knew it from listening to colleagues speak on the issue, including my previous colleague, Thomas Pringle, as well as members of Sinn Féin. Nothing prepared me for the extent of the disaster and what people have gone through and continue to go through. I fully support Deputy Charles Ward in that regard. Not only are there defective blocks and concrete, there is also defective understanding and a defective compensation scheme. They are all defective.

Today is the anniversary of the Creeslough explosion. While it is absolutely not an election issue, I promised at every opportunity to repeat what they asked me to repeat when I met them in a private capacity in Donegal. They said that they feel abandoned, both nationally and locally. I just want to put that on record.

With regard to the budget, I cannot believe that we have utterly failed to learn from the pandemic and the declaration of the climate and biodiversity emergency in 2019. Over the years, the Government has acknowledged the planet is burning. I searched in vain in the two speeches to see whether there was a recognition of not alone the emergencies we have declared, but the necessary transformative action. While I do not expect any budget to sort out those crises, I expect a budget to be put in the context of the challenges and the existential threat posed by climate change. I also expect the budget to be put in the context of public health infrastructure so that we are prepared for the next pandemic.

It is very worrying that I see a continuation of the business-as-usual model when transformative action is needed. More than 16,300 people are homeless and there is no recognition or framework put in here with regard to how that crisis was caused. The Housing Commission said that we need a radical reset of policy, yet we are fiddling around adding more pieces to a jigsaw with no overall picture. Indeed, the figure in this budget is €2 billion for HAP and one or two other schemes. Not only should HAP be phased out – not overnight because people are utterly dependent on it now – but the Government is still using the language that people are being adequately housed in social housing. Such a twist of language leads to a huge problem of trust for people on the ground regarding what is being said. If a person is in receipt of HAP, he or she is not adequately housed in social housing. The Government is twisting language on its head. The most fundamental human right is the provision of a home for our people in a so-called Republic.

In respect of this plan, I will pick out some aspects. While there are some good points, colleagues will forgive me if I highlight the amount that is missing. The Government made a solemn promise to do away with the means test for carers, but that has been utterly reneged on. I will read out some of the figures for carers. They relate predominately to females, which might go a long way to explaining why we and economists continue to ignore them. The number of people in unpaid positions just increases. Between 2016 and 2022, the number of

people providing regular unpaid care increased by more than 50%, up to nearly 300,000 in 2022 and rising all of the time. I will not go into the other figures. We have not abolished that. The opportunity was not taken. I know the Minister of State's, Deputy Moran's, heart and soul are behind abolishing that and I do not know why it is not happening. I do not know how we can go with economists telling us we have a growth economy when we are not valuing the number of carers doing unpaid leave. Then we were promised a cost-of-disability payment. I could go back over all the reports that set out the need for that. It is not even mentioned in the budget.

One of the major solutions to the housing crisis is to make a commitment to build public housing on public land. It will not sort out the problem but it will go a long way towards a solution and will also send a strong message that the Government is in the middle - i lár an aonaigh - as regards the solution. The prices, ultimately, will have to come down. Instead of that, we are allowing public land to be used for a mixture of housing and there is no analysis of that solution to the amount of people on a waiting list. In Galway city, the wait is between 15 and 20 years.

In Galway, as we speak, 64 patients are on trolleys. There are 40 in the accident and emergency department and 14 in wards. We play around with numbers all the time and talk about the billions of euro going into health but ignore the fact we have failed to train enough people to work in our hospitals and are reliant on agency staff, which cost much more.

The Minister of State is putting his head down and I do not blame him, in a sense. These problems come up year after year and we need to put out the message they are not inevitable. A republic worth its name has to recognise that the neoliberal ideology to date has created these problems. We cannot keep going on. The latest EU report on climate change pointed out we are failing to recognise we cannot continue with the same unsustainable growth approach and also do something about climate change. It is not possible.

Violence against women was mentioned by Deputy Coppinger. There is an increase of some €11 million in it. It is a drop in the ocean compared with the figures. Despite our third strategy for zero violence against women, the figures keep rising. It is a crisis and, at a conservative estimate, costs €2.5 billion to the economy every year. Every year since 2016, I stand up here and point this out. Perhaps the economists could put a specific value on it. I am told it is €2.5 billion. We could save money for the economy by stopping it.

There is not one single line about or commitment to public childcare, which is the solution to the problem of people paying two mortgages for years, one for a house and one for childcare. The previous Government with the Green Party went some way to reducing the cost, and I always praised it for that, but the answer is public childcare. Otherwise, people cannot work. They need to do that and not have to pay a second mortgage.

Regarding the Irish language, there is an utter failure to recognise there is a housing crisis in the Gaeltacht. Tá an Ghaeilge agus cúrsaí tithíochta fite fuaite lena chéile. Tá méadú suarach ó thaobh airgid d'Údarás na Gaeltachta. Níl ach breis is €2 milliún i gceist.

An Ceann Comhairle: Go raibh maith agat, Deputy.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Ní leor é sin chun dul i ngleic leis na dúshláin-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. Your time is up.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: -----atá os comhair Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na nGaeltachtaí. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. Before I move to the next group, I ask all Deputies to be aware the office of President is beyond political debate; therefore, so are the candidates running in the upcoming election. I want everybody on both sides of the House to respect that. There is no mention of candidates or the President in this House; they are above political debate. Thank you. That is for everybody in the House.

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: It is nothing new to the Deputy to be bending the rules.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran: The Deputy was always about disobeying the law.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is a law now, is it?

An Ceann Comhairle: I move now to Deputy Michael Collins.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Can I just ask for clarity? What Standing Order is that, or is it a salient ruling?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a salient ruling, Deputy. Thank you.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Which number? Could you send me an email with the number?

An Ceann Comhairle: I will, absolutely. I will send a note to every Deputy. I call Deputy Collins.

Deputy Michael Collins: One of my constituents after seeing the budget today sent me this message: "Work, work, work, and at the end of the year you are back to where you started." After budget 2026 has been unveiled, many working families across the country are asking a simple question: where is the relief for us? Despite rising wages, soaring rents and relentless inflation, the Government has chosen not to adjust income tax bands. This decision means that middle-income earners - the backbone of our economy - will continue to be taxed more heavily as their earnings rise, even if those increases barely keep pace with the cost of living.

We are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. Families are struggling to afford groceries, childcare, energy bills and housing. Yet instead of easing the tax burden, the budget leaves them exposed. The failure to index tax bands to inflation means that more of their income is pushed into higher tax brackets, reducing take-home pay and punishing hard work. This is bad news for working families. It is bad news for the nurse doing overtime, the teacher taking on

extra duties and the small business owner trying to grow. These are the people who keep our country running and they deserve better.

There are welcome measures in this budget - increases in social welfare, investment in housing and support for the arts - but, for the average worker earning €40,000 to €60,000 a year, there is no meaningful tax relief, no recognition of the pressures they face and no signal that their contribution is valued. We must ask whether this budget is for everyone or just for some. Middle Ireland is not asking for handouts. It is asking for fairness, a tax system that reflects reality and a government that understands that working harder should not mean falling further behind. Let us not forget that economic growth must be inclusive. If we leave behind the very people who drive that growth, we risk undermining the social contract that binds us together.

The Government's decision to reduce the VAT from 13.5% to 9% for food-led hospitality and personal services is a hard-won victory, one for which I and my colleagues in Independent Ireland have campaigned relentlessly. This is not just a budget line item; it is a lifeline. For months, I have stood in this Chamber and in towns and villages across Ireland warning that, without urgent action, businesses would close, jobs would be lost and communities would be hollowed out. I said plainly this was a necessary pressure-release valve for an industry under immense pressure. Let me be clear that delaying the measure until July 2026 is a mistake. It risks pushing many operators to the brink. We cannot afford to wait. Every day counts when you are trying to keep the lights on. I cannot understand People Before Profit Deputies continuously dismissing this as a non-runner. They keep picking out high-flyers in the industry but the bottom line is that hairdressers, small cafés and small restaurants are in dire trouble. Some 600 of them closed in 2024 and 150 closed in the first three months of this year. People Before Profit Deputies are probably not on the ground like we are; they are probably in a bubble thinking this VAT rate is not welcome. It certainly is but I wish it was going to be delivered straight away. The fuel increase is going through tonight; the VAT decrease should go through tonight as well.

I met with café owners in Kerry, salon operators in Dublin and pub owners in Cork. They told me the same thing, namely, they are keeping the doors open but are not taking home a wage. Margins have been decimated by insurance premiums, rates, energy bills, wage demands and supply costs. This so-called temporary measure has become the economic bedrock for many local businesses. Entire enterprises were launched during the life of the 9% VAT rate, particularly across Cork, Kerry and the west coast. They are now clinging on in the hope that some stability will be restored. To those in government who say the VAT cut is too costly, I ask what is the cost of doing nothing. If even a fraction of these businesses shut down, the knock-on effects will be devastating - not just job losses, but the loss of community anchors. These are not faceless corporations but family businesses, corner cafés and village pubs that are live wires of towns and parishes up and down the country.

In the budget, the wet pubs have got nothing, which leaves many of them in a dire situation. The only thing they see out of it is the minimum wage has risen so they will have to pay out more. This is a big blow to them. With geopolitical uncertainty threatening foreign direct investment, now is the time to double down on supporting domestic industries. Hospitality and personal service remain among the largest indigenous employers in Ireland. We welcome the

VAT reduction but will continue to fight for its swift implementation, for fairness and for the survival of the small businesses that make Ireland what it is.

The budget does not meet the moment. It does not reflect the hardship faced by ordinary people, especially those in rural Ireland, where the cost of living continues to spiral and where the burden of Government policy is felt most acutely.

Let us talk about fuel - a basic necessity for families, workers and farmers. Today, the average price of petrol is €1.74 per litre and diesel is €1.67 per litre. These prices are among the highest in Europe. With the planned carbon tax increase of 2 cent per litre, Ireland is set to become the most expensive country in the EU for diesel. Home heating oil will go up €20 per fill. Car diesel will go up €1.48 per fill. Petrol will go up €1.25 per fill. Gas will go up to nearly €17 per fill. Coal has gone up 90 cent per bag and it will be more again in January. This is not just statistic; it is a crisis. In west Cork and across rural Ireland, people rely on their cars. Public transport is limited or non-existent. Parents drive long distances to schools. Workers commute to towns. Farmers depend on fuel to run machinery. These are not luxuries; they are lifelines, and yet the budget adds to their burden. The carbon tax hike layered on top on excise duty and VAT means that up to 60% to 70% of the costs of every litre of fuel goes back into the Government coffers in taxes and levies. That is €6 out of every €10 taken from the pocket of the working family.

I have said it before, and I will say it again, that this is not an environmental policy, it is a fiscal punishment. It disproportionately affects those who can least afford it. It punishes rural communities, low-income households and small businesses. What supports are offered in return? None. There is no fuel rebate. There is little rural transport expansion. There is no meaningful relief for those who have no choice but to drive.

This budget also fails to deliver on housing. While €11.3 billion was allocated, the reality is that delivery remains painfully slow. Families are still waiting. Young people are still locked out and dereliction continues to scar our towns. We need direct build programmes, not just schemes and subsidies. There are over 16,000 people homeless and more than 5,000 of these are children. This budget does not help them get a home.

During the election, this Government promised that the cost would be down by €200 per month per child. Where is that promise today? Aside from the rent or the mortgage for a typical family, the second biggest expense is childcare. Where are the election promises? They are not there. It promised false promises.

On healthcare, the promises ring hollow. Waiting lists grow. Services are stretched. Rural hospitals are under threat. We need investment in community care, GP access and mental health services, not just headline figures.

For our older citizens, a €10 pension increase is welcome, but it is not enough. St. Vincent de Paul said it should be €16 at the very least for pensions. Many pensioners are living in cold homes facing rising energy bills and struggling to make ends meet. They deserve more than tokenism; they deserve dignity. This budget is a missed opportunity. It could have been a budget for fairness, balance and vision. Instead, it is a budget of imbalance and neglect.

