



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**DÁIL ÉIREANN**

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe  
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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## **DÁIL ÉIREANN**

*Dé Máirt, 24 Márta 2026*

*Tuesday, 24 March 2026*

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

*Paidir agus Machnamh.*

*Prayer and Reflection.*

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### **Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions**

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** We are four weeks into a crisis that has seen fuel prices skyrocket and only now has the Government brought forward limited measures to respond. It has taken relentless pressure from Sinn Féin and massive public anger to force it to act.

*(Interruptions)*

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Government watched on as fuel prices spun out of control. It has sat back as working people struggle to heat their homes and fill their cars. When households needed a government of action, they got this do-nothing Government. Clearly its plan was to ride this one out. Its package today had to be dragged out of it. Still the Government comes to the table with half-measures. It could not bring itself to provide the maximum support that people need. The reductions in motor fuel do not go far enough.

The Government has it in its power to deliver the maximum excise cut possible on diesel, a similar cut for petrol and to remove excise entirely from home heating oil. Motorists have been hammered for a month at the pumps and the Government could have done more, but instead it chooses to short-change people. However, its standout failure is on home heating oil. It has literally abandoned the 750,000 households that rely on home heating oil. The price of a fill of home heating oil has doubled in a matter of weeks. A measly cut of 2 cent a litre is an insult. It amounts only to a €20 reduction on a fill that now costs around €1,700 - a drop in the tank.

Of course, in any event, the Government will take this back from people anyway when it hikes up carbon tax in just a few weeks. It gives with one hand, only to take back with the other. It could have removed, and should completely remove, excise on home heating oil. That would provide these households with a meaningful relief but instead it chooses to leave them high and dry. Once again when it comes to the crunch, the Government sells working people short with weak half-measures but that is Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil all over. The Government's measure on fuel allowance is paltry. Extending the payment by four weeks will not make a dent in these massive fuel price hikes.

Chuir Sinn Féin iachall ar an Rialtas bogadh. Faraor, tá beartas Fhianna Fáil agus Fine Gael maidir le díosal agus peitрил i bhfad róbheag i gcomparáid le cad atá ag teastáil. I gcás teaghlaigh atá ag brath ar ola theasa tí, tá siad tréigthe. Beidh Sinn Féin ag brú le haghaidh fíorghníomh anocht.

These soaring fuel prices are a real emergency for households requiring real action, not the half measures the Government presents today. We will not watch on as the Government lets people down again. These are people who have to get to work in the morning, carers who have to get to the people they look after and people with disabilities, who, it should be remembered, were left €1,400 worse off in the Government's budget.

We will therefore move an amendment to the Government's financial resolution to deliver the maximum excise cut possible for diesel and a similar cut for petrol and to completely remove excise and strip away carbon tax from home heating oil. That is the difference between the Taoiseach and me. I believe that when families are put to the pin of their collar and when the Government can intervene, it should - no delays, no excuses, just action.

**The Taoiseach:** Ní aontaím leis an Teachta. Is éard atá faoi chaibidil ag an Rialtas ná cabhair agus tacaíocht a thabhairt do dhaoine ar ioncam íseal agus do na daoine is boichte sa tír. Sin é an fáth go bhfuil, ó thaobh cúrsaí leasa shóisialaigh de, cabhair agus tacaíocht á dtabhairt againn. Tá níos mó cabhrach agus tacaíochta á dtabhairt don tionscal haulage chomh maith mar tá sé riachtanach ó thaobh cúrsaí geilleagar na tíre.

This is a moment of great instability and uncertainty in the world, and the war in the Middle East has created without question the greatest oil supply shock ever in the history of the markets. That is a very sobering and significant reality that has to be taken on board by any responsible government. We have no intention of being reckless or irresponsible with this crisis. We want to be flexible and to give supports to people. Every government is limited as to what it can do in situations like these. All the international advice from the ECB, the IMF and so on is to target temporary, affordable measures because we do not quite know what is around the corner as to how this will unfold, not only in terms of the war itself but also in terms of the Strait of Hormuz and the impact on oil and gas installations that have already been destroyed. There will be a lag time now of a couple of years before some of those are restored to capacity. The wise thing to do, therefore, is to introduce measures of the kind we have introduced today, that are targeted and that give some degree of universal support in terms of the reduction in excise and petrol duties. That is important. Then there is a very specific measure for the haulage industry, which Sinn Féin would not support and which it was warning us against doing yesterday. The reason we are doing that is that the haulage industry is absolutely central to our trading and to our economy. It is extremely important that over the mid-term we make sure structurally that we create a sustainable haulage industry into the future to underpin what is a very strong exporting economy. That is the targeted nature of this.

The fuel allowance has been extended for four weeks, which will take us up to 1 May. I think any reasonable person would say that by that stage - yes, climate and the weather change and so on - we will be in a warmer situation. It is logical to target about 470,000 families on low incomes. I know Sinn Féin opposes that. It believes in allocating about €2 billion to €3 billion right now. What do we do in October, what do we do in December, if the consequences of this crisis continue?

We have a budget coming up. We want to protect investment in services, education, health and children right across the board. These are real choices we have to make. I am sure the Deputy herself must realise that. It is probably one of the more generous packages being developed across Europe. I do not know what instructions she has given to her own Ministers in Northern Ireland. I think a total of £30 is the only benefit towards upcoming bills that it is giving. It cannot decide where an additional £17 million that is available is to go. Sinn Féin has two Ministers in charge of this brief in Northern Ireland, and I ask the Deputy to compare their performance with what we are doing here.

There is no comparison. There has been poor enough leadership from those in Deputy McDonald's party who are in charge of that operation. From our point of view, these are temporary measures. We do need to retain some degree of flexibility in terms of how this situation unfolds in the coming weeks and months.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Taoiseach is always so shocked and outraged when it is a case of families and working people needing support. That is such an "outrageous" thing to say. That is so "unsustainable". It is always so "unaffordable", even when the Government coffers are full. Of course, he takes a very different view when it is developers or big bankers or big corporate interests. Mind them every day of the week, but when the families come knocking on the door and when they are under pressure, that is a different story. How very telling and how very Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. It is not wise to leave 750,000 households who rely on home heating oil in the lurch. It is not wise to short-change workers, carers and people who have to get out and about to do their business. These are families and people who are already to the pin of their collar in a cost-of-living crisis. Where is the wisdom of that? Not alone is it stingy and mean and detached but above all else, it reveals the Government's political priorities and, by God, those are not the working men and women of this country.

**The Taoiseach:** With the greatest respect, the only party of late that has been courting bankers and developers and every sort of corporate financial operation is Sinn Féin, particularly in the United States, where the party has raised a hell of a lot of money from developers and builders. Spare lecturing everybody else about fundraising from developers and bankers and everybody because Sinn Féin has been doing it on a serial basis for many years in the United States, Northern Ireland, the UK and elsewhere.

**Deputy Jerry Buttimer:** And Australia.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputy McDonald speaks out of both sides of her mouth when it comes to all of that playbook that she just regurgitates every time there is an event or a crisis in the world. We do not take Sinn Féin's approach. Exactly what we are doing here is targeting our measures on the fuel allowance, which would help poorer families and low-income working families withstand the impact of the increases in home heating oil and other energy products. That has been our focus and, indeed, in the budget it was our focus. The ESRI bears out that we had a very strong budget in terms of the low-income deciles.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** It does not. You cannot keep on lying. It does not. It is not true. I will send it to you.

**The Taoiseach:** You are not leader yet, Deputy. I keep on saying you are not leader of the party; do not be interrupting. The bottom line is that the evidence is there that we looked after the lowest income groups and through the household benefit scheme as well, which was successfully improved as a result of the budget.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** The illegal war on Iran launched by Trump and Netanyahu is now in its fourth week. Households across the country are reeling from the energy crisis. Petrol and diesel prices are now well over €2 per litre and those reliant on home heating oil are particularly badly affected. They are facing massive price increases, with the cost of refilling a 1,000 litre tank getting to €1,800. In the face of this, the Government's package of measures to support struggling households, which the Taoiseach has described as generous, is simply not enough. It is too little and very late. True, the excise and levy cuts to fuel prices will give relief to some, as will the extension of the fuel allowance, but hundreds of thousands of households are already in arrears on energy bills. There is no real reassurance here for far too many. Just before I came in here, a woman emailed me to convey what she described as her disgust and deep unhappiness. As a working single parent, her last electricity bill was €637 and she said there is nothing in this package of measures for her. For her and for so many more, we need longer term thinking and measures from the Government that will ensure energy security and tackle climate change.

Labour has championed a real right to remote and flexible working and the International Energy Agency, IEA, is telling us we need to pivot to this and to real investment in cycling and public transport to decarbonise our economy and society, as Deputy Ged Nash has said. This is imperative in the week when the World Meteorological Organization says 2025 was the worst year on record for climate change. Last Thursday, the Taoiseach attended the European Council in Brussels. There he would have heard the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, speaking about how Spain is less exposed to this huge energy shock than other European countries. Why? Because Spain pivoted early to renewables. Last week, 60% of Spain's energy electricity was generated through renewables. The price of electricity per kilowatt-hour is well over €100 here.

The equivalent price in Spain is just €14. That is an extraordinary difference. When I was in Brussels myself last Thursday, I spoke with Sánchez and with the climate Commissioner, Teresa Ribera. The Spanish left Government has shown robust leadership within the EU, strongly condemning the US and Israel for their attacks on Iran and showing real leadership on climate action. That is what we need from the Taoiseach's Government - real leadership. It is clear the best way to address the crisis is to stop the war. European leaders should now unite to condemn the war, to challenge Trump on his so-called little excursion and to stand up to this erratic and dangerous leader, not hand him a bowl of shamrock in the White House.

While the war continues, however, the Government must ensure that struggling households are protected, and we must strive harder to shift away from fossil fuels. Will the Taoiseach join with the Spanish socialists in condemning the US-Israel war? Will he work with EU leaders to stand up to Trump, this bully, and to seek an end to the war? Will he ensure that struggling households are really supported through this crisis and that we now move urgently to end our reliance on fossil fuels?

**The Taoiseach:** I acknowledge that people are under a lot of pressure in terms of the impact of this crisis and the cost of energy as a result of this war. There is no question about that. The Government is limited in how comprehensively it can respond. Governments cannot compensate every single person in society. I am sure the Deputy would acknowledge that. We need a realistic assessment of this and a realistic discussion about it. However, we can try to protect those on the lowest incomes and to protect people in general by providing some supports to reduce the impact of this crisis. The reduction in excise duty does that. It does not address the issue totally, but at least it helps and takes a bit of pressure off people. We fully acknowledge that it does not deal with the scale of the increases in the cost of home heating oil or petrol. The focus on the fuel allowance does help with home heating oil, as does the reduction in the NORA levy. It should be remembered that there is a substantial household benefits package of €420 a year for electricity and gas. The supplementary welfare allowance is available for people in real need. The Minister for Social Protection has spoken to community welfare officers and to his Department to make sure they are responsive to anybody in need. We are looking towards the autumn budget and the development of mechanisms to connect what we do on fuel poverty allowances with arrears. We have to focus and work on developing a direct connection so that we can get those arrears down for people.

In terms of the renewable story, Ireland has been very fast in recent years. We are probably the fastest growing in terms of renewable energy. Spain and Portugal have a higher level of renewables. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, they managed to get a separate agreement from the EU in respect of the structures governing energy prices on the Iberian Peninsula. There was a lot of discussion about that at the EU Council meeting last week. The Commission's assessment is that gas's connection to the defining of pricing levels is not easily broken. That is a challenge for Europe more generally because it is a key determinant of the overall price of energy.

The Deputy will know the four component parts. We have acted on one of those four component parts, namely, taxes and levies. The ECB spoke to the EU Council meeting, as did the chair of the Euro Summit, and they recommended, as per IMF advice, targeted, temporary and affordable measures. They warned that we do not know what is around the corner and therefore have to keep something in reserve in case things deteriorate even further over the next couple of months.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** Of course, the Labour Party supports the introduction of short-term measures to support struggling households. I think everyone does. Everyone here acknowledges that but this package is just not enough. The Government could do more. Look at it this way: the full-year cost of the tax cut the Government gave to the hospitality sector, the burger barons Deputy Nash speaks about, in last year's budget is €680 million. That is the three times the value of the package the Government is now offering struggling households in what the Taoiseach himself has said is the biggest energy shock we have seen in the world.

It is just not enough, and the Taoiseach has acknowledged the reality of fuel poverty for far too many households across the country. This is the reality for the hundreds of thousands of households in arrears already on electricity and gas bills. The Taoiseach must acknowledge the desperate overexposure of Ireland on the liquified natural gas, LNG, front. We are so reliant on LNG. We are so reliant on fossil fuels and we are simply not acting fast enough to roll out renewables in the way we should.

We know that takes a little more time, but we need to see commitment from Government on this. Here is one very quick ask the International Energy Agency, IEA, has called for: move now to a real right to remote and flexible working. That is one way to support struggling households.

**The Taoiseach:** There is a lot of flexible remote working in our economy already and-----

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** A real right for remote and flexible working.

**The Taoiseach:** -----particularly in the public service, the degree of remote working is quite significant and prevalent now. The Deputy again attacked the reduction of VAT for hospitality. That supports a lot of minimum wage workers in our economy, people the Labour Party should be supporting and defending.

**Deputy Ged Nash:** They are on minimum wage.

**The Taoiseach:** Not everybody in the hospitality sector is on the minimum wage but, nonetheless, it was about protecting jobs in an important sector of our economy. With changing job profiles with AI and everything else, it is particularly important that tourism and hospitality are protected and looked after, and that is what we did in the budget.

In terms of LNG, Deputy Bacik referred to energy security, the LNG facility is required from an energy security perspective.

**A Deputy:** That is nonsense.

**The Taoiseach:** It is not nonsense. It is rubbish to suggest that we should not put in an LNG facility in this country. It is absolute nonsense in terms of-----

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** It is not the way to manage it.

**The Taoiseach:** I am sorry; if anything happened the gas connectors linking this country to the United Kingdom, this economy would not survive beyond ten days. That is the reality. That is the advice we received from an energy security perspective. The Opposition has to twist it - not the Deputy personally - but it gets twisted, it gets spun as an anti-climate measure. It is anything but that. It is an energy security and economic security matter.

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** It is nearly a month into this crisis and the Government is finally acting but the measures announced today do not go far enough. A temporary cut to excise duty to provide some relief at the pumps is long overdue but where are the targeted supports for those who need them most?

The Government, having spent weeks and weeks reviewing the situation, has come into this House and done the bare minimum. It is extending the fuel allowance for a few weeks but it barely scratches the surface of what is required to support people who are struggling the most. There is almost nothing in this package for low-income households who are reliant on home

heating oil and unable to pay the 80% spike in prices. The Government seems to think that it does not have to help because we are now in March, but people must still heat their homes in spring, and there are vulnerable people all over the country who cannot now afford to turn their heating on, including elderly people, sitting in freezing cold homes, whose pensions just will not stretch far enough, disabled people, whose incomes were already cut by €1,400 in the Government's budget, and are making choices between heating and eating, and families at breaking point who do not know how they will be able to keep the lights on.

The Social Democrats have repeatedly asked the Government to introduce a targeted €400 energy credit that would be paid to 800,000 households who are struggling the most. The Taoiseach said again that we need targeted and affordable measures. This is a targeted and an affordable measure. This would help hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers who do not receive the fuel allowance and it would provide a much greater level of support for pensioners, carers and disabled people. It would not go far enough to cover the spiralling price rises we have seen but it would be a big help and represent meaningful support. The Government has not even bothered examining this proposal, so the Taoiseach is already in here today announcing half measures instead of the comprehensive package that should be introduced.

We listen to lectures from the Taoiseach and his Ministers all the time on the importance of targeting supports for those who need them most but there is a huge gap between what they say and what they do. The Government's budget reduced the incomes of the poorest households by more than 4% and massively increased poverty rates among elderly people from 13% to 19%. That is not me saying that; that is the Parliamentary Budget Office.

The Taoiseach comes into this House today, when people desperately need real support, and all he has to offer them is a measure that excludes hundreds of thousands of households who are drowning in skyrocketing bills. Why are there no targeted supports for low-paid workers? Will the Taoiseach examine the Social Democrats' proposal for a targeted energy credit of €400?

**The Taoiseach:** I appreciate the Deputy raising these issues in a constructive light. It is not just the Deputy that has made the comment that the Government has waited for weeks and weeks. We are in a war for three weeks. We need some perspective here. The Government does not have billions and billions to allocate on a monthly basis, which is the implication one could draw from all of the protestations from the Opposition today. We need a bit of reality and flexibility in terms of the fiscal situation and in terms of thinking out to the end of the year and making sure we have enough in reserve to cushion and to make sure we can support people if things get worse. That is a consideration.

We also have to protect services. There are increasing costs in education, in health and in other services, and I am very anxious that we have enough in reserve to protect those also. The easiest thing for us to do would be to announce a €2 billion package today, and people would say that is great, but this is only March. We have to be relatively cautious and responsible, acknowledging that people out there are under a lot of pressure. There is no question about that because of the impact of the war on energy markets and because of the unprecedented nature of the supply shock. That has not yet filtered through, by the way. It has not filtered through globally or to our economy. I would disagree with the Deputy's assessment on the budget.

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** It is the Parliamentary Budget Office's assessment.

**The Taoiseach:** What we did for child support payments was the most significant - record increases of €8 per week for children under 12, and €16 per week for children over 12. As part of the child poverty unit in my own Department, with the Minister, Deputy Calleary, we have focused on that child poverty package, which is permanent. Today, DEIS plus was approved by Cabinet. We have taken a series of measures that have worked on the child poverty issue and that will bear dividend in the coming years. Of that I have no doubt, because of our focus on those key areas.

The working family payment cohort of people who, up to the last budget were excluded from the fuel allowance, have now been included. That is an extra 50,000 working families. That means about 470,000 families or people overall are now benefiting from the fuel allowance. The extension will be welcomed by all of those families as a targeted measure. It is an instrument or mechanism we have within the Department of Social Protection to enable us to pay people and to give them additional allowances to help them to try to cope with the very large increases that have occurred over the last number of weeks. That will take it out to the end of April, in addition to the reduction in excise on diesel and petrol.

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** The Taoiseach can disagree with my assessment all he likes but I was quoting the Parliamentary Budget Office, which is independent. Is the Taoiseach saying he does not accept its independent analysis of the budget? The proposal that we have put forward is fully costed - €362 million. It is targeted and affordable, as the Taoiseach says measures need to be. That would leave plenty of room for further measures later in the year, if, when and as they are required. Why is the Government not adopting our proposal? The Government is doing nothing extra for low-paid workers who do not receive the fuel allowance at all. Does the Taoiseach not see the difficulty they are in? If you are on low pay, do not qualify for the fuel allowance and your home heating oil bill to fill the tank has gone up by 80%, what are you meant to do? Are they invisible to the Taoiseach? Why are there no measures for them? In terms of people who have disabilities, carers and pensioners, why does the Taoiseach think the increases of just a few weeks to the fuel allowance is sufficient? It does not make a dent. A huge number of them were already in arrears before this crisis began. A total of 320,000 households were in arrears. Why is the Government not taking the targeted measures it needs to support them?

**The Taoiseach:** The working family payment was generally designed with low-income workers in mind. They are now included in the fuel allowance, which I think is a significant targeted measure by the Government, and the correct one. It is a framework that exists already. This package is about €250 million. I am not sure what the Deputy is saying he would take out. I am not clear on his costings, and I would need to get it costed properly by the Department of Social Protection and others in respect of that but we have an alternative suite of measures that cost about €250 million.

In the United Kingdom it is £53 million. If the Deputy goes around the European capitals, he will not see a packet as big as this one. As I said earlier, we have to think ahead in terms of other potential challenges that may come our way in respect of this crisis. It is now only March.

We need to be cautious, notwithstanding the pressures that are on people and will manifest themselves in other parts of the economy as well if this continues.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** Ireland has walked blindfolded into an energy crisis, not by accident or misfortune but because consecutive Governments chose to leave our country exposed and dependent on others for the most basic lifeline we have – energy. The price of those choices is now hammering every single household and business in this country. In 2022, during Leaders Questions to the current Taoiseach, I raised the Barryroe oilfield and demanded that Ireland build real energy independence. Later that year, I spoke of a floating gas terminal off Cork harbour. I warned that relying on imports was reckless and dangerous, and the Government laughed off my warnings saying it is fine. Well, it is not fine. The people of Ireland are paying dearly for that Government arrogance. Fuel prices have jumped again and again in recent weeks. Hauliers are warning they cannot keep the wheels turning. Farmers, tradesmen, fishermen, home help, carers, school bus drivers, ordinary squeezed-middle families and 1.5 million elderly people are being squeezed until they break. What does the Government do? It tells people to wait. Last week we were told by the Government there will be no knee-jerk reaction and to be patient. Even yesterday, a coalition source said that the Government cannot shield people. While it cannot shield people from everything, the complete green agenda of the previous government is coming home to roost, which was to make sure to never prepare our country for the future but tax the living daylight out of every citizen in this country with 65% fuel taxes, like VAT, the NORA levy and carbon tax, making the motorists of this country a cash cow for the Government like no other country in the world. This is a total failure of planning, leadership and responsibility by this and other Governments. A country that imports nearly all its energy, taxes fuel at 60% to 65% and blocks practical solutions for security is not transitioning; it is stumbling.

While Irish families struggle, other countries are securing their futures. Europe and the rest of the world is planning. Ireland is panicking and being called the laggards of Europe. In 2022, I spoke to the Taoiseach about the Barryroe oilfield because it represented something bigger – not just an oilfield but a political system that refused to even access its own resources while continuing to rely on foreign fuel. It is complete neglect by government. Beyond Barryroe, Ireland still has no clear, credible path to energy independence. Imagine after a Green Party in Government, solar systems cost up to €20,000 to run a home only gets a measly €1,800 grant. This is not transition; it is a slow motion collapse and the Government is participating in what is happening. People are paying more because of the choices made at the Cabinet table, choices based on ideology instead of practicality and choices that have left Ireland more rather than less vulnerable. We did not just leave ourselves open, we left ourselves defenceless. Today's announcements help those on fuel allowance. That must be welcomed but the squeezed middle gets 20 cent a litre off diesel, which is the same amount as it went up last week. There is 2 cent a litre for the farmer and fisherman, which leaves the country in a very angry state and both those sectors furious. Ireland needs an immediate, urgent national plan for energy independence and not in 2050. Will the Taoiseach outline this plan today?

**The Taoiseach:** We do have an energy plan. At the European Council meeting last week, there was a very interesting presentation by President von der Leyen, which went back from the late 1970s through every decade to the present day. The one constant was that every energy crisis was a fossil fuel crisis generated through war and conflict with the most recent being the

Russian invasion of Ukraine before this war. The Deputy attacked the wind and solar energy agenda and so on. He is actually creating a scenario where there would be more energy dependence into the future and an energy dependence on fossil fuels, which would be a disaster for the country. If this teaches us anything, it is the necessity to double down on our focus and investment in renewables. There are hard choices to make on this. I was in the Dáil recently when a Deputy, in one contribution, complained about a gas generation station, a wind farm and a solar farm in one location. I asked the question: “How are we going to turn on the lights?”

We do need a societal discussion about this because the bottom line is we are importing a lot of fossil fuel, which is subject to volatility in the markets and to various crises that can occur.

The Barryroe oil field has been a long time - long before 2022 - handled by, or dealt with, within the private sector. It never really bore fruit, even prior to any decisions that we took both as a Government or as an Oireachtas in terms of any new fossil fuel developments. The recent 2025 energy in Ireland report showed that about 41.3% of our electricity demand in 2024 was being generated by renewable sources. That is very good progress. We have made a lot of progress in the past decade or so and beyond. We have a target of 80% of electricity demand to be made by renewables in the near term and to go to net zero out to 2050. We are a renewable success story. That is the trajectory of travel. We receive more of our electricity from onshore wind farms than anyone else in Europe. We are among one of the global leaders in integrating variable renewables onto the electricity grid. That is something that runs contrary to the narrative that the Deputy was representing.

Regarding the carbon tax, €175 million of that went to farmers through ACRES. In 2026, €173 million is going to the Department of agriculture for farmers. We have 55,000 farmers in ACRES. That improves best outcomes on climate, air and water quality, biodiversity, green agricultural pilots and so on. Deputy Collins would be the very first Deputy coming in if any farmer in west Cork had reduced funding as a result of the carbon tax being removed and he would be singing a different tune if that turned out to be the case.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach. Deputy Collins to respond.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I will be singing a different tune because the farmers of west Cork were disappointed this morning that they are only going to get 2 cent off the green diesel. Those are the facts. The facts are that the Government made these promises to me in 2022 about renewable energies. It has not delivered. That is the bottom line here. Ireland's energy security is hanging by a thread. We cannot keep relying on imported diesel in global markets we have no control over. The Government's promise in 2022 was more offshore wind farms but the only one we have has sought a decommissioning licence. When will the first of these offshore wind generating plants be developed in Ireland?

I am bringing forward a proposal for Ireland's first zero emission freight corridor pilot scheme from Cork Port to west Cork, not alone as a climate measure but as a real energy security solution. We have the experts to do this. Electricity heavy duty trucks supported by a battery swapping and hybrid charging depot in filling stations would slash our dependence on foreign fuels. Every diesel truck on this route today burns fuel that Ireland does not produce and cannot guarantee. Battery swapping turns trucks around in about five minutes powered by

local renewable energy keeping supply chains stable even when a global fuel market goes wild. This protects family-run haulers by giving them a secure affordable energy source. This is not experimental. This system is already fully operational in New Zealand, Hong Kong and Japan and works. This deserves full support from the Government. Will we get it?

**The Taoiseach:** On the offshore wind, we held the onshore RESS 5 and the offshore Tonn Nua auctions, which have delivered wind energy projects at competitive prices for consumers. The Department expects the five projects that bid into the offshore one auction to be in construction by 2030, marking a new phase in electricity generation in Ireland. The second offshore auction was the first to be held under the new spatial plan for offshore renewable energy development in the south coast designated maritime area plan and so forth. We are making progress. It is challenging. I have established a clearing house within my Department involving industry, regulators and Departments to drive this forward and accelerate it as quickly as we can. I think it is vital for the future of country's economy in terms of that particular agenda.

By the way, I never laugh at anything the Deputy proposes or suggests. He has a good old turn of phrase where he says he was laughed out the window, or he was laughed out of something three or four years ago. The point is that we have had a very poor record historically on fossil fuel discovery in this country. We have Kinsale and Corrib. That is about it. Independence in terms of energy in-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Time is up. Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** -----this country will be grounded in renewables, wind, solar and battery storage.

### **An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Before I call on the Chief Whip, I welcome all the people in the Gallery this afternoon. I hope they are enjoying our robust debates, especially St. Anne's National School from Rathangan and their teacher Ms Cunningham. I call the Chief Whip under Standing Order 35 to move the arrangements for this week's business.

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

Tuesday's business shall be:

- Motion re Ministerial Rota for Parliamentary Questions (without debate)
- Motion re Proposed Approval by Dáil Éireann of the Data Protection Act 2018 under (Section 60(6)) and (Section 51)(3)) Regulations 2026 (without debate)
- Motion re Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform (without debate)
- International Co-operation (Omagh Bombing Inquiry) Bill 2026 (Second Stage) (to conclude after the first round, not to exceed 3 hours and 34 minutes)

- Financial Motion by the Minister for Finance [2026] (Financial Resolution No. 1 (to be brought to a conclusion within 60 mins, and any divisions claimed to be taken immediately)

Tuesday's private members' business shall be the Motion re Cancer Services, selected by Sinn Féin.

Wednesday's business shall be:

- National Oil Reserve Energy (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Second Stage) (to conclude after the first round, not to exceed 3 hours and 34 minutes);
- Motion re Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026 (to be taken no earlier than 5.30 p.m. and to conclude within 60 mins)
- Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Report and Final Stages) (to conclude within 60 mins)
- National Oil Reserve Energy (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Committee and Remaining Stages) (to conclude within 60 mins)
- Motions for Revised Estimates for Public Services 2026 [Votes 1-10, 13, 16, 20-25, 27-32 and 34-45] (back from Committee) (to be moved together and decided by one question, and any division claimed to be taken immediately)
- Motion re Consideration of Estimates by Committee (without debate)

Wednesday's private members' business shall be the Motion re An Garda Síochána, selected by the Labour Party.

Thursday's business shall be:

- Statements on the Bessborough Development (not to exceed 2 hours and 25 minutes)

Thursday evening business shall be the Second Stage of the Organisation of Working Time (Leave for Health Screening Purposes) Bill 2025, sponsored by Deputy Duncan Smith.

*Proposed Arrangements for this week's business:*

In relation to Tuesday's business, it is proposed that:

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) the time allocated to Government business shall be extended in accordance with the arrangements for that business and the Dáil may sit later than 10.48 p.m.;

(b) private members' business shall be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on the Financial Resolution; and

(c) Topical Issues shall not be taken and the Dáil shall adjourn on the conclusion of Parliamentary Questions to the Minister for Further and Higher Education;

2. the proceedings on the Motion re Ministerial Rota for Parliamentary Questions shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

3. the proceedings on the Motion re Proposed Approval by Dáil Éireann of the Data Protection Act 2018 under (Section 60(6)) and (Section 51(3)) Regulations 2026 shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

4. the proceedings on the Motion re Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform shall be taken without debate;

5. the proceedings on the Second Stage of the International Co-operation (Omagh Bombing Inquiry) Bill 2026 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the end of the first speaking round and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the first-round speeches, not including the Ministerial response, shall be in accordance with the table below (to be read across);

(b) on conclusion of the first speaking round, or where speeches conclude before the 3 hours and 24 minutes have elapsed and no other member is offering, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes; and

(c) members may share time; and

|      |     |     |     |       |                        |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|------------------------|
|      | Gov | SF  | Lab | Gov   | SF                     |
| Mins | 20  | 20  | 20  | 12    | 4                      |
|      | SD  | Gov | SF  | IPTG  | Gov                    |
| Mins | 20  | 12  | 4   | 20    | 12                     |
|      | SF  | ITG | Gov | SF    | OM                     |
| Mins | 4   | 20  | 12  | 4     | 20                     |
|      |     |     |     | Total | 3 hours and 24 minutes |

6. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, in relation to the Financial Motion by the Minister for Finance [2026] (Financial Resolution No. 1), the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the proceedings on the motion shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes;

(b) the Question on the motion shall dispose of any amendments not disposed of tabled to that motion;

(c) the order of speaking and allocation of time shall be as follows:

opening speech by a Minister or Minister of State – 10 minutes

speeches by representatives of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group, and Independent Technical Group – 7.5 minutes per party or group

speeches by Other Members – 7.5 minutes; and

a speech in response by the Minister – 5 minutes

(d) members may share time; and

(e) any division demanded shall be taken immediately.

In relation to Wednesday's business, it is proposed that:

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) any motions to be taken without debate shall be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on the National Oil Reserve Agency (Amendment) Bill 2026; and

(b) the weekly division time shall be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on any motions without debate;

2. in relation the proceedings on the Second Stage of the National Oil Reserve Agency Bill 2026, the provisions of Standing Order 181 shall not apply and the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the end of the first speaking round and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the first-round speeches, not including the Ministerial response, shall be in accordance with the table below (to be read across);

(b) on conclusion of the first speaking round, or where speeches conclude before the 3 hours and 24 minutes have elapsed and no other member is offering, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes;

(c) members may share time; and

|      |     |     |     |       |                        |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|------------------------|
|      | Gov | SF  | Lab | Gov   | SF                     |
| Mins | 20  | 20  | 20  | 12    | 4                      |
|      | SD  | Gov | SF  | IPTG  | Gov                    |
| Mins | 20  | 12  | 4   | 20    | 12                     |
|      | SF  | ITG | Gov | SF    | OM                     |
| Mins | 4   | 20  | 12  | 4     | 20                     |
|      |     |     |     | Total | 3 hours and 24 minutes |

3. the proceedings on the Motion re Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 4(2)) (Scheme Termination Date) Order 2026 shall be taken no earlier than 5.30 p.m. and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply thereto:

(a) the order of speaking and allocation of time shall be as follows:-

opening speech by a Minister or Minister of State – 10 minutes;

speeches by representatives of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group, and Independent Technical Group – 7.5 minutes per party or group;

speeches by Other Members – 7.5 minutes in total; and

a speech in response by the Minister – 5 minutes; and

(b)members may share time;

4. the proceedings on Report and Final Stages of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill 2026 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes by one question, which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality;

5. the proceedings on Committee and Remaining Stages of the National Oil Reserve Agency (Amendment) Bill 2026 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes by one question, which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment;

6. the following arrangements shall apply to the proceedings on the Motions for Revised Estimates for Public Services 2026 [Votes 1-10, 13, 16, 20-25, 27-32 and 34-45]:

(a) the motions shall be moved and decided together by one question which shall be put from the Chair;

(b)the proceedings thereon shall be taken without debate; and

(c) any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately; and

7. the proceedings on the Motion re Consideration of Estimates by Committee shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately.

In relation to Thursday's business, it is proposed that:

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a)topical issues may be taken earlier than 7.24 p.m. with consequential effect on the commencement time for the Second Stage of the Organisation of Working Time (Leave for Health Screening Purposes) Bill 2025, and on the time for the adjournment of the Dáil: provided that up to ten topical issues may be taken; and

(b)the Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 14th April, 2026; and

2. the Statements on the Bessborough Development shall not exceed 2 hours and 25 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the statements, not including the Ministerial response, shall be in accordance with the sequence contained in the table immediately below (to be read across);

(b)following the statements, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes; and

(c)members may share time.

|      | Gov | SF  | Lab | Gov  | SF  |
|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|
| Mins | 25  | 15  | 10  | 10   | 3   |
|      | SD  | Gov | SF  | IPTG | Gov |
| Mins | 10  | 10  | 3   | 9    | 10  |

|      | SF | ITG | Gov | SF    | OM                 |
|------|----|-----|-----|-------|--------------------|
| Mins | 3  | 9   | 10  | 3     | 5                  |
|      |    |     |     | Total | 2 hours 15 minutes |

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is that agreed? It is not agreed. I call Deputy Doherty.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** The agenda that has been presented here is outrageous. The Government expects us to debate the major burning issue. The Government might think it is not an issue but for four weeks, people have been pushed to the pin of their collar. Diesel has gone up by 55 cent while the Government has delayed and dithered. When it now brings forward a motion that is a half-baked idea that does not go far enough, it says that it has to be dealt with in 60 minutes. Crucially, the key issue is that the Government is afraid of the amendment that we will bring forward tonight. The Government will not even allow that amendment to be voted on, according to the agenda here. What is the Government afraid of? We will put down an amendment that will remove excise from home heating oil and reduce tax on diesel and petrol. Let us have a vote. What the Government is doing is a disgrace.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** I register my utter dissatisfaction with how business is being operated. Eight minutes before we were due to sit today, we got a new agenda that will give us just an hour to discuss the financial resolutions on the only thing that people have been talking about over the past couple of weeks. It is utterly unsatisfactory and we register huge objection.

**Deputy Jen Cummins:** The cost of living in this country is skyrocketing. Before the war in Iran, 320,000 households were in electricity arrears. People are choosing between heating and eating. The cost of living is impacting more than just energy, though, because there is now the price for education. Exam fees, which had not been in place since before the pandemic, are being reintroduced without warning to parents. The cost of living needs to be discussed this evening.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It is clear that Donald Trump and the Israeli regime are criminal warmongers that could do anything. If they start to bomb more energy infrastructure in Iran, and there are reports suggesting that they are already doing this having said that they would not, the miserable concessions the Government has made to address the spikes in the cost of living could be wiped away overnight. We need serious time to discuss how the Government is going to actually protect people in this country from the cost of energy spikes resulting from Trump's war.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I agree with my colleagues that 60 minutes is not enough time to speak about the crisis this country is going through at the moment. We need a proper debate in here and I call for that proper debate. Farmers, the hard-squeezed middle, fishermen and other people are facing a serious crisis. People cannot put heating oil into their home heating

tanks this evening. They expected a proper break but they did not get it and we need a proper debate on that this evening.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I will offer some clarity about what will transpire later today. There will be a motion regarding Financial Resolution No. 1 this afternoon from the Department of Finance. Sixty minutes have been allowed and we are votable immediately afterwards so I expect there will be several votes at that time. I want to be clear on that.

There has been a change to tomorrow's Order of Business. The National Oil Reserve Agency (Amendment) Bill 2026, which will be allowed 204 minutes and a ten-minute wrap-up, will be taken instead of the statements on sports so there will be plenty of time for debate tomorrow.

I wish to inform the Ceann Comhairle that there is every possibility that I will be returning with a second updated Order of Business this afternoon with regard to the second financial resolution. The Order of Business stands. People want to know exactly what is happening.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Are the arrangements for the Order of Business agreed to?

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** On a point of order-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** What is the point of order?

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** The point of order is looking for clarification on the motion.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** A point of order arises where a Standing Order has not been complied with. I ask the Deputy to resume his seat. There is no point of order. We will vote on the Order of Business. Is the Order of Business agreed to?

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** I ask for-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** There is no point of order.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** -----clarity on what we are asking people to vote for. The proposal before us provides that all amendments will be disposed of and the only vote will be on the Government's proposal. The Government Chief Whip has just stated that there will be numerous votes after the 60-minute debate. I am looking for clarity. If the Government is accepting that there will be numerous votes on the amendments, I accept that.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Does the Government Chief Whip wish to respond? If not, we will move on.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** The Order of Business stands.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Order of Business stands.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** What is it? Which one is it?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Are the proposed arrangements for dealing with this week's business agreed to?

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** Are you getting rid of all the amendments?

**Deputy Martin Kenny:** She is not telling us.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I will put the question.

Question put: "That the proposed arrangements for this week's business be agreed to."

| The Dáil divided: Tá, 85; Níl, 63; Staon, 0. |                         |       |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Tá                                           | Níl                     | Staon |
| Aird, William.                               | Ahern, Ciarán.          |       |
| Ardagh, Catherine.                           | Bacik, Ivana.           |       |
| Boland, Grace.                               | Boyd Barrett, Richard.  |       |
| Brabazon, Tom.                               | Brady, John.            |       |
| Brennan, Brian.                              | Buckley, Pat.           |       |
| Brennan, Shay.                               | Byrne, Joanna.          |       |
| Brophy, Colm.                                | Carthy, Matt.           |       |
| Browne, James.                               | Clarke, Sorca.          |       |
| Burke, Colm.                                 | Collins, Michael.       |       |
| Burke, Peter.                                | Conway-Walsh, Rose.     |       |
| Butler, Mary.                                | Coppinger, Ruth.        |       |
| Buttimer, Jerry.                             | Cronin, Réada.          |       |
| Byrne, Malcolm.                              | Cummins, Jen.           |       |
| Byrne, Thomas.                               | Daly, Pa.               |       |
| Cahill, Michael.                             | Devine, Máire.          |       |
| Callaghan, Catherine.                        | Doherty, Pearse.        |       |
| Calleary, Dara.                              | Donnelly, Paul.         |       |
| Canney, Seán.                                | Farrelly, Aidan.        |       |
| Carrigy, Micheál.                            | Farrell, Mairéad.       |       |
| Chambers, Jack.                              | Gannon, Gary.           |       |
| Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.                        | Gogarty, Paul Nicholas. |       |
| Clendennen, John.                            | Gould, Thomas.          |       |
| Collins, Niall.                              | Graves, Ann.            |       |
| Connolly, John.                              | Guirke, Johnny.         |       |
| Cooney, Joe.                                 | Hayes, Eoin.            |       |
| Crowe, Cathal.                               | Hearne, Rory.           |       |
| Cummins, John.                               | Kelly, Alan.            |       |
| Currie, Emer.                                | Kenny, Eoghan.          |       |
| Daly, Martin.                                | Kenny, Martin.          |       |
| Dempsey, Aisling.                            | Kerrane, Claire.        |       |
| Dillon, Alan.                                | Lawless, Paul.          |       |
| Dolan, Albert.                               | Lawlor, George.         |       |
| Dooley, Timmy.                               | Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig. |       |

|                             |                           |  |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Feighan, Frankie.           | McDonald, Mary Lou.       |  |
| Fleming, Sean.              | McGettigan, Donna.        |  |
| Foley, Norma.               | McGuinness, Conor D.      |  |
| Gallagher, Pat the Cope.    | Mitchell, Denise.         |  |
| Geoghegan, James.           | Murphy, Paul.             |  |
| Grealish, Noel.             | Mythen, Johnny.           |  |
| Harkin, Marian.             | Nash, Ged.                |  |
| Harris, Simon.              | Newsome Drennan, Natasha. |  |
| Healy-Rae, Danny.           | Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.  |  |
| Healy-Rae, Michael.         | O'Callaghan, Cian.        |  |
| Heneghan, Barry.            | O'Donoghue, Robert.       |  |
| Heydon, Martin.             | O'Flynn, Ken.             |  |
| Higgins, Emer.              | O'Gorman, Roderic.        |  |
| Keogh, Keira.               | O'Hara, Louis.            |  |
| Lahart, John.               | O'Reilly, Louise.         |  |
| Lawless, James.             | O'Rourke, Darren.         |  |
| Lowry, Michael.             | Ó Broin, Eoin.            |  |
| Martin, Micheál.            | Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.   |  |
| McAuliffe, Paul.            | Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.       |  |
| McCarthy, Noel.             | Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán. |  |
| McConalogue, Charlie.       | Quaide, Liam.             |  |
| McCormack, Tony.            | Quinlivan, Maurice.       |  |
| McEntee, Helen.             | Rice, Pádraig.            |  |
| McGrath, Séamus.            | Sherlock, Marie.          |  |
| McGreehan, Erin.            | Smith, Duncan.            |  |
| McGuinness, John.           | Stanley, Brian.           |  |
| Moran, Kevin Boxer.         | Tóibín, Peadar.           |  |
| 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'Donovan, Patrick.         |                           |  |
| O'Meara, Ryan.              |                           |  |
| O'Shea, John Paul.          |                           |  |
| O'Sullivan, Christopher.    |                           |  |
| Ó Cearúil, Naoise.          |                           |  |
| Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.          |                           |  |
| Richmond, Neale.            |                           |  |
| Scanlon, Eamon.             |                           |  |
| Smyth, Niamh.               |                           |  |

|                  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|
| Timmins, Edward. |  |  |
| Toole, Gillian.  |  |  |
| Troy, Robert.    |  |  |
| Ward, Barry.     |  |  |

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

Question declared carried.

*3 o'clock*

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** “Violence against women and girls is the shame of our society and we must do everything possible to end it.” These were the words of Natalie McNally's heartbroken brother Declan yesterday after Stephen McCullagh was sentenced to life in prison for her horrific murder. It is a sharp reminder of the dangers women face. Today violence against women and girls is at epidemic levels across Ireland. The first government strategy was delivered 15 years ago this month. Progress is far too slow - a judicial system that does not work for victims, court cases taking too long, support services underfunded and overstretched. Despite Jennie's law receiving Cabinet approval last October, we still do not have a register of domestic abusers to protect women from repeat offenders. When will we see a step change from Government to deliver change and bring the determination required to eliminate violence against women and girls?

**The Taoiseach:** The level of domestic and gender-based violence is a tremendous stain on our society. There has been a step change in Government responses in the past number of years. Funding is now at about €80 million under the last budget. The establishment of Cuan has been an important step change in terms of dedicated, focused provision of services and the representation of the zero-tolerance strategy. There has been a €12 million increase year on year so the financial resources have been significantly step-changed in respect of this issue. The acceleration of additional refuge spaces and safe accommodation is an important aspect of that. The target is to provide about 282 safe spaces by the end of 2026.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** There is a whole range of other measures as well that we have outlined.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We will be on time, Taoiseach. I call Deputy Bacik.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** Less than four weeks into the Government's new rental regime, we are already seeing the effects. The Government is now presiding over the highest level of evictions since the Famine. Last week, Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, data showed the number of eviction notices issued rose by 41% in quarter 4 of 2025. Just over 20,000 people received a dreaded notice of termination through their letterboxes last year as landlords were already leaving the market in anticipation of the new reckless rent rules. Now we are seeing mass evictions at a higher scale again: 14 families in an apartment complex in Ballybane in Galway

city; 20 families in Lord Edward Street in Limerick; and in my constituency too, I am hearing it. Renters are vulnerable and need protection. The Labour Party has offered constructive solutions. I ask again if the Taoiseach will institute a ban on no-fault evictions now to protect families and children, in particular, from homelessness.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy seems very confused in her presentations on the rental market. On one level, she is complaining about evictions she suggests are caused by recent reforms of the rental market, which were all about protecting tenants and the six-year term. Which is it?

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** Landlords are confused.

**The Taoiseach:** If the Deputy banned evictions, she would cause greater churn and a greater loss of landlords. The facts do not bear out what she said. The latest RTB data shows continued growth in quarter 4 of last year with 243,598 tenancies, the highest on record. There were 104,687 private landlords, broadly unchanged year on year. Churn is normal but overall numbers are stable and, actually, rising. A total of 17,342 new tenancies were registered in quarter 4 of 2025. The residential tenancies Act of 2006 ends no-fault evictions, essentially---

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**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach. I call Deputy Whitmore.

**The Taoiseach:** -----for larger landlords, places stronger restrictions on tenancy termination and caps rent increases at inflation.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Whitmore is on her feet.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** When global energy crises hit, there is one certainty in Ireland and that is that energy prices shoot sky high like a rocket and then take years to drop.

We saw it happen when Russia invaded Ukraine. In fact, there are still people suffering the consequences of that, with 320,000 remaining in arrears on their electricity bills. We are still facing sky-high electricity prices despite the CSO reporting yesterday that wholesale electricity prices are down by 72% since the peak. People in Ireland have not seen a 72% reduction in electricity prices, as we know well.

We are seeing the same happening as a result of the war in Iran, with a near immediate increase in prices at the pump. We welcome the excise reductions the Government is bringing in but how will it make sure there is pass-through such that people see a reduction in petrol and diesel prices from when the measures are introduced and that there will be absolutely no opportunity to price-gouge people in this instance?

**The Taoiseach:** The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission is there to ensure fair play in the marketplace. The Government certainly will be keeping a very watchful eye on this issue. If there is not pass-through, that will have implications for any potential future measures we might take in the energy market itself. We will be keeping a weathervane eye on

this in the coming days. I take the Deputy's point that prices went up very quickly and they need to come down once the excise duty change works its way through.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** A task force on special education in Dublin 15 was set up in October 2024. Why, eight months after its final report was handed to the Minister, has it been buried and still not published? Dublin 15 is a fast-growing area with an acute crisis in school provision for children with additional needs. Three parents, all of whom have children with additional needs, gave up their time voluntarily to be part of the task force. They pushed for the strongest possible recommendations, many of which got diluted in the drafting. Among the recommendations were forward planning, a central database, good communication, a disability support hub and "substantial additional capital funding for appropriate places". They also asked for action on the teacher supply crisis.

Why is this report being buried? What is the Government afraid of in publishing it and being held to account? Was it just done to take this issue off the agenda in Dublin 15 before the general election? We need an additional special school in Dublin 15 and one more children's disability network team, CDNT, area as well.

**The Taoiseach:** I will check with the Minister of State with responsibility for special education in respect of that report and timelines for its publication. There is forward planning now. We brought forward the date by which parents and students apply for places in our schools. That has happened this year, as the Deputy must be aware. The establishment of a central database has to happen but I acknowledge it is not there yet. There have been substantial capital funding increases for education, particularly special education, which takes up a huge portion of the education capital budget. That provision for special education will continue this year. Special education is growing exponentially in terms of resources, whether they be special needs assistants, teachers or buildings. That is the story of where we are in terms of special education and it will continue to be the case.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** The Taoiseach may have seen the latest figures from the Health Products Regulatory Authority, HPRA, which are a cause for concern. Last year, for example, more than 750,000 units of illegal or fake medicines were seized and the number of individual packages separately purchased by members of the public rose by a whopping 180%. There was a 30-fold surge in fake glucagon-like peptide-1, GLP-1, weight loss products, for example, and also a sharp rise in seizures of pregabalin, which is a drug with legitimate applications, such as for epilepsy, but which can kill when misused. The HPRA, to its credit, has shut down thousands of online listings but the problem is still escalating. With this serious and growing public health threat, what additional measures and resourcing will the Government provide to curb the online sale of dangerous medicines, protect vulnerable people and ensure safe and affordable access to legitimate treatments?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputy for raising what is a very important issue. I will talk to the Ministers for health and enterprise and others who can have an impact. It is a very serious issue because fake drugs can do real harm to people and damage their health.

It is an area that perhaps needs a higher profile focus. I will certainly take away the fact the Deputy has highlighted the issue. I will come back to him with the views of the authority and others.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Last night the EU and Australia came to a trade agreement. As a small open economy, trade is hugely important to us in Ireland. The agreement looks to be a fairly good opportunity for Ireland but I want to draw attention to farmers' needs. They are under pressure with milk prices, fertiliser prices and diesel. Increasing competition at this time is much more challenging for them. What assurances are there for farmers that there will be similar standards in this trade agreement, and that milk and beef farmers will be able to compete on a level playing field following this trade agreement?

**The Taoiseach:** The Government has welcomed the agreement and will be supporting it at EU level. Ireland's agrifood exports will benefit under the deal through easier access to the large Australian market. We believe this will give us more opportunities to sell our products due to tariff elimination. Tariffs will go down to zero on key EU export products such as cheese over three years. There will be recognition for iconic Irish geographical indications, such as Irish whiskey, Irish cream and poitín. There will be preferential rules of origin for Irish whiskey. Exports of prepared foodstuffs and Irish dairy products, including cheese, will also see tariff reductions. European Union dairy exports to Australia are estimated to have the potential to grow by 48% under the deal.

There are issues with the importation of beef; that will be over a ten-year period. However, mechanisms have been put in place to deal with an unacceptable impact on markets where the EU can intervene. The figure is much less than what the Australian side was seeking. It will be phased in over a ten-year period. It represents about 0.5% of European Union domestic consumption of beef.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** On Friday, I met Denise from Tiernans Nursery in Rathmines. She has been operating it for over 35 years. Unfortunately, she has had to take the decision to exit core funding to make ends meet. She has had to notify parents of that. This is not a person who is looking to make loads of money; she is just trying to continue to provide the service she was already providing. Since I was elected as a TD, I have met lots of childcare providers in my constituency who have had to make this difficult decision to exit core funding. They do not want to tell parents that they are going to have to increase their fees, and obviously the Government is trying to reduce the cost of childcare for parents. My question is on the level of engagement the Department can have with providers that do exit. From responses to parliamentary questions, I know the overall figures are relatively small. However, we want to get them back into the system. We do not want people exiting core funding because we cannot control the fees if they do so. Some of this is bureaucracy and the various funding schemes that they have to operate under. Could we be doing more for providers that exit core funding so that we can keep the costs down for parents and support providers at the same time?

**The Taoiseach:** I do not have the background to the specific case. Core funding now exceeds €436 million, up 62% since 2022, with 93%, or 4,590, of providers signed up, which keeps fees at 2021 levels. I will speak to the Minister on this. It is a matter that is kept under constant

review. As the Deputy said, we do not want to lose anybody from the core funding framework. People may feel they can do better outside it, but it is not great for parents in terms of costs when that happens. I will let the Minister know that the Deputy raised this. We keep it under constant review to make sure it is accessible and that it makes sense for people to be participants in the core funding programme. The increase in numbers in the system over the past four years has been pretty impressive.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** I would like the Government to urgently address a serious situation facing a primary school in my constituency that has the potential to impact hundreds of children and families. Despite providing the first breakfast club of its kind in the State, St. Paul's National School is hugely concerned that because it does not fit the new model for school meals, it is at risk of losing this vital service. Its funding is in limbo. It has sought clarity from the Department to no avail. I have raised this privately with the Minister, Deputy Calleary, and have not yet received a response.

This school is at the heart of a proud community in Drogheda that has felt the brunt of organised crime feuds. Its breakfast club, school meals and canteen are a lifeline to many. In 2016, the Government clearly agreed with this when its new Bill rightly ensured that fully-fitted kitchens and dining spaces were included in the plans. Its model, which was lauded as best practice for school meals at the time by Fianna Fáil Ministers, must now be facilitated within the new hot school meals programme. The funding must be provided without delay and, more importantly, the school needs to be given clarity. Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister to at least visit this school and see the model at work at first hand, and allay the concerns of the principal and the wider community?

**The Taoiseach:** Again, I do not have the full background to the case here. Obviously, the Government has funded the building very well. The hot school meals programme has been rolled out very quickly and effectively on many fronts. There is a lot of debate around improving nutrition. However, fundamentally over the last three years, it has been rolled out at considerable pace across the length and breadth of the country. I will talk to the Minister, Deputy Calleary, in respect of the issue the Deputy has raised. The Departments of education and Social Protection can reflect on whether there is flexibility in how the allocation, which every school gets, is spent and I will come back to the Deputy.

**Deputy Erin McGreehan:** I acknowledge the temporary measures that have been introduced to help address the rise in fuel and energy costs. They will offer some short-term support at the time when many households and businesses are feeling real pain. I have spoken to many Louth hauliers, coach operators and households who are desperately worried about what is to come. This conflict in the Middle East is the latest supply chain shock for energy markets. Uncertainty around supply chains is creating real fears about what lies ahead. In Louth as in the rest of the country, families are already finding it difficult to manage heating and everyday living costs. Small businesses are affected. Coach operators and hauliers along the M1 corridor continue to face fluctuating fuel costs. We need a real plan to start reducing the cost of energy in this country, which is unsustainable, as the Taoiseach knows. Given these global pressures and local challenges, will the Government keep the situation under close review and ensure the supports can be adjusted if it worsens? Can we start front-loading investment into alternative

energy sources, advancing our critical infrastructure plan and extending our retrofit programmes to help future-proof these problems?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. The haulage industry is a key industry whose role in our modern economy has been underestimated in terms of getting goods from ports to shelves and from manufacturing facilities to the ships for our export markets. I am very interested in making sure that we have a sustainable haulage industry into the future. The Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, has engaged with the industry over the last number of weeks and today's measures reflect part of that engagement and will provide some ease of the pressure. I acknowledge the pressures on the industry are still very significant. More generally, the Deputy is correct about the need to drive forward with the retrofitting programme and energy efficiency programmes. Through front-loading solar energy and insulation, we will continue to do everything we can to support businesses and households in terms of any energy efficiency measures they can take to help in the short term.

**Deputy Catherine Callaghan:** I wish to raise the state of our local roads in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny. While the recent spell of persistent heavy rain has thankfully ceased for the moment, the damage done to our roads in the flash floodings of January this year, particularly in rural parts of Carlow and Kilkenny, is still very evident and is causing grave disruption and inconvenience, disproportionately affecting rural dwellers. I commend Carlow and Kilkenny county councils, which have worked hard at making our local roads passable, but they are a long way from being sufficiently repaired. The reason for that is not the lack of will of both local authorities but the delay in receipt of the emergency funding that was promised from the Government. Following the surveys that have been done, it is estimated that Carlow County Council needs approximately €4 million and Kilkenny County Council needs an estimated €5 million to return those severely damaged roads to pre-flood conditions. Where is the promised funding for local authorities and when will it be released to Carlow and Kilkenny county councils?

**The Taoiseach:** The Minister has sought submissions from local authorities across the length and breadth of the country in respect of damage done in recent storms and flooding that occurred.

The Minister is assessing those submissions now with a view to allocations to try to help the county councils concerned.

**Deputy Donna McGettigan:** I recently sent the Taoiseach a parliamentary question which he declined to answer. The question was to him and was about the decision-making process behind the recent announcement of a 200-bed hospital unit in Raheen, Limerick, which is option B, part of the HIQA recommendations. People in Clare are asking, when were the Taoiseach and the Cabinet made aware of this? It seems some of his own TDs and Senators in the local area were not aware of this announcement being made. People in Clare were told to stop suggesting sites by one of his Government Ministers. Did this mean it was a done deal? How did the procurement process come about? Did the Government approach the landowner or *vice versa*? This plan will not solve the problem in Clare that the Government caused in 2009. People in Clare are asking, was this a Fine Gael announcement or a Government

announcement? If you look at this announcement on "Reeling in the Years" down the line, you will see it is all Fine Gael elected reps at this. Does the Taoiseach believe that this will solve the issues for those in Clare, particularly those out west and in north Clare, well outside the golden hour?

**The Taoiseach:** First, I did not decline to answer any question, and it is wrong of the Deputy to suggest that I did. She knows full well that questions about hospital sites go to the Minister for Health.

**Deputy Donna McGettigan:** But I was asking the Taoiseach, not-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, there is no interaction.

**The Taoiseach:** I am sorry, no, I am not responsible for every individual Minister's decision-making. It is a well-known practice in the Dáil and the Oireachtas that questions go to the Minister who is accountable to the House in respect of the matter. Of course, I was aware of the decision, and the Minister would have informed me very early on, along with the Tánaiste, the Minister of State, Seán Canney, and other Ministers as to what, overall, is a positive decision, given the congestion in UHL. Now there is a pathway forward in terms of health facilities in Limerick and in the mid-west, to be complemented by further services for Ennis and Nenagh. It is a positive development overall. The Deputy is obviously against it but-----

**Deputy Donna McGettigan:** I am not against it. It is positive for Limerick but-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach. The next speaker is Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett. Your time is up, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes, but it is positive overall for healthcare, I would have thought.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Over the past week I had parents of children with intellectual disabilities from the Before We Die campaign in with me. They pointed out that about 2,000 adults with intellectual disabilities are living with parents who are over 70, and about 500 of those people are living with parents over 80. Their parents are extremely worried about what will happen to their children when they pass away and are asking, "Where is the plan?" They are saying there should be a plan, a framework. The number of houses being delivered, supported housing they need, is pathetic. They give me a figure of one transition for 2026 so far, with thousands of people needing it. Will the Taoiseach respond to the Before We Die campaign's call for a plan, for a framework and for urgent action to provide the transitions necessary for children with intellectual disabilities?

**The Taoiseach:** I am responding to the issue. I met with the Before We Die group some weeks ago. This is on the agenda of the next Cabinet subcommittee on disability. I have spoken to the Minister for housing, the Minister for disability and the Minister for Health. What is

needed here is a concerted, collective approach. I acknowledge that the current situation is not sustainable or satisfactory and creates undue pressure on parents, particularly parents of citizens and people who are of senior age and who need independence. The idea that some of the section 39 organisations would just say, "Go and apply to the local authority, and it's up to yourself", is not on, and I have made that very clear to the system. The bottom line is that we need people joined up together and we need to have supports if someone gets housing. There is a varying continuum of need, so some will need less support, some will need substantive supports and so forth. This is an issue I am seized of. It is a very serious issue for the families concerned and society more generally.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** The Taoiseach, like me and probably many people in this Chamber, probably learned to swim in a local authority or community pool. Fingal has no local authority pool. The closest we have to one is the not-for-profit pool provided by Portmarnock Sports and Leisure Centre. Due to extensive works needed for the pool roof, the pool is closed indefinitely. This is not only threatening jobs and the viability of the leisure centre but also removing a vital resource, that is, the ability to learn to swim, from people in Portmarnock, Malahide, Swords and all over the Fingal area. The Minister, Darragh O'Brien, is aware of this. We need funding to repair the roof for this pool. There is no local authority funding stream any more for pools from the Government, but there needs to be an investment in the repair of the roof. It is the only community pool available in Fingal and it needs to be repaired at the earliest possible opportunity. I ask the Taoiseach to engage with the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, me and the board of Portmarnock Sports and Leisure Centre to ensure that this can be repaired.

**The Taoiseach:** I do not have the background to this. I learned to swim in the sea, actually, down in west Cork, or maybe Robert's Cove or somewhere like that, but we had a baths long ago. We used to call it the baths, the swimming pool-----

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** We used to have one too.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** We still have not got it back.

**The Taoiseach:** -----next to City Hall, and the craic was good. I passionately believe in swimming opportunities for young people and children in particular to learn how to swim, as Deputy Smith says, because water safety is essential and it can be a very joyous and healthy discipline for the rest of your life.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** And vital.

**The Taoiseach:** I will talk to the Minister, Deputy O'Brien. He is fairly innovative when it comes to projects in Fingal. I will see what can be done. I take the Deputy's point. The Minister of State with responsibility for sport is here. We will see what can be done in respect of the roof on the swimming pool in Portmarnock.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** A review of income used by Naas General Hospital under the National Treatment Purchase Fund has found that consultants were paid €2 million between 2022 and 2025. Of this, close to €500,000 was paid to two external companies, in which a director in each company also works as a consultant at Tallaght hospital. The audit found that consultants were paid significantly higher levels under the fee-per-patient structure than they would have been through standard contractual or overtime arrangements. More importantly, there was no evidence of approval being sought by hospital management for a derogation from standard public procurement procedures. First, what are the consequences if and when reviews find such misappropriation of NTPF funds? Second, is it time for a national review of the NTPF programme to make sure that this is not a widespread issue in hospitals throughout the country?

**The Taoiseach:** There has been a HSE review of the insourcing programme and practice. There has been huge investment since 2025. The Minister undertook a detailed survey of all insourcing activities within the HSE in light of concerns about an over-reliance in the system on supplementary capacity. That report was submitted and published by the Minister in July of last year. That led to a number of measures being taken, stricter control measures, to reduce reliance on inappropriate third-party insourcing while maintaining all options for the provision of care to patients. Those controls are now in place to restrict the use of third-party insourcing. We are moving away from our dependence on the model to fully use the internal under-utilised capacity we have within our core health service.

**Deputy Roderic O'Gorman:** Yesterday the UK Government announced it would make plug-in solar panels available in the near future to British households. Plug-ins are low-cost solar panels that families can put on balconies or outdoor spaces. Retailers and manufacturers are working with the UK Government to make them available in shops within months. They would save people money on their bills in the UK and they could do the same here as well. However, when I got a reply to a parliamentary question I put to the Department of energy in February, the Department told me it had been considering plug-in solar for 18 months and still needed more time for consideration. In the middle of an energy crisis, the luxury of time has gone past us. Will the Taoiseach move on this? Will he look to make plug-in solar panels available in Ireland immediately?

**The Taoiseach:** I will talk to the Minister about it. What the Deputy has said sometimes illustrates - I will not say the futility of asking parliamentary questions, but you do tend to get standard replies from time to time. That was last February. The Minister has a huge capital budget. I am not saying capital is required here. I will talk to the Minister about this. I would be favourably disposed to it. Anything that can accelerate people getting familiar with the utilisation of renewables and solar is good. One of the complaints about the existing grant schemes we have is their inaccessibility to people on low incomes, for example. I will talk to the Minister about this.

### Message from Select Committee

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Select Committee on Disability Matters has completed its consideration of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill 2026 and has made no amendments thereto.

### **Planning and Development (Material Interest) Bill 2026: First Stage**

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to prevent certain objections to grants of planning permission by requiring, subject to exceptions, that an objector must have a material interest in the development to which the objection relates; and to provide for related matters.

I am very glad of the opportunity here to introduce and move the Planning and Development (Material Interest) Bill. This is a very important piece of legislation and I hope it will speed up the planning process across the country. The objective of the Bill is to ensure that people with a genuine and local stake in a development can participate in the planning process and make observations and objections if they see fit. However, we want to prevent a scenario where individuals or groups who have no connection to a local area and who are in some cases acting in bad faith can submit objections to critical infrastructure, housing, etc.

At the moment it is quite extraordinary that objectors to developments can come from right across this country. For example, if a farmer is applying for a slatted shed in Donegal, it is currently the case that objections can be submitted by individuals from Kerry, Cork, Dublin and right across the country who have no interest, no awareness or no local material interest in that planning application. We believe this is wrong, and we want to ensure the planning process is speeded up, that efficiencies are introduced, and indeed that we prevent the bogus objections happening currently.

Under this Bill, people will be barred from objecting if they live more than 10 km from the site, or indeed if they own land farther than 5 km away. This is about supporting local democracy and it is fundamentally important local communities and local people have the opportunity to build houses, sheds and infrastructure that is needed in local areas.

The Bill does not extend to State agencies or public bodies. However, it is important to state that individuals or groups can still object as long as they are doing so with the support of, and in conjunction with, local individuals in the community. That is fundamentally important because in this country it has been the case where environmental NGOs have submitted planning objections to housing developments and other applications and they were doing so on the basis of making a quick buck and to hamstringing contractors to ensure those developments were delayed. Those individuals were then essentially seeking ransom money through consultation fees. It is extraordinary what is happening in the State at the moment.

We have put a great deal of work into this Bill. We have a major problem in relation to vexatious planning objections from people right across the country who have never seen or never set foot in some of these local areas. This Bill balances the right of people to object with the need to prevent abuse in the planning system. As I mentioned, we have seen scandals in the past where environmental NGOs were objecting to developments and then offered to

withdraw those objections if the developer paid them the fee. It was absolutely scandalous what was happening, with an NGO operating purely for profit with no genuine environmental concerns whatsoever. In one case, two brothers set up an NGO and objected to housing developments at the other end of the country claiming environmental grounds and then only withdrew those objections if the developer paid the so-called consultancy fee. Essentially, they are demanding to be to be paid off and situations like this make a mockery of our planning system.

Our Bill protects the rights of communities to object to developments. It protects the rights of people to lodge objections on behalf of residents within an area and it protects businesses whose interests may be affected. It is fair, reasonable, and proportionate and we would urge all Members of the House to support it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the Bill opposed?

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler):** It is not opposed.

Question put and agreed to.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

### **Ministerial Rota for Parliamentary Questions: Motion**

**Minister for Education and Youth (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I move:

THAT, notwithstanding anything in the Order of the Dáil of 5th February, 2025, setting out the rota in which Questions to members of the Government are to be asked, Questions for oral answer following those set down to the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, shall be set down to Ministers in the following temporary sequence:

Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment

Minister for Defence

Minister for Education and Youth

whereupon the sequence established by the Order of 5th February, 2025, shall continue with Questions to the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Data Protection Act 2018: Motion**

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

That Dáil Éireann approve the following Regulations in draft:

Data Protection Act 2018 (Section 60(6)) (Scoping Exercise in Response to Requests from Dignity4Patients) Regulations 2026,

Data Protection Act 2018 (Section 51(3)) (Scoping Exercise in Response to Requests from Dignity4Patients) Regulations 2026,

Data Protection Act 2018 (Section 60(6)) (Children's Health Ireland Inquiry into Spina Bifida and Complex Scoliosis Services Scoping Exercise) Regulations 2026, and

Data Protection Act 2018 (Section 51(3)) (Children's Health Ireland Inquiry into Spina Bifida and Complex Scoliosis Services Scoping Exercise) Regulations 2026,

copies of which were laid in draft form before Dáil Éireann on 23rd March, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Report of Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform: Motion**

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

That Dáil Éireann adopts the Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform entitled "Oral Questions to the Taoiseach, and Divisions and Weekly Division Time", copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 23rd March, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Ceisteanna - Questions**

#### **Ukraine War**

1. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [11873/26]

2. **Deputy Malcolm Byrne** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [74069/25]

3. **Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [74071/25]

4. **Deputy Shay Brennan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [74073/25]

5. **Deputy Liam Quaide** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [16305/26]

6. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [18698/26]

7. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [18701/26]

8. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [18942/26]

9. **Deputy Louis O'Hara** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [20115/26]

10. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the most recent meeting of the coalition of the willing in support of Ukraine. [22089/26]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, together.