On agriculture, the tillage sector is on its knees. This was the day to deliver but there was zero. There was no suckler grant increase this time; there was zero. The farming bodies are a

calling it a non-event today. On derogation, the dairy sector and the problems with the drop in the price of milk, there was no addressing of those situations today. The mackerel quota looks like it could drop 70%, which would decimate Irish fishers. The Government has stood over the decimation of them before. Surely be God it should stand up strong this year. However, there is nothing for inshore sector. The National Inshore Fishermen's Association issued the following statement:

The National Inshore Fishermen's Association, NIFA, wishes to express our deep frustration, disappointment, and sense of abandonment following the announcement of this year's budget. Just €7.4 million has been allocated to Bord Iascaigh Mhara, BIM, for sustainability, a figure that once again shows how little value this Government places on the inshore fishing sector and the families who depend on it. For the thousands of men and women working our coastal waters, this is not just a number on a page - it is a clear message that we have been forgotten. While €357 million is provided for broadcast, €65.4 million for TG4, €84.9 million for major arts projects, €10.7 million in extra funding for Sport Ireland, and €3 million to establish League of Ireland academies.

They got zero. That is an astonishing hit for the inshore sector. The statement continues that the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, and his colleagues "speak often about supporting rural Ireland and protecting traditional livelihoods, but this budget tells a very different story." What they are saying is that there was a non-delivery for the inshore sector, which is struggling and on its knees at present. I would like to know about the roads budget, the OPW and water treatment plants, but my time is up and I will give way to my colleagues.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Budget 2026 is remarkably flat. It is a budget without vision. It is absent of ideas and innovation. The budget looks like it was written by a senior civil servant just looking to keep the system ticking over. I imagine maybe that is what happened because the Minister, Deputy Chambers, was too busy. He was involved in the omnishambles of the presidential election campaign.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy was here when I made my remarks.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I am not mentioning any candidates in the election at all.

An Ceann Comhairle: Do not even go there.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It is important because we had an individual whose job it was to be the director of elections of that campaign and who was also at the time expected to produce a budget. That individual, and the truth be known, went through a serious crisis while trying to introduce a budget. That is a mistake. It is a mistake in relation to making sure that this issue of budgetary development is so important. It should have the full attention of an individual and not what has happened over the past number of weeks.

In many ways, this is a post-election budget. Budgets are usually designed to fit the economic cycle, but what we are seeing here is a budget that is suiting the electoral cycle. This time last year, we were all listening to all the different promises of a giveaway budget but here we see

retrenchment in the Government's budgetary plans. Basically, there is no need to spend because they got the votes that were necessary to get them into these leather seats-----

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon): It was in the programme for Government.

Deputy Peadar Kirby: -----and this year they will retrench on it. One of the major problems with this Government is that it is focusing on the actual cycle itself. Post-election budget hammers the middle-income earners. Instead of the promised tax cuts the Government mentioned, for middle Ireland there is a tax increase today. It is an incredible situation. Instead of the cuts to student fees, there is a fee increase today. Instead of a once-off energy credit for families suffering from the cost-of-living crisis, there is a carbon tax increase today. The Government is going in the opposite direction in terms of the promises it made last November.

One of the biggest problems of the Government is that it is one of the key drivers of the cost-of-living crisis. Last year, the Government took in €4.1 billion in fuel taxes. This was highest ever in the history of this State in the jaws of a cost-of-living crisis. It is an incredible thing. Usually, governments reduce the pressure on families who are suffering from the cost-of-living crisis, but this Government went in the opposite direction.

On the carbon tax, it is an incredible situation. The carbon tax is being increased this year again. Last year, carbon tax took in about €1.1 billion. It is going to be increased again this year. The Government says it has no other option and it wants to change people's behaviour around climate change, but there is more than one way of changing people's behaviours. The Government does not need to use a stick all the time to change people's behaviours in terms of climate change. People are crying out for public transport, but they cannot get it in their local communities. I am from a constituency where the Government promised a rail line for the past 20 years. It is still not in place. People would love to ditch the car and get onto the train to get to work, but the Government will not provide it. People are crying out for solar panels, but it costs €10,000 to put solar panels on their roofs. People are looking to get their houses deep retrofitted, but it can cost €30,000 to €40,000 to get that deep retrofit in their homes. People would love to buy electric cars, but they are significantly more expensive.

Instead of using the carrot in terms of changing people's behaviours when it comes to climate change, this Government is following on from where the Green Party left off. It is the tax stick to beat change into people. It is wrong. It is hurting people, and it is not fair. That is where the Government needs to change in relation to this.

One of the big problems I have - and I do not think any political party has mentioned this yet - is the single lack of desire in this budget to deal with waste. Waste has been one of the most defining elements of this Government over the past ten years. This Government has become allergic to accountability and responsibility. As a result, we have seen so many projects balloon in cost in our time from the national children's hospital down to the last news report of the €100,000 bike shed for the National Maternity Hospital. However, there is nothing in this to say that the Government is going to fix the problem and save money for the State. For most families, a budget includes the income that comes in, but also what goes out, and in terms of what goes out, many families are forced to make efficiencies to make sure they can make ends meet. This Government will not even do that. That blinding lack of focus on waste is a disaster

for this Government. I have said it before, but if either the Taoiseach, Deputy Martin, or the Tánaiste, Deputy Harris, were employed by a private business, they would be fired right now because of the level of waste that is happening in Irish society.

6 o'clock

It is extremely frustrating. I put in a number of parliamentary questions recently. One of the replies that came back was amazing, that €74 million has been spent on commissioning reviews in this country, reviews that often do not even get read or are sometimes not even published, and often just remain on a dusty shelf. This budget is promising €21 million extra for the running of the Oireachtas, and nothing in it about tillage, farmers who are at the pin of their collar in terms of the costs they are suffering and the lack of prices they are getting for their product. Parliamentarians can vote themselves €21 million for the running costs of the Oireachtas. Some €1.3 million was spent by the Department of agriculture to get UCD to conduct a review into Ireland's dog population numbers. The level of reviews, publications and reports is astounding and the money being spent on them is absolutely massive.

I want to talk about the issue of housing. I am amazed that we have had a crisis of such enormity yet there is such lack of ambition in terms of the Government responding to this crisis. We have among the slowest planning and permit systems in the European Union. We have one of the slowest tendering systems in the EU. We have judicial reviews to beat the band to stall major projects. There is nothing in this budget in terms of reforming the whole process which is grinding the building of homes to a halt. Then there is the issue of Uisce Éireann and Electric Ireland. Uisce Éireann was in the infrastructure committee a couple of months ago. I asked the officials how long it would take Uisce Éireann to fill the gaps that exist in the water infrastructure that are currently blocking the building of homes. They said that by 2050 they will have those gaps finished. In 25 years Uisce Éireann aims to have the gaps that are blocking the building of homes filled, so those homes can be built. Most people, if you told them the housing crisis was going to exist for another ten years, would literally be pulling their hair out. Uisce Éireann is saying it cannot get to grips with the infrastructure problems for another 25 years. The money that has been put into Uisce Éireann is paltry. I could have missed it but I did not see any word of the Apple tax in this budget. It was all the rage before the election but it seems to have fallen off a cliff in terms of investment now when the Government is in business. On Electric Ireland, there are currently dozens if not hundreds of homes across the country that are empty because they cannot get connected to the grid. There are loads of building projects currently not going ahead because they cannot get a connection to the grid. There is no serious investment to make that happen.

I welcome the reduction in VAT on apartments. It is going to make a difference of about €8,000 in the building of an apartment. There is a sustainability gap of about €100,000. Closing that gap by €8,000 is not really going to make a significant difference. It is also actually going to help the investors. For Mary and Pat down the road who want to buy a house, this is going to make no difference to them at all. We should have the level of ambition where we scrap VAT completely for the building of homes. Why should the Government take €54,000 out of the building of any house in a housing crisis? Left, right and centre in every town and parish, builders are not building today in a housing crisis because they cannot make it work for them financially, yet the Government is taking €54,000 typically off an average house in VAT. There is not VAT on the building of homes in the North of Ireland. The Government is driving

inflation and driving costs, and preventing the system from working. There are 4,000 empty homes and it takes an average of eight months for them to be flipped and turned around so people can use them. Meanwhile in the private sector, it takes three weeks for a home to be flipped and re-rented so people can use it. Why is that? There is nothing of any depth in this budget in that regard. I welcome the tax on derelict houses but note again the low level of ambition.

There is an ability deficit, a competency deficit, in the Government when it comes to these issues. The timeline is appalling. The Government is looking to introduce legislation maybe next year, draft up an inventory of vacant properties in 2027 and then introduce a derelict home tax somewhere after that. In provincial towns across the country, especially in the west, the main streets are festooned with empty properties. Empty properties in the middle of a housing crisis is akin to exporting food in the middle of the Famine. It is absolutely wrong. The main streets of towns right across the west, such as Claremorris, are literally falling down because of derelict homes in a housing crisis. It is absolutely wrong.

I want to talk about older people and those living in poverty. A €10 pension increase for older people when inflation has pushed food prices well beyond that is wrong. We need to make sure pensions are indexed to the average wage so they keep apace of the costs older people are dealing with. Meanwhile 200,000 children are currently in poverty. The Government thankfully took a leaf out of Aontú's book. We suggested last year that there should be a second child benefit for those who are in poverty. I am delighted the Government took that idea but it has not been implemented yet. The Minister, Deputy Calleary, said two weeks ago that the Government just has not got it together to put in place what is necessary. It is incredible. Those children are suffering significantly and their futures are hampered as a result. Their potential is reduced.

I understand Tusla got an increase of €16 million in terms of its investment. This country has been consumed by the crisis happening in Tusla for the whole of the summer. We have had the State searching for the remains of two small boys. We have 105,000 children who were referred to Tusla this year, 35,000 more than actually sat the leaving certificate. There is a tidal wave of pressure coming on Tusla. Tusla says it needs €400 million extra to be able to do its job. When the next crisis happens, and it will happen, when a child either loses their life or has a significant, radical challenge to their life, we will be in here and people will be speaking in measured tones about how shocking it was, how heartbreaking it is to hear, and how disastrous it is, yet the budget is not being used as a tool to make sure it does not happen again.

On students----

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time is up, Deputy.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Minister mentioned today----

An Ceann Comhairle: You are over time on your other colleagues.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I will leave it at that. Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I welcome the opportunity to speak on budget 2026. In this contribution, I would like to mainly focus on the macro issues and some of the key measures announced, while in my slot tomorrow I hope to go more into individual measures in terms of what is welcome, what is unwelcome and what is a missed opportunity. There are plenty of missed opportunities both day to day and strategic. First, and I do not think too many people have, we need to look at the context. This budget has echoes of 2007. In the budget before the election of that year, all political parties, including the one I was then a member of, albeit to a lesser extent, called for increased spending across the board. People ignored the signs where we were depending on the service sector to keep the party going. It appeared as if the Celtic tiger would never end. While some like Anne Pettifor and Nouriel Roubini sounded warnings internationally, not to mention our own Jim Power and David McWilliams, here in Ireland few politicians if any thought for a second that a Wile E. Coyote moment was coming and that things would fall off a cliff globally and particularly in Irish finance. If they did, nobody was letting on. Fianna Fáil was re-elected for a third successive term on the back of a massive giveaway budget. After just a few months in office, the mood music changed. The budget of October 2007 was a more muted affair, still splashing the cash, but there was a knowledge that the revenues were beginning to dry up. The global economic crash and banking crisis that followed hit many countries worldwide. However, if Fianna Fáil's economic policies post-2000 made the boom boomier, they also made the crash an absolute wreck. We know how the rest turned out. Tough, unpopular decisions had to be made to clean up the mess and policies were put in place to ensure that such a disaster could never happen again. Or could it? One of the measures put in place was the establishment of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the aim of which was to provide independent oversight and not let politicians get carried away. It is always focused on financial prudence but for some years - it was especially relevant post Covid - the advisory council, the so-called watchdog, has been urging extra-special caution. It warns that the corporate tax receipts windfall could dry up at any time and should not be factored into economic deliberations. Before this budget, it stated:

Given that the economy is performing well, this is not a time for a large budget package. Budgetary policy is already providing significant support. After excluding excess corporation tax receipts, the government is spending more than [it] collects in underlying revenue.