On 24 February, I attended an online meeting of the coalition of the willing to mark the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The meeting was co-chaired by British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and was joined also by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, as well as other leaders, some of whom were attending commemoration events in Kyiv.

The meeting reaffirmed the coalition's resolve to continue to support Ukraine until a peace agreement is achieved, including protecting and repairing its energy infrastructure, and through increasing pressure on Russia to encourage it to engage in meaningful negotiation through imposing further sanctions and disrupting its shadow fleet. The meeting was an opportunity to take stock of negotiations involving the US, Russia and Ukraine, and President Zelenskyy offered us Ukraine's perspective on progress. During the meeting, we discussed how the coalition of the willing can support these efforts to secure peace, and how the coalition can ensure that Ukraine is in the strongest possible position in those talks. I conveyed Ireland's strong commitment to supporting efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace and security for Ukraine, as I did directly to President Zelenskyy during his visit to Ireland last December. I also underlined Ireland's consistent position that it is for the people and Government of Ukraine to determine their future and to agree to the terms of any peace agreement.

I reiterated Ireland's strong support for Ukraine's path towards EU membership and said that the accession negotiations should be accelerated, emphasising that EU membership is an important security guarantee for Ukraine and fulfils the objectives of the vast majority of the Ukrainian people. I joined other leaders in strongly condemning the continued attacks on civilians and critical energy infrastructure. These attacks have left millions without electricity during the harsh winter months and have forced Ukraine to declare a state of emergency in the energy sector. Over the past six months, Ireland has contributed €27 million to provide support for Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure and to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis inflicted

by Russia's aggression. Ireland continues to consider opportunities to bolster Ukraine's energy security. Work will continue within the coalition to ensure that, in the event of a peace agreement, Ukraine has the security guarantees it needs. Such measures would be in accordance with respective legal and constitutional arrangements of participating countries.

Ireland's consistent position has been that it is for the Government and people of Ukraine to determine their future and to agree to the terms of any peace agreement. It is crucial that it is a just and lasting peace, respecting the principles of the UN Charter. The fundamental principle that borders cannot be changed by force must be upheld. Any agreement must also protect Ukraine and Europe's security. That means strong, credible guarantees that ensure Ukraine can defend itself going forward to avoid a repetition of the past. Ireland will continue to support these efforts as part of the European Union and through participation in the coalition of the willing.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It seems that, as dangerous as we think the world is, it keeps getting worse and worse. We have seen the war in Iran, which is obviously an absolutely illegal action by genocidal Israel with the absolute backing of America. We hope the American President, Donald Trump, has bitten off more than he can chew but we do not know what the future holds. It has also meant a lifting of restrictions on the sale of Russian oil. What engagement has the Taoiseach had with others on this? I reiterate what was said here earlier, in that while we obviously want to see reductions in the price of diesel and petrol, we cannot avoid dealing sufficiently with the huge costs people are paying for home heating oil. We have to protect ourselves. We also need to eventually play our part in developing a roadmap to a better world where we will not have to deal with this madness.

**Deputy Malcolm Byrne:** I welcome the fact that Ireland will continue to contribute in whatever way we can to addressing Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. We need to co-operate in a number of specific areas. One such area I want to instance is cybersecurity. Like many other European countries, Ireland is regularly on the receiving end of cyberattacks emanating from Russia. At our meeting of the Committee on Artificial Intelligence today, the Courts Service highlighted the fact that Russia is the source of many of the cyberattacks on that service. I also want to know how we are going to continue to address the problem of the shadow fleet operating in Irish waters. I refer both to Russian sanction-busting with regard to oil and to Russian submarines and naval vessels operating in those waters. It is critical that we operate in partnership with other European nations and learn from their experiences.

**Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil:** This morning, *The Irish Times* reported on work done by Conor Gallagher and the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, OCCRP, in relation to Aughinish Alumina in Limerick and how product from that facility is being used in the military industry in Russia. This afternoon, I spoke with the Ukrainian ambassador, Larysa Gerasko, who expressed her deep fears about this news. What is the Government doing and, to the best of its knowledge, what can it do in relation to this work at Aughinish Alumina to stop the sale of products from Ireland for use in the war in Ukraine?

**Deputy Shay Brennan:** The Middle East conflict is having wide-ranging repercussions. Two of these impact directly on Ukraine's ability to defend itself. The first is that Russia was

selling Urals oil at approximately \$40 dollar in the past few months, towards the end of last year. This price has obviously risen substantially since the outbreak of the conflict in the Middle East. There are two reasons behind this: the rise in global oil prices and the US sanctions waiver that is now allowing India to purchase Russian oil. It is estimated that Russia takes in about \$370 million per day from oil. President Zelenskyy has said that this rise in oil prices and Russia's ability to now sell to India is worth approximately \$10 billion to the Russian war effort in Ukraine. What discussions is the Taoiseach having at EU level on this matter?

**Deputy Eoin Hayes:** The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin began four years and one month ago. I remember when Zelenskyy was here in the Chamber late last year. It seemed as if the whole world was upon his shoulders. It is something I will never forget. In the context of the recent geopolitical events and spreading of warfare, it is clear that tougher sanctions will be required to counter Putin's warmongering. Combined with the alarming reticence of the Trump and Orbán Administrations to join the coalition of the willing, there is a substantive question about how the coalition will impose tougher sanctions, steadfastly uphold existing sanctions on oil and gas from Russia in the midst of an energy crisis, and enforce the robust security guarantees sought by Ukraine to end the war. Will the Taoiseach make a commitment here and now that Ireland will not participate in the lifting of sanctions on Russia, including those sanctions on Russian oil and gas, that we will pursue tougher sanctions on the Russian Federation and that we will do so even in the absence of US support?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** The Taoiseach has rightly and repeatedly condemned Putin for a criminal, barbaric and imperialist attack on Ukraine. Will he do the same when it comes to what Trump and the Israeli regime are now doing to Iran and Lebanon? They are bombing the hell out of civilians and infrastructure in Iran. Israel is now ethnically cleansing south Lebanon. Will the Taoiseach condemn Trump's suggestion that he might "take over" Cuba, attacking another country in exactly the same criminal, entirely unjustified and illegal way that Putin attacked Ukraine? Is the Taoiseach consistent in his principles? Will he condemn it and call it out when it is done by the United States and the regime in Israel?

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** On 5 March, the Fianna Fáil Minister of State, Deputy Robert Troy, told the Dáil that:

Ireland's position on the use of force where there is no UN mandate or authorisation is well established and known. For fear that anyone is in any doubt, let me be clear: it is wrong and it is illegal.

He said that the use of force without UN mandate or authorisation is wrong and illegal, which is absolutely correct. How can the Taoiseach square that with his support for the coalition of the willing in Ukraine? How can he square it with continuing to try to abolish the triple lock? The use of force is illegal unless done with a UN mandate. That is absolutely clear. It applies whether it is for peacekeeping or "strengthening international security", as it is put in the heads of the defence (amendment) Bill. Is there disagreement in Fianna Fáil over this? The Taoiseach wants to abolish the triple lock that enshrines the principle that we will only engage in the use of force with a UN mandate while a Fianna Fáil Minister of State is correctly saying that violating that principle is illegal.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** I too want to raise the report by Conor Gallagher in today's edition of *The Irish Times*, which was carried out in conjunction with the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. It is very concerning. It is reported that Russian smelters supplied by the Limerick Aughinish Alumina plant are selling vast amounts of aluminium to a trading company that supplies dozens of Russian arms manufacturers. Is the Taoiseach's Government aware of any links between companies receiving aluminium from Aughinish Alumina and the weapons industry in Russia?

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** Many of the Ukrainian nationals who came to Ireland following the invasion of Ukraine did not speak English. To assist them, the State provided significant additional funding for English for speakers of other languages, ESOL, classes through the ETB network. This year, the Government has decided to remove this additional funding for ETBs. As a result, Galway and Roscommon ETB has had to inform 25 teachers that they are being let go and that roughly 150 classes will be cancelled. This cut is affecting classes across the board. It is mainly English language and literacy classes but it is also Irish language classes and other areas. Many of the staff affected were only weeks away from receiving permanent contracts, having almost completed their four years. As we speak here, staff and students are protesting these cruel cuts outside the GRETB facility in Athenry. I want a commitment from the Taoiseach that he will engage with the Minister in relation to this and advise him to reverse these cuts.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am not sure this is pertinent.

**The Taoiseach:** It is the wrong area to ask about. We are on the coalition of the willing here.

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** It is in the context of Ukrainian people coming here following the outbreak of the war.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We will leave it to the Taoiseach.

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** My question is also about Ukrainians living here and what we need to do. It has been brought to my attention that many Ukrainians who are living here are having major difficulties in renewing their Ukrainian passports. Those who fled the Russian invasion and sought refuge here now find themselves unable to renew their passports in Ireland. The Taoiseach will know that, when Ukrainian children reach the age of 14, they have to get a passport of their own. Otherwise, they are fined. The current online process repeatedly times out and kicks them out of the system. Other countries, such as Spain, Italy and Poland, have put in place an in-person appointment-based DP document service to allow Ukrainians to renew their passports efficiently and without unnecessary stress. However, Ukrainians in Ireland have told me they are now forced to travel to Poland, Spain or Italy at significant financial cost. Does the Taoiseach know about this? Will he ensure it is rectified?

**The Taoiseach:** The question relates to my attendance at the meeting of the coalition of the willing. It is striking that quite a number of Members just avoided any reference to my attendance at that meeting, which is illustrative, and not really good enough. If specific

questions are tabled, we should concentrate on those during Taoiseach's Questions because we have the Order of Business for half an hour or 40 minutes on general issues like ETBs, education, health or whatever. We also have the Leaders' Questions for a range of other issues.

Deputy Ó Murchú referred to the restrictions on the sale of Russian oil. We were seeking to impose a further round of sanctions last week. Hungary is objecting. The Hungarian position is outrageous in terms of both stopping any new round of sanctions and the €90 billion package for Ukraine. The Deputy's party opposed it as well. It is in good company with Viktor Orbán in opposing-----

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** For God's sake. The Taoiseach should not be obtuse.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Conway-Walsh, allow the answer please.

**The Taoiseach:** That is not obtuse. That is a fact. Sinn Féin has opposed the €90 billion.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It is an easy shot the Taoiseach has taken. Can we move on?

**The Taoiseach:** I want to finish my point. There is a view abroad-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies, excuse me.

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** We are either neutral or we are not.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It is about neutrality and the Taoiseach knows that.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This is not allowed.

**The Taoiseach:** Hungary has a view. Orbán has a view. Sinn Féin has a view. It is basically saying that Ukraine should surrender because if the Ukrainians do not get that budgetary package and a package to support them defend themselves, it is surrender. There is no other option for Ukraine-----

**Deputy Malcolm Byrne:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** -----but to surrender if we do not get that €90 billion package across. I am shocked at Sinn Féin's position on it-----

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** I am shocked at the Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** -----but it is reflected in its questions. When I talk about the coalition of the willing, it is about Ukraine. All Sinn Féin can offer is one question on that and another on the ETB in Athlone, which has nothing at all to do with it. It just suggests that as far as Sinn Féin is concerned, Ukraine really does not matter and that has been its position----

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** That is just not true.

**The Taoiseach:** -----since 2014.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Continue on.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy will have to take it up in another forum.

**The Taoiseach:** We want more sanctions and there could be challenges down the line if the global crisis continues.

Deputy Byrne raised the issue of cybersecurity. It is a huge issue, and many private sector organisations are under fairly regular attack. A lot of them are occurring from within Russia. There could be third country backers that back certain hackers or people involved in cyberwarfare, or there can be criminal entities, but that are known to the authorities in Russia. The Conti group is believed to have caused the attack on our health services during Covid-19. It is inconceivable that it would be allowed operate with the freedom that it does in Russia without some tacit acknowledgement or support from the administration or the government there.

The Deputy also referenced the Courts Service. It is a very significant source of concern for us. We have to build up. We discussed this with the United Kingdom Government the week before last when we met with Keir Starmer and the ministers. It is a big concern for them. We want to co-operate more with them on knowledge around technology and how best we can resist cyber-attacks. Collaboration is the name of the game in countering cybersecurity attacks, which is about learning from the experiences of others that have had them and about trying to pool our best brains to counter such attacks into the future.

With regard to the shadow fleet, legislation is being passed that will enable Naval Service personnel to board them or our naval vessels to intercept them. They will also be able to put queries to the operators of these ships regarding their legality and a whole range of other issues. There are a lot of environmental concerns around the shadow fleet. Many of them are potential maritime disasters if there were leakages of oil and so on, which would have devastating impacts on the marine environment. They have been disrupted by a number of EU member states. They have been boarded and so on. The idea was to try to disrupt the *modus operandi* of the shadow fleet and to make it less efficient in terms of its service to Russia during these times.

Deputies Ó Cearúil and Whitmore raised Aughinish Alumina. It is a very significant employer in the mid-west and it supports hundreds of jobs directly and indirectly. It also has a connection to the supply chain within Europe in terms of steel and its products. That is why there has been a general principle at European level that we should not damage ourselves disproportionately, particularly given that it is an industry that is under attack anyway from broader issues around how the global economy operates today in terms of some countries giving more protections, subsidies and so on. However, I am concerned about the report because that was never on the agenda. The report states that it supplies to intermediaries who are then supplying it on to Russia to be used for armaments. That is a concern, and we will

examine it to try to get the background to it. It is not just about Ireland. It has a relevance to other EU member states in terms of its production.

In response to Deputy Boyd Barrett, I made it clear in my speech at the White House about Ireland's adherence to UN nations, the need for a UN mandate and its adherence to the international rules-based order. I articulated that strongly, as I did about the need for the war to end and for a peaceful resolution. We are dealing with a very repressive regime in Iran that has been conducting a surrogate war for years on an ongoing basis against many countries. In the Middle East, it is particularly-----

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Is it more repressive than Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Boyd Barrett, please do not engage.

**The Taoiseach:** Yes, I would argue that Iran is much more repressive than Saudi Arabia. We do not have a precise number, but thousands of their citizens who went on the street to protest were mowed down. I am not defending any other regime but this is a particularly-----

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I do not know why the Taoiseach is saying this.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, it is not a back and forth. Respect other members.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** UAE, Cuba.

**The Taoiseach:** The contrast with Ukraine is very different, but the Deputy will never acknowledge that.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** It was always different from Iran.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, please.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputies Boyd Barrett, Murphy and others will never acknowledge that point. President Zelenskyy executed nobody before Ukraine was invaded. I believe in dialogue. I believe in the international rules-based order and a UN mandate, although the UN is paralysed. The reason we are doing the triple lock is the UN Security Council is paralysed. It is going to be very hard to get a peacekeeping mission going and because of the Security Council, UNIFIL will end at the end of this year. The opportunities for Irish peacekeepers, which is something we have been doing uninterrupted since 1958, is very much in the balance, but no one seems to care about that on the Opposition side in terms of our future role in peacekeeping.

Cuba should be resolved by dialogue. It is another regime that has a certain glorified narrative around it here but it has been quite a repressive regime as well and it has oppressed its people for far too long. It needs to get with it in the modern era and engage in a sensible dialogue to try to get a resolution. It does not need any external interventions. I have been to

Cuba. When I was the Minister for Foreign Affairs, I was one of two or three European ministers in the 2007 to 2010 period who visited Cuba in the hope of getting a more liberal view of things, but, even then, it did not release the political prisoners that we had sought the release of. President Castro and his brother, who was his successor, ruled with an iron fist. That was wrong and the consequences for its citizens have been fairly dire. Hence many left and went to the United States or elsewhere. No one case is simple. There is a complexity and history to a lot of these issues that defies simplistic sloganeering. I dealt with the questions about the triple lock and UN mandate. I dealt with Deputy Whitmore's question. That is our take on it and we will examine it.

In response to Deputy O'Hara's question about the ETB-----

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** Was the Taoiseach aware of this?

**The Taoiseach:** No, not at all.

In response to Deputy O'Hara, that is a matter for the Minister for education. There are plenty of routes to try to source an answer to that question. I will reference that the Deputy raised it, but it is not appropriate to raise it in the context of the coalition of the willing.

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** Some 25 jobs have been lost. People were protesting today.

**The Taoiseach:** I know, but this is a different set of questions.

In response to Deputy Conway-Walsh, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is aware of this issue. I will talk to the Minister and come back to her. There have been challenges all around. Because of the war in Ukraine, there are lots of issues and public services that have come under pressure.

*4 o'clock*

### **Departmental Reports**

11. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [74524/25]

12. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [74526/25]

13. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [14259/26]

14. **Deputy Albert Dolan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [16742/26]

15. **Deputy Ryan O'Meara** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [16743/26]

16. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [17330/26]

17. **Deputy Liam Quaide** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [18160/26]

18. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [18699/26]

19. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [18702/26]

20. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [18787/26]

21. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [19725/26]

22. **Deputy Louis O'Hara** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [20116/26]

23. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his Department's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. [22090/26]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 11 to 23, inclusive, together.

The Department of the Taoiseach's statement of strategy 2025-28 was approved by the Government on 7 October 2025 and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 10 December 2025. The statement of strategy outlines the Department's vision, mission, values, core responsibilities, key activities and policy priorities over the period from 2025 to 2028. The Department's mission is to support the Taoiseach and the Government, including in the implementation of the programme for Government, through principled leadership and joined-up governance; by co-ordinating Government activity to ensure effective, inclusive and timely decision-making; by providing impartial, high-quality policy advice in the national interest; by upholding democratic integrity, Civil Service values and public trust at the centre of government; and by promoting a strategic, sustainable and long-term perspective that safeguards Ireland's future prosperity, cohesion and resilience. The core responsibilities and key activities of the Department encompass executive leadership and Government co-ordination; legislative, parliamentary and constitutional duties; policy coherence and whole-of-government perspective; State protocol and commemorations; public communications and information, emergency management and civic engagement; and Civil Service and public service leadership and renewal.

Supporting implementation of the programme for Government is at the core of the Department's mission. The policy priorities outlined in the statement of strategy, which align

with the commitments contained in the programme for Government, include housing; infrastructure; disability; children and education; economy, trade and competitiveness; climate action, environment and energy; health; justice, migration and social affairs; EU and international affairs; Northern Ireland; national security; and water quality. In 2025, the Department provided the secretariat for 46 Government meetings, which dealt with 1,233 memos to the Government. It supported me as Taoiseach with nine meetings of the European Council, ten meetings of the coalition of the willing on Ukraine and a significant programme of inward and outward visits, including the AI summit in February, the EU-Africa summit in Angola in November and the visit of President Zelenskyy in December 2025. The strategy sets out how the Department will progress work in all the areas I have mentioned, including through the Cabinet committee structure and its related senior officials' groups. The Department's annual reports over the period from 2025 to 2028 provide a mechanism to report progress made on the policy priorities outlined in the statement of strategy. The statement of strategy is published as Gaeilge agus as Béarla.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** Last November, I brought the Taoiseach to the University of Limerick, where he visited the centre for robotic and intelligence systems, better known as CRIS. The CRIS laboratory is led by Professor Dan Toal. When we were there, he saw the huge array of cutting-edge and cost-effective technology, including submersibles, drones and all sorts of equipment. On the day we were there, from that laboratory in the University of Limerick, they were monitoring with a robotically powered undersea vehicle a wind turbine off the Portuguese coast. There is huge potential here. This potential transcends many Departments. There is the potential to monitor shadow fleets, subsea cables, gas lines and offshore wind energy; to survey ecological and habitat areas; and to tackle the trade of illicit drugs. That is only the start of it. This is a very cost-effective way to operate. I think it is strategically important for Ireland. I hope the Taoiseach might be able to accede to the request for him to convene the various Departments to lead out a group that could look at this. Unfortunately, we are currently the outliers in Europe as the only EU country without a national laboratory for robotics. This is strategically important to Ireland Inc., to the Department of the Taoiseach and to many other Departments. I ask the Taoiseach to work with Professor Toal's group and co-ordinate a cross-party interdepartmental group to lead this forward.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** A constituent sent me a letter. It states:

I am writing to you to highlight the serious and immediate impact that rising fuel prices are having on community nurses and their ability to provide essential healthcare services.

Community nurses depend heavily on travel to reach patients in their homes, often covering large rural areas every day. Unfortunately, the current travel and mileage allowances no longer reflect the true cost of fuel. As prices continue to increase, the reimbursement provided does not cover the actual expenses incurred while carrying out our duties ...

Ultimately, it may also affect the continuity and quality of care that patients receive in their own homes.

I urge you to raise this issue with the Minister for Health and the Government and to support an urgent review of mileage and travel allowances for community healthcare staff so that they accurately reflect the real cost of fuel and travel.

Community nurses play a critical role in keeping people out of hospital and supporting patients in their homes. It is essential that they are not financially penalised for carrying out this vital work.

I restate what was said earlier, which was that an insufficient offering is on the table in relation to the reduction in the cost of fuel. This needs to be addressed. I get that the Government cannot do everything, but I am saying that there needs to be further action in relation to the cost of home heating oil because people are under severe pressure. That is before we talk about the cost-of-disability issues and the wider cost-of-living crisis.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** The Taoiseach's reply highlighted a number of priorities. One area of key focus is disability. The Cabinet committee on disability is going to try to push forward with the national rights strategy for disabled people 2025-30. One key area the Government needs to focus on is accessibility in our towns, particularly towns like Athenry, Tuam, Gort and Loughrea. These are towns in Galway East where, in the last year, we have seen progress toward greater accessibility, but we need to see more. What is the Department going to do to focus on accessibility around our towns so that everyone has an equal opportunity to experience our lived spaces?

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** The Taoiseach said today that the proposed LNG plant is necessary from an energy security perspective. I have spent many hours going through the documentation for that argument, and I cannot see how this plant is required from an energy security perspective. There are alternative ways of dealing with energy security. This plant will lock us into fossil fuel infrastructure and it will be an incredibly costly exercise, with a cost of €1 billion over ten years. If an alternative and evidence for that alternative are provided to the Taoiseach, will he give it serious consideration? There is another way of dealing with this energy security issue.

**Deputy Liam Quaid:** The mental health strategy, A Vision for Change, is now 20 years old, but the State is still nowhere near providing the specialist multidisciplinary teams it promised for older people in that document. There are large parts of the country, including Dublin south-west, Limerick city-Tipperary north, Cork north and east, and Cork south and west, where the HSE has approved no occupational therapy posts at all for older adult mental health services. There are no approved psychology posts in Kildare-west Wicklow or Donegal. These are essential therapies to help to support older people and their families as they face mental health challenges in the context of ageing. What makes this even more serious is the lengths to which the HSE went to obscure these shortfalls. In January, I was told that the HSE did not maintain data on approved posts for these services, which is frankly farcical. The HSE's 2019 model of care for older persons, which contained clear staffing targets, disappeared offline shortly after I submitted my first parliamentary question, only to reappear immediately after the media queried its absence. What commitment can the Taoiseach give to the funding of multidisciplinary posts for older adult mental health teams?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** The Taoiseach mentioned that there is a focus in the strategy on housing and on the delivery of affordable housing. In my area, the average house price is now €680,000. The limit for the first home scheme for affordable housing is €500,000. In

other words, if it is a new build, it cannot be more than €500,000. The Government's affordable housing schemes simply do not apply in Dún Laoghaire. Ordinary workers in Dún Laoghaire do not earn more because they earn in Dún Laoghaire. If you are a nurse, a teacher, a bank worker or a council worker, you do not earn more because you live in Dún Laoghaire. The Government's schemes are completely non-applicable. That is true in many parts of Dublin, by the way, where house prices are way in excess. What is the Taoiseach going to do? The local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, funding, which was given out in the millions to developers, was supposed to be conditional on giving back houses of €300,000 or less when it originally came out.

That was abandoned. In places like Cherrywood, where €15 million in LIHAF funding was given out on the condition that there was supposed to be some affordable housing, we got no affordable housing and the houses are coming in at €600,000 and €700,000. How are ordinary workers supposed to pay for houses at that price? What is the Taoiseach going to do to deliver them some affordable housing because his schemes do not apply in huge swathes of Dublin?

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** On the policy priorities in the Government's statement of strategy and the priority of children in education, the Taoiseach has told us repeatedly that he is doing everything he can to ensure there is an appropriate school place for every child. Why then does a school that comes forward because it wants to provide additional classes face so many road blocks? I have raised Stapolin Educate Together National School with the Taoiseach before. It is doing its absolute best to provide two badly needed new and additional autism classes but the Department of education has not sanctioned them. There are 50 children on a waiting list who need these additional classes to be provided. These children need the Taoiseach and his Government to step forward and act on this. Why has the Taoiseach not given the go-ahead? Will he ensure the go-ahead is given for these two new additional classes?

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** On 5 March a large public meeting was held in Dunshaughlin, County Meath on the shortage of mainstream junior infants classes for September 2026. I was there with my colleague Fionnan Blake. The Taoiseach's party was represented by a local councillor, as was the Minister's party. An Independent TD was there. There is a commitment from the Department in written responses to me that families can be assured that all children who require a school place will be provided with one but, three weeks on, despite repeated correspondence and repeated requests, there is no indication at all when that plan will be in place or what the detail of it will be. A number of clear proposals were put forward by local principals and the local community at the Gaelscoil and the community national school. Will the Taoiseach contact the Department and the Minister for education to ensure a response issues to this local community?

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** I want to bring to the Taoiseach's attention the condition of Gaelscoil Riada in Athenry, which is a fantastic school. It is the only Irish-medium primary school in Athenry but the school building is totally inappropriate. There are a number of issues, including toilets frequently blocking and overflowing due to ongoing sewage drainage problems. Raw sewage is overflowing and spilling onto the school yard. The sewage is flooding at the main entrance to the school, and the entrance was inaccessible in recent weeks as a result. These deplorable conditions pose a real and serious health and safety risk to the

entire school community. They have been waiting since 2006 for a new school campus alongside Coláiste an Eachréidh. They have been included on the NDP list for 2026-27 but still have not received clarity on a likely timeline and start date for construction. In light of the circumstances, will the Taoiseach engage with the Minister to ensure clarity is provided as soon as possible in order that the project can be accelerated and support can be provided to the school in the meantime to deal with these issues?

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** The effectiveness of our national security framework depends not only on the capabilities of our security services but also on maintaining the trust and confidence of the public. That trust must be grounded in transparency, accountability and proper democratic oversight. At present, the mechanisms available to this House to scrutinise national security policy remain limited in scope and visibility. Strengthening the oversight role of the Oireachtas while at the same time fully respecting the need to protect sensitive and operational information would bring Ireland more closely in line with international best practices. This issue takes an added importance as we prepare to take over the EU Presidency in July. Our EU partners are looking to us for reassurances that their officials will be safe while visiting Ireland. Will the Taoiseach commit to expanding democratic oversight of our national security within the Oireachtas in order to strengthen public confidence and trust in this area? I also want to ask about the investigation into the drone incident during President Zelenskyy's visit. When will it be completed and reported on?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank all the Deputies who raised questions. Deputy Cathal Crowe raised the CRIS centre in University of Limerick, which I have visited. I saw at first hand the excellent technology in respect of underwater remotely controlled drones which can observe critical undersea infrastructure, such as subsea cables, gas interconnectors and eventually offshore windmills. Such key infrastructure is vital to our economy and society. When I came away, I said that we need to build on this. I think we need a national centre that can develop this technology. We can see all over the world how advanced drone technology has become and how effective it is in many different manifestations and uses. The entire area of monitoring subsea cables with others and monitoring gas infrastructure or indeed other interconnectors – we will shortly have one with France which will be live next year – is very critical for our economy. I have spoken to the Minister, Deputy Lawless, about it, as well as other Ministers. I have alerted them to the potential of this centre. We will do some more work on that. Part of the role of An Taoiseach is to co-ordinate and drive certain initiatives. I commend the Deputy for visiting it and raising the issue. It is one I intend to pursue with colleagues to see how we can advance the investment in that centre. The buildings and so on are fairly rudimentary, if I may say so. As the Deputy said, there is huge potential there and a cross-government approach is required to support it.

Deputy Ó Murchú raised a specific case in highlighting the role of community nurses in the context of rising fuel prices. Community nurses have an essential role in community-based healthcare and providing services to people on the ground. We are three weeks into this war and we are continuing to keep everything under review, in particular the cost issues for people. We have announced a package of measures which is probably larger than most other packages of measures across Europe but it is very much targeted and temporary. We will keep monitoring the situation to see how this unfolds. We need to keep resources in reserve for any potential worsening of this situation. We need to keep an eye on impacts on the economy. It is now

March and we have some distance to go to the end of the year, so we are being cautious and retaining flexibility. We are very conscious of the pressures many people are under. I hope the package will help to alleviate some of those pressures for people across the board.

Deputy Dolan raised accessibility and he referenced Athenry, Gort, Tuam and Loughrea. I agree 100%. I have set up a disability unit within the Department to make sure every single Department is seized of the importance of disability services and in particular the implementation of the human rights-based disabled persons strategy, which we launched last year. We had a very good meeting with many of the groups on the action plan and its implementation. We need to work with local authorities, TII, the NTA and others to ensure comprehensive accessibility for people with disabilities along with other measures we are contemplating, particularly the replacement of the existing mobility transport schemes in a way that will benefit people and make them more flexible and accessible as grant schemes for people who want to adjust their cars. Maybe it will not be at the same level as the older scheme, but there will be a tiered approach. I hope we will be in a position to launch it next year. We will bring proposals to the Government shortly on it and then get it worked up.

Deputy Whitmore did not outline, or even whisper, what the alternative is to the LNG floating reserve infrastructure we have decided to provide. The advice is very strong. There is enormous vulnerability to our energy security if anything was to happen to the interconnectors. We know that the *Yantar* and other parts of the Russian shadow fleet have traversed over those pipelines. Our own undersea divers had to go down with British undersea divers to check and make sure there was nothing untoward happening. These are very real threats. In other seas there has been disruption of pipelines.

I am very worried about it. It is a significant vulnerability and hence the decision to proceed with the LNG floating infrastructure reserve. It would never in itself have a sufficiency in terms of meeting the wider economic needs. It is not going to in any way stop us from driving forward with the renewable agenda. I outlined earlier in the House the degree to which we have made a lot of progress in terms onshore in this country and the degree of electricity generation that is caused by renewables now. If the Deputy has an alternative, we are always open to alternatives and ideas. Certainly, we look forward to the Deputy submitting that to us.

Deputy Quaide raised specialist multidisciplinary posts in respect of senior citizens. Again, we are in favour of providing multidisciplinary supports across the board. It is the most optimal way of providing healthcare at all levels, be it primary, community, or indeed, inpatient services. I will talk to the Minister for Health and the Minister of State with responsibility for mental health in relation to these issues. There has been a lot of progress made on some fronts, such as dementia on a range of community-based supports that were not there five years ago that are there now. That said, however, the need is there. We will certainly see how we can progress that even further.

Deputy Boyd Barrett raised the very high house prices in Dún Laoghaire in his constituency. I acknowledge that. It is a very significant issue. In an unprecedented way, we have provided a lot of State investment in housing, particularly in certain schemes not just in the first home scheme but in terms of the help-to-buy scheme, which has helped a lot of people to be able to buy homes, and cost rental. We need to do more. Shanganagh was the first major development by the Land Development Agency, LDA, which had a broad mix of housing from social to affordable. The LDA is accelerating its work. Only yesterday it was announced that 550-odd

houses will be provided on the Naas Road. Again, it is a mix of housing which will be affordable to people and involves cost rental also. However, the most important way to deal with housing overall is to get supply up. That means both public sector investment at unprecedented levels, which we are doing, but it also means substantial private sector investment to get to the levels of house building that are required to deal with population growth and the needs of the young people to be able to get houses they can afford.

Deputy O'Callaghan raised school places. I do not have the answer to every specific request at every specific location in respect of special classes. The allocation to special education will be significantly up on last year. The Minister will be responding to requests for special classes. The numbers are way ahead of last year because of the early date. It seems to have opened up a level of applications that was not anticipated. There is a lot of work needed and required to drill into that to make sure we have appropriate placements for children. The Minister, Deputy Naughton, and the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, will be doing everything they possibly can to secure places for all children. They have the resources to do that.

Deputy O'Rourke raised the shortage of mainstream junior infant classes. I did not get the location.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** Dunshaughlin.

**The Taoiseach:** Again, I will speak to the Minister in respect of that. There was a commitment there to provide school places. I am sure that will be realised and fulfilled. Particularly in areas of high population growth, there is a need to have interim measures to make sure children get access to the places that they are entitled to and that they need.

Deputy O'Hara raised Gaelscoil Riada. Admhaím go bhfuil deacrachtaí agus dúshlán an-mhór ann ó thaobh bhainistíocht na scoile. Níl an struchtúr oiriúnach agus tá an-chuid le déanamh. There is sewage and flooding and there are a lot of issues with the building. Again, I will talk to the Minister in terms of clarity around that particular project.

Deputy Conway-Walsh raised the national security framework. This was the first Dáil where we have a committee covering security and national security. I want to see democratic oversight. It has to protect sensitive information. If we are honest, there is a big question mark over the capacity of the Oireachtas to do that. Most committees can be fairly loose with documents but that is the nature of modern democracy. Some of the forces and services can let information out as well. There is a review on the way about the committee's remit.

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** Yes, there is. Obviously, we are constrained.

**The Taoiseach:** There is a review of the-----

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It is not happening for another six months.

**The Taoiseach:** I have discussed it with the Chief Whip.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It is happening in the summer.

**The Taoiseach:** We will come back to the Deputy. I accept the basic principle of democratic oversight of national security measures.

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*Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.*

### **International Co-operation (Omagh Bombing Inquiry) Bill 2026: Second Stage**

**Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan):** I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am pleased to introduce the Bill to the House. This Bill has a single purpose - to assist the Omagh Bombing Inquiry established by the Secretary State for Northern Ireland in February 2024 to investigate whether the bombing could have been prevented by the United Kingdom's state authorities. Its terms of reference are set out in the Schedule to the Bill for ease of reference. The Government has made clear its commitment to facilitating and supporting the work of the inquiry to the greatest extent possible. The Bill before the House is another important step towards delivering on that commitment. The Bill deals with the taking of oral evidence before our courts and will sit alongside the measures I have already put in place to facilitate the disclosure of documentary materials to the inquiry. Colleagues may recall that in April of last year I entered into a memorandum of understanding with the inquiry to provide it with relevant documents held by the State.

The bombing of the town of Omagh on 15 August 1998 was the single worst atrocity of the Troubles. It was a senseless, brutal terrorist attack resulting in the loss of 31 lives and at least 220 people were injured. The Government has condemned the abhorrent criminal actions of those who planned and perpetrated the attack and planted and detonated the bomb. I do so again today. The families and survivors in their eloquent testimony to the inquiry's commemorative hearing last year gave voice to the enormity of that loss and its enduring toll. The formal decision taken by the Government on 9 July 2024 to assist the inquiry and to authorise officials to engage with the inquiry to explore mechanisms for working together was taken in recognition of the importance of the inquiry for families and survivors and their quest for truth and justice. The programme for Government also clearly reiterates our commitment stating that we will "play our full part in legacy processes ... including facilitating and supporting the Omagh inquiry".

Delivering on our commitment to assist an inquiry established by another sovereign state is not without its challenges. There are legal complexities that must be navigated to ensure consistency with the laws of Ireland and the Government's duty to safeguard the essential interests of the State and the constitutional and other rights of citizens. Successive Governments have navigated similar challenges in the past, including assisting the Northern Ireland courts during the civil proceedings taken by the families and enacting primary and secondary legislation to support cross-Border co-operation with United Kingdom authorities.

I have referred to the actions we have already taken to support the Omagh inquiry. These include agreeing a memorandum of understanding with the chairman of the inquiry last April to guide the disclosure of State materials and implementing measures to support the disclosure

of sensitive personal data. These measures are in operation and working well with a very significant quantity of State materials, principally Garda Síochána materials, disclosed to the inquiry with more being disclosed on a rolling basis.

I understand that to date approximately 20,000 pages of material have been provided by the Irish State to the Omagh bombing inquiry. I welcome the acknowledgement by counsel to the inquiry at its hearing last Thursday of the "considerable efforts that have been made" by Irish authorities and the "effective progress" that has been made to respond to the inquiry's requests. My Department and the Garda Commissioner have dedicated resources in place to support the disclosure process to ensure that it is conducted with rigour and that all potentially relevant material is made available to the inquiry in line with the memorandum of understanding. This is vital and the Government is at one with counsel to the inquiry when he said, on announcing that the first evidential hearings will now start in September, that it is important that the inquiry is not rushed and that it is as comprehensive as it can be in addressing its terms of reference.

The Bill before the House provides a bespoke legal mechanism to facilitate the taking of sworn evidence from State bodies and former ministerial officeholders before a judge of the High Court at the request of the chairman of the inquiry. The approach is modelled on the mechanism contained in the Criminal Justice (International Co-Operation) Act 2019, which Deputies will be aware was enacted to enable the taking of oral evidence from An Garda Síochána for the purposes of UK Troubles-related inquests such as the Kingsmill massacre inquest.

Importantly, this Bill includes some new features. These take account of the nature of the inquiry and its broader terms of reference and are aimed at maximising the evidential opportunities available to the chairman and enhancing transparency. As I go through the key sections of this relatively short Bill - 12 sections in all - I will touch on these new features. The Bill is a stand-alone Bill concerned solely with the provision of assistance to the Omagh bombing inquiry. The mechanism it provides will be available to the chairman of the inquiry over the lifetime of the inquiry and will allow for assistance to be sought as matters arise in the course of its work. This single focus recognises the significance of the bombing and also the need for speedy enactment. As the House will be aware, I intend to bring forward separate legislative proposals before the summer to progress implementation of the Government's commitments in the joint framework on addressing the legacy of the Troubles that was agreed with the United Kingdom Government last September.

Part 2 of the Bill contains the substantive provisions detailing the application and operation of the bespoke legal mechanism to enable co-operation with the inquiry and the safeguards that will apply. As referred to earlier, it is premised on the taking of evidence in this jurisdiction before the High Court. This mirrors the bespoke mechanism first developed in 2019 and safeguards both the essential interests of the State, including its sovereignty, and the rights of Irish State witnesses while seeking to maximise evidential opportunities for the inquiry. As I have said, the bespoke mechanism is triggered by a request from the chairman of the inquiry for assistance. Such a request may be made to An Garda Síochána. However, section 4 allows the Minister to designate other bodies at the request of the chairman. Those other bodies include Departments of State and the Defence Forces. This is a new feature compared with the 2019 Act and recognises that bodies other than An Garda Síochána hold records that are potentially relevant to the inquiry.

Section 5 deals with how the chairman may request assistance from a State body, be that An Garda Síochána or another designated State body, and the steps to be taken by the head of the State body on receipt of such a request. The head of the State body could be the Garda Commissioner, the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces or the Secretary General of a Department. An important development on the 2019 Act is that a request may, in addition to specifying the questions the chairman is requesting be asked, specify current and past officeholders, be they members of An Garda Síochána or officials, from whom the inquiry wishes to hear. The head may accede to a request in full or in part but must refuse a request where to do otherwise would be likely to prejudice the sovereignty and security of the State and other essential interests of the State, would be likely to prejudice a criminal investigation of criminal proceedings in the State or would otherwise be inconsistent with the functions, whether statutory or otherwise, of the designated State body. I emphasise that the assessment requires an individual consideration of each question and the potential evidence concerned. No classes of records are automatically excluded from being put into evidence using this mechanism. I also emphasise that the decision by the head of the body is subject to an important check. Prior consultation is required with me as the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, and where relevant the line Minister responsible for the body, before a decision may be taken not to accede to a request in respect of a particular question. The head of the body is required to make the decision as soon as is practicable. This is important to ensure that momentum is maintained and the inquiry is not subject to any delay. The section also ensures transparency around decision-making by requiring the reasons grounding any refusal to be notified to the chairperson.

Section 6 is similar to section 5 but concerns requests for assistance from former ministerial officeholders, that is, those who have held the office of Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister or Minister of State. This extension seeks to take account of the inquiry's terms of reference, which include investigation of the approach taken by United Kingdom state authorities to security normalisation before and after the Good Friday Agreement. In the event the inquiry forms a view that a former ministerial officeholder has relevant evidence to give on the approach taken by the UK authorities, it is appropriate that the State would have in place a suitable mechanism to facilitate the taking of such evidence.

As I have outlined, sections 5 and 6 make provision for past members of An Garda Síochána or the Defence Forces or former officials and holders of ministerial office to be requested to provide assistance. Their participation will be voluntary and subject to their written consent. This consent-based approach arises from such persons being private citizens who cannot be compelled to give evidence for the purposes of an inquiry outside of the State. However, I expect co-operation from all concerned who are requested. They may, of course, of their own volition decide to attend such an inquiry. If they were to choose to do so, they would remain subject to certain residual obligations in respect of sensitive information acquired during their service but with none of the benefits of the privileges and immunities to which they are entitled under Irish law. The Bill seeks to provide a means for those retired members and officials or former ministerial officeholders to provide evidence to the inquiry under Irish law.

Section 7 deals with the designation of witnesses. It is for the head of the State body, having come to a decision as to whether the request for assistance may be acceded to in full or in part, to designate those who will give evidence before the High Court. In the case of those no longer serving, their prior consent will be required.

Section 8 deals with the nomination of the High Court judge who will act as the conduit for the evidence to be taken under sections 9 and 10. The request to the President of the High Court must be made as soon as is practicable. Again, this is intended to avoid any undue delay to the work of the inquiry.

Sections 9 to 11, inclusive, deal with the taking of the evidence. Section 9 provides that the nominated judge shall ask the agreed questions of the designated person, while section 10 enables the chairman or counsel to the inquiry to ask follow-up questions for the purposes of clarification. This is a new feature compared with the 2019 Act and is intended to allow for minor matters to be clarified on the day rather than by way of a fresh request for assistance under section 5.

Section 11 sets out that the evidence is to be taken on oath, with the witnesses having the benefit of the privileges and immunities available before the High Court. The evidence is also to be taken otherwise than in public. This is appropriate as it does not involve the administration of justice. That said, I draw the attention of the House to the provision that enables core participants and their legal representatives to attend along with the chairman and the inquiry team.

Those with core participant status before the inquiry include many families and survivors, along with United Kingdom state bodies. Enabling the families and survivors to attend the High Court and hear the evidence at first hand is an important new feature to ensure as much transparency as possible. The section also makes clear that the nominated judge may issue directions in relation to the arrangements for the taking of the evidence. I draw attention to the explicit reference to any arrangements necessary for securing the safety of the person giving the evidence. Once the evidence has been taken, it will be a matter for the nominated judge to certify the transcript and make it available to the chairperson of the inquiry. The dissemination and publication of the transcript will be a matter for the chairperson of the inquiry.

That brings me to the close of how the bespoke mechanism is intended to operate. As I have said, it will be open to the chairman to use the mechanism as needed over the course of his work. The Government, through a representative at the opening hearing of the inquiry on 30 July 2024, committed to doing everything in our power to support co-operation, including putting in place new legislation if that was what was required. This Bill will deliver on that commitment.

The inquiry has announced that it will commence its evidential hearings on 21 September. As I have said before, I am committed to having this Bill on the Statute Book before the start of those hearings. I hope, with the support of this House and the other House, to see it complete its passage before the summer recess.

Before concluding, I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank those on the Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration for the decision to grant my request for a waiver from the requirement to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny on the general scheme. I also acknowledge the intensive engagement between the inquiry team and my officials over the past months and thank the inquiry for its constructive approach as we seek to work together to support the inquiry to fulfil its terms of reference.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis seo. I apologise to the Minister for missing some of his speech and also apologise to the House that I have to leave immediately after my own because this debate is clashing with a meeting of the Oireachtas justice committee. That affects a number of Members. I ask the Minister to engage with his officials to try to ensure that justice debates in future will not clash with meetings of the committee because a number of members of the committee would like to be here for the duration of the debate.

The purpose of this Bill is, as the Minister has outlined, to provide a specific legal mechanism for the taking of oral testimony before a High Court judge in this jurisdiction for the purpose of the Omagh bombing inquiry. That Omagh bombing inquiry was established by the Northern Secretary of State in February 2024 to investigate whether the bombing in the town of Omagh, County Tyrone, on 15 August 1998 could have been prevented. The Irish Government made commitments to assist with the inquiry and this Bill is to facilitate this assistance. Sinn Féin fully supports this co-operation.

Last year, the inquiry heard four weeks of what could only be described as heart-breaking testimony from the victims and survivors of the Omagh bombing. It was important to do that at the very beginning of the inquiry, in my view.

Sinn Féin had supported the demand of the families of the victims of the 1998 Omagh bombing for a cross-Border public inquiry. The families, who have campaigned for 27 years for that inquiry, deserve full transparency and full disclosure about the events that led to the killing of their loved ones. The Government declined to establish a parallel independent inquiry in this jurisdiction, something a number of the families had been calling for, but in the absence of that, the fullest co-operation possible with the existing inquiry is needed.

The Bill allows the Irish authorities to take sworn evidence from Garda members, Defence Forces personnel, civil servants and former Ministers to support the Omagh bombing inquiry. It sets procedures for requesting, giving and protecting such evidence, provides judicial oversight and amends existing international co-operation law to facilitate the process. The mechanism provided for in the Bill is modelled on that contained in section 3 of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 2019 for the taking of oral testimony from members of An Garda Síochána for the purposes of Troubles-related inquests and this legislation follows on from a memorandum of understanding that was agreed in April 2025.

Under the Bill, any provision of oral sworn evidence to the inquiry by former members of An Garda Síochána, former members of the Defence Forces, former Ministers and former officeholders of Departments of State will be done on a voluntary basis, and there are some concerns regarding the voluntary nature of this evidence and how that might work in practice.

Concerns have also been raised that national security limits could restrict disclosure because governments, and particularly that of our nearest neighbours, often protect intelligence services and operations. Under the terms of this Bill, officials may decline to provide evidence and broad security claims could be used to justify withholding sensitive or potentially embarrassing information. Far too often in the past we have seen the British Government, in particular, misuse these type of provisions in relation to national security for failing to disclose information related to collusion, for example. I want to say clearly that national security must not be used to conceal failures or wrongdoings. While every jurisdiction has lawful national security issues - we all recognise that - the question is how wide or narrow these are and how

they are defined in law. We have seen national security clauses used as a vague, undefined concept by the British Government to effectively veto the release of information that it did not want to release, so the way the concept is applied here is of paramount importance.

The families and survivors of Omagh also have genuine concerns that the current draft may give rise to difficulties that could undermine its intended purpose, and these concerns need to be addressed. I was taken aback and surprised when a representative for the families told me the Minister is refusing to meet with the families at this stage. I remind the Minister that in December last, when he announced the drafting of this legislation, he stated that "the legitimate needs and expectations of victims' families and survivors who have long searched for truth and accountability" would be at the heart of this approach. I would question how the Minister can marry making such a statement with refusing to meet with members of families and survivors. I urge the Minister to listen to the families directly in relation to concerns they have about this legislation.

The families were also taken aback at the fact they were given no sight of the legislation before it was published. The unfortunate consequence of that is that it has left families in some cases feeling unimportant to a process that should have had them at the core, which would have been trauma informed. I would make that case to the Minister to reconsider that position. The list of people the Minister is refusing to meet seems to be getting longer and longer. That is unfortunate, especially because I can point to instances where people who have been campaigning have met the Minister and those engagements have been productive and worthwhile.

The Minister mentioned that the justice committee co-operated with his office in waiving pre-legislative scrutiny to allow the Bill to move swiftly through the Oireachtas, because at the end of the day we all want a system in place that has the full support of the families and victims of the Omagh bombing. That decision to waive pre-legislative scrutiny might not have been the same had members realised there was going to be an issue in terms of engagement with the families. I appeal to the Minister to ensure that meeting takes place before we get to Committee Stage because we want to make sure that the legislation is fit for purpose and, just as importantly, that the voices of the families of the victims of the Omagh bombing are listened to.

As this legislation makes its way through the Oireachtas, we are reminded of how the British Government has hidden behind national security concerns for its failures to disclose vital information to Troubles-related victims. We saw, for example, the refusal of the British Government to establish a public inquiry into the 1997 murder of Sean Brown. The First Minister, Michelle O'Neill, rightly described the British Government's behaviour in that case as disgraceful and accused it of showing deep disrespect to the Brown family and the fine, clear High Court and Court of Appeal rulings.

We are also reminded of how little co-operation this State has got from the British Government on incidents of collusion in this State.

I am minded, as we approach the 52nd anniversary of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, of the continued lack of co-operation from the British Government in handing over papers and files relating to the atrocities, despite the repeated demands from this House. Again, this is completely unacceptable.

Prior to this legislation being brought forward, the Irish Government reached a memorandum of understanding with that inquiry, which included commitments on disclosures to the Omagh Bombing Inquiry. The reason I am raising other cases is that the priority now should be to get similar commitments on disclosure regarding events in this State from the British Government. We need to ensure all families and victims have recourse to truth and justice. We have seen several reports being published and limited investigations have been carried out but, again, this State has never delivered a full public inquiry with statutory requirements to compel all relevant evidence relating to Dublin and Monaghan, particularly in respect of material held by British authorities. There has never been a sustained diplomatic or legal pressure applied to force disclosure from the British Government in cases like that, and that has to change. It is absolutely right that the Irish Government co-operates in respect of inquiries, such as the Omagh Bombing Inquiry. That is unanimously agreed across this House.

We should also have the right to state that we expect the same level of co-operation from the British Government, which has not been the case up to this point. The British Government must release all information relating to not only that attack but to all others that were perpetrated by the so-called Glenanne gang, and in all instances where British state actors or agents colluded in attacks and murders on this island, be it in the North or South.

Before I conclude, I wish to make a couple of observations on the need for this State to deal properly with historical investigations, including but not solely narrowed to, the cases related to the legacy of the conflict and collusion I raised with the Minister last week. To be honest, I found his response quite dismissive. If we are serious - and I think we have every right to - about challenging the British Government on its failure to provide truth and justice or to provide an avenue for legacy issues to be addressed, then we also have to look at the record in this State.

In addition to State cases related to collusion and the legacy of the conflict that has been mentioned, there are far too many unresolved cases of historic investigative failures. I have mentioned the issue and legacy of the Garda Heavy Gang, which has never been addressed and for which there has been no accountability for the number of miscarriages of justice that group was involved in, yet nobody has been held to account. It was incredible for the Minister to state there has been no accountability in terms of the facts we know. Agents of this State framed people for crimes they did not commit, including by coercive confessions, with one case resulting in the death of a person who was framed for a crime they did not commit. Nothing or very little has been done for cases related to the legacy of the conflict where there is evidence of collusion, such as the cases of Eddie Fullerton, the Dublin Airport bombing, the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, the case of John Francis Green and the case of Martin Doherty.

We also have cases with clear investigative failures that have been raised several times in this House, including the case of Fr. Niall Molloy, the case of Terence Wheelock and the case of Shane O'Farrell. All those cases continue to cast a dark shadow over the criminal justice system in this State. The reason I raise all those cases is that we have to mean what we say when we say victims of historical injustices have a right to answers, truth and justice. That is why I believe there is a very strong case for the establishment of a historical inquiries unit in this State, along the lines of what has been proposed by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Committee on the Administration of Justice. I will say it again: we have all been rightly

critical of the approach of British governments relating to issues regarding the legacy but our own record and the record of this State also needs to be addressed.

I will say again in my closing remarks that we have to and should co-operate with legacy investigations in other states, particularly where there is pertinent information within State bodies here, as with the Omagh bombing. We also need to ensure we can say, hand on heart, that the outstanding cases in this State are fully investigated.

I commend the victims and survivors of the Omagh bombing on the dignified manner in which they have campaigned for truth and justice. Those of us who engage with families across the board, and from different perspectives, are never but overawed and inspired by the way and manner in which they ensure the memory of their loved ones is protected and held in esteem. Their ability to secure truth and justice never wavers. Finally, the principle we should agree on is that all those who have been bereaved as a result of conflict on this island, from whatever perspective, whether their family members were killed by British state agents, republicans, loyalists or loyalists in collusion with the British state, regardless, they all have the same right to truth and justice. We should make that a principle we all agree to and that we agree this House will do whatever is necessary to create the mechanism for which that will happen.

**Deputy Martin Kenny:** As the Minister is aware, we fully support what the legislation we are discussing here today is trying to achieve, which is to form a situation where the State can co-operate fully with the Omagh inquiry to ensure there is a complete transparency around what happened in Omagh. I remember that incident very well. In my home area of Cloone, County Leitrim, we were commemorating 200 years since the French came through it in 1798. There was a weekend of commemorative events but there was this shadow over it because of what happened in Omagh and the terrible tragedy of the many people who lost their lives in the most tragic of circumstances. At that time, we, as a society, were trying to move to a peaceful process and to move forward. Thankfully, the peace process was strong enough to withstand what happened in Omagh and the many other incidents similar to it.

What we are dealing with here today is very clearly a situation where we need to ensure we get maximum co-operation from the State in every way possible. The Minister mentioned the process that is set out and how that process will work. He mentioned how there will be a judiciary overseeing all of this and that this will be done in a transparent and clear way. The Minister also mentioned that in section 5, there are some robust checks in regard to a possible non-acceptance of a request. I would hope that would not come to pass, and I am sure that is the Minister's position. I hope we would not see any prospect of any section of the State refusing to co-operate in any way with this process.

The families of those who lost their lives on that day and those who were injured deserve to get full co-operation from this State and from everyone involved that can possibly throw any light on this subject. At the time, I remember the RUC chief constable, Ronnie Flanagan, said he was putting a special task force in place to assist the local RUC to investigate the situation in Omagh. There are very many who doubt what the role of that was and how it was facilitated, if it actually assisted or if it was an obstacle in trying to resolve the situation and to have a full and complete investigation.

However, we are where we are. We have a robust inquiry in place, and we have to ensure the State responds to it adequately. As we in this State put processes in place to ensure there is

an adequate and robust response to the request from the Omagh inquiry to get full and accurate information of everything this State knows about what happened with that atrocity, we also have to look at what the British state has done with regard to similar situations and how there has been a huge reluctance in the British state to provide information.

The Dublin and Monaghan bombings were mentioned, and there are many other instances similar to that, where there are families who want to get answers, clarity and transparency as to what happened and how the circumstances came about where they lost their loved ones. All of us have a responsibility to try to do everything we possibly can to ensure that happens.

*5 o'clock*

In particular, the sovereign state, whether it is the British State or the Irish State, has a unique and central role in ensuring that full transparency is delivered to everybody in respect of that. While we, of course, want to see the full rigour of the inquiry brought to bear on all of this, it is probably a year since a memorandum of understanding was set in place, and we are now following through with this legislation. The Minister will have the full support of everyone in the Houses to deliver this and ensure it is in place before the inquiry comes back into session in September.

I fully support what is being done here. All of us commend the families of the victims of Omagh, and the many other families who are also looking for justice and transparency in regard to all of this. There is some difficulty with part of the legislation. For instance, if a set of questions is put forward by the inquiry, and those questions are answered and then generate other questions, it has to go back over the same process again. Perhaps more space needs to be made for cross-examination, or if that is not the right term, then we must ensure there is a full means of assessing the outcome of a particular piece of information if it creates other questions. That can be done without having to revert to the beginning of the entire process. There needs to be a way of ensuring that can happen. It is one of the concerns that representatives of the families have regarding the legislation.

In general, we are all on the same page. We want to ensure that this is delivered, and that the families of those who tragically lost their lives in Omagh, the victims and the survivors, get a sense that this State is going to co-operate fully. That will put further pressure on the authorities in the North to ensure they also co-operate and provide the information that is required.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** I very much welcome this Bill, which is highly necessary. It provides a legal mechanism for testimony before a High Court judge with regard to the inquiry.

At the initiation of the inquiry, the families were given time to speak about what happened and the aftermath in relation to their loss and those who were injured. It was harrowing. I remember the day that happened. I remember exactly where I was. I remember watching the television. I think the news was extended for another hour, and it kept going on. I remember listening. Back then, there was not the same amount of radio and television, and there certainly was not Internet at a high level. I kept listening to the news and watching for television updates. The number of people who had been killed or were passing away kept going up and up as the evening went on. I remember waking up to a new number the following morning. It was horrendous.

We talk an awful lot about what is going on in the world, especially at the moment. This was mass murder on our island. It is something that needs to be said in here because it was not said by the first two speakers. The people who carried this out are the lowest of the low. The people who covered it up are equally the lowest of the low and, without a shadow of a doubt, the worst kind of human beings that ever existed on this earth. I would love to use some other language, but I will not because of where I am, but that needs to be said in here, and that has not been said yet. There are people who covered up what happened. We all know it.

I very much welcome the trajectory of where the Minister has gone with this, although I have some concerns. In July 2024, the Government committed to assisting the Omagh bombing inquiry to the extent permissible under the Constitution. I know there are limitations, and that is why we are bringing in this legislation. It was in the programme for Government that we would do so. We have to bring in bespoke legislation in this regard. It is locked in under section 3 of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 2019, which has been used previously.

The new features of the Bill include extending the mechanism to State bodies other than An Garda Síochána, including both serving and former members of An Garda Síochána, and the Defence Forces, which is necessary and welcome. From a historical point of view, this is more wide-ranging than just those two State bodies. There is also the extension in relation to Department officials and ministerial office-holders. Facilitating core participants, particularly survivors and family members of victims, to be present to hear the evidence given first hand is very welcome. That the inquiry will be able to ask questions to clarify evidence is also welcome.

I have some concerns. The lead counsel said on 19 March 2026 that the new phase of hearings will take place six months later than scheduled. That is a concern. Chapter 3 is the next stage of the hearing, and it will include how the bomb was constructed, warning calls, claims of responsibility, arrests and subsequent court hearings. The delay is due to material originating from the Republic of Ireland not being available. I am taking this as a delay based on volume rather than anything else because the volume of material being brought forward has been so extensive.

The most important thing is that this inquiry, and how we are legislating for our component of it, is survivor-led and independent to progress meaningful truth and reconciliation for victims and survivors of this atrocity. That will take significant work across a breadth of different issues. In recent Dáil statements on Operation Kenova, we commended the body's rigour, independence and emphasis on survivors. At this juncture, other tragedies, such as the Dublin-Monaghan bombing, must be investigated with the same rigour and independence.

Of course, a single Bill or a joint framework will never come close to dealing properly with our past. That is obvious. This has to be about the people who have been hurt, who have suffered and who have been bereaved. The right to truth and justice is absolute. It cannot be partial or selective. We need to be committed to dealing fairly with the past, and to justice and legacy mechanisms that meet the relevant standards and the European Convention on Human Rights.

While we in the Labour Party welcome this Bill, several questions require consideration and clarification. Under section 5, it is for the head of a designated State body to make a

determination as to whether the information they are being asked to provide should be privileged from disclosure on grounds of sovereignty, security or essential interests of the State. Section 6 does largely the same thing for former ministerial office-holders and officials. These categories under which co-operation can be refused are so vague that they are meaningless. Given the way this is drafted in the Bill, I fail to see how the head of a designated body is supposed to make such a determination. It is subjective and customisable to their own opinions, rather than giving a confirmed, direct provision for determination by the designated head of any body that is requested to do so. It is really at their will. This needs to be more defined.

I am not alone in saying this. Others who have looked at this are saying the same thing. It is too open-ended. It is not defined enough. That is a serious concern because it is at the core of everything in it.

That is before we ask the fundamental question of this process, which is whether it allows for full and frank disclosure to get to the truth of what happened. Of course, there should be safeguards for those giving evidence, which is essential, but whether the Bill will allow for fulsome investigation is an open question, based on what I just said. The Bill seems to only make provision for oral questions, which must be submitted in advance of vetting. There is no provision for access to records. Will that be sufficient to represent real access to justice for victims and survivors? Will that get to the truth they have been waiting for for so long?

It is not prescribed enough or detailed enough. There are so many outs for those who, though they have to be protected under the Constitution, need to give evidence and give access to information, records and data. We will not get all the information these people desperately deserve and require.

I hope the Minister takes on board what I am saying. We will consider amendments on Committee Stage to deal with this. We did not do pre-legislative scrutiny as a committee; maybe that was a mistake. I know there are time pressures. However, this is very generic and needs more emphasis and focus. Let us remember the bombing took place in 1998, almost 28 years ago. Most officials will probably have retired in the years since. I assume nearly all of them will, especially if they were at a senior level yet the Bill will apply to retired officials only with their advance written consent. Will these provisions give affected families reassurance we can get to the truth? With these open questions, it is deeply concerning the Minister has not met with the families and survivors to discuss the outworkings of this important legislation.

In his reply, he might provide the Dáil with an update on his stance on this. Will he be doing so in the coming weeks? If not, why not? Is there a legal, constitutional basis for not doing so? Is there an updated response as to why he has not done this or will not do it? We have a Bill published. There is something for the families and those affected by this to critically analyse and give their thoughts on. In a dignified way, they have earned, which is the wrong phrase to use, as they deserve the right to a meeting with the Minister to discuss this. The Minister is a reasonable person. He has met others and has had very good meetings with others who requested them. He has dealt with one or two of them in a way I commend him on. Why will he not do it in relation to one of the largest atrocities, if not the largest, on this island ever? I do not understand it. Will he explain why? Is there something we are all missing? This legislation is published, so why will the Minister not do it? Is he being advised not to? There are some times when he has to be brave and say to his officials, "I don't agree with you and I'm

willing to do this." Sometimes standing up for what is right is more important than being perfect as regards taking on board advice.

The families have serious questions that deserve to be analysed. They have critically examined the legislation. They did not have prior knowledge of it. It was not given to them beforehand but now they have had time to observe it and have been in touch with me and many others in the House. This does not just raise questions about the basic dignity and respect these families deserve; it inevitably raises questions about the efficacy of the Government's approach to the legislation. If the Minister is not willing to meet with the families, it raises further questions regarding how we can be confident in the Government's proposals and legislation. Will he please answer that in his reply?

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill. I thank the Minister and his officials for bringing forward this important and necessary Bill, which I support. It is an important step in delivering on our programme for Government commitment to facilitate and support the Omagh bombing inquiry. It reflects the seriousness with which this State must approach the search for truth and accountability in relation to one of the darkest atrocities of the Troubles.

The Omagh bombing took place on 15 August 1998, just four months after the Good Friday Agreement had been signed. It was an act of appalling evil, and those who orchestrated and executed that bomb are pure evil as well. A total of 29 people were murdered, including a woman pregnant with twins, and hundreds more were injured. The trauma of that day did not end with the explosion. It has lived on for survivors, their families and entire communities ever since.

As Chair of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, we have met with victims and survivors and have heard directly of the pain they continue to carry, but also the dignity, persistence and courage with which they continue to seek answers. Their call is not unreasonable or excessive; it is a basic call for truth, accountability and respect. Peace on this island was not inevitable; it was built painstakingly through courage, compromise and public leadership. It was hard-won and if peace is to endure, our commitment to truth, justice and accountability must endure too.

We cannot say we honour the Good Friday Agreement if we turn away from the unfinished business of legacy. We cannot say we support reconciliation if victims and survivors are left carrying unanswered questions decade after decade. This Bill matters because it provides a statutory mechanism for the State to assist the Omagh bombing inquiry in a more structured, transparent and legally robust way. It builds on the steps taken by the Government, including the memorandum of understanding, which the Minister and the chairman of the inquiry signed, on the disclosure of State materials. It also reflects the data protection regulations introduced to enable the lawful disclosure of sensitive personal data.

The Bill adds a further layer of practical co-operation. It creates a bespoke legal mechanism to facilitate the taking of sworn testimony before a judge of the High Court for the purposes of the inquiry. It provides a framework that seeks to maximise the assistance that can be given while safeguarding the essential interests of the State and the rights of witnesses. That balance matters.

Assisting an inquiry established under the law of another jurisdiction is legally complex. It raises serious issues around sovereignty, security, due process, witness protection and the integrity of criminal investigations. It is, therefore, right that the legislation is careful, structured and grounded in law but we should also be clear on the principles. Complexity cannot be an excuse for delay and legal difficulty cannot become an excuse for inaction. Families have waited far too long.

I welcome the provisions in the Bill that strengthen transparency and ensure that the core participants, families and survivors can hear evidence directly before the High Court. That matters because this process must remain accessible and grounded in the experiences of those affected.

The processes must not become remote or abstract exercises. They must remain grounded in the lived reality of those who have borne the consequences of this atrocity for nearly three decades.

I also note the provision to extend the mechanism, on a voluntary basis, to former ministerial office-holders, as referred to by the Minister. This is a significant measure that reflects the breadth of the inquiry's work and the need to ensure that where relevant evidence exists, there is an appropriate lawful pathway for that evidence to be heard.

More broadly, the Bill speaks to something bigger than one inquiry alone. It speaks to the bona fides of the State in relation to legacy itself and to the credibility of our commitment to cross-Border co-operation. The Minister indicated that more than 20,000 documents have been handed over, which is welcome. The Bill speaks also to our understanding that lasting reconciliation requires openness, honesty and a willingness to confront difficult and sometimes painful truths.

The Good Friday Agreement was not just a political settlement. It was a moral turning point on our island. It asked people to choose democracy over violence, hope over hatred and partnership over permanent division. The Omagh bombing was a direct assault on that hope. Supporting this inquiry, and supporting the search for truth in respect of Omagh, is part of defending what the agreement made possible. It also creates confidence around co-operation between Ireland and the UK. It underpins our support for legacy issues. The State must be as transparent as possible and so too must the UK Government.

I welcome this debate and the support for the Bill. I do so in solidarity with the victims, survivors and families who have campaigned for so long and with such dignity. I do so in the belief that truth and accountability matter and in the hope that the hard-won peace can be protected, the truth will be revealed, justice can be delivered and the work of reconciliation between the two traditions on this island can continue.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** Before I discuss the legislation and the legal mechanisms of co-operation between states, it is important to pause and remember exactly what we are about today. This is by no means just another Bill. It is about the 29 people and two unborn children killed in Omagh, the 220 people injured and the families who, nearly three decades later, are still searching for answers. It can be too easy for atrocities to become a moment in history, a date or an event. That should never be allowed to happen. For the families, this atrocity is

their present and something they carry with them every single day. Sometimes the scale of loss is so overwhelming that it risks becoming abstract. We must never allow that to happen.

I will name just a few of the victims of that day. Alan Radford died helping his mother to do the weekly shopping. The deaths of Avril Monaghan, her 21-month-old daughter Maura and her mother, Mary Grimes, saw three generations killed in one horrific moment. It was Mary Grimes's 66th birthday that day. Avril was 33 years old and heavily pregnant with twins, Eimear and Evelyn, whose lives never even got a chance to begin. Avril's daughter Aoibheann put it more powerfully than any of us ever could when she said:

The pictures of Eimear and Evelyn's scan are a reminder of the futures that never became a reality. The loss that we as a family have experienced cannot be measured and there is no replacement for the time we would have had with our mam, Maura, Eimear, Evelyn and granny.