The Government is spending more than it collects in underlying revenue. Just think about that. After excluding these excess corporation tax receipts, the Government is not heeding the call. Or, rather, it has heeded the call this year but it did not in previous years. It did set a relatively small portion aside for areas that were historically underfunded. The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, said at the start of his contribution that uncertainty was the defining feature of the global economy this year. Indeed it is, but uncertainty was predicted before Trump's tariffs and any truly fiscally responsible Government would have reflected this in decisions made during last year's giveaway budget. If a little dampening down was done last year in reducing the sweeteners, there might have been a little more in the coffers this year and its reduction in largess would not have been noticed to the same extent.

This budget talks the talk on being financially responsible but shows no signs of cutting wastage and still finds room for money to be thrown out, albeit to the wrong sectors. On the day-to-day side of things, this budget is a missed opportunity to help carers, people with disabilities and other vulnerable people, particularly in early years education. It could have

provided a bit more to help those dealing with the increased cost of living. The measures that have been announced in these areas are so incremental as to have no meaningful effect. Instead, we have helped wealthy developers and investors with an ill-thought-out and premature reduction in VAT for apartment building, a move that ignores the fundamental issues behind the housing crisis, which is one primarily of supply, from infrastructure to planning, to tendering, to training enough construction workers. It is also not helped by an overseas investment policy that places jobs for non-essential workers - localisation workers, for example - in the highest demand housing areas.

We have seen a generalised reduction in VAT for the hospitality sector, and while the small café benefits, so, too, does the larger entity that is making massive profits. Ronald McDonald gets the tax breaks while the McDonald family members living in Clondalkin, Lucan, Palmerstown and so on struggle to keep up with costs. What would have been more sensible was the extension of the increasing cost of business grant or the power-up grant, which could have been more targeted for small business in this sector.

On the macro level, I welcome the medium-term fiscal and structural plan, which reflects the advisory council's call for more medium-term planning. It is not quite multi-annual funding but it is a start. As revenues have been so unprecedented in recent years, we have been putting away some money. We put away €2 billion in 2022 and €4 billion in 2023, which the Fiscal Advisory Council said was relatively small in comparison to the overall estimated excess corporation tax receipts. Last year, as the Minister outlined, the national reserve fund was dissolved but transferred approximately €8.4 billion to the new future fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund. Further funds have been added this year, which on one hand I welcome for the prudence, but given what is facing us down the line, we are missing out on opportunities that will cost us all massively in the long run. As the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, stated, if we are going to have €40 billion built up in long-term funds by the end of the Government term, we are actually destroying our future. What we are missing is strategic infrastructural planning where we use that windfall receipt and the Apple money to put us on a more stable footing in the years ahead such as by front-loading the water services infrastructure, improving the grid and energy generation potential to make us a net exporter rather than the €6 billion we are spending on imports, and gearing up for a massive increase in homegrown prefabricated and modular housing and apprenticeships to go alongside it. I will elaborate further on some of these issues tomorrow as well as on some of specifics of the budget, but on a macro level, we are missing an opportunity where we could have started the long-term planning in this budget.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: People may know me as passionate. I am actually speechless after seeing what the Government has brought into the budget, and I am not often speechless. I also feel empathy for the people who work in this country. I have had families on to me again today saying they were hoping they would have something in this budget that would help them to survive. Instead, the more they work - and they are taking on extra hours - the more tax they are now paying. One man told me he got a wage increase, as did his wife. Now, the tax bands have not moved and they will pay more tax. He said they had another problem. As they would now be paying more tax, they are getting caught, in that they will not get any relief for their family. They are borderline and do not get anything to support their family. Both of them are working. They have built and paid for their own house. They are mortgaged to the hilt. One

of their children is now going to college and they are getting €500 towards their college fees when last year they got €1,000. They got a 50% decrease in payment and are paying more tax.

With the giveaway budget last year, we thought there was hope that the Government was going to look after the working class people. The man I spoke to said he would be better off at home, not working. His family would qualify for more if he was not working. His children would get educated in this country if he was not working. He questioned how he was going to make his children go out to work and ask them to work for the vulnerable and for their own future, which they have no problem doing, so they can support people when their own Government is treating people not even like second- or third-class citizens. It is not treating people like citizens at all. People thought slavery was gone out of the dictionary until it came to this Government. That is what they are saying to me.

The Government is now saying that the USC, which was brought in as a temporary measure, will give people more benefits. It should have been doing this already. It was brought in as a temporary measure and the Government kept it there. When is the Government going to stand up and look after the working person? If someone is self-employed in this country, he or she prices a job for somebody, goes in, does it on budget and on time to make a profit, and pays his or her taxes. That is accountability. Our Government can go and have a €853 million overspend on a children's hospital that is curved, which means extra maintenance after it has been built and it never can be extended onto. All the furniture, blinds and everything else are special order and more expensive when it should have been about the caring in the hospital. Build a box. Put all the caring stuff into that box and look after the vulnerable people. How many nurses, doctors and assistants could have been paid for by the embarrassing Government overspend on the children's hospital? How many hospitals could we have built on the overspend on the children's hospital, which has not even opened? In Limerick, a report that took 16 months to produce told the Government what was needed in UHL. People are in here giving out about UHL every day. I was one of them. It now transpires that UHL is looking after more patients coming through their doors from Limerick, north Cork, north Kerry, Clare and Tipperary. Per head, it has fewer people on trolleys based on the numbers who go through other hospitals. That is a fact. It came out in the report. We asked the Government to lift the ban so we could have more people working in the hospital to look after and care for the people but it did not do that either. A report has now come out and it has given the answers I gave the Government on the first day in this Dáil. I have given the Government every opportunity but we have to waste money on the design of hospitals that are not even opened. From now on, I want this Government to design, deliver and build and to provide care in the building. I want design and delivery.

On Uisce Éireann, the Government goes on about building houses and that it is going to give a certain rate to build apartments. However, it cannot build anything without infrastructure and it is giving billions upon billions of euro to Uisce Éireann, which has not brought in one project on budget or on time. Would anyone be in business tomorrow morning if that was the case? No they would not.

The Government has given €10 to the elderly while on the other hand it put up the price of a bag of coal. Despite food inflation, it gave €10. These people who worked all their lives were hoping they would get the benefit of what they worked all their lives for. The Government gave nothing to farming or to tillage sectors.

Consider people who must use transport. What does the Government do? It increases the carbon tax again. Did the Government not look at the age of the vehicles on the roads at the moment? People cannot afford to upgrade their cars so the Government puts a carbon tax on those vehicles. That is what the Government has done. The carbon tax is on vehicles such as the trucks coming from the ports with food. They are travelling up and down the country. They come from Dublin Port which charges a tax. There are also transport costs, including putting tires on vehicles. Across the board, what does the Government do? It is puts on another tax. I hope people remember and do not return the same people again.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: Every budget tells us who matters, what matters, and who does not matter. This one tells us that far too many Irish people do not matter to the Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, and Lowryite Administration. Yes there are some good measures in the budget, until we scratch the surface of it. There is a €10 increase for pensioners and social welfare recipients, a €5 increase in fuel allowance, and a 9% VAT rate move that I would argue does too little too late by July of 2026. Some of my colleagues have mentioned that McDonalds will do well out of this. It is worth noting that McDonald's employs 11,700 people in full-time positions in this country, with an additional 2,760 people with ancillary jobs around the McDonald's group.

These are small steps by the Government that I have mentioned but they will not change the reality of most households who are struggling in Ireland. This is not a reformatory budget. It is a holding exercise. It is an exercise of holding the goods and holding back. It is a Government that is trying to steady itself but it does not move this Republic forward.

Consider, for example, our inheritance tax and the fairness that still is not there. Under the current capital acquisitions tax regime, there are three categories of relationships with different tax thresholds: group A is parents passing on to their children with a €400,000 threshold; group B is siblings, nieces, nephews and grandchildren with a €40,000 threshold; and group C, is "other", which is a friend, a colleague or somebody else the person knows, with a €20,000 threshold. A child can inherit up to €400,000 tax free but a niece or a nephew or a close friend can receive €40,000 or €20,000 before having to pay tax of 33%. This is a 10:1 difference or a 20:1 difference, depending on the bracket you are in. These hardworking citizens, who have done nothing but work hard, serve their country, and pay every tax that was asked of them, are being penalised by a system that fails to reflect modern Ireland. There are over 36,000 childless couples and there are 1 million adults without children in this country who cannot pass on their moneys. If this situation was reversed and the threshold was the other way around with a €40,000 threshold for the children, there would be uproar and outrage on the streets. This is why Independent Ireland and I will introduce a capital acquisitions tax (equity in family succession) Bill in early 2026. I hope the Government will support this to make the system fairer. Equality before the law should not depend on parenthood.

The case of industrial school survivors is a mortal debt ignored. This is another silence in the budget and it is a disgraceful one. There is not one single mention of the 4,500 survivors of Ireland's industrial schools and reformatory schools. These are men and women who were robbed of their childhoods, beaten, abused, and forced into labour in institutions that were run and funded by the State. Many of these people hold criminal records from the age of three months old with their only crime being torn from the arms of their mothers and fathers. Some of these people are now on day 17 of a hunger strike, just metres outside this House. Many of them are elderly and many are unwell, and they are on hunger strike and ignored by this

Government. They have modest demands for a Health Amendment Act, HAA, state medical card, a full contribution pension for recognition of their forced labour, a survivor's trust of €500,000, and a national memorial that was promised to them by previous Governments going back to 2009. That is not charity; it is just simple justice for those people.

With regard to the cost of living, the reality on the ground at the supermarkets is that inflation is still above 5%. A family pack of chicken costing €6 in 2021 now costs €10.55 in the local supermarket. A loaf of bread is up by 20%. The cost of milk, cheese and eggs has risen by 15%. The €10 increase in welfare is gone before it has arrived. Three years of rising prices in this country have already wiped the value of that €10.

When we look at our older people, our widows and widowers, I believe it is wrong to be taxing them with local property tax. These are homes they have paid for throughout the years. There is no mention of that in this budget. They are not landlords and they are not speculators. No fair society would tax people over the age of 65, who are on a fixed income, on the roof over their heads. Quite simply, they have paid enough. Where is the accountability in this? Where is the money really going and where was it really spent last year? Some €4 billion was spent on accommodation and food for asylum seekers under IPAS. Much of that was to private operators under opaque contracts. Meanwhile, this Government fought tooth and nail with school principals, with parents, with teachers and with the Opposition over €26 million, the ask from school principals who asked for additional capitation money to keep the heat on in classrooms and to keep the lights on. This was not extravagance; it was just simply to keep the schools open and educate children. I am sure the Government would find the €26 million if it was something to do with gender equality, trans and all this sort of stuff it is trying to slip into eight-year-olds' minds. We spent €4 billion on a system that argues about €26 million to keep the lights on in our schools. Independent Ireland is calling for a Garda-led, national, anti-fraud task force to root out the waste and the profiteering of the IPAS business sector. It would cost roughly €19 million to set up and would recover, we believe, an estimated €400 million in a year alone - euro that could be spent on schools, carers and energy supports.

A budget is not about the numbers; it is about value. This budget leaves behind those without children, the survivors of atrocities, who are outside this House as we speak, the widows and the widowers, the families struggling at the till and the young man or the young girl going to work and filling the car. It leaves them behind. This is not a fair budget and it does not show leadership of this Government.

Deputy Gillian Toole: I will begin by thanking all the departmental teams, the team in the Parliamentary Budget Office, and the ushers who were ferrying budget packages up and down today. I thank everybody who worked long, hard hours in preparation for this, in trying to go back over trends, looking through forecasting, looking at the global situation and then coming up with a plan that would try, first of all, to meet the objective I understood was the primary objective, which was to begin by targeting supports and measures towards those most in need. There are elements of it I could say I am not happy with and that do not match objectives I may have submitted to our team but it is a starting point.

The areas I welcome the increases in are the allocations across education, including special education, disability services and agriculture. However, I await details of a specific tillage sector aid package and the 9% VAT reduction. I would request, and I think it would be

common, that the latter could be implemented sooner, if at all possible, than July 2026. There are many small businesses hanging on by a thread and July may be just too late.

I refer to accessibility to healthcare, a subject that is much debated and much commented on in this Chamber. Though not directly referenced in the budget, no less than €75 million has been allocated for a new pharmacy agreement. This will deliver improved accessibility to and affordability of healthcare in every community in Ireland and across all age classifications through the common conditions scheme, health screening initiatives and various other measures enclosed in that agreement.

There is one area that, as a follow-on with regard to the cost of living, needs to be reviewed and amended, that being, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities. If we recall last weekend, the wind howled for three days, yet we had a cut-off on our own indigenous wind energy at 500 MW because we had the agreement on an interconnector. There are specific areas that can be looked at.

Moving on to housing, one initiative that is particularly welcome is the living city initiative. Dare I say, we all want it extended to other towns and not just cities. I can name a number in County Meath. There are even possibilities there for specificity in age categories and job targets, if we want to reduce dereliction and invigorate living in our towns and cities.

I am leaving aside the particular categories because I will be honest, I am wading through the different books and the devil is in the detail and the Finance Bill, when that comes to pass. That is where the meat will be on the bones. It is more important than ever that spending be clearly profiled, that it be managed within the year and reviewed, that there be ongoing costing of maintaining existing levels of service as our population grows, and that there be population growth through robust and fair management of same. We also have an ageing population. Even though an entity as large as the Exchequer will have huge complexities, micromanagement is essential. In any small business or family home, cost-benefit analysis is done on a daily basis and will be required regularly. Overruns in spending will have to be investigated in a timely manner with the necessary course correction. There is a willingness there, and there is the renamed Department of public expenditure and the reform piece. I would be anxious to see what the format of reform actually drills down into.

As I have said many times here on different subjects, accountability, efficiency and productivity are key to the delivery of the objectives of this budget for 2026. Without being repetitious, we have to run the country like we run a family home or a small business. Everything has a cost and everything counts.

As a final point, I would like to see more consideration given to paying down our sovereign debt. As both Ministers said in their opening remarks, we have external challenges. If there are any measures that can give us some stability and buoyancy at the same time, then sovereign debt is one of those areas. I would also like to see increased payments into the Future Ireland Fund and the management of that fund to copper-fasten our self-sufficiency.

As I said, the devil is in the detail. There is a huge amount of information to read. The publications have been extremely helpful. I will leave it at that point.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Tá áthas orm an deis a fháil labhairt ar an mbuiséad seo anocht. I welcome the opportunity to speak on some of the measures outlined earlier today. However, it

is also important to highlight what did not happen today. For me, this is the budget of a Government that lost its nerve, a budget of half-measures and lip service. Yes, the income disregard for the carer's payment will increase to €1,000 for a single person and €2,000 for a couple and, yes, the domiciliary care allowance will also go up by €20 to €380 per month. That is certainly welcome but they are very small measures. Unfortunately, yet again, the Government has been found wanting in political courage with respect to the abolition of the means test for carers, who save this State billions of euro every year. We would be absolutely lost without them. The care they provide, and their dedication and commitment, need to be rewarded. The fairest way to do that is to abolish the means test and it is disappointing to see that, yet again, that has not happened in this budget. The carers desperately need our support and it has to happen. I hope that this time next year, we will be here and hear it has been abolished.

The same attitude is found in the decision to reduce the VAT rate to 9%. While this is welcome and is something I raised in this Chamber many times over the last number of years, the delay in its implementation will certainly drive some businesses to the wall. Leaving them so long to wait until July is incomprehensible. I note from my own constituency of Offaly that we have restaurants, cafés and hair salons that are just clinging on by a mere thread. That decision to leave it until July needs to be reversed. The reduction in the VAT rate to 9% needs to happen immediately in order to save businesses and jobs. Instead of immediate relief, the businesses got the continuation of imminent threats. Instead of a helping hand, they got an iron punch from the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, even if it did come in a velvet glove. This is not what these businesses needed. The Government has to rethink this and we have to have the measure kick in as soon as possible.

With regard to agriculture, which is the backbone of the national economy and that of County Offaly, employing 10% of the national workforce, I accept that some positive steps have been taken. Generational renewal, tax relief for farm consolidation, young farmer relief out to 2029, the widening of the scope of farm restructuring relief to include forestry and the acceleration of capital allowance for slurry storage are all certainly welcome. However, there has been a notable emphasis on extensions rather than on transformative investment into the agriculture sector. There is also a strong suggestion that these measures inadequately address succession planning and the active farmer test extension to donors deters non-farming heirs, potentially forcing sales of viable holdings to cover liabilities exceeding the €335,000 threshold.

With farm incomes down year on year, low-income family farms, comprising about 60% of Offaly's 4,000 holdings, yet again face squeezed margins without enhanced basic income support. I agree with the analysis offered by IFA farm business chair, Mr. Bill O'Keeffe, who said that while the renewal of the various tax reliefs was extremely important, some of the taxation changes and measures would be costly for farmers. He added that the reduction in the flat rate addition for VAT would cost farmers over €61 million this year. The decision to kick the rezoned land tax issue down the road creates more uncertainty for farmers, who really do not need that uncertainty, especially when they are being impacted by this fundamentally unfair tax.

I want to mention the increase to the school capitation grant. This will include, on a per pupil basis, a €50 increase for primary and special schools from €224 to €274 and a €20 increase for post-primary schools from €386 to €406. I also welcome the decision about the Department

of Education and Youth's €1.6 billion capital allocation for 2026 to progress delivery of more than 300 school building projects. However, I take real issue with the claim that the majority of these are expected to be completed in 2026 and 2027. In my constituency, we have St. Brendan's Community School in Birr. It had its works approved in 2018 and there is neither sight nor sound of a contractor. It needs to change. We need urgent action and I call on the Minister to ensure that she takes action for St. Brendan's Community School in Birr.

From 8 October, the rate of carbon tax for petrol and diesel will increase from €63.50 to €7 per tonne. This increase will apply to all other fuels from 1 May 2026. Regarding the carbon tax total allocation, in 2025, €951 million was allocated from carbon tax revenues, an increase of €163 million on 2024. That brings me on to my next point. It is disappointing to see that the haulage sector did not receive support in this year's budget. The haulage sector is a vital cog in the wheel of our economy. I know the Irish Road Haulage Association president, Mr. Ger Hyland, had called on numerous occasions for small, basic measures, such as the subsidisation of HVO, to be made a priority by the Government in this budget. HVO is 20% more costly per litre than diesel. If the Government is serious about the environment, why is HVO not subsidised for the haulage sector? That is my question tonight, especially when I look at the takings for carbon tax. It makes no sense that the Government would not support a sector that is already supporting our economy. I hope that will be looked at and that support will be given to the haulage sector, which is currently crippled by yet another increase in carbon tax and absolutely extortionate tolls, an issue which also needs to be tackled.

If the Government is not going to take robust measures to tackle and limit illegal immigration and the associated multibillion euro costs, then the budgetary process will amount to nothing but a bad joke. Illegal immigration has to be tackled. The multibillion euro costs that are put on the heads of taxpayers have to be tackled. This issue has been going on for too long and is putting significant pressure on our health and education systems. Our housing is in deep crisis and it is being made much worse because supply is exceeding demand. We have to take on the whole issue of illegal immigration and make sure that we adopt robust measures urgently.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to talk on this budget, which has been awaited by many people around the country to see if they will benefit from it. All of us here might do it differently but we have to go by the amount of money the Government has to spend, and the choices it makes about how to spend it is what we have to go through. There are many things that are welcome and a good few things that I am disappointed with.

We welcome the capitation grant for schools because we know many principal teachers are funding things themselves, which is not fair. They have been very good. I know it has happened in Kerry.

While we as a group asked for the abolition of the means test for the carer's allowance, the Government is committed to doing it on a phased basis. We would prefer if it had been implemented all in one go, because those people are vital for the people they are caring for, first of all, and they are doing tremendous work for the State in seeing after people who need care. It should not be treated as a social welfare payment, as carers are working hard, day and night, taking care of their loved ones and saving the State billions of euro.

Nothing has been done for the ever-increasing cost of electricity. I have said day after day that since Bord na Móna was abolished in 2020 or thereabouts, the cost of electricity has gone

up daily, and it does not come down. I am wondering where the energy regulator is. Is it there at all? I do not think it is. Elderly people are afraid to turn on the heating because of the cost of electricity and are suffering and perishing in the cold. Costs have gone through the roof. People are in fear of having their electricity turned off. They cannot afford to pay their bills. Many people are behind on paying their bills.

The running costs of small businesses, including electricity, insurance, rates, water charges and staff, are high. While we welcome the minimum wage being increased for low-paid workers, the Government cannot claim any part of this, because employers have to pay the extra employment costs. It will not cost the Government a penny, which we have to remember.

I am disappointed because, as I said last week, we do not seem to be doing enough at all for working-class people. I attended a party last Friday week where ten local people, grand boys and girls from the age of 24 or 25 to 31 or 32, were having a party because they are all leaving, going to Australia before Christmas. I am sad and hurt about that because they had great jobs, were highly educated and were a real asset to our country. We cannot afford to lose those kinds of people. Their parents went through a lot and they went through a lot themselves to get properly educated, but the main reason they are going is because they cannot see themselves ever being able to purchase a new home in Ireland or Kerry. They cannot build one because of the planning restrictions, which there is no need for. Those issues could be addressed. Give them planning. There was a mention of legalising granny flats or building onto the back of houses. Where is that?

To see these working people go out early in the morning and work at nights, and continue to pay all the costs, their taxes, and high fuel costs to get to work, to get nothing in return from the Government, is not fair. They do not qualify for a medical card or benefit in any way. The working people are getting disheartened. Many say to me that they would be better off at home, by the fire, drawing some kind of a payment because as they are, they have nothing left at the end of the week and they do not qualify for anything. That is not right. They are saying that they would be better off not working. It is disappointing to hear that because the work ethic is in the Irish people and they should be rewarded for it.

I welcome the fuel allowance for those families on income supplement who will now qualify for it. I asked this before of Heather Humphreys when she was Minister. Why are those on benefits, who have paid their fair share of taxes, still not eligible for fuel allowance, jobseeker's benefit, which they do not qualify for, illness benefit or maternity benefit? Why is this the case? A person at home sick is not eligible for fuel allowance. A mother with a young baby is not eligible for fuel allowance. This is unfair.

There is very little in the budget for farmers who have increasing costs. I see the increase for ACRES but the problem with that is that they are not being paid on time. Go back to 2023 when people were supposed to be paid. They have still not even been paid today as we are talking. I cannot understand that.

There is €20 million extra for 17,000 sheep farmers. I welcome that. There is €85 million for TB. Will the Government do something about TB? We are overrun with badgers and deer, and they are spreading TB. Badgers are being vaccinated, but cattle are not. Why can we not vaccinate cattle against TB and get rid of it once and for all? Cattle are going down all around me in east and south Kerry. I heard earlier the news that more gone down in Kilgarvan today.