That line alone should stop every single one of us in our tracks because it shows how the Omagh bombing took entire futures.

As we discuss this Bill, we must be very clear that the process must always come back to people. Michael Gallagher's son Aiden was killed that day. He was 21 years old. Michael Gallagher did not just grieve; he fought. For 25 years, he fought through the courts, against institutions and against every obstacle placed in front of him. His legal challenge produced the 2021 High Court ruling that found there was a plausible case that the bombing could have been prevented and that directed the establishment of a human rights-compliant investigation. Without Michael Gallagher, there would be no inquiry. It is important to state that clearly in the House today. The inquiry we are legislating to support exists because a bereaved father refused to accept that either state could simply move on. That is what citizenship looks like at its most determined. We owe it to him and to every family affected to match his determination with our own.

The Omagh bombing inquiry is examining whether this atrocity could have been prevented. It is a profound and difficult question but a very necessary one. For the families, the question has never gone away as to whether something more could have been done, whether the bombing could have been stopped, whether lives could have been saved and whether those murderers could have been prevented from doing their dastardly deed. To answer that question, the inquiry needs access to evidence, co-operation and transparency. Crucially, it needs the full participation of the State.

We need to be honest about what the inquiry is actually examining. Its terms of reference include alleged intelligence-sharing failures between the UK Government and the Irish authorities in the period leading up to the bombing. That is not a peripheral issue. In fact, it goes to the heart of why the co-operation of the State matters so much. There may have been information held on this side of the Border. There may have been decisions made or not made at the highest levels of the State. I certainly am not making any allegations of such but I am saying the question exists, is live and it goes through the thoughts every day of family members who lost their loved ones in Omagh. It is a question that must be answered.

That is precisely why the voluntary participation of former office-holders is not an abstract procedural matter. It is potentially central to getting to the truth. This legislation creates a mechanism to allow sworn oral evidence to be taken in this jurisdiction before a High Court

judge from members and former members of An Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces, senior officials and former Ministers. I absolutely welcome that. Without their co-operation, the inquiry simply cannot do its job and, without the inquiry doing its job, the families will not get the answers they deserve and for which they have fought for so long.

I note the architecture that preceded this Bill. It includes the memorandum of understanding on disclosure of state materials, the data protection regulations that enable transfer of sensitive personal data and the directives to the Garda Commissioner to support co-operation. They were meaningful steps and they deserve acknowledgement. It is important to be honest about what this Bill does and does not do. Two issues sit alongside the legislation and cannot be ignored. The first is the delay in proceedings. The inquiry's evidential hearings examining the days immediately before and after the bombing were due to begin on 9 March but have been pushed back six months to 24 September. The families were informed of the delay on 6 March, three days before hearings were due to begin. Part of the reason for the delay is the sheer volume of state material still being processed. The lead counsel to the inquiry has confirmed the full Irish disclosure will not be complete until June. I want to be fair here. The inquiry's own counsel has praised the efforts of the State and An Garda Síochána in meeting deadlines. That is to the State's credit but the process is still at an early stage. For families who have waited nearly 30 years, early stage simply is not good enough.

The second issue is the special advocates dispute, which is a live issue before the courts. Michael Gallagher is judicially reviewing Lord Turnbull's ruling that the inquiry has no power to appoint special advocates. The latter exist to represent the interests of excluded parties at closed hearings held in private because of national security sensitivities. The argument being made on behalf of the Gallagher family is a serious one, namely, that without special advocates, families could be entirely shut out of hearings where, in effect, findings about state failures are made. It simply cannot be right that a father who forced this inquiry into existence through decades of legal struggle could be excluded from the room when the most sensitive evidence about what the states knew is being heard. This Bill does not and cannot address that dispute, which is a matter for the courts. However, the House should put it on the record that the rights of families to meaningful participation in the process should never be negotiable. I ask the Minister to clarify the Government's position in this regard.

I move to the voluntariness question. The consent requirement in the Bill runs through the entire mechanism for former office-holders of any kind; not just former Ministers but also former Garda Commissioners, senior Defence Forces officers and departmental officials. Any of them can decline to give evidence. I understand this is constitutionally necessary because we cannot compel sworn testimony before a foreign inquiry. The law has limits in that regard. Will the Government actively encourage relevant former office-holders to participate? Will it make clear that non-participation where someone holds potentially relevant evidence is not an acceptable posture?

Creating the mechanism, and leaving its uptake entirely to an individual's conscience, should not be sufficient. If former officeholders have relevant evidence, they should give it, and this Government should say so plainly.

This Bill was granted a waiver from pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. That was the right call, given the urgency of the legislation, and I do not criticise it for a moment. However, it means that this House bears a

responsibility today to ask questions that would ordinarily arise at the pre-legislative scrutiny stage. That is what I will try to do. I encourage the Minister to engage with these questions substantively as the Bill progresses. Complexity cannot become an excuse. Two jurisdictions, sensitive material, legal constraints and constitutional limits are all real but none of that is a reason for delay or half-measures. Every delay is felt by the families. Every bureaucratic obstacle is a reminder that they are still waiting. We are a Republic and claim to value accountability, truth and the rights of citizens. The families of the victims of the Omagh bombing are citizens of this island and they deserve that the State bring the full weight of its co-operation, its institutions and its political will on their behalf.

We in the Social Democrats welcome the Bill, but we will judge it not by what it enables but by what it delivers. I want to put three specific questions on the record. Will the Minister commit to a timeline for the completion of full Irish State disclosure to the inquiry? Will the Government publicly encourage former officeholders who hold relevant evidence to participate and not merely make mechanisms available? Will the Government set out its position on the special advocate's judicial review and on the rights of families to meaningful representation at closed hearings? For the families of the victims of the Omagh bombing, this is not about politics, legislation or frameworks, but is simply about the truth. It is about whether this State played any part, through action or inaction, in what happened on that hideous day. It is about whether after nearly 30 years we finally have the courage to find out. The families deserve that. Michael Gallagher deserves that. Aoibheann deserves that as do Eimear and Evelyn, lives that never even got to begin.

When we speak about the brutal and horrific tragedy in Omagh, it is incumbent on me also to mention the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. I have met families living in my constituency who experienced the most profound tragedy on the day of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. They lost loved ones and were left disfigured. They also still wait for truth. So many families in so many walks of life in Ireland have asked these simple questions. What happened on that day? Why has nobody been held responsible? The families of the victims of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings are asking for the exact same thing that we are potentially delivering today, which is some degree of co-operation and truth from a jurisdiction that is not their own. For the sake of all those families, it is incumbent on us all that we demonstrate the urgency and resolve to give them the truth, however long they may have waited and had to fight. Everybody deserves to know what happened on days when their loved ones were lost, lives were changed, and cities and communities were torn apart.

**Deputy Shane Moynihan:** Is mór agam an deis seo a thapú labhairt ar an mBille seo, Bille a bhfuil fáilte ann dó. Tá a fhios agam go gcuirfidh clanna na n-íobartach fáilte roimhe. Cabhróidh sé leis an bhfiosrúchán a bheidh ar siúl. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the International Co-operation (Omagh Bombing Inquiry) Bill 2026. I strongly support this Bill, which is an essential step in honouring our commitment as the Fianna Fáil Party in the programme for Government to fully facilitate and support the Omagh bombing inquiry. It is also an important signal of our commitment to the victims, families and survivors, people who have endured unimaginable loss and have waited too long for truth, transparency and accountability.

The Omagh bombing on 15 August 1998 stands out as the single worst atrocity of the Troubles with 29 people murdered, hundreds injured, families absolutely shattered and a

community traumatised. The horrific irony of this is that it happened four months after the Good Friday Agreement was signed, at a moment when hope was finally emerging across the island. I still remember where I was when I learned of the awful atrocity that had been committed. When I watched the news, we had a visitor from overseas staying with us. She turned to me and said, "I thought all this violence had ended." A horror and sadness filled the entire country when we saw what happened in Omagh. The then President, Mary McAleese, captured that pain but also the determination and hope emerging across the island when she spoke in Drogheda later in 1998. She reminded us that our duty is not only to remember victims but also to ensure that their memory guides us to a future where such horrors can never happen again. She also drew attention to the fact that we needed to be mature and open, and embrace the shared histories that brought us to where we are today. Those words remain as true now as they were then.

Part of that need for maturity, openness and embracing those shared histories is bringing this Bill to the Dáil and I commend the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan and the Minister of State, Deputy Collins, on that. The Bill augments the suite of measures already implemented, including the memorandum of understanding which the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, signed with the chairperson of Omagh bombing inquiry last April on the disclosure of Irish State materials and the data protection regulations signed by the Minister last month to enable the disclosure of sensitive personal data to the inquiry.

Despite multiple investigations over the years, no one has been held fully accountable for the Omagh bombing. There have been legitimate questions during this time, questions around intelligence handling, cross-Border co-operation and whether more could have been done to prevent this atrocity. As these questions persist, closure evades the families of those who lost their lives. The current Omagh bombing inquiry, established by the British Government in 2024, is explicitly tasked with determining whether the bombing could reasonably have been prevented by British state authorities. I have on many occasions discussed in this House the importance of the need to address the legacy of the enormous impact of Troubles-related violence and the legitimate needs and expectations of victims' families and survivors who have long searched for truth and accountability. We have a responsibility, whether it be moral, political or legal, to ensure that no delays arise from the Irish side with regard to what we can do to facilitate and support the inquiry into the Omagh bombing. This Bill gives us the mechanism to do just that.

By establishing a robust statutory framework to honour our commitment to assist the inquiry to fulfil its terms of reference while also protecting the essential interests of the State and the rights of witnesses involved, this Bill creates a bespoke legal mechanism allowing all evidence to be taken under oath here in Ireland before a High Court judge for transmission to the inquiry. Importantly this is not a brand new innovation; it builds on the model used in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 2019 but goes significantly further by extending participation to An Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces and departmental officials; by allowing family members, survivors and their legal representatives to be present during evidence taken before the High Court judge; and by allowing the chairperson of the Omagh bombing inquiry or their counsel to ask clarifying questions directly, thereby maximising the evidential value of every session while also protecting necessary safeguards, Irish national security, the rights of witnesses and the essential interests of the State. Participation by former Ministers is voluntary but the mechanism is now there. That is important because it is something that the inquiry

specifically asked for. This Bill is about delivering steps towards transparency, towards accountability and towards fulfilling our commitments in good faith.

In recent months we have had a lot of discussion on the issue of legacy with the publication of the Kenova report and the summary of the Operation Denton report. They have exposed deeply troubling patterns of collusion, failure to act on intelligence and decisions that cost innocent lives. The Kenova report showed British state collusion across the board. Operation Denton showed collusion with loyalist paramilitaries. These revelations underline a simple truth: legacy investigations can uncover new and vital information when there is co-operation, when there is courage and when victims' families are represented and respected as partners in the process. Both reports recognised the constructive role played by the Irish State, by our Departments and by An Garda Síochána in assisting cross-Border investigations. This Bill strengthens that tradition of co-operation, a co-operation which has been at the core of Ireland's engagement with the United Kingdom on how we address the issue of legacy. It clearly signals that we will not shy away from difficult truths, including truths that may touch on our own institutions. As An Taoiseach has said, "If you are sincere in wanting to build a real peace ... you cannot with any honesty deny so many people truth and accountability for the terrible crimes committed against their communities".

I cannot let this opportunity pass without again drawing attention to the fact that there is still an unmet need for openness and accountability relating to the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings, something called for by multiple resolutions in this House.

It is deeply regrettable that the full Denton report has not yet been published. Survivors and families have waited far too long. This House has on three occasions sought access for an independent, international judicial figure to all original British files relating to the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings, and I repeat that call today. Openness and accountability are not merely standards we should demonstrate ourselves; we should ensure we call for them from our partners as well.

I realise there are those who will say this Bill does not go far enough, who wanted extra powers of compulsion and who wanted a parallel inquiry here. I understand where those perspectives come from. This Bill does what is legally possible under our Constitution while still ensuring that substantial assistance - real, meaningful assistance - can be provided to the inquiry as it unfolds. The Government has made clear that it will keep this under constant review and that if additional steps are required either during or after the inquiry, they will be considered.

The Omagh families have waited more than a quarter of a century. They deserve answers, they deserve honesty and they deserve full co-operation from every public institution on this island. This Bill is a significant, carefully constructed and necessary step towards achieving that goal, honouring a commitment made in the programme for Government and honouring our commitment as a State under the joint framework on addressing Troubles legacy issues. Most importantly, it honours the memory of the 29 people who left their homes on a warm August day in 1998 and never returned. I am proud to support the Bill and commend it to the House.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** The Omagh bomb was the deadliest atrocity of the Troubles in the North of Ireland. It was second only to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, which killed more people in the seventies. On 15 August 1998 the Real IRA, a group opposed to the IRA

ceasefire and to the Good Friday Agreement, killed 31 people, including two unborn children, and injured 220 others. Confused telephone warnings were made which did not specify the location of the bomb, and the police mistakenly moved people towards its location. The Real IRA denied that the bomb was intended to kill civilians and apologised, but this has to be one of the most damning and reckless actions ever to have taken place during the Troubles. The victims included people of all ages and backgrounds. Catholics, Protestants, Spanish tourists, southerners, women and children, nationalists and unionists were all killed on that day.

In 2013 a legal case started to try to understand if it was possible for the security forces to have prevented the Omagh bomb. Five years ago, in 2021, Mr. Justice Mark Horner at the Belfast High Court stated that there was a "real prospect" that the 1998 Omagh bomb could have been prevented by the security forces. That is an earth-shattering sentence for a judge to say. The idea that a corporate decision was possibly made by the British security forces to allow the bomb to proceed is deeply shocking. Did the British security service prioritise the protecting of informants over the protecting of citizens? Was there a failure to connect intelligence? Were there political reasons for not stopping the bomb going ahead?

It is also incredible that the wheels of justice are so slow in grinding forward. It has been 28 years since that bomb ripped through Omagh. I remember that in 2021 Micheál Martin said he would consider if the South could facilitate information being disclosed and evidence being taken in the South of Ireland. That is five years ago. It has been five years since the Taoiseach made that statement, and it has taken that time to get the necessary legislation in front of us.

I welcome this Bill and the Minister's role in making it happen, but it has taken an age for it to happen. The Bill allows for oral testimony to be taken before the Irish courts for the purpose of the Omagh bombing inquiry. It allows a specific legal mechanism to facilitate the taking of sworn testimony from State bodies and former ministerial officeholders before a judge in the High Court. It is modelled on the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 2019, which allowed oral testimony to be heard for the purposes of Troubles-related inquests outside of the State. Family members and survivors and their legal representatives will be allowed to attend as regards the evidence given before a High Court judge, and the Bill will allow for counsel to the inquiry to ask questions to clarify evidence given by a witness to the judge.

There is a bigger truth we need to focus on as well, welcome and all as this Bill is. We need to focus on the bigger issue of the unresolved investigations where families are searching for truth and justice and have been refused them for many years. We have to look at how we can resolve this on this side of the Border. For years and years the British Government has refused to tell the truth, refused to give evidence, protected informants, protected collusion and refused to let information be known about what happened under its authority. However, we should not let that paralyse us in terms of the actions we need to take in this State. We need to create structures ourselves for all-Ireland investigations and public inquiries. Atrocities and wrongdoings do not recognise the Border; they need an all-Ireland approach. The Border is actually a competitive advantage for the perpetrators of these killings.

In 2023 Aontú introduced the Commission of Investigation (Collusion of British State Forces) Bill to provide for public inquiries into collusion between British state forces and other groups and individuals between 1968 and 1998. It passed First Stage in the Dáil. If the Bill were to pass all Stages, it would see an inquiry constituted in this State to investigate the British

state either where it committed murder or if it assisted in the committing of murder or prevented prosecution in certain serious offences in Ireland, North and South.

Interestingly, in that same year, 2023, the former Minister for justice Charlie Flanagan commented in relation to the Omagh bombing that the Republic should have a parallel inquiry into that atrocity and that the public need to be able to see vital evidence held in this State given over to allow for the truth to be known. Victims and survivors are entitled to know who did what and who was responsible for what. If this Aontú Bill were to pass, it would institute an investigation into what happened. We know that the British state forces had a role in so many killings and so much loss of life in Ireland, North and South, and many of those cases were covered up. They were covered up at the time but the British state distanced itself from that cover-up. The recent legacy Bill is the son and heir of that cover-up and, in fact, the British have their fingerprints all over that Bill. The new iteration of that Bill is extremely problematic as well because it still allows for the British Secretary of State for the North of Ireland to prevent the holding of investigations and inquiries. The Secretary of State for the North of Ireland has previous on this. He has fought the family of Sean Brown in all the courts of the land in Britain to prevent them from having a proper investigation into the murder of their father. It is incumbent on this Government that it does not allow the British to pass a law whereby a politician determines whether an investigation can be had. The Minister or I should not have an opportunity for an investigation concerning ourselves be determined by a politician. It should be determined by the Judiciary and the Judiciary alone.

There are many ways we can allow for evidence to be taken and heard abroad and documents that have already been used by the Police Ombudsman in the North of Ireland or many of the different investigative tools in the North of Ireland to be used in an investigation into the South in order that we can bring forward truth and justice to the families that need them. It is beyond time the Government started to institute that process in this jurisdiction. The Government has gone some way in doing that in this Bill to allow for information to be collected here for an inquiry in the North of Ireland, but the opposite can be done as well to make sure we get to the truth. That truth is needed. So many families have now waited 50 years since the killing of their loved ones while the immediate family - their mothers and fathers or even their brothers and sisters - have passed away, with the fight for justice in the hands of grandsons, granddaughters, nephews and nieces. This Government has an opportunity to draw a line under that and make sure there is access to justice. I urge the Government to take that opportunity.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** We supported the demand of the families of the victims of the 1998 Omagh bomb for a full cross-Border public inquiry.

Obviously, the Government has declined to establish a parallel, independent inquiry in this jurisdiction. In the absence of that, we need to see that we would have the fullest level of co-operation. Families have many grievances not only about the heinous act that occurred in 1998 but also in relation to the investigation. Many questions need to be answered about what information was known previously. I think that is only right.

On some level, we are dealing with what has been a failure in the past. We also know as we do this that there is an absolute demand from across this House that we ensure that our engagement with the British Government is about ensuring it stands up to the promises it has made about a decent legacy framework and a step back from the protection that has been

provided for British state forces, which is in no way acceptable to basically anyone on this island. I have yet to hear from somebody who is in support of it. That is an absolute requirement.

We have been through a period where the only positive I can say is that there is at some level a greater level of understanding of the dirty war that went on in the North. I would like to draw attention to two particular cases. We have just commemorated the anniversary of Dundalk bombing of 19 December 1975, in which 62-year-old Jack Rooney who worked for the council and 60-year-old tailor Hugh Watters were killed. That was a bomb attack at Kay's tavern. That is a family that has been abjectly failed by the State over many years. That happened on the same night that Trevor Brecknell, Patsy Donnelly and Michael Donnelly were killed by the same outfit, the Glenanne gang, in Donnelly's bar in Silverbridge. We know there have been significant inquiries and we know what has happened in relation to Operation Denton, but we need to see the full outworking of that inquiry and the full information. We know there are other families that have been failed. That is right through, whether we are talking about Castleblayney, Belturbet or the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. We need to make sure we provide a framework and delivery for those who have been abjectly failed.

I would also bring up the case of Seamus Ludlow, a forestry worker who was killed in Dundalk. This happened 50 years ago, on 2 May 1976. The family has recently met with the Garda. I put it to the Minister of State that there is a need for real engagement on this case. We know that the Glenanne gang was a UVF gang which obviously had cross membership of British state forces and a number of other engagements. What we are talking about here is a gang that literally was members of the British Army who killed Seamus Ludlow, a man who was not involved in anything. Not only do we talk about the failure of Governments at the time - particularly Liam Cosgrave's Government - but we have had families who did not get the investigation that was required. We have had families to whom disinformation was provided at times even by gardaí. We have had families at each other's necks. There has been further information in relation to this particular case. The families were quite happy that, as I say, an investigation was ongoing. They engaged recently, and were told that despite the fact that there are witnesses and new information, this case is not going anywhere. I ask the Minister of State to bring it to the senior Minister from the point of view that I think we need to make sure this State ensures no stone is left unturned.

**Deputy Carol Nolan:** I welcome this Bill. It is certainly a long and overdue step that will allow Irish State bodies, serving and former members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces, civil servants and even former Ministers to give oral evidence before a High Court judge to assist the Omagh bombing inquiry. However, I want to be clear that this legislation arrives almost 28 years after the horror of August 1998 when 29 people, including a woman who was nine months pregnant and her unborn twins, were murdered in Omagh. For nearly three decades successive Governments made up of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and the Green Party have failed those families, with delay after delay, broken promises and a shocking lack of political urgency. Even after the UK inquiry was established in February 2024 and Ireland gave its commitment in July 2024, it has taken until 2026 to bring forward this Bill.

I want to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to my colleague and friend, Deputy Mattie McGrath, who is very vocal on this issue. Since 2013, Mattie has stood shoulder to shoulder with the Omagh families. He organised a delegation from the Omagh victims support

group to brief Members of the Oireachtas on 1 May 2013. Just days later, on 8 May, he stood in this House during Leaders' Questions and called directly on the Taoiseach for a cross-Border public inquiry. He spoke of the courage of Michael Gallagher, who lost his 21-year-old son Aiden, and of all the families who have fought so bravely for truth and justice. Deputy McGrath has never wavered in that support and today the House should acknowledge his work on behalf of the victims.

Justice delayed is justice denied. The families of Omagh have waited long enough. I support the passage of this Bill but I urge the Minister to ensure it is implemented without any further delays or foot dragging.

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Niall Collins):** I thank the Deputies for their productive engagement during today's debate. I will convey the many assurances of support for the passing of this Bill to the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan. My belief and that of the Government is that we must do all we can to assist the inquiry so that its investigation into the fundamental question of whether the bombing could reasonably have been prevented is as comprehensive as possible. Actions speak louder than words, and the Government has demonstrated its commitment through the concrete measures the Minister has already taken. The measures relating to the disclosure of materials are working well, with a significant quantity of materials having been disclosed to the inquiry and further disclosure continuing on a rolling basis. The bona fides of the Minister's Department and An Garda Síochána have been acknowledged publicly by the inquiry, most recently at its hearing last week, and that is welcome.

There is of course much more to be done. As the inquiry made clear, the volume of potentially relevant materials held by An Garda Síochána and other State bodies should not be underestimated. It is important that the process is conducted in a rigorous manner rather than being rushed. The fixing by the inquiry of a date for its first evidential hearings to start in September is welcome. It was disappointing that the original date set for this month was postponed, particularly for the families and the survivors. I note that the inquiry, at its hearing last week, identified a number of contributing factors, including the scale of disclosure by our authorities, as making the original date unviable. The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and the Garda Commissioner have dedicated resources in place to ensure timely handling of all requests from the inquiry.

The Bill will complement the measures already in place by enabling the taking of sworn testimony for the purposes of the inquiry. Some may query why it is necessary to provide for a bespoke mechanism whereby the evidence will be taken before our courts and not before the inquiry in the UK. The reality is that there is an undeniable tension between the Government's desire to assist an inquiry established under the law of another sovereign jurisdiction and the duty of the Government to work within the laws of Ireland and to safeguard the essential interests of the State and the rights of citizens.

*6 o'clock*

The Minister has sought to go as far as possible, using the 2019 statutory mechanism as a template but adding to it in some notable respects, not least in facilitating the families and survivors to be present in the High Court to hear any evidence at first hand. The Government

is satisfied that this bespoke approach is legally robust and will maximise the evidential opportunities available to the inquiry.

The Bill is focused on the terrible atrocity that was the Omagh bombing but there were many others committed over the course of the Troubles. Many were the subject of the Kenova report, which we debated in this House last month. Reaching agreement on the joint framework to address the legacy of the Troubles last autumn was a major step towards providing routes to truth and accountability for those many other families and survivors. The Government is committed to giving effect to its commitments under the framework. The Garda legacy liaison unit has already been established to act as a single point of contact for victims in relation to unresolved incidents in this jurisdiction.

The Government has also committed to putting in place the arrangements necessary to facilitate the fullest possible co-operation with the UK legacy commission, once it is established. The UK Government has made a reciprocal commitment in respect of legacy investigations and inquiries in this jurisdiction.

Legislation is required in both jurisdictions. The progress on the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill in the UK Parliament is to be welcomed. While our legislation can only be published and proceed through the Houses once the UK Bill is in place, the Minister hopes to be in a position to publish his proposals before the summer and to bring them before the Houses as quickly as possible once the UK Bill is law.

Deputy Alan Kelly asked whether the disclosure process by the Irish State was to blame for the six-month delay to the inquiry. I will put on record that the decision by the inquiry last December to postpone its March evidential hearing was disappointing, particularly for survivors and for victims' families. At its procedural hearing on 19 March, the inquiry announced that the postponed hearings will now begin on 21 September. The announcement of a date for the rescheduled hearing is welcome. The inquiry referred to the disclosure of Irish State materials as being only one of several reasons the March hearings were postponed and did not seek to assign blame to anyone, least of all the Government of Ireland and our authorities. I refer Deputy Kelly to the published transcript of the inquiry's hearing of last Thursday, 19 March, where counsel to the inquiry felt the need to correct inaccurate media reporting on this matter. He said:

can we be clear, anyone who has based their reporting of the proceedings ... on the basis that ... [the inquiry] suggested that the government of Ireland was the sole cause for the need for the postponement, anyone who has reported on the basis ... that the government of Ireland was being blamed, has made a serious error and must correct it.

Returning to the Bill, I have listened to the contributions here today since taking over from the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, here in the Chamber. I will brief him on those contributions. He looks forward to working with Deputies to ensure this Bill makes its passage through this House and the other House as soon as possible. We thank the Deputies for their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

**International Co-operation (Omagh Bombing Inquiry) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee**

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Niall Collins):** I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration pursuant to Standing Orders 103(2)(b) and 188(1).

Question put and agreed to.

*Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 6.07 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 6.11 p.m.*

*Sitting suspended at 6.07 p.m. and resumed at 6.11 p.m.*

**Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil**

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I call on the Government Whip, the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, to make a statement.

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

Notwithstanding today's Order of Business, that the financial motion by the Minister for Finance, Financial Resolution No. 2, shall be taken on the conclusion of the Sinn Féin Private Member's Business. It shall be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

The question on the motion shall dispose of any amendments not disposed tabled to that motion.

The order of speaking and allocation of time shall be as follows:

- Opening speech by a Minister or Minister of State - 10 minutes;
- Speeches by representatives of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group and Independent Technical Group - 7.5 minutes per party or group;
- Speeches by other Members - 7.5 minutes; and
- A speech in response by the Minister - 5 minutes.

Members may share time and any division demanded shall be taken immediately;

and that the arrangements for the motion for the Revised Estimate on 25 March 2026 shall include Vote 33.

Oral parliamentary questions from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will be removed from this evening's Order of Business and will be rescheduled.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Is that agreed?

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** It is not agreed. The Government has had weeks now to respond to this crisis. There has been a lack of communication to the Opposition. We have been frantically trying to get clarification on votes to allow us to prepare amendments. This is no way to do business and we strongly object to the way this has been handled today. We will push a vote on this matter.

**Deputy Ged Nash:** I want to put on record my serious concerns about the way in which business has been conducted today. At the end of the Order of Business and the Chief Whip's short contribution earlier today, she mentioned that there may be other resolutions this evening. We were in the dark about this. We want to be a constructive and responsible Opposition. There are people watching in who are concerned about their everyday livelihoods and the challenges they face, and now this is being sprung on us with a limited amount of time to prepare. This is no way to do business. We expressed our concerns about that earlier today through our own Whip, Deputy Duncan Smith. This is just a repeat of that. It is completely unacceptable. There is a better way to do business and this is not it.

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** I agree with the points that were made. We need proper notice to be able to do our jobs.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I understand the Deputies' concerns about the way business is being conducted, but I flagged on the Order of Business that I would potentially be coming back in this evening. Notwithstanding the importance of what the Government is doing, Financial Resolution No. 2 means hauliers, who are at the pin of the collar at the moment, will see an increase from 7.5 cent per litre to 12 cent per litre, backdated to 1 January. If the Deputies believe they cannot support this because I was a little bit late bringing this motion forward----

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**Deputy Ged Nash:** That is not the point.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** It is extremely important and the order stands.

**Deputy David Cullinane:** That is disingenuous.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** It is so important that the Government did not even-----

**Deputy Ged Nash:** It has been trailed through the media for days that hauliers are going to get a rebate. That is fine. We will consider that. It does not mean anybody opposes it. Everybody accepts that hauliers require support. That is not the point. The Government knew earlier today that this was going to happen. It could have provided the Opposition with the information in a constructive fashion, and we could have worked on a collegial basis to get this business done. People are watching. They are worried about their livelihoods and businesses. Why can we not do this properly? It is sharp practice.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Minister of State has moved the proposal.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** The Minister of State should not misrepresent what we said. The way this has been handled today is completely disrespectful to the Opposition. We had no chance to prepare amendments. We are frantically trying to get information from the secretariat and there is a vacuum. We are calling a vote in protest at the way the Government handled this today, considering it took it weeks to get to this point. It also briefed all the journalists in recent days. It knew what it was doing. It just did not have this organised today. It is not an acceptable way to do business.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I did not brief anyone today. I did not brief any journalists. I have not had time to bless myself.

Amendment put:

| The Dáil divided: Tá, 84; Níl, 66; Staon, 0. |                         |       |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Tá                                           | Níl                     | Staon |
| Ardagh, Catherine.                           | Ahern, Ciarán.          |       |
| Boland, Grace.                               | Bacik, Ivana.           |       |
| Brabazon, Tom.                               | Bennett, Cathy.         |       |
| Brennan, Brian.                              | Boyd Barrett, Richard.  |       |
| Brennan, Shay.                               | Brady, John.            |       |
| Brophy, Colm.                                | Buckley, Pat.           |       |
| Browne, James.                               | Byrne, Joanna.          |       |
| Burke, Colm.                                 | Carthy, Matt.           |       |
| Burke, Peter.                                | Clarke, Sorca.          |       |
| Butler, Mary.                                | Collins, Michael.       |       |
| Buttimer, Jerry.                             | Conway-Walsh, Rose.     |       |
| Byrne, Malcolm.                              | Coppinger, Ruth.        |       |
| Byrne, Thomas.                               | Cronin, Réada.          |       |
| Cahill, Michael.                             | Cullinane, David.       |       |
| Callaghan, Catherine.                        | Cummins, Jen.           |       |
| Calleary, Dara.                              | Daly, Pa.               |       |
| Canney, Seán.                                | Devine, Máire.          |       |
| Carrigy, Micheál.                            | Doherty, Pearse.        |       |
| Chambers, Jack.                              | Donnelly, Paul.         |       |
| Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.                        | Farrelly, Aidan.        |       |
| Clendennen, John.                            | Farrell, Mairéad.       |       |
| Collins, Niall.                              | Gannon, Gary.           |       |
| Connolly, John.                              | Gogarty, Paul Nicholas. |       |
| Cooney, Joe.                                 | Gould, Thomas.          |       |
| Crowe, Cathal.                               | Graves, Ann.            |       |
| Cummins, John.                               | Guirke, Johnny.         |       |
| Daly, Martin.                                | Hayes, Eoin.            |       |
| Dempsey, Aisling.                            | Hearne, Rory.           |       |
| Devlin, Cormac.                              | Kelly, Alan.            |       |
| Dillon, Alan.                                | Kenny, Eoghan.          |       |
| Dolan, Albert.                               | Kenny, Martin.          |       |

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Dooley, Timmy.              | Kerrane, Claire.          |  |
| Feighan, Frankie.           | Lawless, Paul.            |  |
| Foley, Norma.               | Lawlor, George.           |  |
| Gallagher, Pat the Cope.    | Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.   |  |
| Geoghegan, James.           | McGettigan, Donna.        |  |
| Grealish, Noel.             | McGuinness, Conor D.      |  |
| Harkin, Marian.             | Mitchell, Denise.         |  |
| Harris, Simon.              | Mythen, Johnny.           |  |
| Healy-Rae, Danny.           | Nash, Ged.                |  |
| Healy-Rae, Michael.         | Newsome Drennan, Natasha. |  |
| Heneghan, Barry.            | Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.  |  |
| Heydon, Martin.             | Nolan, Carol.             |  |
| Higgins, Emer.              | O'Callaghan, Cian.        |  |
| Keogh, Keira.               | O'Donoghue, Robert.       |  |
| Lahart, John.               | O'Flynn, Ken.             |  |
| Lowry, Michael.             | O'Gorman, Roderic.        |  |
| Martin, Micheál.            | 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.             |  |
| McGuinness, John.           | Quinlivan, Maurice.       |  |
| Moran, Kevin Boxer.         | Rice, Pádraig.            |  |
| Moynihan, Aindrias.         | Sheehan, Conor.           |  |
| Moynihan, Michael.          | Sherlock, Marie.          |  |
| Moynihan, Shane.            | Smith, Duncan.            |  |
| Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer. | Stanley, Brian.           |  |
| Murphy, Michael.            | Tóibín, Peadar.           |  |
| Naughton, Hildegard.        | Ward, Charles.            |  |
| Neville, Joe.               | Ward, Mark.               |  |
| O'Callaghan, Jim.           | Whitmore, Jennifer.       |  |
| O'Connell, Maeve.           |                           |  |
| O'Connor, James.            |                           |  |
| O'Dea, Willie.              |                           |  |
| O'Donnell, Kieran.          |                           |  |
| O'Donovan, Patrick.         |                           |  |
| O'Meara, Ryan.              |                           |  |
| O'Shea, John Paul.          |                           |  |
| O'Sullivan, Christopher.    |                           |  |
| Ó Cearúil, Naoise.          |                           |  |
| Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.          |                           |  |
| Ó Muirí, Naoise.            |                           |  |
| Richmond, Neale.            |                           |  |
| Scanlon, Eamon.             |                           |  |

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| Smyth, Niamh.    |  |  |
| Timmins, Edward. |  |  |
| Toole, Gillian.  |  |  |
| Troy, Robert.    |  |  |
| Ward, Barry.     |  |  |

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Ged Nash.