Something will have to be done. We are talking here about the production of food that is important to every one of us, even people who have never been on a farm. It is important for those people to have food. It is expensive enough but if we have to import it, then we will know what the cost is.

I welcome the VAT reduction relating to apartments. We certainly need to build more apartments and more houses. People have also been asking about the first-time buyers grant they get to buy or build a new house. People are still first-time buyers when they are buying second-hand houses. Could the grant not be extended to those individuals? Maybe the Minister will think about doing that, particularly as it is important for those people. People are leaving our shores mainly to put a roof over their heads. This is because they cannot see themselves ever doing it here. I am asking the Minister of State to at least consider that. It would be something for those people if they could buy second-hand homes and get the same assistance as if they were buying new homes.

I am glad in a way that Deputy Doherty referred to me earlier, but he was incorrect in what he said. He said that I voted for the carbon tax. On any day that I was in here, I never did so. Sinn Féin did, but maybe he is forgetting about that. Maybe he would have been better advised to run for President or some similar office where he could have had someone going around with him and reminding him of what he did or did not say and what he did or did not do. I did not vote for the carbon tax. I am paying more for carbon than any other expense I have, and that is God's gospel truth.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: The Deputy voted for the budget.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I did not interrupt other Deputies at any time. I will not interrupt them when they are talking, but I am telling the truth.

An Ceann Comhairle: Continue, Deputy.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I will do that in spite of anyone interrupting me. The facts are that I never voted for it. That tax will be coming in tomorrow morning without any vote here tonight.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: So the Deputy is going to vote against it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: There is no vote about it tonight. It will go ahead in the morning because Sinn Féin voted for it before. That is God's gospel truth.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Tomorrow, the Deputy will have his chance.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, stop interrupting.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: They do not understand their place. I never interrupted them.

In any event, I am disappointed with the way some of the carbon tax is spent. In the name of active travel, the road into Killarney is being narrowed. The footpaths are now wider than the road and the carriageway. Wide vehicles are having serious trouble passing each other at Fossa, where the great Cliffords who shook Croke Park in the middle of the summer come from. Sadly, our road is being narrowed in the name of active travel and climate change. What has the narrowing of the road in Fossa have to do with the weather? It has not a God's thing in the world to do with changing the weather, keeping the weather or anything to do with the weather. Those are the facts. I have a difficulty when I see the hard-earned money people have to pay when buying fuel at the pumps being wasted and thrown around like that. These footpaths just finish up, and they to nowhere then. You are only coddling people that there is a footpath because they cannot walk all the way along it. For example, you cannot walk to Killorglin. You cycle there either because there is too much traffic and the road is too narrow. There was a good cycleway, but all that has been changed at a massive cost.

There is €27.4 billion for health. I am glad of that, but we must be careful about the way it is spent. Previously, money has not been spent wisely or carefully. I do not know what is happening, but it is not meeting the needs of people who get sick. It is not meeting the needs of those who during the summer wanted to get away for a week from minding their elderly parents. These people wanted to go away with their children for just six days but there was no one to mind their parents or no respite places for them. We have few respite places in Kerry. We need to address those matters.

There are waiting lists for people to get into Tralee hospital, into the district hospital in Killarney, into the facilities in Kenmare, Dingle and Cahersiveen and into St. Columbanus Home. I was disappointed at a meeting of the health committee last week when a Deputy frightened the daylights out of the people with disabilities when stating that St. Mary of the Angels, in which there are 54 patients, is being sold. I got a letter from St. John of God saying that it is not being closed. I want clarification on that from the Minister for disabilities. I want to know where that story came from, because it has hurt parents and patients. I want the matter clarified and I want what is going on to be explained. It is very unfair to hurt people in that category. I refer to people who are disabled and who may have been disabled all of their lives. It is wrong to do that. We need to keep St. Mary of the Angels open. We need a lot more facilities like it in order to help those people. I have seen patients with disabilities being told that the only place they will get residential care is in County Meath. Imagine that - sending them all the way from Killarney to County Meath. Now we are being told by a certain Deputy - who is frightening people again - that St. Mary of the Angels is to be sold. That is very wrong. I want that statement retracted in order that we can give confidence to the parents and patients that it is not being sold.

I am grateful to thank the Minister of State for recognising the players on the field who give us so much enjoyment all summer. I refer to the Kerry team, especially the likes of the Cliffords, the captain of the Kerry team from Killarney and all those players gave so much to ensure that Kerry once again won the Sam Maguire. I know it will be given across the country to other players, and they deserve it because they bring people enjoyment. We look forward to watching them each year. We have to keep them going, because they have costs when it comes to getting to training, to games and so on. They need to be helped in some small way.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. It would be important to clarify that the money is for the clubs rather than just the players.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: By helping the clubs, we will be helping the players.

An Ceann Comhairle: I agree, but we would not want the public to think we are paying GAA players.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 6.58 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 8 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 6.58 p.m. and resumed at 8 p.m.

Allocation of Time: Motion

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): I move:

It is proposed that the following arrangements shall apply on the motions for the Financial Resolutions by the Minister for Finance:

- Resolution Nos. 1 and 2 shall be grouped together for the purposes of debate, and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 30 minutes;
- Resolution Nos. 3 and 4 shall be grouped together for the purposes of debate, and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 45 minutes; and
- each motion for a Financial Resolution shall be brought to a conclusion by one question which shall dispose of any amendments to that motion not yet disposed of, and which shall be put from the Chair.

Question put and agreed to.

Financial Resolutions 2025

Financial Resolution No. 1: Excise

Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I move:

(1) THAT for the purposes of the tax charged by virtue of section 72 of the Finance Act 2005 (No. 5 of 2005), that Act be amended, with effect as on and from 8 October 2025, by the substitution of the following for Schedule 2 to that Act (amended by section 70 of the Finance Act 2024 (No. 43 of 2024)):

“SCHEDULE 2

RATES OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS TAX

(With effect as on and from 8 October 2025)

Description of Product	Rate of Tax
------------------------	-------------

Cigarettes	Rate of tax at-
Cigars	Rate of tax at €541.758 per kilogram.
Fine-cut tobacco for the rolling of cigarettes	Rate of tax at €521.201 per kilogram.
Other smoking tobacco	Rate of tax at €375.847 per kilogram.

- (a) except where paragraph (b) applies, €483.50 per thousand together with an amount equal to 8.78 per cent of the price at which the cigarettes are sold by retail, or
- (b) €533.99 per thousand in respect of cigarettes sold by retail where the rate of tax would be less than that rate had the rate been calculated in accordance with paragraph (a).

".

(2) IT is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution shall have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1927 (No. 7 of 1927).

Financial resolution No. 1 provides for excise duty increases on tobacco products with effect from midnight tonight. The increase amounts to 50 cent, VAT inclusive, on a pack of 20 cigarettes in the most popular price category together with the *pro rata* increases for other tobacco products. The price of a pack of 20 cigarettes in the most popular price category, assuming the full increase is passed through to the final retail price, will increase to €18.95. The excise duty component of this price will be €11.33 and the total tax, inclusive of VAT, will be €14.88, which represents approximately 78.51% of the price of a pack of cigarettes. The *pro rata* increase on the price of a typical pouch of roll-your-own tobacco will increase by 69 cent to €27.66.

Deputy Matt Carthy: On Financial Resolution No. 1, it has got to the point where these increases in the cost of cigarettes are now just vindictive rather than serving any purpose. It certainly does not serve any health purpose. We know that for a number of years, there were substantial reductions in the number of smokers. That has begun to turn around despite the fact that over the past number of years, the price of cigarettes has increased by more than 34% until last year - I do not have the specific figure - taking these new figures into account.

The Government's actions, apart from being vindictive, are also counterproductive. They are enticing and encouraging a growing black-market economy. Therefore, when we look at what we should be doing to encourage people to quit smoking, there are better and more effective ways than taking this vindictive action against many people who desperately want to quit and who clearly are not being incentivised by the ever-increasing cost in a packet of cigarettes, but who need supports.

That is why last year, for example, I spoke against the Government's decision to increase the cost of vapes and impose a new tax on vapes because, again, it was using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. We want to remove access to vapes from young people, in particular. We want to ensure that people who have never smoked, for example, do not use vapes. However, we should also be supporting mechanisms that actually provide people who are quitting cigarettes with a less dangerous option.

It is notable that the only real impact on smokers, for example, from the Government's budget announced today will actually be an increase in their cost of living. There was nothing in

today's budget for workers and families who are absolutely crippled by the cost of living and, of course, from midnight tonight, they will see a rise in the cost of driving to work or driving their families in places they need to be, which is essential for anybody who does not have access to public services. Once again, carbon tax means that petrol and diesel prices are going to rise again. Therefore, rather than support families and workers with the cost of living, today's budget is actually going to make people's lives harder. That is particularly prevalent in constituencies like my own.

I read through this exact debate from 12 months ago, from 1 October 2024, and I came across some very interesting comments:

The increase in carbon tax today further exasperates everyone who has to use a car to go to work, increasing costs for lorries and commercial vehicles and the transporting of food, essential goods and supplies, and the transporting of agricultural products. Passenger bus hire and taxis will also be impacted. The carbon tax is also pricing vehicles off the road.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is Deputy Carthy dealing with-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: That is the statement from the Minister's Government colleague, Deputy Danny Healy-Rae.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We are talking about cigarettes.

Deputy Matt Carthy: We are talking about the financial resolutions-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Financial resolution No. 1.

Deputy Matt Carthy: -----and I am putting on the record-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We are talking about Financial Resolution No. 1.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is what we are doing.

Deputy Matt Carthy: -----that I will not support a resolution that is making the lives of people more difficult for no purpose other than to serve a stated objective of the Government to give the appearance of doing something. The truth of the matter is that just like today's budget, this financial resolution is not in the interests of the people we were sent here to represent. It is, as I said, a vindictive measure on the part of Government.

Deputy Duncan Smith: We have no issue with the increase in price on tobacco, but it is worth stating on the record in the debate on this financial resolution that 2025 was supposed to be the year that the policy target of a tobacco-free Ireland would be met and that tobacco prevalence would be at 5%. It has been a common thread through the last four Governments - this Government and previous governments, with Fine Gael being one of the common threads in the last three Governments alongside Fianna Fáil - that they have failed. We have 18% tobacco prevalence. The impact on our health system is absolutely horrendous. People are

getting sick, people are dying, and we are not making any impact in meeting the policy targets of a tobacco-free Ireland.

We can continue to tax tobacco budget after budget, and we do not mind that, but we need to see some brave, imaginative, real policy initiatives that are actually going to make a difference in terms of reducing the tobacco prevalence in Ireland. This annual financial resolution alone will not do that.

That is a message that needs to be brought home to this Government and to the Minister for Health. They really need to focus on reducing the tobacco prevalence in Ireland and reducing the impact that tobacco-related illnesses are having on people's mortality and on our health system.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is the motion on Financial Resolution No. 1 agreed?

Deputy Matt Carthy: It is not agreed. Vótáil.

Question put: "That Financial Resolution No. 1 be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 112; Níl, 46; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Aird, William.	Brady, John.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Buckley, Pat.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Boland, Grace.	Carthy, Matt.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brennan, Brian.	Collins, Michael.	
Brennan, Shay.	Connolly, Catherine.	
Brophy, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Browne, James.	Cronin, Réada.	
Burke, Colm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Burke, Peter.	Cullinane, David.	
Butler, Mary.	Daly, Pa.	
Butterly, Paula.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cahill, Michael.	Graves, Ann.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Calleary, Dara.	Healy, Seamus.	
Canney, Seán.	Kenny, Martin.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Lawless, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Clendennen, John.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Collins, Niall.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Connolly, John.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Cooney, Joe.	Mitchell, Denise.	

Crowe, Cathal.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Cummins, Jen.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Cummins, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Currie, Emer.	Nolan, Carol.	
Daly, Martin.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
Devlin, Cormac.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Dillon, Alan.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Dolan, Albert.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Fleming, Seán.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Foley, Norma.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Stanley, Brian.	
Gannon, Gary.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
Geoghegan, James.	Ward, Charles.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Ward, Mark.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.		
Grealish, Noel.		
Harkin, Marian.		
Harris, Simon.		
Hayes, Eoin.		
Healy-Rae, Michael.		
Hearne, Rory.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Higgins, Emer.		
Kelly, Alan.		
Kenny, Eoghan.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Lahart, John.		
Lawless, James.		
Lawlor, George.		
Lowry, Michael.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McCarthy, Noel.		
McConalogue, Charlie.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McEntee, Helen.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		
Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		

Nash, Ged.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Neville, Joe.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Donoghue, Robert.		
O'Donovan, Patrick.		
O'Gorman, Roderic.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghail, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Sheehan, Conor.		
Sherlock, Marie.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smith, Duncan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Wall, Mark.		
Ward, Barry.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell.

Question declared carried.

Financial Resolution No. 2: Corporation Tax

Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I move:

(1) THAT section 291A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) be amended, in subsection (6)(a), by the substitution of the following subparagraph for subparagraph (i):

“(i) any allowances to be made to a company under section 284 as applied by this section, and any balancing allowances (within the meaning of section 288) to be made to a company in respect of a specified intangible asset or specified intangible assets, and”.

(2) THAT paragraph (1) of this Resolution shall have effect as respects any event referred to in section 288(1) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) which occurs on or after 8 October 2025.

(3) IT is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution shall have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1927 (No. 7 of 1927).

Financial Resolution No. 2 agreed to.

Financial Resolution No. 3: Value-Added Tax

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Financial Resolutions Nos. 3 and 4 will be discussed together.

Minister for Education and Youth (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move:

(1) THAT the rate of value-added tax chargeable on the supply of electricity provided for by section 46(1)(caa) of, and paragraph 17(2) of Schedule 3 to, the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 (No. 31 of 2010) and the supply of gas provided for by section 46(1)(caa) of, and paragraph 17(3) of Schedule 3 to, that Act, being 9 per cent until 31 October 2025, be extended until 31 December 2030 and that section 46(1)(caa) of that Act be amended accordingly.

(2) THAT this Resolution shall have effect on and from 8 October 2025.

(3) IT is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution shall have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1927 (No. 7 of 1927).

This resolution provides for an extension in the temporary reduction in VAT on gas and electricity at an estimated cost of €254 million per year. At present, gas and electricity have a 9% VAT rate applied on a temporary basis until 31 October this year. This rate is due to revert to 13.5% from 1 November. This temporary reduction, introduced in May 2022, was one of the Government's responses to the current energy crisis and its impact on the cost of living. While inflation has eased and global energy prices have dropped, I believe it is appropriate to provide an extension to this measure. For many people, the cost of living remains relatively high, so the Government is proposing this extension from 1 November this year until the end of 2030. The cumulative cost of the measure since its introduction is estimated to be €746 million.

As Deputies will recall, the background to this measure is that up to April 2022, Ireland maintained a historical derogation in respect of VAT rate on gas and electricity of 13.5%. This derogation was necessary as, otherwise, the standard rate of VAT of 23% would have applied.

However, following the amendment to annexe III of the VAT directive in 2022, it was expanded to include gas and electricity. This meant that Ireland could apply a reduced rate of 9% to these products in line with other goods and services to which a reduced rate applies and that is exactly what we are doing here for the next five years.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I want to address Financial Resolution No. 4. I have to say I am not surprised that none of the Ministers from the relevant Department are here to defend it because it is quite clear they were not in favour of the introduction of this particular policy measure. There is no doubt there is a challenge in terms of affordability and viability but the suggestion that a reduction in VAT on new apartment purchases, from 13.5% to 9%, would do anything to address either of those issues is absolutely absurd. In fact, it shows that this Government, more than any of its predecessors, has been completely captured by one particular lobby group, namely, Irish Institutional Property.

When the outgoing Government was exposed for misleading the public during the election campaign on new home completions, the Government went into a tail spin and in walked Pat Farrell from Irish Institutional Property. The lobbying register confirms the volume of times he was in Government Buildings earlier this year. He looked for three things. He wanted a dramatic reduction in the quality of apartment standards - smaller and darker apartments - and he got that. He wanted to be able to reset private rents in between tenancies to the top of the market rents. He got that. And he wanted this. He wanted a VAT reduction, which will do nothing at all to increase the output of apartments or reduce their cost to purchasers or renters, but it will do everything to put more money into the pockets of his clients, and he got that. What is really unbelievable about this measure is not just the blatant way in which the Government has decided to increase the profits of large apartment developers by an average of €25,000 per apartment, but in addition to that, it will do nothing to increase supply or viability. On that basis, Sinn Féin is opposed to it. If the Minister is able to come back in at the end of this session, I would like her to respond to four very specific questions about this resolution. Will she confirm, as it appears from the Minister's statement today, that this VAT reduction is at the point of sale and purchase of apartments? Why is the Government allowing it to be applied to buildings currently under construction? The Government will spend €250 million next year on this measure. These are apartments that are being built now, the overwhelming majority of them have purchasers now and the Government is going to blow €250 million on a so-called activation measure for apartments that are already under activation. It makes no sense whatsoever. The bulk of the people buying those apartments are approved housing bodies and local authorities. Will the Minister confirm that they will not be protected from this measure? That means the State is essentially going to be paying €20,000 to €25,000 extra for those turnkeys, which makes no sense whatsoever. Will the Minister confirm what we already know, namely, that there will be no mechanism put in place to ensure that the developers of these apartments are forced by the Government to reduce the sale price by the VAT reduction to whoever the purchasers are?

Deputy Conor Sheehan: This was not in either Fianna Fáil's or Fine Gael's manifesto at the general election, nor was it mentioned in the programme for Government. The Government has no mandate for this. This change in the VAT rate for certain costs incurred in the construction of apartment developments might lead to an increase in the development of build-to-rent apartments, provided there is enough demand for these high-rent units. It certainly will

not lead to a single additional apartment being built anywhere outside of Dublin and possibly Cork. The Minister said the measures would help address the viability gap. However, this viability gap has not been clearly quantified by Government. If the viability gap still exists, why do the apartment guideline changes that were supposed to address the viability gap not work? If this VAT change is deemed necessary, why is it not targeted at a cost incurred on the development of apartments for affordable rental or purchase? This VAT represents a saving of about €18,000 on a €500,000 apartment. It might marginally improve viability, but it certainly will not do anything for affordability.

Earlier this year, the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, came out on national radio against what he termed Celtic tiger-style tax breaks, which he said had done more harm than good. How is this different from the Celtic tiger tax break? If not, what has changed between what the Minister said then and announced today and why is this measure not time limited? Where is the sunset clause and why is it not tied to output? This should not be a permanent windfall-gains measure if the Government is going to introduce it. The factors that contribute to high apartment costs, which include the cost and availability of finance, land, regulation and so on, are complex. Cash subsidies such as this are not actually going to increase the supply of apartments or make apartments more affordable. Like night follows day, we will be back here again in six months or a year with something else, the next thing that institutional investors and Pat Farrell are looking for. Developers are already getting huge cash subsidies through a variety of schemes. If these cash subsidies have failed to increase construction, why does Government think that this tax break will work?

Deputy Matt Carthy: I want to speak on Financial Resolution No. 4 very briefly and support the comments from Deputy Ó Broin that this just appears to be a rabbit out of a hat. It stands as one of those examples where Ministers and probably senior civil servants sitting around a room late last week realised they had done nothing in respect of housing and needed to provide some form of a fig leaf to suggest that they were actually going to do something to address the housing crisis that has got worse every year with this Government. Somebody decided to introduce another tax break for the people who had got plenty of tax breaks and who had yet to deliver affordable housing at the required scale. Every option and every policy proposal needs to be examined in detail in order to resolve the housing crisis and nothing should be ruled out just for the sake of it. That is why Sinn Féin previously looked extensively at the suggestion of cutting VAT for specific construction sectors, including apartments.

As Deputy Doherty outlined earlier, we were informed by officials that it would be costly, very difficult to administer, and would not actually move the dial on house prices. I do not think that would be a surprise to anyone. It would simply get pocketed by the developers. It would be very useful if the Government and the Department published the advice they have received and outline what they think the output of this new policy proposal will mean, other than a big dent in public finances that could be used to give people who are struggling at the coalface of the housing crisis some support.

On Financial Resolution No. 3 in respect of the VAT rate on gas and electricity and the maintenance of the 9% rate, of course this will be supported, I am sure, across the House. I would contend that it should be the very bare minimum. The Minister's introductory remarks set out in very stark terms to me precisely why so many people will be despondent tonight. She talked about inflation coming down and about the relatively high prices of gas and

electricity. This shows again that the Government does not get it. I do not think the Government understands what it means for many people when the ESB bill or the gas bill comes through their letter boxes. Electricity prices are 70% higher than they were pre crisis. Gas prices are 100% higher. That is double where they were. This has real consequences for people's energy bills and heating their homes, never mind the fact that they are getting no tax supports whatsoever and no other supports. By not providing for a cost-saving package for energy costs and by increasing costs through the carbon tax for people who rely on solid fuel home heating and who have to drive their cars to places, it means that all those families all over this State are actually going to be worse off this year than they were last year. Considering the promises that were made during the election campaign, promises that quite clearly mean nothing, the starkest thing that has been pointed out today - I think many people will see a real truth in it - is that the Government is taking a gamble here that people are going to forget this budget. This is a coasting budget on the part of the Government where its true colours come out regarding its affinity with workers and families who are struggling to make ends meet. The Government has made their lives much more difficult and I think that this budget is going to be a defining moment in the lifespan of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in government.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I particularly want to speak to resolution No. 4. However, I welcome No. 3 and the continuation of the 9% rate of VAT for electricity, which is very welcome. While in some people's view it does not do so entirely, it does in some way mitigate the removal of the measures to help people pay their bills. I agree with others that maybe it should have been continued for another year. I note the Fiscal Advisory Council's advice that if we take out the corporation tax receipts that were very tight, it is possibly spending beyond our means. We have to try to get the balance. I believe that the 9% VAT rate on electricity strikes that balance and I support it.

For the first time, this budget looks at the medium term. As I said in my earlier contribution, it is not multi-annual funding but the Fiscal Advisory Council did say that we also needed to look to our medium-term projections, which is in line with best practice in Europe. I noted the €12 billion medium-term expenditure on water, but it is just over €1 billion in this budget. If we are trying to deal with the infrastructural issues - and housing needs water infrastructure - we should be front-loading it.

Similarly, we need massive investment in redefining the electricity grid, in investing in offshore wind and wave energy, and in putting more into R and D. We are in a kind of wartime situation. We need to look 15 years down the road and start changing the way our Civil Service operates. We have to change the way various Departments and Government agencies operate starting right now. I did not see any of that type of vision even referenced in the budget and we need to have it.

I regard resolution No. 4 as a bit of a waste with €250 million going to investors and developers. On paper, it ticks a few boxes and we might get a few more apartments built but I do not believe that will actually happen. There is a greater risk of the VAT reductions inflating the value of land because - this will be borne out when this actually comes in and what state it comes in at - developers are going to make profits that could be described as supernormal profits, in which case they will see land as a more important commodity. The Government has said that in development plans, which are turning into ten-year development plans now, more land needs to be zoned for housing even though they are not building on the existing land.

Developers will see this as a much more valuable asset and it may drive up land values, which would have a knock-on effect on the value of property.