### Financial Resolution No.1: Mineral Oil Tax

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Simon Harris):** I move:

(1) THAT for the purposes of the tax charged by virtue of section 95 of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999), that Act be amended, with effect as on and from 25 March 2026, by the substitution of the following for Schedule 2 to that Act (as amended by section 52 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2023 (No. 39 of 2023)):

#### "SCHEDULE 2

#### RATES OF MINERAL OIL TAX

|                   |         | Light Oil:        |                      |                         |                                      |                                          |          | Heavy Oil:      |                      | Liquefied Petroleum Gas:      |              |
|-------------------|---------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| With effect as on | Petrol  | Aviation gasoline | Used as a propellant | Used for air navigation | Used for private pleasure navigation | Kerosene used other than as a propellant | Fuel oil | Other heavy oil | Used as a propellant | Other liquefied petroleum gas | Vehicle gas: |
| 10 March 2022     | €474.11 | €474.11           | €413.51              | €413.51                 | €413.51                              | €84.84                                   | €118.01  | €120.55         | €118.27              | €54.68                        | €9.36        |
| 1 April 2022      | €465.98 | €465.98           | €405.38              | €405.38                 | €405.38                              | €84.84                                   | €118.01  | €120.55         | €118.27              | €54.68                        | €9.36        |
| 1 May 2022        | €465.98 | €465.98           | €405.38              | €405.38                 | €405.38                              | €103.83                                  | €141.12  | €111.14         | €130.52              | €66.93                        | €9.36        |
| 12 October 2022   | €483.34 | €483.34           | €425.45              | €425.45                 | €425.45                              | €103.83                                  | €141.12  | €111.14         | €130.52              | €66.93                        | €9.36        |
| 1 May 2023        | €483.34 | €483.34           | €425.45              | €425.45                 | €425.45                              | €122.83                                  | €164.23  | €131.47         | €142.76              | €79.17                        | €9.36        |

|                  |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |        |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1 June 2023      | €532.12 | €532.12 | €466.10 | €466.10 | €466.10 | €122.83 | €164.23 | €140.28 | €142.76 | €79.17  | €9.36  |
| 1 September 2023 | €589.03 | €589.03 | €506.75 | €506.75 | €506.75 | €122.83 | €164.23 | €149.09 | €142.76 | €79.17  | €9.36  |
| 11 October 2023  | €606.39 | €606.39 | €526.83 | €526.83 | €526.83 | €122.83 | €164.23 | €149.09 | €142.76 | €79.17  | €9.36  |
| 1 April 2024     | €638.91 | €638.91 | €551.22 | €551.22 | €551.22 | €122.83 | €164.23 | €163.96 | €142.76 | €79.17  | €9.36  |
| 1 May 2024       | €638.91 | €638.91 | €551.22 | €551.22 | €551.22 | €141.82 | €187.34 | €184.30 | €155.01 | €91.42  | €10.13 |
| 1 August 2024    | €671.43 | €671.43 | €575.61 | €575.61 | €575.61 | €141.82 | €187.34 | €199.17 | €155.01 | €91.42  | €10.13 |
| 9 October 2024   | €688.78 | €688.78 | €595.68 | €595.68 | €595.68 | €141.82 | €187.34 | €199.17 | €155.01 | €91.42  | €10.13 |
| 1 May 2025       | €688.78 | €688.78 | €595.68 | €595.68 | €595.68 | €160.81 | €210.45 | €219.50 | €167.25 | €103.66 | €11.48 |
| 8 October 2025   | €706.14 | €706.14 | €615.76 | €615.76 | €615.76 | €160.81 | €210.45 | €219.50 | €167.25 | €103.66 | €11.48 |
| 25 March 2026    | €584.18 | €584.18 | €453.15 | €453.15 | €453.15 | €160.81 | €210.45 | €193.06 | €167.25 | €103.66 | €11.48 |
| 1 May 2026       | €584.18 | €584.18 | €453.15 | €453.15 | €453.15 | €179.81 | €233.57 | €213.39 | €179.49 | €115.90 | €12.84 |
| 1 June 2026      | €706.14 | €706.14 | €615.76 | €615.76 | €615.76 | €179.81 | €233.57 | €239.83 | €179.49 | €115.90 | €12.84 |
| 14 October 2026  | €723.49 | €723.49 | €635.83 | €635.83 | €635.83 | €179.81 | €233.57 | €239.83 | €179.49 | €115.90 | €12.84 |
| 1 May 2027       | €723.49 | €723.49 | €635.83 | €635.83 | €635.83 | €198.80 | €256.68 | €260.16 | €191.74 | €128.15 | €14.20 |
| 13 October 2027  | €740.85 | €740.85 | €655.90 | €655.90 | €655.90 | €198.80 | €256.68 | €260.16 | €191.74 | €128.15 | €14.20 |
| 1 May 2028       | €740.85 | €740.85 | €655.90 | €655.90 | €655.90 | €217.80 | €279.79 | €280.49 | €203.98 | €140.39 | €15.56 |
| 11 October 2028  | €758.21 | €758.21 | €675.98 | €675.98 | €675.98 | €217.80 | €279.79 | €280.49 | €203.98 | €140.39 | €15.56 |
| 1 May 2029       | €758.21 | €758.21 | €675.98 | €675.98 | €675.98 | €236.79 | €302.90 | €300.83 | €216.23 | €152.64 | €16.91 |
| 10 October 2029  | €773.25 | €773.25 | €693.38 | €693.38 | €693.38 | €236.79 | €302.90 | €300.83 | €216.23 | €152.64 | €16.91 |

|               |             |             |         |         |         |         |             |             |         |         |            |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|---------|---------|------------|
| 1 May<br>2030 | €773.<br>25 | €773.2<br>5 | €693.38 | €693.38 | €693.38 | €253.25 | €322.<br>93 | €318.<br>45 | €226.84 | €163.25 | €18.0<br>9 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|---------|---------|------------|

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rates per 1,000 litres

Rates per 1,000 litres

and from:

Rate per megawatt hour at gross calorific value

".

(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).

This is the resolution for the temporary reductions in mineral oil tax. This first financial resolution provides for reductions in the rates of mineral oil tax applying to petrol, auto diesel and to marked-gas oil. These reductions will take effect from midnight tonight until 31 May 2026.

The rate of mineral oil tax will be reduced on a VAT inclusive basis by 15 cent per litre for petrol, 20 cent per litre for auto diesel and 3 cent per litre for marked-gas oil. To further ease the financial impact of the significant energy price shock arising from the ongoing conflict in the Gulf region and Middle East region, the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, will also reduce the NORA levy from 2 cent per litre to a nominal amount. That will require primary legislation which will be forthcoming this week. When the excise reductions in petrol and diesel are combined with the changes to the NORA levy, that means a 22 cent reduction in a litre of diesel and a 17 cent reduction in a litre of petrol.

These are concrete actions to help and support families, working people and business with the real and rising cost of fuel and energy. We know the pressure people are feeling right now. People are genuinely worried about the impact this conflict is having on their energy costs and what is facing them and their families in the weeks and months ahead.

There will be a second resolution, which we will discuss later in the House, on the diesel rebate scheme providing practical support to hauliers and coach operators. The estimate cost to the Exchequer of the two resolutions relating to the Department of Finance is approximately €160 million. When coupled with the NORA levy proposal and the fuel allowance expansion that brings the total Government intervention today to €250 million.

The Government is conscious of the increased financial pressure on households and businesses arising from this ongoing conflict. These measures are an effort in the here and now to help reduce fuel prices and to help in a practical way people at the pump and to endeavour to support key sectors of the Irish economy. Solid budgetary management in recent years means we now have the capacity to respond in a timely and targeted way to help with this energy price shock. That point should not be lost on any of us. If we look at countries endeavouring to deal with this global economic challenge, and deal with it from a position of

deficit, we see how the market responds to those countries. We have an ability to respond because of the sensible economic decisions this Government and successive governments have taken in recent years and the resilience and hard work of the Irish people.

These measures will be in place for a defined period of time. I want to be very clear why that is. We have to remain nimble, agile and flexible in relation to any set of measures. It is entirely possible that what seems like the right economic medicine today may not be the prescription required in the weeks and months ahead.

Therefore the Government - and let our position not be misrepresented - reserves the option to adjust our approach as circumstances evolve to revise, amend, edit and start or stop measures that may be required in the time ahead. This approach is not unique to Ireland. It is very much in line with the European Council conclusions from Brussels last week and also with the response of other EU member states. I think I referenced in the House last week the decision taken by the Italian government to bring in measures for 20 days. Every government and set of people are trying to grapple with a fast-evolving situation both from a humanitarian point of view but, for the purpose of this debate, from an economic point of view as well.

These measures will provide mitigation for businesses and households against the recent fuel price increases. It is real money and a real reduction in taxes on petrol, diesel and green diesel. These excise reductions strike the balance between mitigating costs to consumers while managing the tax base and also respecting the law under the Energy Tax Directive.

We have to navigate this period of uncertainty to the best of our ability. To put it bluntly, nobody knows what the situation will be in a month from now. We have to remain flexible in our response. The economic impact will depend on the depth and duration of supply disruption. The Government will help to share the burden of the energy price shock but no government in the world can fully absorb the impact. That is why there is also benefit in continuing to work at European level. I will attend a meeting of the Eurogroup on Friday and the Taoiseach attended a meeting of the European Council last week because we have seen in the past where conflicts have become elongated. Europe has often considered how it can move together and various policy responses and levers we can consider as a collective.

This conflict also is a sharp reminder that we must accelerate our transition towards energy independence. While much of the discussion is quite rightly on what we can do to help people in the here and now, and that is one of the reasons we are bringing forward these measures tonight to take effect from midnight, we also have to remind ourselves that as long as we are reliant on fossil fuels from far-flung parts of the world, there is a real vulnerability from an economic security point of view as well. We have to see what we can do at a European level and an Irish level to accelerate that transition in terms of our fuel and energy supply. I think that is a view shared across this House and I welcome suggestions and proposals in relation to that.

Specifically on this resolution, we saw prices rise quickly enough on the forecourts when the war in Iran broke out. It is very important that we see these cuts passed on to the consumer very quickly as well. The Government will be monitoring this extremely closely. In the past the CCPC has done useful work. At the start of the brutal illegal Russian aggression and war on Ukraine the CCPC monitored the passing on of the impact.

I hear what the industry says. I accept the logic that for some small rural stations that it might take a little bit longer but for the vast majority, we expect to see very quick passing on of this. People were quick enough to put it up. They need to be quick enough now to show the benefit of that. The Government reserves the right to consider any further action - legislative or otherwise - that may be required should this not be the case. More broadly, I indicate again tonight the Government's intention to strengthen further the powers of the CCPC and to work on a collaborative basis across this House with the view of doing that as well.

I have heard much commentary in relation to the Government's proposals today from the Opposition. Some are constructive and some are less so. I look forward to engaging constructively in the time ahead because we all must approach this challenge with a degree of humility. We have to make sure we keep a degree of our economic powder dry because the economic situation that our country will face in the winter is very different to an economic situation that our country could face this summer if this conflict goes on for a longer period of time. We all hope it does not. We must all work for de-escalation. The set of measures we may need to consider together will indeed be different too. I am happy and eager to engage constructively with the Opposition. I ask people to acknowledge that we are taking efforts today - a €250 million package - to try to help people in the here and now.

I hope in Northern Ireland that the Executive takes the measures too that are required. I note with significant concern the comment from the Alliance MP, Siorcha Eastwood, today in relation to the delays and the lack of urgency on the part of the Sinn Féin economy and finance Ministers in relation to measures to help people with heating costs. I hope that can be resolved as well. I hope Sinn Féin's concern in relation to energy costs are not partisan concerns and do not stop at the Border.

We will work constructively with anybody in this House on ideas and proposals. Today, we are bringing forward a balanced package of measures to help people at risk of fuel poverty and people who are struggling with the home heating oil by extending the fuel allowance season for a further four weeks, helping almost 500,000 households most in need. Many of them are carers, pensioners and people with a disability but also helping people who are getting in the car tomorrow and this week and driving to work or college and trying to go about their business and trying to help somewhat while being honest that no government can absorb all of it.

I propose this resolution tonight. I reiterate our message to industry - let us play fair and let us see that passed on quickly. The Government will monitor this closely. I say to this House and the people of this country in all honesty that we have to be nimble. We may well need to return to this conversation but tonight is a start in terms of an intervention that we believe is the balanced, proportionate and measured response that will make a real difference in the here and now.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** I move amendment No. 1:

In Schedule 2, inserted by paragraph (1), by the substitution of the following for the rows dated 25 March 2026 and 1 May 2026:

"

|      |        |        |        |        |        |      |        |        |        |        |       |
|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 25   | €496.1 | €584.1 | €405.7 | €453.1 | €453.1 | €0.0 | €210.4 | €134.5 | €167.2 | €103.6 | €11.4 |
| Marc | 4      | 8      | 6      | 5      | 5      | 0    | 5      | 0      | 5      | 6      | 8     |

| h<br>2026     |             |             |             |             |             |           |             |             |             |             |            |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 1 May<br>2026 | €496.1<br>4 | €584.1<br>8 | €405.7<br>6 | €453.1<br>5 | €453.1<br>5 | €0.0<br>0 | €210.4<br>5 | €134.5<br>0 | €167.2<br>5 | €103.6<br>6 | €11.4<br>8 |

".

Tá teaghlaigh i gcrúachas fud fad an Stáit. I ndiaidh ceithre seachtaine den Rialtas ag suí ar a lámha agus na praghsanna ag dul in airde agus in airde gach aon lá, agus an phian agus an deacracht atá seo ag cur ar theaghlaigh ar fud an Stáit, tháinig an Rialtas chun na Dála anocht i ndiaidh brú ollmhór ó Shinn Féin. Tháinig an Rialtas chun tosaigh le moladh nach dtéann fada go leor. Níos measa ná sin, ní dhéanann an Rialtas aon rud ar chor ar bith ó thaobh tithe atá ag brath ar ola le tithe a théamh agus níor ghearr sé an cháin air sin ar chor ar bith. Tá leasú ag Sinn Féin os comhair na Dála anocht. Baineann sé an cháin d'ola do thithe a théamh agus laghdaíonn sé an méid is mó is féidir ó thaobh cháin ar dhíosal agus an méid céanna ar pheitreal.

I move the amendment because this is an emergency for households across the State, not in theory or on spreadsheets, but in kitchens, sitting rooms and homes where people are counting litres of oil and counting every euro just to get through the week. This Government simply does not get it because if it did and really got it, we would not have to wait four weeks of delay. We would not have to see four weeks of dithering while prices spiralled and families were hammered and four weeks when the Government stood back and did nothing. After all of that, the Minister has the cheek to come in here with a package of half-measures and expect the people to be grateful. It is too little too late. Petrol and diesel prices have soared. Workers depending on their cars to get to work, to bring children to school and to care for their loved ones needed the maximum reductions at the pumps tonight. The Government had it within its power to deliver it but it refused. It made a conscious decision to hold back and shortchange people.

When it comes to home heating oil, the Government's failure is even more stark. The cost of a fill has nearly doubled in a matter of weeks. People are not turning the heating down. They are turning the heating off. They are rationing what little they have left. One person who I met at the weekend told me that they have less than 100 litres in their tank. They are afraid to turn on the heat. They cannot afford the €1,700 to refill. Another told me that they are wearing more clothes inside than they would wear outside just to stay warm. That is the reality that the Minister and his colleagues in Government have created. What does the Government offer them tonight? Two cent per litre. That is not support; that is an insult.

The vast majority who rely on home heating oil do not qualify for the fuel allowance. Carers who are already stretched to breaking point are excluded. People with disabilities - many of them who are not entitled to oil allowance - are simply left behind. These are people who cannot cut back any further because there is nothing left to cut. What is the Minister's answer? A pathetic token gesture-----

**Deputy Simon Harris:** What is the Deputy's answer then?

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** -----that does not even come close to what is needed. And worse, the Government is now preparing to increase carbon tax on home heating oil in the space of

four weeks while clawing back with one hand what it pretends to give with the other hand. Do not come in here and try to pretend that this is the Government simply helping the people because it is not. It is just going through the motions while more and more people suffer.

Let us be absolutely clear. The Minister can shake his head all he wants. It is not an issue of resources. There is a multi-billion euro budget surplus. The Government is taking in millions of euro as a result of the additional tax revenue from fuel prices that are soaring. The money is there. Do you know what is not there? It is political will from this Government. That is what is missing - to stand up for ordinary workers and families. When it comes to the crunch - and we all know this on this side of the House - Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael always make the same choices. Hoard the surplus, protect the banks and leave ordinary people to fend for themselves.

Tonight, we are putting forward an alternative. We are putting forward a different choice because Sinn Féin actually listens to people. It listens to the concerns that people have been telling us over the past four weeks.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** Not in the North.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** Our amendment will deliver the maximum reduction on diesel, the same reduction on petrol and will remove completely excise duty for home heating oil - an oil that has nearly doubled in the space of four weeks and the Government plans to increase the tax on it in a couple of weeks' time. Real measures, immediate relief and action that matches the scale of this crisis because people cannot wait. They cannot take another hit. They should not be abandoned like this. Is the Government going to continue to insult people with half-measures or is it going to finally act and deliver the support that they need? We on this side, in Sinn Féin, are going to stand with workers, carers, families, those with disabilities and small businesses tonight. We are not going back down. People deserve far better.

I say to Government TDs and the Independent TDs who support the Government that they are going to have a choice within an hour. Are they going to stand up? Are they going to stand with Ministers? Are they are going to hide behind Deputy Simon Harris or are they going to do the right thing and stand up for workers, carers and small businesses, reduce the excise to the maximum amount and remove excise duty from home heating oil at this time of crisis?

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Simon Harris:** Do your job in the North.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please, Tánaiste.

**Deputy Ged Nash:** The people of Ireland have waited for an intervention from the Government to deal with this energy spike for weeks now. To say that today's intervention - this package of measures - is underwhelming is an understatement. In fact, it is a classic understatement. I said earlier today that these proposals are timid and anaemic. I stand over that. The evidence that is presented to us here this evening is the very definition of half-measures when people expected the Government based on its previous track record to go the

whole hog and to go the full way. There is not any real comprehension at the Government level of the day-to-day problems that people across this country are experiencing in their daily lives.

Quite frankly, this was evident in last year's insipid budget where choices were made by this Government. I always make the point that if you want to understand my politics and my philosophy, you should look at my budget and look at what my priorities are. It is worth reflecting on that. We know from last year's budget that burger barons and big builders were favoured over the interests of working people. Why do I say that? It is because an expected indexation of PAYE tax rates and bands for workers did not come. Instead workers now pay for a VAT cut for the hospitality sector that will be introduced on 1 July in the teeth of an energy crisis where people across this country are really suffering. The net effect is that after the budget, people who would have hoped to experience a pay increase have seen that pay increase taken away from them because of the absence of indexation and given to the Revenue Commissioners. People are in an even less favourable position in 2026 than they were in 2025 to absorb any energy spike that may be encountered and - my word - people are encountering it today and over the past few weeks.

It was less than two years ago that the Government decided to take the bazooka out and spend billions of euro supporting untargeted, unwarranted and economically illiterate propositions to buy its way to election success. That is what it did. What is the difference between then and now? The difference is that we are three and a half years away from an election. That is the difference. I am intrigued by the justification for some of these measures. I accept that some of them are targeted in the way we would like, for example, the fuel allowance. This is a very good idea and I am glad the Government accepted the Labour Party's argument. We were being briefed that we would have a two-week extension to the fuel allowance. Now it is a four-week extension and that needs to be kept under review. For the record, the Labour Party is happy to support the cut in excise that has been proposed. This is necessary. As the Tánaiste said at the outset, it is important that the value of this is seen at the pumps quick smart. There can be no justification for that not happening. We need to see a price below the €2 psychological threshold reached in the coming days. That is a psychological figure. It is not only psychological but very meaningful for people and we need to see it reached and maintained as prices come down.

We also support the intervention on the fuel allowance but outside of the excise cut, there is very little here for working people. The Government and the famed energy task force have proposed nothing to deal with the hundreds of thousands of people who are in long-term energy arrears. They literally cannot sleep at night because they cannot pay their electricity bills and are focusing on that instead of other things they need to do for their families. We need to look again at the prospect of reducing the VAT rate on home heating oil from 13.5% to 9%. I have seen the strained arguments in replies to parliamentary questions recently as to why that cannot happen. Earlier, the Tánaiste mentioned the European Council initiative at the weekend telling EU member state governments to reduce taxes and levies on energy prices to help people and businesses through. That is one way of doing that. We know about the lower VAT rate of 9% on gas and electricity. Further consideration needs to be given at EU level to reducing the VAT rate on home heating oil.

Why can we not have a tax credit for working people to assist with energy costs? This is something proposed by the Labour Party in successive alternative budgets and by colleagues

in the Social Democrats as well. This would be a smart way of targeting several hundred euro each year at working families who do not qualify for the working family payment and need that support.

The volatility we are experiencing in the world at the moment is not going to go away. As the Tánaiste said, this is a very unpredictable set of circumstances. My word, we are performing poorly when it comes to energy security. We got a warning in 2022 after Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. We saw the spike in energy prices, the impact of this on residents and businesses, the strain it put on the resources we have and what we needed to do as an Oireachtas to target supports to people who needed them most. We cannot continue to do that. How many warnings do we need? We need that pivot to decarbonisation and energy security. That means focusing more on offshore and onshore wind energy, making that happen and realising the moonshot moment famously mentioned a number of years ago by former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar. We have not reached that moonshot moment. We need to. We need to focus on that and we need to deliver energy security and independence. That is the way to deliver cheaper fuel for the people of Ireland and make sure we are less reliant on the Irans and Russias of this world.

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** The temporary reduction in excise duty will offer some overdue relief at the pumps, and the extension of the fuel allowance will give some respite to pensioners and people receiving social welfare, but it will not be enough. A figure of €152 misses the mark completely. What the Government is doing here is leaving hundreds of thousands of low-income workers who are facing astronomical increases, particularly in home heating oil, out of those targeted measures.

The Government knows well that before Iran was attacked, there were 320,000 households in arrears on their electricity bills before Trump and Israel started this war. People need to be able to heat their homes tonight, they need hot water and they need to be able to get by day by day. The measures the Government is proposing fall well short of that.

Since the budget when it withdrew the universal energy credits, which we never supported because we always said they should be targeted, the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach have said hundreds of times that targeted measures are needed. The extension of the fuel allowance is targeted but it is €152. What about low-paid workers and what about everyone who is entitled to the fuel allowance? Does the Government really think that a figure of €152 will get them out of the hole they are in? If you are reliant on home heating oil and have seen the price almost double, €152 will not cut it and the Government knows that. The Tánaiste can use the word "targeted" all he wants - he has said it hundreds of times - but we put forward proposals for targeted measures that were fully costed and constructive, like the energy credit for 800,000 households at a cost of €362 million, but the Government did not implement them. Why does it not implement a targeted measure that would really help people who need it most?

The Tánaiste uses the word "targeted" all the time but, as Deputy Nash said, we must look at what the Government's most recent budget actually did. It reduced the incomes of the poorest households in Ireland by more than 4%. That is what the budget did. It drove more older people into poverty, with the number increasing from 13% to 19%. These are not my figures; those are the figures from the Parliamentary Budget Office, which independently assesses what this Government has done. At the same time, it reduced the incomes of disabled people by up

to €1,400. If someone is €1,400 down, a €152 extension in the fuel allowance is better than nothing but it does not begin to meet the gap that is there and the urgent need for support that people have.

We put forward our proposal for a targeted energy credit, which we costed. I urge the Tánaiste to look at that. It is a sound and economically sustainable approach. That kind of approach will work, regardless of what happens over the coming weeks and months, and will provide the space for additional supports to be put in place as and when they are needed.

The Tánaiste talks about achieving and accelerating energy independence. Fine Gael has been in government since 2011. It is now 2026.

*7 o'clock*

Sadly for this country and for people who are finding it very hard to meet their bills, the Tánaiste has completely and utterly missed the opportunity we have had. Ireland could be a superpower when it comes to renewable energy. We should be a superpower when it comes to renewable energy. Instead, we are one of the countries in Europe with the highest electricity bills despite these massive resources at our disposal. We should be leading in terms of clean energy. We should not be a laggard on it. Successive Fianna Fáil- and Fine Gael-led Governments have had the resources to be able to invest in this, so why have they not done it?

Look at the example of Spain and what they have achieved. Look at what they have done in Spain and Portugal, for example, where wholesale electricity prices are at €60 to €70 per megawatt-hour, far below what we are at. Look at what Spain has done just since 2019, for example, where they have doubled their wind and solar capacity. They have added over 40 GW, cutting gas's influence on electricity prices by 75%. That is what they have done since 2019. We have more potential than they do, certainly in terms of wind, so why have we not done the same? While the Tánaiste has been in government, why have we not done it? If we had done that, we would not be in this situation of dependence that we are in at present. Spain has some of the lowest power prices in Europe. What do they have that we do not have such that they are able to do that? Of course, we should be doing this.

Ireland has enough wind to power the island and enough money to make it happen. That is a fact. What we are missing is the political leadership to get that job done. While Spain and Portugal have insulated their people from this global crisis in terms of energy prices, the Government has left Irish households exposed to the actions and the chaos being created by the whims of Trump. We should and could be an energy independent electro-state, but instead we are not in that situation. We need proper action and leadership on that.

I appeal to the Tánaiste to introduce a targeted energy credit. It makes sense, it is affordable and it can be done. It would make a big difference to people on low incomes, including low-paid workers who are not eligible for the fuel allowance. That would really lift people out of the difficulty they are in. The Government has failed to do that and it could do that.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** It is a bit ironic that we are now paying the price for a horrific imperialist adventure by Trump and Netanyahu, which the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach have never once condemned. The Taoiseach spent a whole day in Washington and managed not to say one thing about the attack on Iran.

In relation to the emergency motion the Tánaiste is bringing through the Dáil, where is the emergency action for the disabled people who have lost out on €1,400 a year, the 320,000 people in arrears on their electricity who have been mentioned and the 180,000 in arrears on their gas? I will support this measure if it does anything to decrease prices for people. However, it is far from going to deal with the situation. We need emergency measures to lift the burden off the general population, not just hauliers and bus companies.

There was an academic on TV last night who was talking about people having become too reliant on these one-off measures and needing to be weaned off them. There seem to be some people living in an alternative universe, not realising the hardship that people have been going through in this country for the last number of months.

In relation to electricity, the ESB should be taken back into public ownership and it should be run on a not-for-profit basis, as it used to be. We need to bring down prices and the cost of living all across the board for ordinary people.

On price controls, groceries have gone through the roof. There is power under the Consumer Protection Act to immediately introduce maximum prices at affordable levels for necessities and food staples. Likewise, why not use this as an opportunity to introduce free public transport? It would be a huge benefit to people's pockets and also to the environment. Why is a cost-of-disability payment not being introduced? It should have been brought in immediately. I obviously welcome the measures for people on fuel allowance, but that is a limited number of people. Tens of thousands of people are suffering.

I am very concerned to hear that there will be backdated rebates for hauliers and bus companies. The books should be opened up. It should not be across the board. If they are needed, they could be given in a targeted fashion, but some people have been profiteering off the situation as well.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Even before the Israeli and US illegal and bloody aggression against Iran and Lebanon, there was a cost-of-living crisis in this country that the Government was not acting in any serious way to address. We already had electricity prices that were approximately 25% higher than the rest of Europe. Gas prices had doubled over the previous five years. We have seen the price of groceries, etc., increase very significantly. In all of those areas, of course, massive profits have been recorded by the energy companies and the supermarket chains, and then we get this. The failure of the Government to condemn in clear and unequivocal terms Trump's bloody and illegal war is mirrored in the failure of the Government to seriously address the economic and financial consequences of their bloody warmongering on ordinary people, because not only are they raining down death, destruction and fire on the people of Iran, Lebanon, people of Palestine and the whole region, they are costing every person in this country money and the Government cannot even bring itself to condemn them and, indeed, continue to allow the US military to refuel at Shannon Airport. It is shameful. Would the Tánaiste let Putin into Shannon Airport? Of course he would not, and rightly so, yet the Americans are allowed to prosecute their war.

What the Tánaiste has offered here is better than nothing but it is late in the day on top of an existing crisis. What we have proposed is that the Government should help people with their arrears by giving them a €500 energy credit and introduce price controls to hold down

petrol and diesel prices at €1.75 a litre, to hold down home heating oil at €1 per litre and to reduce the kilowatt-hour charges for gas and electricity.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Can this be done? It is being done elsewhere in Europe, in the Czech Republic-----

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Stanley.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I have five seconds left-----

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Oh.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** -----but now I do not, thanks to your interruption.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** It is gone now. I call Deputy Stanley.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** The assistance being given on the cost of fuel will bring some relief but I would like to see it more targeted. The question is how we can target it in the short term.

There are middle-income areas who do not qualify for the fuel allowance. There is a particular cohort whose income is just over the limit and they will not benefit from the extra month of fuel allowance, although it is welcome.

The cost of home heating oil is an issue that is not being addressed and we are stuck with it for now. Many rural households out there, particularly in counties such as Laois, are dependent on home heating oil, unfortunately, for now. They are not going to feel any benefit from this, particularly the ones who are outside of the fuel allowance limits.

I welcome the VAT rebate being given to hauliers, but the same VAT rebate needs to be given to bus operators, who are mainly on fixed-price contracts. I would like the Tánaiste to note that a particular sector, including minibus and coach operators, have fixed-price contracts from the Department of education and from tour operators and they need the same VAT rebate as hauliers.

While I welcome the €235 million spent on the measure, I would like to see it more targeted. There is a question over how quickly this is going to kick in and the Tánaiste has admitted this. We need to see some action on this. Prices went up very quickly but as soon as this kicks in, we need to see the prices reduce.

I would have liked to see some specific measure for households in arrears on electricity and gas bills.

I will try to put this realistically in the context of what is happening. We need to move on energy independence. We may not be able to become totally independent - I understand that - but I would like us to be able to accelerate that and move towards a greater level. The red lights are flashing. We also need to do it for environmental reasons, given that the report yesterday

said the globe is warming even faster than we had thought. For many good reasons, we need to accelerate and move towards energy independence with renewables.

Lastly, we need to clearly oppose this crazy war. It is absolutely crazy. It is an imperial war, it is an oil war----

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Deputy should conclude.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** -----and, as a small neutral country, we need to stand up and say, "Stop the madness".

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** Families are being crushed by this energy crisis. Small businesses are going to the wall. Carers cannot drive to mind the older people they are looking after. Workers cannot fill their car tanks, even just to get to work, and farmers' costs are spiking at a time when their produce prices are falling.

At the heart of this crisis are Government taxes, and no other political party is calling this out. For sure, the war in Iran has significantly accelerated the hardship, but the Government was already taking 60% to 65% out of petrol and diesel before the war. There were 320,000 people in energy arrears in this country before the war, and Irish electricity prices were the highest in Europe. Behind all the mealy-mouthed words from Government today, the painful reality for people in this country is that the Government is going to keep tax-gouging families.

Our parliamentary questions have shown that the Government took €4.1 billion in fuel taxes in 2024. Carbon taxes are at a record level, topping out at €1 billion. Even today, the Government's plans are to raise carbon tax on 1 May. That is a savagely damaging policy against the people of Ireland. In this crisis, the Government has already collected €120 million in extra taxes in the last four weeks. It is quids in with the crisis so far, and its increase on carbon taxes for the rest of the year will bring in €160 million. Those two together are more than €135 million that it is spending on this. We are asking the Government to reduce carbon taxes now and let people live.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** A week on from previous statements, the Government has finally come up with some measures, so I will be supporting them, like others in this House. However, that does not mean I think they are in any way sufficient. Hauliers have been dealt with and there is the 2 cent measure coming tomorrow with respect to storage, but the reduction in excise duty on its own is not enough. The cost of fuel has gone up by more than the amount by which excise duty is going to be cut. People in vulnerable situations need support. We had a discussion earlier this year about the cost-of-living allowance that is needed for people with disabilities. One of the calls coming from advocacy groups was that the fuel allowance should be extended to people on disability-related payments and that the season would be lengthened to 32 weeks. In the context of this fuel crisis, that is a reasonable ask at this stage, as are measures that can also support middle-income earners, especially pensioners who are just over the threshold but are going to be hit by the fuel costs.

As others have mentioned, there are people who are dependent on home heating oil because they cannot get the piped gas. It is mainly in rural areas, but it also affects people in urban areas. In the longer term, as I mentioned when the Tánaiste was here previously, we absolutely

need to move towards energy self-sufficiency and I would like to see that put on a wartime footing, with a five-year project rather than a 25-year project. For climate change reasons but especially for energy self-security, we need to move a lot faster than we are.

**Deputy Ken O'Flynn:** While I welcome some of the changes the Government is going to make, particularly the extension of the fuel allowance, we are giving with one hand and taking away with the other. At the start of this crisis, the price of diesel was €1.80 a litre. Today in Circle K, it is €2.28. The Government has already accumulated €120 million. This project is delivering a roughly €200 million package, so it is really costing the Government €80 million.