One thing that was not addressed in any commentary on housing was the impact of industrial policy. As Deputy Hayes would know because he sits beside me on the economic committee, we have an industrial policy that tries to get the likes of software companies to relocate around the country. However, the software companies like to locate in Dublin. The problem with that is the employees of these companies who are not essential workers are pushing up the price of housing in my constituency and elsewhere. One of the top companies in Europe - I forget the name but it was mentioned during the committee debate - was quoted on the IDA website as saying that if companies could not get enough workers here in Ireland, there were plenty more in the EU who would come to Ireland to work. This means we are getting localisation-type jobs that are not creating any homegrown Irish jobs. I am not talking about Irish people, but about the types of job we need to be filled by people from abroad, such as construction workers, doctors and nurses, all the ones who make a great contribution already. We do not need localisation jobs to be located in Dublin or any of the major cities. With the remote working capability we have and with broadband being rolled out, if software companies want to employ people in Ireland for localisation, let them move around the towns and villages of Ireland and regenerate those areas that are currently dying, with vacant units above shops in many towns and villages. In my constituency, I have seen areas where 90% of the people who have bought the expensive housing were not born in Ireland. They are working in very well-paid jobs and fair play to them for that. However, a garda, a teacher, a nurse or somebody who grew up in the area cannot even afford the affordable housing because every time the baseline price goes up, that person's threshold is moved and he or she needs to apply again. It is heartbreaking for people who are making a fantastic contribution to this country but their wages are not commensurate with top-end software localisation jobs and they lose out as a result. We need to look at our industrial policy in terms of spreading those types of jobs around the country. Ultimately, it is about overall supply.

We are talking about the planning process, speeding up the tendering process, and making more investment in the likes of apprenticeships so that we have people to build those houses. There were some good suggestions made before about setting up a number of factories to build modular or prefabricated housing. As others have said, the State should be the biggest construction company in the country. It does not mean that it has to build it but it can certainly tender for the work to be done. That is a way to move on the supply issue rather than depending on the investors who are only trying to cream off the high-end profits.

I note the Social Democrats amendment and I am inclined to support it.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I will speak to resolution No.4. In this reduction in the VAT rate, the Government is very clearly throwing us back to an Ireland that we thought we had left behind. It is the Ireland of crony deals and dig-outs for developers and the wealthy. I was wondering if Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael did some séance or bring out a Ouija board to design the budget? Did they conjure up the spirit of Charlie Haughey and ask him what they should do? Did he say they should keep bending the knee and rolling out the red carpet for the big money? The truth is this VAT cut is the same old Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael policy. They did it in forming the Government; they resurrected Michael Lowry. Now they are resurrecting the failed tax policies of the Celtic tiger with tax breaks for developers but now it actually gets even worse.

We are seeing the bankrolling of global vulture funds. That is who will benefit from this tax cut. It will be multibillion global funds and big developers who will get their tax bills cut. Through this reduction in the VAT rate, they will get almost €500 million every year between the VAT cut and the other measure to reduce construction costs. This is being poured into their pockets for what? It is to develop build-to-rent apartments that they will then charge absolutely astronomical rents for, which will now have no rent controls under the Government's new housing measures.

I will give examples of the companies the Government is bankrolling. Kennedy Wilson, a \$28 billion US real estate fund with thousands of rental apartments here, will no doubt be developing and buying more. It charges €3,800 for a two-bedroom apartment. IRES REIT is another one that will be developing, buying up and benefiting from these VAT cuts. It charges €2,100 for a one-bedroom apartment. It had a rental income of €83 million last year but who are its major shareholders? Where is this money going? Kennedy Wilson, as I said, is a major US fund. The major shareholders of IRES REIT are the US-based BlackRock and Fidelity, and UK-based asset managers. It is similar for big developers, Glenveigh and Cairn. International funds are creaming huge amounts of money from this.

While one in five of our children is in poverty after the family pays their housing costs, in this budget the Government is going to give €500 million to global and Irish investor funds to build even more extortionate rental apartments that no young people in this country will be able to buy. It is absolutely incredulous that in the coming two or three years, we could be looking at over €2 billion given in tax breaks to these funds to build apartments on which there will be no requirement whatsoever regarding the price they are sold at or the rent that is charged. We are pumping billions of euro of taxpayers' money to build apartments on which there will be no affordability requirement. It is essentially providing a slush fund to these developers and investor funds to charge whatever they want. This is not policy; it is madness.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael claim to be the parties of home ownership, but now that is just a figment of their imagination. They have self-deluded themselves into thinking that their policies promote home ownership. Between 2011 and 2022, the number of 25--to-35-year-olds who own their homes has collapsed by 50%. They have turned our young people into rental fodder for global vulture funds. It is important we point this out because there is a serious lack of critical thinking and engagement in policy in the Government, the Department of housing and the Department of Finance regarding this measure. There is no guarantee whatsoever that new units will be built or that they will have affordability requirements. They will be able to charge whatever price and rent they want.

What choice is the Government giving young people in this country? It is giving them the choice to either hand over the majority of their hard-earned money to a corporate landlord, stay stuck in their childhood box rooms unable to start their independent lives, or else emigrate. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are telling young people in this country to emigrate because they are not going to offer them a home.

The only big initiative the Government is doing on housing in this budget is to bankroll investor funds and developers. The Government is so devoid of new ideas, vision or ambition. The Taoiseach said he was going to make difficult housing policy decisions, but the difficult decision would have been to pump money into State construction to actually deliver homes that would bring down rents and house prices. Instead, the Government is doing nothing in that

regard. It is very clearly captured by the large funds and that is what this VAT change is about. The Government is about blaming everyone else except itself. It needs to take responsibility. This VAT cut will not deliver anything except more expensive rental housing.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: In the old days, housing figures came out and we took them to be public housing figures. I find it actually laughable in recent years the way the housing figures encompass everything that is built in the country and the Government takes the credit. I see this as the Government's drive to reach the housing targets it missed by pumping money into private developers and construction companies in a desperate means to get the figures up.

What is the total cost of all of these measures? While I have seen a figure for one of the measures, I have not seen a figure for the VAT cost. What is the nature of the apartments that will be built? They could be extremely expensive and luxurious apartments. Is the Government putting any rules or stipulations whatsoever in place, or is it just lashing some money down?

As has been said, these apartments will most likely be rented out at completely unaffordable rates, just like all of the apartment complexes that every single one of us see flying up in Ashtown and Ongar, which tend to be eight or nine storeys high with a big "U" sign and rented out by vulture funds. They will do nothing to make the life of anyone who is trying to get a home and struggling in the private rental sector easier. The only thing the Government did for those people was to give them a €200 credit per year.

Did the Government ever give any consideration to giving this money directly to councils to build on their own vacant land? Does the Government have figures for the acreage of council land available? To give the Minister an example, one I have raised here many times before, there is a vacant strategic land bank for the whole of Dublin owned by Fingal County Council stretching for miles, with beautiful forestry and rivers situated near a rail line. The council said it could build 7,000 social and affordable homes on that land. That is 7,000 homes in Dublin right now, which would be a significant contribution to reducing the housing crisis in west and north Dublin, but what is the Government doing? Not a brass farthing has been given to develop that land bank; there has been nothing. A question was put in by one of our councillors recently about this land. The answer came back that no money had been asked for or given. It is not like there is a rush or anything. It is not like there is an emergency or people in desperation.

This really is neoliberalism taken to its nth degree. The Government has just given up any semblance of building public housing. I checked the figures for the third quarter of 2024 where the words "housing options" and "housing supports" come up again and again. The Government uses measures like HAP, which is the most expensive and wasteful way to house someone that one could think of, and other means of leasing and so on from private developers.

This is shameful. We are now into – and it should be marked - 12 years of successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments that have been content to let housing misery fester in this country. Imagine that for 12 years. People who were being made homeless contacted me back in 2013 and it has not stopped since. This is a social ill that the Government has been happy to allow. Today, the big two features of the budget are for the fast food industry, which is getting a huge tax break, and the developers. There is nothing for the disabled. There is no hope for people on the housing lists or for those emigrating. This really is neoliberalism writ

large. The Minister for housing, Deputy Browne, should be here to answer some of these questions.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No one is offering. Does the Minister wish to respond?

Minister for Education and Youth (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank the Deputies. This financial resolution provides for the reduction of the VAT rate applied to the sale of new apartments to 9% from 8 October 2025. It will apply to the 31 December 2030, that is, for the next five years. Its estimated cost for the first year is €250 million.

The Government is committed to the delivery of more than 300,000 new homes by 2023. It is, of course, apparent that apartments need to be a significant part of that delivery. This is about ensuring that we have a greater delivery of not just apartments but cost-rental, affordable and private homes. To say that nothing is being spent or that there has been no focus on housing in this budget other than this specific measure simply is not correct.

I will outline matters again. There is an allocation of €11.3 billion to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for 2026. A total of €7.2 billion of that allocation is in capital funding, which will include €2.9 billion to support the delivery of thousands of new build social homes and second-hand acquisitions; €1.2 billion for the starter homes programme to deliver thousands of starter homes through a range of affordability supports, alongside the help-to-buy initiative; €300 million to support the regeneration of our towns and urban areas through the urban regeneration development fund; €205 million for a new housing activation infrastructure fund to support the work of the new housing activation office; €140 million to retrofit further homes; and €130 million to fund up to 17,000 grants to adapt the homes of older people and people with disabilities, which is in addition to the significant €628 million increase in disability funding this year. On top of those measures, there is then €2 billion to support 100,000 households through the existing different schemes, such as the rental accommodation and social housing current expenditure schemes. It is important to continue those schemes.

We need to increase our focus on building apartment complexes. A total of 50% of our employment or growth is going to happen across five cities, namely, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway. A total of 40% of our development will happen in brownfield sites in the coming years. We need to ensure that we are doing more when it comes to apartment complexes. Construction in this area is not moving so we have to ensure we are putting in place measures that will actually move and ensure we have delivery.

Looking solely at Dublin, of the last 44,500 units with planning permission, 90% of those, or approximately 40,000, are apartments that have not yet commenced. Overall, some 70,000 apartments with planning permission have not gone anywhere. That is not just in the past five or six months. Rather, it goes back as far as 2022 and before. We need to ensure that we are doing – and this is just one measure – what we can to activate. It is very clear there is a viability gap between apartments and houses in Ireland. That is something that has been said time and again. The purpose of this measure, therefore, is to reduce that gap to achieve wider policy goals as we have outlined, many of which are the national planning framework, such as increasing density and recognising demographic and societal changes. All of this can be delivered through more housing and apartment delivery.

In terms of the guidelines and how they will be implemented, Revenue is working to develop and implement the different guidelines. Essentially, this is aimed at incentivising builders to build additional apartments. This will stretch over a number of different years.

With regard to the types of apartments, this measure will apply where a property is at least two storeys high and has least three units. It will not extend to duplexes or single-storey developments. It will extend to student accommodation as long as it meets the criteria for apartments, that is, multistorey accommodation with at least three units. It will not apply to apartments built over a business or apartments constructed as part of a hotel. Overall, it will fall within the definition from high-value accommodation to apartments built for social housing purposes and will cover all sizes of apartments.

9 o'clock

All the detail is being worked through. The guidelines to implement this are being developed by Revenue. This can be applied to by and can be sold on to any individual or group, be it a housing body, private or otherwise. This is about making sure we construct more apartments. In the past number of years, that has not been happening. There is a viability gap there and the aim behind this is to address it. It is one measure among a number we are introducing to increase the overall construction of affordable, social and private apartments and homes for people across the country.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister is absolutely correct. There are planning permissions for 40,000 apartments that have not yet been commenced. The Minister claimed that this measure is to activate those permissions. Why then provide a VAT reduction in respect of apartments under construction? All the expenditure being provided for this measure next year is for apartments that are currently being built. It takes approximately two years to build out an apartment development. That means €250 million of this money for next year will go on apartments which are under constructions and for which there already are buyers. In many cases, because they have forward purchase agreements, the prices have been fixed. The Government will then spend €350 million on it next year, and a large proportion of that money will also go on apartments that are currently under construction. Those apartments are being built. If the Government did not introduce this measure, those apartments would be built and bought by funds or AHBs. It is simply not the case that next year's expenditure or the bulk of that for the year after is about activation.

At a press conference earlier, the Minister, Deputy Browne, was asked why that is the case. Why, for example, did he not link this measure to a commencement date like tomorrow? I still think it would be a bad policy but it would mean the Government would not be wasting €250 million next year. What did the Minister say? He said he could not do that because it would delay the sale. What utter nonsense. If there was a commencement date of tomorrow, anything commenced before that would not have its sale delayed and the State would not be blowing hundreds of millions of euro that could be spent on the delivery of genuinely affordable homes for working people.

I take it from her remarks that the Minister, Deputy McEntee, is confirming that, next year and the year after, the apartments bought by AHBs and local authorities under turnkey agreements for social or cost rental will effectively be captured by this. That means the State

will pay an additional €20,000 to €25,000 per unit next year and the year after on top of the price already committed to through the forward purchase agreements. That is utterly bizarre.

Let us deal with viability. The Minister, Deputy Browne, gave some figures on viability at his press conference. I do not necessarily accept their veracity but he claims that suburban apartments have a viability gap of €114,000 per unit and that inner-urban apartments have a viability gap of €156,000. That is the gap that has to be closed. How in God's name will a VAT reduction of €20,000 close either of those? The maths do not add up.

I do not know which Deputy before me made this point, but it was a point well worth making. This was not a commitment in the programme for Government, unlike, for example, the promise to progressively increase the renter's tax credit, a promise that was broken today. It is a specific demand of a specific lobbyist who came into Government Buildings and requested it. The Minister is right this is one of three measures. That is the one point on which I will agree with her. The Government is allowing apartment developers to dramatically reduce the size of and the light and storage options in apartments and to dramatically reduce the quality of the lives of those who occupy them. It is also about to introduce legislation that will allow not only for those apartments that come on stream to come in at the top of the market but also to reset to full market value every six years. Hines has told us its turnover of tenants is 25% every year. This means that means in exchange for an extra €25,000 going into a developer's pocket, that developer will build a volume - we do not know how many, but I agree with colleagues that it will not be a large volume - of smaller, darker, far more expensive homes. If anybody tells me that is a credible solution to the housing crisis, they clearly do not understand what is happening.

The worst thing of all - I say this with the greatest of respect for the Minister opposite and the people in her constituency who cannot get affordable homes - is that the only apartments which may arise from this cocktail of measures will be very expensive ones in limited areas of Dublin, namely the Docklands and Sandyford, for example, in which very high rents of €3,000-plus obtain. Nobody will be building anything in the Minister's constituency on the basis of these measures because that is not what those in the institutional investment and apartment developer community are interested in. They want a small amount of expensive, high-end and high-density apartments in Dublin, and maybe the Docklands area of Cork. Every other county in the State will get nothing.

The Government did not increase the social housing targets beyond previous commitments. It did not increase the affordable cost rental or purchase targets in order to fix those schemes and make them genuinely affordable. It is doing nothing to ensure an adequate supply of good-quality, private homes in every county in the State for working people to purchase by supporting and activating the small and medium-size builder-developer sector.

Michael O'Flynn, one of the most respected builder-developers in the State, has stated over and over that he does not want tax breaks. He wants a viable business model to build homes for working people to buy. That is not in this budget. This will not work. The only beneficiaries are very large developers. I do not understand how somebody can defend the indefensible policy in front of us today.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I thank the Minister for her response. The increase in the cost of developing apartments is complex. We have had multiple interest rate rises and still have not

seen the evidence base for these VAT cuts. I would really like to see the publication of the advice from the Department of Finance on this. It is a major transfer of wealth to institutional investors and property developers, with little or no clawback by the State. It is not being combined with use-it-or-lose-it clauses around planning permission or anything to deal with land speculation or land hoarding, which is a big issue in the context of uncommenced apartment developments. This simply will not work. We will be back here again to deal with it, if not next year then in two year's time.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: It is absolutely extraordinary that this measure is being brought in for apartments currently under construction, some of which are near completion. In the context of many of those apartments, the prices are locked in. Those purchasing them - approved housing bodies or whomever - have already agreed a price. This will create a windfall profit for developers, and that money will go straight into their back pockets.

There is no need for a resolution like this now. It could have been designed in another way. I do not think it would work for activation anyway. If it was a genuine measure about activation, however, it should have been designed differently. This measure that will be voted through shortly by Government will give some individuals a windfall profit that will go into their back pockets, with no good policy outcome for the public. In fact, it is costing us in terms of the VAT cut and, potentially, it will cost the State because approved housing bodies and others buyers have already locked in prices. This is a really rotten measure in terms of value for money and the public interest.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I want to back up my colleague and others who have said that this is incredible. The Minister needs to explain the basis on which the decision was made to hand money over to developers and investor funds that are already building these homes. What is happening is illogical. What is the rationale behind it? We need an explanation. This involves significant amounts of public money. Is it another example of the Government wasting public money with no consideration? It is in the same line as the decisions made by the new Minister for housing when he got rid of the tenant in situ scheme. He had to row back somewhat on that when he realised what he was doing was pushing people into homelessness. This is another example of an ill-thought-out policy that is clearly just responding to lobbyists.

I have a direct question for the Minister. Under the croí cónaithe cities scheme, developers can get a subsidy of up to €140,000 per apartment. Will the Minister clarify for us tonight that this VAT reduction is on top of that?

Deputy Conor Sheehan: It is.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Potentially, those building and developing apartments, and let us say an apartment is potentially going for sale for €600,000 or €800,000, are getting €160,000 or €170,000 State subsidy per apartment. Will the Minister clarify that please?

Deputy Matt Carthy: That is a good question.

Deputy Helen McEntee: To respond to a number of points, I have never seen a Government implement in full its programme for Government in one year. Deputies need to acknowledge that we have four years hopefully ahead of us to implement many more measures-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: I have never seen a Government throw it out before the first budget.

Deputy Helen McEntee: -----and to activate more housing nor have I ever seen a Government that was not allowed to do more than the programme for Government. We may stray beyond the programme for Government from time to time, so be warned. Meath County Council has surpassed its housing targets with the support of Government. We will work with it to do even more. Coming from a county with a growing young population, just like the Deputy, I want to ensure that constituents have access to affordable homes and that they can buy, rent and own. On the timelines, the advice that I have been given is that there were legal issues around the overall timeline, but also the potential implications to stall the markets. If we set a future date, whether it is tomorrow or in six months, the further out it is we prevent the commencement of property. There were legal issues around defining the commencement date and the timing. That is the information I have been given. This is on top of any of the other measures that have been put in place. I have to stress again that this about activating the tens of thousands of planning permissions that have not yet started and have not yet been acted on and making sure that we can bring far more apartment complexes into the overall context for people.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Will the Minister answer the question?

Deputy Helen McEntee: I have answered it. It is in addition to any other schemes.

Financial Resolution No. 3 agreed to.

Financial Resolution No. 4: Value-Added Tax

Minister for Education and Youth (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move:

(1) THAT the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 (No. 31 of 2010), be amended—

(a) in section 46(1) –

(i) in paragraph (a), by the insertion of “(cab),” after “(caa),”;

(ii) in paragraph (c), by the insertion of “, (cab)” after “(caa)”, and

(iii) by the insertion of the following paragraph after paragraph (caa):

“(cab) during the period from 8 October 2025 to 31 December 2030, 9 per cent in relation to goods of a kind specified in paragraph 9A of Schedule 3 on which tax would, but for this paragraph, be chargeable in accordance with paragraph (c);”;

and

(b) in Schedule 3 –

(i) in Part 2, by the insertion of the following paragraph after paragraph 9:

"Housing as part of a social policy.

9A. The supply of housing, as part of a social policy, being the supply of an apartment, used or to be used for residential purposes, in an apartment block within the meaning of section 31E of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999.”,

and

(ii) in Part 3, by the substitution of the following paragraph for paragraph 14:

“14. Subject to paragraph 9A, the supply of immovable goods used or to be used for residential purposes.”.

(2) THAT this Resolution shall have effect on and from 8 October 2025.

(3) IT is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution shall have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1927 (No. 7 of 1927).

Question put: "That Financial Resolution No. 4 be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 95; Níl, 65; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.	
Browne, James.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Colm.	Connolly, Catherine.	
Burke, Peter.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Crowe, Seán.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cullinane, David.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cummins, Jen.	
Cahill, Michael.	Daly, Pa.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Calleary, Dara.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Canney, Seán.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Gannon, Gary.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gould, Thomas.	
Collins, Michael.	Graves, Ann.	
Collins, Niall.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Connolly, John.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Cooney, Joe.	Healy, Seamus.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Hearne, Rory.	

Cummins, John.	Kelly, Alan.	
Currie, Emer.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Daly, Martin.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Lawlor, George.	
Dillon, Alan.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Dolan, Albert.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Dooley, Timmy.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Feighan, Frankie.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Fleming, Seán.	Murphy, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Nash, Ged.	
Geoghegan, James.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Grealish, Noel.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Harkin, Marian.	Nolan, Carol.	
Harris, Simon.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Heydon, Martin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Higgins, Emer.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Keogh, Keira.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Lahart, John.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Lawless, James.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Lawless, Paul.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Maxwell, David.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Quaide, Liam.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Rice, Pádraig.	
McCormack, Tony.	Sheehan, Conor.	
McEntee, Helen.	Sherlock, Marie.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Smith, Duncan.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Stanley, Brian.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Wall, Mark.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ward, Charles.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ward, Mark.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Neville, Joe.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		

O'Donoghue, Richard.		
O'Donovan, Patrick.		
O'Flynn, Ken.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Tóibín, Peadar.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Rory Hearne.

Question declared carried.

Financial Resolution No. 5: General

Minister for Education and Youth (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move:

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

Debate adjourned.

Developer Profits Transparency Bill 2023: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

Deputy An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Developer Profits Transparency Bill 2023. On Thursday, 2 October 2025, on the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 69; Níl, 88; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	

Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Brady, John.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Brian.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Shay.	
Carthy, Matt.	Brophy, Colm.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Browne, James.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Colm.	
Connolly, Catherine.	Burke, Peter.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Crowe, Seán.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Cullinane, David.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cummins, Jen.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Daly, Pa.	Cahill, Michael.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Calleary, Dara.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Canney, Seán.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Gannon, Gary.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gould, Thomas.	Collins, Niall.	
Graves, Ann.	Connolly, John.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cooney, Joe.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Healy, Seamus.	Cummins, John.	
Hearne, Rory.	Currie, Emer.	
Kelly, Alan.	Daly, Martin.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Kenny, Martin.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Dillon, Alan.	
Lawless, Paul.	Dolan, Albert.	
Lawlor, George.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Feighan, Frankie.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Fleming, Seán.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Foley, Norma.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Murphy, Paul.	Geoghegan, James.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Grealish, Noel.	
Nash, Ged.	Harkin, Marian.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Nolan, Carol.	Heydon, Martin.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Higgins, Emer.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	Keogh, Keira.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Lahart, John.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Lawless, James.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	Lowry, Michael.	

O'Hara, Louis.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McCarthy, Noel.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McCormack, Tony.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	McEntee, Helen.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Sherlock, Marie.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Smith, Duncan.	Murphy, Michael.	
Stanley, Brian.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	Neville, Joe.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donovan, Patrick.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Rory Hearne and Cian O'Callaghan; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Question declared lost.

Estimates for Public Services 2025: Message from Select Committee

Deputy An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage has completed its consideration of the following Further Revised Estimate for Public Services for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2025: Vote 34 - Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 9.43 p.m. go dtí 10.23 a.m., Dé Céadaoin, an 8 Deireadh Fómhair 2025.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.43 p.m. until 10.23 a.m. on Wednesday, 8 October 2025.