I was very disappointed with the comments of the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, earlier today outside this House when he stated that carbon tax is not even a tax. In fact, it is a tax, as the name suggests. He must be intoxicated by the leather of the ministerial car whose fuel he does not have to pay for because that is how far removed from reality the Government is. The reality is that people going to work tomorrow and the next day have no other choice. They cannot work from home, they are trying to do their best and these taxes ahead of us, and this reducing of 20 cent here and 20 cent there, will go nowhere.

The Government has completely forgotten about the taxi drivers of this country. It has 100% forgotten about them.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** Regarding the proposals put before people today, first, we did not get enough time to debate the issue. Second, the measly bit of money the Government is throwing to the people is like crumbs off rich men's tables. It is not good enough, and the people of the constituency I represent and the people of Ireland are outraged to think farmers are only going to get 2 cent off a litre of green diesel and fishermen are the same. What does Government think they are, slaves to the people of this country? Does it have any respect for people out there?

In relation to the crisis with home heating oil, people cannot fill their tanks. These are all issues of fierce concern to people, and these people have been contacting me all day. I agree with the fuel allowance and the help the Government has given in that regard. I fully support that. However, there is a bigger issue here, which is that the Government has forgotten the people who elected it, that is, the people whose doors Government Deputies are going to be knocking on in the not-so-distant future.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** I welcome some of the measures that have come, but there is a reality here. The Tánaiste spoke about Northern Ireland earlier. Those people are not bleeding as hard as the people here. The facts are that tonight, a litre of white diesel in the North costs the equivalent of €1.85, which is 40 cent less than here. There is a difference of €200 in the price of 500 litres of kerosene, while green diesel - it is red in the North - is €200 cheaper in the North. Let us concentrate on our own game.

I welcome what has been done for hauliers and the excise duty reduction, but what has Government done for agriculture? Does it not realise food is produced with tractors right around this country? For the agri-contractor sector and for farmers, what farmers have to pay is an absolute insult. Does the Government realise most people in rural Ireland, if they do not have a turf fire, use kerosene? Kerosene has never been as dear. What has been done for them?

A measly 5 cent is going to be taken off between tomorrow and today. It is absolutely disgusting to see the way the agriculture sector has been treated.

Then we hear rural TDs talking about how the Government could not do anything about carbon tax. How is it that we can bring in legislation tomorrow for NORA? I have looked around Europe tonight, and there are different carbon taxes in every bit of it. The EU has told governments to ease the energy cost for everyone and gave that clear mandate last week to all leaders, but no, we will not touch the carbon tax and on 1 May, we will look at it again and add 2 cent more. Does the Government not realise that it gets more than the driver of a tractor agitating or ploughing or whatever it is at?

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** The Government ends up with €16 per hour into its paws, and it is not in the field. It is time the Government woke up and looked at what was going on.

**Deputy Ken O'Flynn:** I wish to move the Independent Ireland amendment. I forgot to mention it earlier.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Deputy cannot move the amendment because the Sinn Féin amendment has been moved. I call Deputy Devlin.

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** I welcome the opportunity to examine this motion, which will deliver a measure of relief for hard-pressed families. The conflict in the Middle East is causing an extreme degree of volatility in the price of oil and other essential commodities. In the short time available to me this evening, I propose to focus on the domestic impact here in Ireland. I am sure we all hope the conflict will end as soon as possible, but it is clear a significant degree of disruption to supply lines has been caused and this will have an impact in the short term.

The changes being proposed by Government to reduce the price of a litre of diesel by 22 cent and petrol by 17 cent are very welcome and necessary. Hauliers are an essential part of the wider economy and must be supported, and the package for them is also welcome. I acknowledge the extension of the fuel allowance, which will give the most vulnerable families an extra €152.

As a state, we are in the fortunate position to be able to assist families. Across Europe, governments are facing much harder choices. I know that, like during Covid, the Government will not be found wanting if the crisis continues into the winter.

I welcome the Taoiseach's comments on improving energy security in this State, particularly in regard to progressing the LNG facility. This is an issue alongside the need for the widespread roll-out of solar and wind generation that I have raised on multiple occasions in this House. As an island, we are critically exposed. This LNG portal is badly needed to ensure a degree of security in what is an extremely volatile time.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I too welcome the package of €235 million. I am thankful for the reduction in white diesel for hauliers and the promised rebate that is to come. I also

welcome the petrol reduction for all of those who are working hard and need their car to go to work.

I deplore the fact that people who need heating oil only get a reduction of 2 cent a litre, which is only €20 for a fill of a 1,000-litre tank. That is very hard.

I welcome the extension of the fuel allowance, but many people are not on the fuel allowance.

Many hauliers have a haulier's licence and operate that way, but there are other hauliers who do not have a haulier's licence and do not have to have it, but who supply their own products. Agricultural lorries transporting cattle will not get the diesel rebate either. I am hurting for those people.

Regarding green diesel for the tractor men, as the Ministers know, no tractor has gone inside a gap for the last three months, and now is the time that they are making a start. Because of the weather conditions, they could not do a bit until now, and there is a lot of work waiting. To offer them 2 cent or 3 cent of a reduction is totally unfair. I was brought up to believe that we should treat everyone fairly. Whatever way the Government could have got around that, it should have done something better for the tractor people. I include in that the industrial workers and fishermen. Those with any type of engine that uses green diesel are paying up to €1.68 a litre when it was 98 cent three weeks ago. That is an awful jump of 70 cent a litre.

The cost of electricity has gone up day by day since the Government closed Bord na Móna. This war might continue, and no one in here or outside can say it will or will not. I am asking the Government to review the rules it has made on turf cutting and ensure that people who have the facility, have a bog and can cut turf are allowed to cut it, whether it is to sell it or use it themselves. That has to be reviewed because of the cost of electricity. We may not have electricity.

I am also hurting because of the fact that there was no bother two or three weeks ago with Ireland supporting a loan of €1.8 billion to keep the war in Ukraine going, yet we cannot find enough money anywhere to help the tractor men who are using green diesel. The day Zelensky was here, we also gave him €125 million.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I ask the Deputy to conclude. I call the Minister.

**Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Peter Burke):** I thank Deputies for their robust engagement on this important issue. As the Tánaiste stated earlier, these excise reductions form part of an overall package that the Government has designed to provide immediate financial support to households. The excise rate changes will provide for VAT-inclusive, per-litre reductions of 15 cent per litre for petrol, 20 cent per litre for auto diesel and 3 cent per litre for marked gas oil, or green diesel. In addition to the NORA levy reduction of 2 cent, this will provide for an overall reduction of 17 cent on petrol, 22 cent on auto diesel and 5 cent on MGO.

While tax changes cannot fully absorb the recent energy shocks or market volatility, these changes will lessen the impact of fuel costs on consumers. This measure will be in place for a defined period of time, and the Government reserves the right and option to adjust these as

circumstances evolve. This approach is in line with the European Council conclusions agreed in Brussels last week, and with the response of other EU member states.

I reiterate the Tánaiste's affirmation that the Opposition amendments cannot be accepted. The proposed amendments disregard the need for a long-term, economic and sustainable approach.

The measures announced today will provide significant mitigation against recent fuel price increases. It is not possible, using the tax system, to offset all of the recent increases, which are driven by market factors. These excise reductions, in conjunction with the NORA reduction and the changes to the fuel allowance and diesel rebate scheme, which has significantly increased by 60%, underwrite the supply lines. This really impacts on inflation for many of the groceries that we buy every single week. If we did not do this, it would have a significant impact on consumers. This will also benefit households at the pumps, given the various measures related to the NORA levy and excise. We must respect the fact that we are limited by the rates allowable under the energy tax directive and VAT directive.

Going by what the ESRI has said in relation to the most important deciles to benefit from budget 2026, there is an extension of the fuel allowance, which now covers 470,000 households. Many of the benefits of this were being operationalised in recent weeks. On 12 March, 50,000 households were brought into the net due to the change to the working family payment, and this was backdated to 1 January. The extension of four weeks, together with the increase in the eligibility criteria of over €1,000 in net income for those over 70, ensures that 370,000 households will benefit, and an additional €150 per month is also targeted at the most vulnerable in society.

In my view, the Government's first port of call is to ensure that, in a time of crisis, when we hit a significant shock in the economy, we first protect the most vulnerable in society. This is backed up by the ESRI, and it is what we are going after in the first instance. We will then go wider for the rest of the economy, thereby ensuring we are underwriting the support for supply chains through our haulage sector, which has seen an increase of 60% in the diesel rebate scheme, as well as the measures at the pumps. Critically, there have been other measures like the €250 million package and the reduction to 9% in VAT for electricity and oil, which ensures that every household in the country will save €100 per year.

Other countries in Europe, for example, Italy, Spain and the UK, are still grappling with changes. Many have not gone as far as Ireland has already gone at this juncture, with Spain looking to reduce its VAT rate to 10%, while Ireland has moved to 9% for electricity.

A critical point from our perspective is to ensure that any changes are affordable. We do not know the duration of this crisis. If we look at what the International Energy Agency has put clearly on the record, this could be a lot worse than what happened in the two crises of the 1970s, together with the challenge of the Ukraine shock, which is very significant.

There is one thing we know following the recent crises that we have faced in this economy. With Brexit, we met that challenge from a position of strength, and we came back stronger. When we hit the challenge of the global pandemic, we met that challenge from a position of strength, and we came back stronger as a government. When we hit double-digit inflation in November 2022, we also met it from a position of strength, and we came back stronger. Equally, by managing the economy well, we will meet this crisis from a position of strength,

and we will come back stronger as a government, and critically, protect the most vulnerable along the way.

Amendment put:

| The Dáil divided: Tá, 69; Níl, 88; Staon, 0. |                          |       |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| Tá                                           | Níl                      | Staon |
| Ahern, Ciarán.                               | Aird, William.           |       |
| Bacik, Ivana.                                | Ardagh, Catherine.       |       |
| Bennett, Cathy.                              | Boland, Grace.           |       |
| Boyd Barrett, Richard.                       | Brabazon, Tom.           |       |
| Brady, John.                                 | Brennan, Brian.          |       |
| Buckley, Pat.                                | Brennan, Shay.           |       |
| Byrne, Joanna.                               | Brophy, Colm.            |       |
| Carthy, Matt.                                | Browne, James.           |       |
| Clarke, Sorca.                               | Burke, Colm.             |       |
| Collins, Michael.                            | Burke, Peter.            |       |
| Conway-Walsh, Rose.                          | Butler, Mary.            |       |
| Coppinger, Ruth.                             | Buttimer, Jerry.         |       |
| Cronin, Réada.                               | Byrne, Malcolm.          |       |
| Cullinane, David.                            | Byrne, Thomas.           |       |
| Cummins, Jen.                                | Cahill, Michael.         |       |
| Daly, Pa.                                    | Callaghan, Catherine.    |       |
| Devine, Máire.                               | Calleary, Dara.          |       |
| Doherty, Pearse.                             | Canney, Seán.            |       |
| Donnelly, Paul.                              | Carrigy, Micheál.        |       |
| Farrelly, Aidan.                             | Chambers, Jack.          |       |
| Farrell, Mairéad.                            | Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.    |       |
| Fitzmaurice, Michael.                        | Clendennen, John.        |       |
| Gannon, Gary.                                | Collins, Niall.          |       |
| Gibney, Sinéad.                              | Connolly, John.          |       |
| Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.                      | Cooney, Joe.             |       |
| Gould, Thomas.                               | Crowe, Cathal.           |       |
| Graves, Ann.                                 | Cummins, John.           |       |
| Guirke, Johnny.                              | Daly, Martin.            |       |
| Hayes, Eoin.                                 | Dempsey, Aisling.        |       |
| Hearne, Rory.                                | Devlin, Cormac.          |       |
| Kelly, Alan.                                 | Dillon, Alan.            |       |
| Kenny, Eoghan.                               | Dolan, Albert.           |       |
| Kenny, Martin.                               | Dooley, Timmy.           |       |
| Kerrane, Claire.                             | Feighan, Frankie.        |       |
| Lawless, Paul.                               | Fleming, Sean.           |       |
| Lawlor, George.                              | Foley, Norma.            |       |
| Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.                      | Gallagher, Pat the Cope. |       |
| McDonald, Mary Lou.                          | Geoghegan, James.        |       |
| McGettigan, Donna.                           | Grealish, Noel.          |       |
| McGuinness, Conor D.                         | Harkin, Marian.          |       |
| Mitchell, Denise.                            | Harris, Simon.           |       |
| Mythen, Johnny.                              | Healy-Rae, Danny.        |       |

|                           |                             |  |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Nash, Ged.                | Healy-Rae, Michael.         |  |
| Newsome Drennan, Natasha. | Heneghan, Barry.            |  |
| Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.  | Heydon, Martin.             |  |
| Nolan, Carol.             | Higgins, Emer.              |  |
| O'Callaghan, Cian.        | Keogh, Keira.               |  |
| O'Donoghue, Robert.       | Lahart, John.               |  |
| O'Flynn, Ken.             | Lawless, James.             |  |
| O'Gorman, Roderic.        | Lowry, Michael.             |  |
| O'Hara, Louis.            | Martin, Micheál.            |  |
| O'Reilly, Louise.         | Maxwell, David.             |  |
| O'Rourke, Darren.         | McAuliffe, Paul.            |  |
| Ó Broin, Eoin.            | McCarthy, Noel.             |  |
| Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.   | McConalogue, Charlie.       |  |
| Ó Murchú, Ruairí.         | McCormack, Tony.            |  |
| Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.       | McEntee, Helen.             |  |
| Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán. | McGrath, Séamus.            |  |
| Quaide, Liam.             | McGreehan, Erin.            |  |
| Quinlivan, Maurice.       | McGuinness, John.           |  |
| Rice, Pádraig.            | Moran, Kevin Boxer.         |  |
| Sheehan, Conor.           | Moynihan, Aindrias.         |  |
| Sherlock, Marie.          | Moynihan, Michael.          |  |
| Smith, Duncan.            | Moynihan, Shane.            |  |
| Stanley, Brian.           | Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer. |  |
| Tóibín, Peadar.           | Murphy, Michael.            |  |
| Ward, Charles.            | Naughton, Hildegard.        |  |
| Ward, Mark.               | Neville, Joe.               |  |
| Whitmore, Jennifer.       | O'Brien, Darragh.           |  |
|                           | O'Callaghan, Jim.           |  |
|                           | O'Connell, Maeve.           |  |
|                           | O'Connor, James.            |  |
|                           | O'Dea, Willie.              |  |
|                           | O'Donnell, Kieran.          |  |
|                           | O'Donovan, Patrick.         |  |
|                           | O'Meara, Ryan.              |  |
|                           | O'Shea, John Paul.          |  |
|                           | O'Sullivan, Christopher.    |  |
|                           | Ó Cearúil, Naoise.          |  |
|                           | Ó Feargháil, Seán.          |  |
|                           | Ó Muirí, Naoise.            |  |
|                           | Richmond, Neale.            |  |
|                           | Scanlon, Eamon.             |  |
|                           | Smyth, Niamh.               |  |
|                           | Timmins, Edward.            |  |
|                           | Toole, Gillian.             |  |
|                           | Troy, Robert.               |  |
|                           | Ward, Barry.                |  |

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

Amendment declared lost.

Amendment put:

| The Dáil divided: Tá, 118; Níl, 39; 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.             |       |
| Boyd Barrett, Richard.                        | Clarke, Sorca.            |       |
| Brabazon, Tom.                                | Conway-Walsh, Rose.       |       |
| Brennan, Brian.                               | Cronin, Réada.            |       |
| Brennan, Shay.                                | Cullinane, David.         |       |
| Brophy, Colm.                                 | Daly, Pa.                 |       |
| Browne, James.                                | Devine, Máire.            |       |
| Burke, Colm.                                  | Doherty, Pearse.          |       |
| Burke, Peter.                                 | Donnelly, Paul.           |       |
| Butler, Mary.                                 | Farrell, Mairéad.         |       |
| Buttimer, Jerry.                              | Gould, Thomas.            |       |
| Byrne, Malcolm.                               | Graves, Ann.              |       |
| Byrne, Thomas.                                | Guirke, Johnny.           |       |
| Cahill, Michael.                              | Kenny, Martin.            |       |
| Callaghan, Catherine.                         | Kerrane, Claire.          |       |
| Calleary, Dara.                               | Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.   |       |
| Canney, Seán.                                 | McDonald, Mary Lou.       |       |
| Carrigy, Micheál.                             | McGettigan, Donna.        |       |
| Chambers, Jack.                               | McGuinness, Conor D.      |       |
| Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.                         | Mitchell, Denise.         |       |
| Clendennen, John.                             | Mythen, Johnny.           |       |
| Collins, Michael.                             | Newsome Drennan, Natasha. |       |
| Collins, Niall.                               | Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.  |       |
| Connolly, John.                               | Nolan, Carol.             |       |
| Cooney, Joe.                                  | O'Hara, Louis.            |       |
| Coppinger, Ruth.                              | O'Reilly, Louise.         |       |
| Crowe, Cathal.                                | O'Rourke, Darren.         |       |
| Cummins, Jen.                                 | Ó Broin, Eoin.            |       |
| Cummins, John.                                | Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.   |       |
| Daly, Martin.                                 | Ó Murchú, Ruairí.         |       |
| Dempsey, Aisling.                             | Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.       |       |
| Devlin, Cormac.                               | Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán. |       |
| Dillon, Alan.                                 | Quinlivan, Maurice.       |       |
| Dolan, Albert.                                | Ward, Charles.            |       |
| Dooley, Timmy.                                | Ward, Mark.               |       |
| Farrelly, Aidan.                              |                           |       |

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|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Feighan, Frankie.           |  |  |
| Fitzmaurice, Michael.       |  |  |
| Fleming, Sean.              |  |  |
| Foley, Norma.               |  |  |
| Gallagher, Pat the Cope.    |  |  |
| Gannon, Gary.               |  |  |
| Geoghegan, James.           |  |  |
| Gibney, Sinéad.             |  |  |
| Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.     |  |  |
| Grealish, Noel.             |  |  |
| Harkin, Marian.             |  |  |
| Harris, Simon.              |  |  |
| Hayes, Eoin.                |  |  |
| Healy-Rae, Danny.           |  |  |
| Healy-Rae, Michael.         |  |  |
| Hearne, Rory.               |  |  |
| Heneghan, Barry.            |  |  |
| Heydon, Martin.             |  |  |
| Higgins, Emer.              |  |  |
| Kelly, Alan.                |  |  |
| Kenny, Eoghan.              |  |  |
| Keogh, Keira.               |  |  |
| Lahart, John.               |  |  |
| Lawless, James.             |  |  |
| Lawless, Paul.              |  |  |
| Lawlor, George.             |  |  |
| Lowry, Michael.             |  |  |
| Martin, Micheál.            |  |  |
| Maxwell, David.             |  |  |
| McAuliffe, Paul.            |  |  |
| McCarthy, Noel.             |  |  |
| McConalogue, Charlie.       |  |  |
| McCormack, Tony.            |  |  |
| McEntee, Helen.             |  |  |
| McGrath, Séamus.            |  |  |
| McGreehan, Erin.            |  |  |
| McGuinness, John.           |  |  |
| 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.          |  |  |

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|--------------------------|--|--|
| O'Callaghan, Jim.        |  |  |
| O'Connell, Maeve.        |  |  |
| O'Connor, James.         |  |  |
| O'Dea, Willie.           |  |  |
| O'Donnell, Kieran.       |  |  |
| O'Donoghue, Robert.      |  |  |
| O'Donovan, Patrick.      |  |  |
| O'Flynn, Ken.            |  |  |
| O'Gorman, Roderic.       |  |  |
| O'Meara, Ryan.           |  |  |
| O'Shea, John Paul.       |  |  |
| O'Sullivan, Christopher. |  |  |
| Ó Cearúil, Naoise.       |  |  |
| Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.       |  |  |
| Ó Muirí, Naoise.         |  |  |
| Quaide, Liam.            |  |  |
| Rice, Pádraig.           |  |  |
| Richmond, Neale.         |  |  |
| Scanlon, Eamon.          |  |  |
| Sheehan, Conor.          |  |  |
| Sherlock, Marie.         |  |  |
| Smith, Duncan.           |  |  |
| Smyth, Niamh.            |  |  |
| Stanley, Brian.          |  |  |
| Timmins, Edward.         |  |  |
| Toole, Gillian.          |  |  |
| Tóibín, Peadar.          |  |  |
| Troy, Robert.            |  |  |
| Ward, Barry.             |  |  |
| Whitmore, Jennifer.      |  |  |

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

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### **Cancer Services: Motion [Private Members]**

**Deputy David Cullinane:** I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 is due to end this year, and a new strategy is needed to drive improvements in access to, and the quality of, care from 2027;

— in 2025, 15 per cent of chemotherapy, and 23 per cent of radiotherapy, patients did not get access to treatment in the target timeframe;

— in 2025, 45 per cent of breast cancer surgeries and 39 per cent of lung cancer surgeries, and in 2024, 61 per cent of prostate cancer surgeries, did not happen within the target timeframe;

— a postcode lottery exists in access to care, with access within target timeframes ranging from as low as 60 per cent in some areas, to upwards of 95 per cent in other communities;

— this State has below European Union average levels of diagnostic and imaging equipment, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Computerized Tomography, and Positron Emission Tomography scanners, which is leading to significant delays in access to care, particularly surgeries, and this is caused by a combination of a low density of equipment, out-dated equipment, and poor utilisation of existing equipment;

— there has been a highly concerning shortfall in the number of women screened for breast cancer, with BreastCheck only screening 75 per cent of the anticipated number of women in 2025, which already assumes a 30 per cent fall off from the number of women invited for screening; and

— the most recent implementation review found that only 1 of 23 National Cancer Strategy objectives had been met;

considers that:

— cancer services need a clear roadmap and guaranteed funding levels for the next decade to deliver key enablers, detailed planning, and turn gold standard targets from aspirations into real deliverables;

— the mission of the new cancer strategy must be to improve standards, timely access to care, patient outcomes, quality of life, efficiencies, and innovation;

— a new strategy must include a strong emphasis on prevention, early detection, and proactive treatment of primary drivers, as well as of cancers themselves;

— a new strategy must address access to care, workforce challenges, equipment and infrastructure deficits, research, innovation, all-island planning, and the post-code lottery which currently exists for services;

— a new strategy presents a significant opportunity to drive all-island collaboration in improving cancer care and outcomes, and all-island planning, training, and delivery should feature prominently in a new strategy; and

— clearly identified, protected, and guaranteed new developments funding should be provided to underpin a new strategy, through a multi-annual funding framework averaging €30 million a year, each year, in additional new developments funding;

condemns the failure of Government to provide and clearly identify ring-fenced new developments funding for the National Cancer Strategy in 5 of the 10 Budgets over the lifespan of the current strategy;

resolves that a new cancer strategy should:

— guarantee timely access to cancer diagnosis, treatment, recovery, and follow up care;

- end postcode and income-based inequality;
  - provide multi-annual funding certainty;
  - expand capacity in line with projected demand;
  - strictly manage expenditure to ensure cost-effectiveness without losing sight of the critical social and economic benefits of health investment;
  - strengthen all-island cancer cooperation;
  - reduce the financial and social burden of cancer; and
  - position Ireland as a leader in research and innovation; and
- calls on the Government to:
- commit to a new cancer strategy, to cover the period 2027 to 2037;
  - guarantee €30 million in additional new developments funding each year, to underpin delivery of the new strategy;
  - end the postcode lottery in access to cancer care, through targeted investment;
  - implement a specific campaign to increase uptake of BreastCheck, catch up on women who did not attend screening invitations, and provide the option for information on breast density through BreastCheck;
  - implement a managed programme for replacing outdated equipment;
  - mandate Health Service Executive Regions to implement site specific equipment utilisation plans, including roster reform agreed with workers, to maximise use of existing equipment;
  - extend service hours in the evening and over weekends, following constructive engagement with workers, for diagnostic imaging, laboratories, and treatment options, and ensure a commensurate increase in staffing levels, to maximise utilisation of equipment and capacity;
  - fund additional training places in areas of strategic need in the health workforce, and work with graduates to ensure employment in the Irish health service;
  - abolish hospital car parking charges for patients and visitors;
  - immediately increase medical card thresholds in line with GP visit card thresholds, and increase funding for discretionary medical cards, to widen compassionate access;
  - increase the health capital budget to €2.5 billion per annum for the remainder of the National Development Plan, to ensure sufficient funding for all of the Government's infrastructure commitments in Health;
  - adopt a systematic approach towards clinical trials and life sciences innovation, aiming to make Ireland a world leader in clinical trials and the development of new medicines and therapies; and
  - place Sláintecare wait time targets into law.

I will be sharing time with colleagues. I start by thanking all those working in our healthcare system who provide the very best cancer services they can. I commend all the nurses, doctors, radiographers, radiation therapists, those who work in primary and community care, and those who provide diagnostic scans. The problems with the national cancer strategy are not down to the hard work of those staff. In terms of research in cancer care, I am blown away by what I see right across our healthcare system and also advances in new medications, a lot of which are produced here by pharmaceutical companies and their workers. I want to put on the record my appreciation of all those working in our healthcare services who provide first-class services to cancer patients.

Cancer care was one of those areas where we were hitting our targets and people were getting rapid access to care. However, in an area where we were doing so well, we are now beginning to see slippage which really disappoints me. Replies to parliamentary questions that I have tabled over the last year or so, particularly over the last number of months, show slippage in the key performance targets and the gold standard access times for diagnosis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and indeed surgeries. There are a number of reasons for that but first I just want to go through some of the figures. In 2025, 15% of chemotherapy patients and 23% radiotherapy patients did not get access to treatment in the target timeframe. In 2025, 45% of breast cancer surgeries, 39% of lung cancer surgeries and 61% of prostate cancer surgeries were not done on time, and people were not seen within the gold standard. They are shocking figures and represent a dramatic reduction on where we were only a number of years ago.

I have spoken to healthcare professionals, the Irish Cancer Society, advocates and cancer patients themselves. They tell me that one of the problems is we do not have enough staff. We know we have a shortage of radiographers and radiation therapists but we also have a shortage of surgeons in some hospitals which is why we are seeing a postcode lottery. For example, in Cavan, people are waiting much longer for chemotherapy than they are in other areas. In Waterford, for example, the majority of patients were not seen within the proper timeframe. It is unacceptable to have a postcode lottery that depends on where someone lives and depends on the surgery as to what access and how quickly they will get that service. One of the problems is that we do not have the staff.

The second problem is with the cancer machinery and equipment. I again discovered through parliamentary questions that we have a lot of cancer equipment which is out of date. In fact, in some hospitals, the majority of equipment is out of date. It could be chemotherapy equipment, radiotherapy equipment or diagnostic equipment. A lot of the time it is not functioning properly. Hospital equipment is at partial capacity, again because we do not have the staff. We do not have the radiographers, radiation therapists and so on. It is a problem to have very expensive equipment either lying idle or only operating at partial capacity. The current national cancer strategy ends next year. In five of the past ten years, the national cancer strategy received no additional funding. It cannot operate in a piecemeal way like that. If we want the national cancer strategy to work, it has to be funded consistently every single year which is why our motion calls to ring-fence €30 million each year for the next five years, a total of €150 million.

We also want to increase the capital healthcare budget because we know there is not enough money to build elective hospitals, a new maternity hospital, finish the children's hospital and

deliver the beds that were promised. That is why we do not have the money to replace equipment and allow for new equipment for cancer care in hospitals, and that is hurting.

Our motion also calls for cutting the cost of cancer care for patients. That is a big issue which comes up a lot. We want to abolish the car parking charges but we also feel that cancer patients should have a medical card. Sometimes cancer patients who apply simply do not get it even though they have a cancer diagnosis which is deeply unfair. We all signed up to the principles of Sláintecare where money should not be an issue and people should have access to high-quality care. It makes no sense years on from Sláintecare that cancer patients still do not have access to a medical card. Our motion today is a call for action from the Government. We do not want half-measures. We do not want slipped targets or slippage. We want a new national cancer strategy that is robust, that is properly funded and that works for cancer patients.

**Deputy Louise O'Reilly:** I thank my colleague Deputy David Cullinane and for bringing forward this motion this evening which gives us the chance to have this very important discussion. I also thank him for the proposals he has consistently brought forward which would make a real and meaningful difference not just for patients but also for people working in our health services.

*8 o'clock*

As was rightly pointed out, the issues that are faced in the cancer control and the cancer care programme are not caused by the men and women working hard in it. They are not the ones who should be held accountable. The delays are due to underfunding. The chaos often at the heart of this Government has caused what many used to consider a world-class, gold-standard service to actually go backwards, and the figures as described by an Teachta Cullinane bear that out. We know the number of people on lists is increasing and the delays are increasing, and all the while it is very expensive to be sick in this State. Time off work, car parking charges - all these things add up. It is really expensive, and the delays make it more expensive. They mean more expense for people, more time off work and more time on reduced hours. They wait and they wait and they panic. When they know they need treatment, when they often know what that treatment is and they cannot access it, that is deeply concerning.

I encourage the Minister of State to examine making the PSA test part of the national screening programme. It is a very simple test and it saves lives. I have close-hand and personal experience of the fact that it saves lives. It should be included as part of any screening programme.

**Deputy Pa Daly:** In April 2023 a location to serve the long-term oncology needs of University Hospital Kerry was identified within the grounds of the current hospital. The HSE had decided to pursue a more substantial, permanent proposal of a day treatment ward, an outpatient ward and a haematology unit. A revised brief and schedule of accommodation were provided in September 2023, costing was identified and a stage 1 report was issued in August 2024. It was supposed to be prioritised; however, nothing has happened since. People in Kerry are waiting and waiting for this. I am not sure what has happened. There is a huge demand for beds in the same hospital. Because of the demand for beds, has this oncology unit been pushed to one side? I do not know. We deserve the same oncology services as any other county and

as any other citizens. It is not fair. Geography deciding your chances and your timely treatment is not acceptable to us.

I want to raise one more issue with the Minister of State and that is medical cards for people who have cancer. I have been dealing recently with a woman who lost her husband in tragic circumstances. She subsequently developed cancer. She has had to have 17 rounds of radiotherapy, and in the middle of all that stress and all that anxiety and dealing with her issue, she applied for a medical card but was told she was over the means test threshold. Surely, however, that is a circumstance where discretion should be applied. It is not being applied, and I ask the Minister of State to look into that. It is totally unfair.

**Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh:** I thank my colleague David Cullinane for bringing forward this motion. As the last speaker, Pa Daly, said, medical cards for cancer patients are a real issue, as is the affordability of access to care. I ask the Minister of State to bring that back to the Minister to ensure that something is done about it.

I commend all the staff working in oncology. They work really hard. In Mayo cancer patients are served by Galway and Mayo university hospitals. The biggest problem we have in Mayo is the delays in diagnosis. If you can afford to get the scans and everything else, you get the treatment more quickly. What kind of a country are we when your life depends on how much money you have? That absolutely should not be the case. Then you have the diagnosis and people undergo treatment and there is no bed there. When I say there is no bed, obviously I mean there is no bed that is fully staffed there for the clinicians who are there to give the treatment. What a waste of money. They stand there waiting for the patients but there are no beds to put them in in order that they can treat them and that they can recover. That absolutely has to be addressed. This is not a problem from today or yesterday; it has been a problem particularly since we have had the centres of excellence. The centres of excellence are a good idea but not if you cannot access them. This has to be made accessible for people. We cannot continue to operate on a postcode lottery whereby if you live in Mayo, you have less of a chance of surviving cancer than you would anywhere else. We have to stop that. We have to bring equity into the system. I think the way we can do that is by having an all-island approach. Wonderful work is done with the all-island cancer research group. We should use that model to spread that across the island in order that there is joined-up treatment of cancer care here.

In the motion we refer to car parking charges. Trying to get a car parking space outside Galway University Hospital is absolutely horrendous. I remember the day my mother died and driving around the hospital looking for a car park space.

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** In January I was contacted by a father and husband whose wife had been diagnosed with cancer at the end of November. She had been referred to University Hospital Galway for chemotherapy. She has young children at home and she was obviously extremely worried, first, to be diagnosed with cancer but, second, with a cancer that had taken her mother. About five weeks into waiting for the chemotherapy, she travelled up there, she presented to the accident and emergency department in pain and, eventually, five weeks after her diagnosis, well after the 15 working days that is the targeted timeframe, she received her chemotherapy. She had begged for weeks for chemotherapy and she had not received it. I imagine that if she had not shown up at the accident and emergency department in pain, she would not have received it within five weeks either.

In terms of UHG, we know there are significant issues with meeting target timeframes that are in place. We know that in 2025 27% of cancer patients did not get access to chemotherapy within the target timeframe of 15 days. The figures are stark as well when you look at the delays in accessing surgery for prostate cancer, with just 21% of patients in UHG getting the surgery within the recommended timeframe of 30 days, that is, only 21% of patients who needed that surgery getting it within the timeframe and the vast majority not getting it. There is a serious issue with resources and people diagnosed with cancer receiving their treatment or surgery within that targeted timeframe, which is so important. Having to contact a TD to try to get help accessing chemotherapy is really concerning and should not happen.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** As we have just had Daffodil Day, I feel we must mention the Irish Cancer Society here. Every one of us knows somebody who has battled cancer, and with one in two people in Ireland affected, this cause sadly touches us all. The Irish Cancer Society provides significant support for cancer patients and their families in County Louth, with services witnessing higher demand throughout 2025. With only 5% of annual funds needed each year coming through State funding, it is vital that we support this organisation where we can.

In Louth we have many other phenomenal groups also supporting cancer patients and their families. We have the Gary Kelly support centre, Cara Cancer Support Centre and the North East Cancer Research and Education Trust, all of which are vital and all of which have to constantly fundraise to keep the lights on and the doors open. Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda is a major centre for cancer care in the north east. It is clear that despite the tireless and fantastic work done by the front-line staff day in and day out the length and breadth of this country, this Government is failing them and the cancer patients they treat when it comes to accessing treatment. People in Drogheda have to wait longer for access to chemotherapy than people in most other places in the country. Out of 25 hospitals providing chemotherapy, Drogheda ranks 16th, with 17% of people not getting their chemo within the target timeframe of 15 working days. That is 67 people who faced serious delays in Drogheda for chemo in 2025. Around the country hundreds are left waiting as hospitals miss their targets to start chemo, and it is just unacceptable. Behind all these figures are hundreds of people who are sick with worry, facing delay after delay, trying to cope with the fear that their cancer is progressing while they wait. The staff in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and the patients behind all these statistics deserve better. We ask the Government to do its job, support this Private Members' business and action everything in it. The very fact that all of this has to be spelled out to the Government is utterly shameful.

**Deputy Mairéad Farrell:** A woman in my constituency of Galway West got the devastating diagnosis last year that she had cancer.

She expected she would be seen and begin her treatment within days, but instead she had to wait three months to start it. When families receive a diagnosis of cancer, or when a person receives that diagnosis, they have a lot to process. The last thing they need to be doing is fighting and getting on to local TDs and getting on to the hospital to try to access treatment. That should be basic and should be something given to them immediately. Unfortunately, this woman's situation is not unusual, and that is probably the most frightening aspect of this. Thousands of cancer patients are having to wait longer than the Government's 15-day target for

cancer treatment. Every cancer patient should have timely access to high-quality care and they should get that immediately. Instead, it seems to be a postcode lottery. Last year, 141 cancer patients at University Hospital Galway had to wait longer than the 15-day target to access their first chemotherapy treatment. Everybody should be getting the care they need and it should not be based on where they live.

There are two other issues that I want raise having seen them in the past year. First, I find it shocking that when a chemotherapy patient lands into the emergency department, they wait for hours to get a trolley and when they get one, they are put in an open place. They are not supposed to be mixing with people, yet they are left on a trolley. I have put in representations about this but the hospital is bursting at the seams and it tries but it cannot cope. We have a situation where chemotherapy patients are exposed in that way. Second, I want the Minister of State to look at the issue of those with pancreatic cancer having assistance with the pump they can get, because of the issues of type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** I stand here today as a cancer survivor. A year and a half ago, I was diagnosed with bowel cancer and had to have a tumor removed. Then I had to wait a space of time so that I could get chemotherapy, which went on for over six months. I know that it will be years before I can say I am free from cancer. I know that and I am not counting my chickens. However, I want to send out a thank-you to all the doctors, nurses and staff, who are so professional and caring. The work they do is just unbelievable. I met patients in the hospital while I was getting chemotherapy. I was struck by the humanity when I was going through the treatment. For some people, treatment delayed can be a death sentence. I had stage 3B, which is right on the edge. I was not scared but my wife Michelle, and my daughters Aoife and Orlaith, my sisters, my dad and my extended family, they always feel it. For anyone with cancer, their family feel it more than them. That is why this is such an important motion that Deputy Cullinane has brought here today. It a really important piece of work because everyone deserves to have the opportunity to live as long as they can and to spend as much time as they can with their family.

This is just a simple thing: in CUH last year, €3 million was collected from parking fees. A lot of that is from families of patients going to see them. I remember a lady who had skin cancer and she could not get a medical card. There should be no barriers to health. I just want to say to people who are going through the journey, I know it can be scary but have hope. We have some of the greatest doctors and nurses, if we had enough of them.

My final point is this. I had Irish doctors and nurses along with doctors from Pakistan, India, Hong Kong, Africa and all over the world. I remember lying in bed in the middle of the night and the people would be coming in with smiles on their faces and it did not matter what colour their skin was or where they were from. The treatment was brilliant; it is just that we need more of it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy Gould, for sharing a very personal experience.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kieran O'Donnell):** I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

"notes that:

- while a large proportion of cancers are preventable, our growing and ageing population is a key driving factor behind the increase in cancers;
- today, over 220,000 people in Ireland are living with or after cancer, a 50 per cent increase compared to a decade ago;
- the National Cancer Registry predicts that 1 in 2 people will receive a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime;
- fortunately, survival rates for patients after receiving a cancer diagnosis have continued to improve, with 65 per cent of patients living five years after a cancer diagnosis in 2014-2018, compared to 44 per cent in 1994-1998;
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data shows that cancer mortality rates in Ireland are falling faster than the European Union average, and faster than our economic peers;
- these improvements were achieved under reforms delivered by three consecutive National Cancer Strategies, dating back to 1996, and these Strategies provided a clear, evidence-based, approach to cancer control, taking a whole-of-population perspective;
- the current strategy was launched in July 2017, setting out an ambitious set of actions to be completed within 10 years, and an evaluation of the strategy will be conducted this year, and the outcome of this will inform the development of the next strategy;
- the new strategy will provide an important opportunity to plan for the introduction of new therapies and treatments across the cancer continuum from prevention, screening, treatment, survivorship and palliative care;
- the current strategy contains 52 recommendations, with 43 of these having been implemented, and the National Cancer Control Programme is continuing to progress implementation of the remaining nine;
- the National Cancer Control Programme plays a key role in the planning and oversight of cancer services, setting national standards, monitoring regional performance and driving service reform;
- cancer services are delivered by a large and dedicated workforce, who strive to provide the best possible care for their patients;
- while services have improved overall, unfortunately, there are periodic regional variations in the performance of some services, and the transition to the new regional health structure, with greater autonomy and stronger performance accountability at local level, is designed specifically to address regional inequality and to improve patient outcomes;
- since the beginning of the current National Cancer Strategy in 2017, the Government has allocated €105 million to the National Cancer Strategy to support cancer services and improve outcomes for patients;

- this has enabled the recruitment of over 670 staff to our national cancer services, including the recruitment of an additional 180 staff to national cancer screening and treatment services as of the end of 2025;
- between 2021 and 2024, approval for reimbursement by the Health Service Executive (HSE) was given for 74 drugs for cancer, and the total spend on cancer drugs in this period exceeded €645 million;
- capital funding of over €140 million has been used to provide state of the art radiation oncology facilities in Galway and Cork, to establish a National Cervical Screening Laboratory, and to update cancer infrastructure in chemotherapy wards and lab facilities;
- more widely, the 2025 National Development Plan (NDP) review secured the largest ever capital investment plan in the history of the State and largest investment ever in health infrastructure in the State, and the NDP Health capital allocation is €1.56 billion for 2026 and the enhanced NDP provision for the health sector for 2026–2030 is €9.25 billion;
- the Government is progressing multiannual budgeting across the health services, and capital investment is already on a multiyear basis;
- since 2020, total staff working in Government funded HSE services has risen by over 22,000 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE), from 107,000 WTE to 129,600 at the end of January 2026, an increase of 21 per cent;
- the HSE continues to focus on service expansion and improvement, and the National Cancer Control Programme has developed a number of programmes to improve capacity at specialist cancer centres, and to support patients in avoiding Emergency Departments;
- the Government has provided significant investment in cancer screening programmes in recent years, and funding of €2.9 million was provided in 2025, to support the recruitment of 22 WTE posts, 15 additional WTE posts were also approved to help expand and futureproof the programme to meet increasing demand, and in 2025, 173,000 women participated in screening, the highest number in BreastCheck's history;
- the Programme for Government contains a commitment to extend the Laura Brennan Programme to anyone under 25 who missed it, and in January 2026, it was announced that the Laura Brennan Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Vaccine Catch-Up Programme would be reopened, to offer an additional opportunity for students in fifth and sixth year of post-primary school to receive HPV vaccination in 2026;
- the Productivity and Savings Taskforce is advancing improvements in equipment utilisation, diagnostics and theatre capacity, including through roster reforms and extended hours where required;
- the expansion and rollout of the Public Only Consultant Contract, alongside the revised 2025 Framework Agreement with health sector trade unions, provides a strong platform to support the extension of services;
- through the National Plan for Radiation Oncology, a major equipment replacement and expansion programme is being progressed, including replacing 14 linear accelerators at St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network and adding two at Beaumont, with associated diagnostic upgrades;

— new advanced services including CAR-T cell therapy and advanced radiotherapy have been introduced, removing the need for certain cohorts to travel abroad;

— significant Government investment is being provided to expand healthcare education, and within the last training year, the total number of doctors enrolled in training programmes has increased by 7 per cent, with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science recently announcing a €28.5 million investment to support the delivery of more than 1,100 additional healthcare training places annually over the next three years across medicine, nursing, therapy professions, pharmacy and dentistry;

— almost 1,600 first year students now enrol in medicine each year, along with 2,200 nurses; and

— in June 2025, the Government approved a significant expansion in training places for Health and Social Care Professions, and this saw up to 310 additional student places created in 2025, and a further 151 in subsequent years, including 23 additional places in radiotherapy and 80 additional places in radiography across 2025 and 2026."

I welcome the opportunity this evening to discuss cancer services on behalf of my colleague the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill. I join with the Ceann Comhairle in commending Deputy Gould on his personal account. I am glad to see him doing so well.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** Go raibh maith agat.

**Deputy Kieran O'Donnell:** I join with other colleagues across the House in acknowledging the great work of all healthcare workers, including medical, nursing and administrative staff and others throughout the health service. They do fantastic work. This year will mark the 13th anniversary of the launch of Ireland's first national cancer strategy and is an opportune time to reflect on the progress made since 1996 and to look ahead to how we advance and build on what has been achieved.

The Government recognises the objective of the Sinn Féin motion in seeking to provide the best possible care for cancer patients now and into the future. Many of the points that have been raised will be brought back to the Minister. All of us in the House share that goal and are working to ensure the very best outcomes for patients and their families. However, the Government is opposing the motion and has tabled a countermotion setting out our clear commitment and the detailed actions we are taking to drive further improvements in cancer services. It is important to point out that the Opposition motion does not recognise the levels of investment and funding provided under the current cancer strategy, with €105 million allocated to new developments, along with €44 million in cancer research funding, €140 million on capital projects and €645 million on cancer drugs between 2021 and 2024. Notably, the motion attempts to place Sláintecare wait-time targets into law, a measure this House debated and voted not to support just four months ago.

With over 24,000 invasive cancers diagnosed each year, the National Cancer Registry predicts that one in two people will receive a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime, as a Member referred to earlier. While a large proportion of cancers are preventable, the reality is that ageing is a key driving factor behind the increase in cancers. As the Irish population ages and grows, the number of people diagnosed with invasive cancer is expected to grow by between 50% and

100% over the 30-year period from 2015 to 2045. Alongside an increase in numbers, the cancer burden is rapidly expanding as it becomes, for many people, a chronic disease they live with for many years. Fortunately, this is a good marker, as the number of people surviving a cancer diagnosis is growing all the time.

In the latest reporting period, 2019 to 2022, over 65% of patients were alive five years after a cancer diagnosis, up from 43% in the period 1994 to 1998. Over 220,000 patients are alive today, having received a cancer diagnosis at some point. We have seen very good progress in the detection and treatment of many of the most common cancers, and in the case of breast cancer for example, five-year net survival has grown from 71% for the 1994-98 period to 87.5% for the 2019-2022 period. Breast cancer survivors are the largest cancer survivor group in Ireland, representing 22% of all cancer survivors and nearly 50,000 women. For prostate cancer we have seen the five-year survival rate go from 66% in the early 1990s to 93% in the most recent data and we now have 46,500 survivors of prostate cancer.

Of course, far too many people still have their lives cut short by cancer and I join Deputies across the House in wishing to ensure that our health services strive to deliver the very best cancer care for patients. The progress we have made would not have been possible without the evidence-based, whole-of-population approach taken under our three consecutive, decades-spanning national cancer strategies. The international evidence demonstrates that sustained progress in cancer control is best achieved through the consistent implementation of appropriately designed and resourced cancer strategies. Research published by *The Lancet* in 2022 reported that Ireland's cancer strategies, dating back to 1996, were a significant factor in improving cancer outcomes.

Furthermore, a study published by Professor Mark Lawler in January of this year in the *Journal of Cancer Policy* evaluated national cancer strategies across 20 countries and ranked Ireland among the highest in policy development and governance scores. The EU and the WHO continue to advise that cancer control is optimised through the development and implementation of national cancer control plans and strategies. We can be thankful that many patients will become cancer-free following their treatment but, for others, their cancer will be chronic conditions requiring prolonged surveillance and episodes of treatment over many years, with the associated significant implementations for service demand. With the development of the next cancer strategy, we will continue to progress our structured and strategic approach to the delivery of cancer services.

Investment under the strategy has ensured that more patients are being seen in specialist centres, more patients are being reviewed by multidisciplinary teams, new drugs and therapies are being made available, patients are receiving better supports during their cancer treatment, psycho-oncology services have been developed and major advances are being delivered for adolescents and young adults.

With regard to the workforce, our investment in infrastructure, research, medicines and staff focuses on providing the best possible outcomes for patients. However, these improvements would not be realised without the commitment of those working in our health service and the dedication they bring to their work, which I and many others have alluded to. In the past five years, we have increased the overall health workforce by 27%. Since the launch of the current national cancer strategy, we have added over 200 additional nursing staff, 100 consultants and 180 health and social care professionals in designated cancer centres. At the same time, we

have fostered and expanded pioneering services, creating new roles and teams in psycho-oncology, genetic services and cancer prevention.

Working in collaboration with the higher education sector, significant progress is also being made in increasing the number of student training places. My colleague, the Minister, Deputy Lawless, recently announced a €28.5 million investment in 2026 to support the delivery of more than 1,100 additional healthcare training places annually over the next three years across medicine, nursing, therapy professions, pharmacy and dentistry.

While we are adding more training places and funding more students, we are also ensuring that more graduates are retained in our health service. A mandate was introduced in March 2025 offering all nursing and midwifery and health and social care profession graduates of Irish colleges permanent contracts of employment when successful at interview. This mandate includes radiation therapist and radiography graduates, who are crucial for cancer services.

In parallel with an increase in staff numbers, it is important that we maximise the existing workforce. The expansion and rollout of the public-only consultant contract, along with the revised 2025 framework agreement with health sector trade unions, provides a strong platform to support the extension of services. Health regions are actively leveraging these arrangements to progress delivery of services in the evenings and at weekends across a range of areas, including diagnostics, patient pathways and community services.

As we invest in staff and expertise, we are also investing heavily in infrastructure and technology. Major infrastructure projects opened under the national cancer strategy include state-of-the-art radiotherapy centres in Cork and Galway in 2019 and 2023, respectively, at a cost of over €120 million and the establishment of a national cervical screening laboratory, which opened in December 2022. The 2025 national development plan review resulted in the largest ever capital investment plan in the history of the State and the largest investment ever in health infrastructure in the State.

Investment in cancer care, particularly in equipment for radiation oncology, is a key strategic priority. Through the national plan for radiation oncology, the Department of health is progressing a major equipment replacement and expansion programme that includes replacing 14 linear accelerators in the St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network and adding two at Beaumont, with associated diagnostic upgrades.

In light of the limited time I have, I will leave the rest of the written statement and go straight to the closing remarks. I once again thank the Deputies for the opportunity to discuss cancer care for patients in Ireland, the progress we have made and our commitment to continuously improve cancer services in Ireland. I acknowledge our shared commitment to improving the lives of cancer patients. On behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, I ask Deputies to support the Government's counter-motion.

**Deputy Martin Kenny:** I thank Deputy Cullinane for bringing forward this motion this evening. The national cancer strategy is due to be reviewed. As has been evidenced by the Deputies who have spoken before me, while the targets that are set are very logical and would ensure that people get the treatment they need within an appropriate timeframe, in many cases, they are clearly not being met. That is not the case just in one place in the country but across the entire country. I know of a gentleman in my own constituency who had a cancer diagnosis.

He was waiting for radiotherapy and contacted the hospital in Galway, which he has to travel to all the way from Leitrim, and was told he was on a waiting list. After several weeks of my office trying to deal with the HSE, he was finally able to move ahead with his treatment but he and his family were extremely stressed because his brother had previously passed away from the same type of cancer he had been diagnosed with. Many people find themselves in that situation.

The Minister of State has tabled an amendment to our motion that states how great everything is going but that is unfortunately not the experience of a great many people. That is very difficult to say because, in fairness, the HSE and the health service have traditionally provided a very good service, particularly when it comes to cancer care. Most people would say that, once you got into the system, you were treated fast, you were dealt with quickly and things progressed as you needed them to. That has changed in the past number of years and particularly in the past 12 to 18 months. I know from talking to my colleagues that many people across every constituency are experiencing the very same thing. There are delays and there is difficulty in accessing treatment and in getting diagnostics. When we talk to the clinicians and the hospitals, they tell us that staffing, medical equipment and facilities are all problems. All of these things need to be dealt with. While the Government's countermotion may suggest it is going to produce the answers, we are very doubtful it will.

**Deputy Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh:** Thirty years ago my mam was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. At that time, she went to her GP with a lump on her neck. She was told it was a cyst. She went back again and was dismissed again. It was only on the third consultation that she was referred for cancer screening. Had the cancer been detected in the first instance, my mam's journey would have looked very different. I commend Professor John Crown, who kept her alive for as long as he did.

Fast-forward 30 years and we still have endemic delays. In County Kildare, 951 people are diagnosed with cancer every year. Many of those people face difficulties accessing timely diagnosis and treatment, which negatively impacts their health outcomes. A constituent of mine, Áine, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma last year, just three months before her leaving certificate. I am thankful that she has made a great recovery, having received great care in Tallaght hospital. Áine has highlighted the significant delays to her chemotherapy caused by PET scan waiting times. At the moment, our equipment density is too low and equipment is out-of-date and underutilised. She was told she was lucky to receive chemotherapy when she did because there was just one space left in Tallaght at the time. Another shocking element of Áine's story is that she had to sleep in a ward of six beds with patients with various illnesses. This was extremely dangerous as her immune system was suppressed by medication.

In Kildare, we need beds for cancer patients at Naas General Hospital. At the moment, many are forced to travel. Long-term planning is essential. There will be an increase of 100% in the number of cancer diagnoses by 2045 compared to the number in 2015 so investment in infrastructure and new developments must be a priority.

We all have a personal story. Tá scéal pearsanta againn go léir sa Teach seo a bhaineann le hailse. Tuigimid ar fad cé chomh dáiríre agus chomh tábhachtach atá an cheist seo. Mar sin, oibrímis le chéile chun cúram ailse den chéad scoth a bhaint amach in Éirinn.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Many people will have harrowing stories to tell today that are personal and connected to them. The unfortunate fact is that cancer has a huge footprint. We have often spoken about people coming to us to say that the system is brilliant once you get into it but we are talking about slippage here. That is the reason Deputy Cullinane is highlighting the absolute necessity of a new cancer strategy. Some 15% of chemotherapy patients and 23% of radiotherapy patients do not start treatment on time. It is as simple as that. There are delays in surgical care, with 61% of prostate cancer surgeries, 45% of breast cancer surgeries and 39% of lung cancer surgeries not happening within the recommended timeframes.

That speaks for itself. It is just not good enough.

Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda ranks 16th out of the 25 hospitals providing chemotherapy with 17% of people not getting chemotherapy within the target timeframe of 15 working days. As Deputy Byrne said, 67 people in Drogheda faced serious delays for chemotherapy in 2025. That is not good enough whatsoever. We know that there are issues with resources, outdated rosters and outdated equipment. They just need to be dealt with.

In the small amount of time I have left, I want to bring up an issue that a constituent has brought to me. It relates to stomas. I appeal once again for people with stomas to be included in the long-term illness scheme. A person wears an ostomy bag for a number of reasons, one of which is obviously cancer. It is an absolute necessity for people, but at the minute they are paying a minimum monthly expense of €80 per month, whereas if they were up the road in Newry this would not be the case. It needs to be looked at and delivered upon.

**Deputy Donna McGettigan:** I thank my colleague, Deputy Cullinane, for bringing this motion forward. He has been very vocal on these issues, which hit nearly every home in the State.

I was personally affected by cancer when my partner at the time, Noel, was very ill. For 18 months, Noel lost a lot of weight and was in a lot of pain. He could barely hold himself up. Noel was yellow. His skin was yellow. His eyes were yellow. He was a bag of bones, yet he was repeatedly sent home from hospital. Noel was shifted between doctors. None of them seemed to talk to each other and because we do not have digital records, there was a complete lack of communication between doctors. Noel could not keep food down. We knew that Noel had cancer. The dogs in the street knew that Noel had cancer, but we had no diagnosis. We had to fight for a medical card. We were paying for petrol and parking costs. We were in and out of hospital, as well as dealing with the pain and the worry.

Noel was told he had cancer and then a week later told he did not. Noel was eventually brought to Dublin where he was opened up and it was then we were told the devastating news that he had stage 4 cancer. It was too late. Nothing could be done for him, but Noel, being mister positive, wanted us to use the six months he was given for us to be happy and get married. I set about arranging a wedding. It was during Covid-19 so we could not have all our family with us. I could not help but cry when it came to the words "in sickness and in health" because I knew there would be no health for Noel. We did not even get to celebrate our first anniversary together. At Noel's funeral during Covid-19, we could only have ten people. The sad thing about our story of delayed diagnosis is that we are not alone in this. I hope no other

family has to go through this. We need to provide better diagnoses and cancer care for people so that nobody else has to go through this.

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** Some of the personal testimonies we have heard this evening underline the need for change and better outcomes in this area. I speak as a representative of the west of Ireland. We know there is a postcode lottery when it comes to accessing cancer treatment across the State. The Irish Cancer Society, medical professionals and many others have consistently highlighted that waiting times to access cancer treatments in the west are among the worst in the State. For too many cancer patients, accessing treatment in a clinically appropriate timespan does not happen. To give an example, data from the HSE shows that almost 30% of cancer patients deemed fit for chemotherapy at University Hospital Galway did not receive it within the recommended 15-day clinical window. Those people are expected to wait weeks to start chemotherapy treatment while knowing that the cancer inside their bodies is not being treated. These are real people who are being put at increased risk. It is unacceptable.

The root cause of these delays and failures is the lack of resourcing and staffing for cancer services. There are plans for the development of a new cancer care centre as part of the master plan at University Hospital Galway. There is still no timeline for that and there are real concerns that the Government has not provided sufficient resources in the HSE capital budget. There is currently no PET scanner operating in the public cancer care system in the western region. This imaging technology is vital for cancer diagnosis. At the moment, patients are being forced to travel really long distances to access these scans, or they are being referred to private operators at a significant cost to the State. We have been told that the delivery of a PET scanner to University Hospital Galway is not planned to be completed until 2033. This means that for many more years, cancer patients in the west will continue to experience challenges in accessing the scans they need and this inequality will continue.

This motion is an opportunity for the Government to acknowledge the failings that too many cancer patients are facing within the public system. It is also an opportunity to end the postcode lottery and improve patient outcomes. I urge the Government to implement the practical solutions outlined in the motion.

**Deputy Marie Sherlock:** I thank Deputy Cullinane and Sinn Féin for introducing this timely motion on cancer services, which the Labour Party supports. I was going to give out that the Government is opposing this motion. It is disappointing that it has decided to nitpick at what is a very good motion. Surely to God, we should all join together to identify the very clear issues that exist at the moment. While it used to be the case that Ireland was a global leader with regard to cancer care, we are now a long way off that because of a lack of investment but also because of a lack of focus on how we organise our health service - not just our hospital services, but right down to our primary care GP services. This is why we are not getting cancer services right in this country today. The reality is that, sadly, one in two people will get cancer in their lifetime in this country and one in three people will die from it. Ireland has the second highest incidence rate of cancer diagnosis in the EU. The number of cancer diagnoses is projected to grow by 47% between 2022 and 2040, so it is something we need to get right in terms of our services. To me, this conversation has to be about funding and how we organise our health services. We await the new national cancer health strategy next year. It is critical

that ring-fenced funding is there and is rooted in prevention, particularly with regard to primary care and looking at those socioeconomic factors. Inequality is at the heart of the higher incidence of cancer among lower-income parts of our population and communities. Funding has to be ring-fenced for early diagnosis through screening, early treatment, innovation and access to technology and medication.

Screening is the low-hanging fruit of cancer services. We know that 40% of women called to attend BreastCheck last year did not go. BreastCheck missed its target by 46,000 mammograms last year and that target has been missed three years in a row. I have not heard any answers or any research into why that is the case. We can speculate. There are many potential reasons, including difficulty getting the time off work, the fear of the mammogram procedure because it is painful, and the potential outcome. My colleague, Deputy Duncan Smith, has a Bill coming this Thursday that will seek to provide for legislative provision for workplace leave for cancer screening. However, we need to see the research and the understanding undertaken by the Department as to why women are not presenting for BreastCheck. To my mind, the conversation has to be about reducing the eligibility age for BreastCheck. In particular, it should be extended to women below the age of 50 to ensure we catch the incidents of cancer at a much earlier stage. We have to send out a message that if breast cancer is diagnosed at stage 1, there is a 99% chance of survival. That is why early detection is so vital. We need to get to the bottom of why the take-up is much lower than it should be.

The other key concern for me is with regard to bowel screening. We know that the target of 50% is obviously much lower than we would like, but the take-up of bowel screening is far below what it should be. The rates of colorectal cancer in this country doubled for those under the age of 50 between 1994 and 2019. In an article published by the *Irish Medical Journal* last year, researchers from Cork University Hospital and Cancer Research Ireland predicted that by the 2030, young onset colorectal cancer will be the leading cause of death for adults between the ages of 20 and 49. One in ten people with colorectal cancer in Ireland at the moment are under the age of 50. We need to get serious about that very real challenge over the coming years. Not only do we need to look at the take-up of the existing screening programme, but we also need to lower the age as well.

To me, screening is the easy, low-cost part of the cancer services.

The other key part is the in-hospital services. We see what has happened with regard to radiation oncology, the delays in terms of access to treatment. Two in ten people are not starting radiation in time. In 2025, two in five women were not being seen on time for their appointment at an urgent breast clinic. Of course, in the Dublin area, 90% of the LINACs are beyond the ten-year lifespan. That points to an enormous Government failure to ensure investment in infrastructure.

The other key aspect of what I want to touch on is outside of the hospital system. It is about the overall system of cancer care, which is the first port of call, namely our GP system. The EU Country Cancer Profile 2025 stated that Ireland faces shortages of various cancer care professionals, including GPs. I have stood in this Chamber a number of times, including with the Minister of State a number of weeks ago, when we discussed the huge geographical inequality that exists across this country with regard to accessing GPs. To be very frank about it, if people have to endure a long wait to access their GP, that is going to deter them from

turning up, particularly if it is an issue relating to testicular cancer, prostate cancer, breast cancer or some of the cancers that may be a bit more sensitive for people in terms of presenting. We have to change that.

It is not good enough in the communities that I represent. There is one GP for 3,000 people in Cabra while it is one GP for 3,500 people in the north inner city. In some of the fast-growing communities, particularly in Kildare, Lucan and east Meath, we are seeing one GP to 4,000 or 5,000 people. That is unacceptable. I sometimes think when we are having this conversation I am having it with people who can pick up the phone to their GP, talk to the secretary and get the appointment the following day or the day after. If that is the case for the vast majority here, that is wonderful, but that is not the reality for many people in the community. The Government opposed our Bill to ensure that the HSE takes responsibility for an even geographic distribution of GPs across the country. We have to get that right if we are making sure that people are presenting at the first port of call within the health system.

The last issue I raise is palliative care. While we are all about early detection and treatment, the reality is people die in this country from cancer. Deputy Farrell raised it earlier, but I raise the lack of pathways when somebody has cancer in this country into the hospital system, whether they are currently in treatment or in palliative care. It is really frustrating to think that people with cancer have to present themselves to an emergency department and sit there for a number of hours or days before they get the treatment they need. St. Vincent's and other hospitals across this country have begun to provide quick access for cancer patients, chemotherapy patients in particular, to their clinics.

I spent time yesterday with a 42-year-old woman who is in palliative care. She is a single mother to a young son. She had to wait three hours for an ambulance yesterday to be brought to her local major hospital in Dublin. She had to wait until 4 o'clock this morning for a bed. She is in palliative care. Because she has been discharged from chemotherapy and even though she is with the hospice, she is not at death's door to go into the hospice just yet. She is in limbo. There is nobody to look after her. She needs a nephrostomy, which is effectively a procedure to ensure that the urine leaking out of her back can be stopped. She had to go into that same hospital a number of weeks ago and waited four whole days, taking up a hospital bed, waiting for a one-hour procedure that does not require a general anaesthetic. I am telling this story this evening to highlight the lack of pathways, particularly for those in palliative care into the hospital system. There is a complete disconnect from when people finish their treatment to when they die or when they go into a hospice. By the time they are admitted into a hospice, they are only a few days or a week or two from passing away. What about those weeks in the middle? That is critical.

Part of it relates to hospital organisation. The other part is the 2024 national palliative care strategy, and it is very welcome. It states great objectives, but I am not at all convinced, when I look at the HSE service plan or the letter of determination from the Minister, that there is any focus on that at all. In some ways, it should not take an awful lot to ensure that somebody with palliative care presenting to a hospital has a particular pathway to get their treatment and get them back out. It is not good enough that a palliative care patient is taking up a vital bed for somebody who may live, if we call a spade a spade, but second, in terms of affording them dignity in their final weeks and months of life, that they would spend any time unnecessarily within a hospital system. This is not really about massive amounts of funding; this is about

how we get our systems right. I am afraid that those systems are not right. There are stories across this country of people having to get into ambulances and present to emergency departments unnecessarily when there should be another way for them.

I thank Sinn Féin for tabling the motion. There is enormous work to be done to ensure Ireland can go back to being a global leader in cancer care. Ultimately, to make sure we get back to that place, we have to get the investment into our equipment right and the investment into access to medicines. We know there is a gross inequality in Ireland between those who have the luxury of private health insurance - when I say luxury, you are paying a fortune for health insurance - or those reliant on the public system and the access to drugs. Across a whole range of cancers, people's potential for survival is greatly enhanced if they can go through the private system and access those drugs licensed through the EMA that have not been licensed for this country. In my book, if a drug has been licensed through the EMA, we need a greatly simplified system through the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics of how we process approvals for drugs in this country. Yes, cost is one of them, but I do not hear anything from the Government about pushing at European level about how drug prices are collectively negotiated. In some ways, the market model is coming back to bite us in Ireland. We need to make sure we collectively negotiate at the EU rather than doing it individually here.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** I thank Sinn Féin for tabling the motion, which the Social Democrats will support. Cancer services were once the jewel in the crown of our health service and an example of what the system could achieve if sustained investment was matched by political will, but the focus on delivery has waned over the lifetime of the current strategy. As a result, we have delayed diagnoses and treatment, missed targets, shocking regional disparities, ageing infrastructure and major staff shortages, none of which were acknowledged by the Minister of State in his opening statement. To put it mildly, it was disappointing, particularly given the stories we have heard tonight.

Ring-fenced funding for the cancer strategy has been sporadic over its lifetime. When the strategy was launched in 2017, the then Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, promised substantial current and capital funding over the ten years of the strategy. However, as the motion notes, the strategy has not received dedicated development funding in every budget since. There is a direct link between this failure to fund the cancer strategy and the missed targets, staff shortages and rampant outsourcing. You cannot starve a strategy of funding and expect it to be a success.

When the Irish Cancer Society appeared before the health committee last October, it was very clear about the need for multi-annual ring-fenced funding for the strategy. The programme for Government commits to developing a multi-annual funding approach for the entire health service. However, multi-annual health service funding has been promised by every Government since 2016, yet none has delivered it. The Minister for Health should have insisted that it was delivered in this Government's first budget. Budget 2026 did nothing to advance multi-annual funding. Last year, during the Estimates process, the Minister told me that it was her ambition to progress multi-annual funding this year, subject to an agreement with the Department of public expenditure. We need to know if this is still progressing and if it will be implemented in budget 2027. The next cancer strategy must have multi-annual funding. Otherwise, it will suffer the same fate as the current strategy.

There is no doubt that patient outcomes have improved over recent decades. However, the absence of sustained, year-on-year funding has meant that too many people are not getting access to timely tests and treatment. The Irish Cancer Society has provided an overview of recent testing and treatment pathways. Last year, 6,200 people waited more than the recommended time for a colonoscopy. The target is zero patients within more than 28 days. Two in five women were not seen on time for urgent symptomatic breast disease clinics. The target was 95% seen within ten working days. In the first half of the year, seven in ten people waited more than three months for an MRI, while six in ten people waited over three months for a CT scan.

Similar things are faced in terms of cancer surgeries in 2025. Two in five people did not have lung cancer surgery within the recommended 25 days. Three in ten women did not get their breast cancer surgery within the recommended 20 working days. In 2024, which is the year for which the latest data are available, three in five men did not get prostate cancer surgery in the recommended 30 working days. The bottom line is that these delays caused avoidable deaths. Research published by the *British Medical Journal* found that every four-week delay in starting cancer treatment can increase mortality by 10%. This is precisely why we have targets in the national cancer strategy. We know that a person's chances of surviving cancer are up to four times higher when treated at stage 1 rather than stage 4.

One of the biggest issues in cancer care is the hollowing out of public radiotherapy services. Since 2020 over €113 million has been spent outsourcing radiotherapy for public patients to private providers. In 2020, €12 million was spent on outsourcing radiation therapy. Since then it more than doubled to €28 million in 2025.

One of the biggest reasons for this shocking spend on outsourcing is the failure to plan. Radiation therapy machines have a ten-year lifespan yet 50% of public machines are over 15 years old with four of these over 18 years old. After the ten-year mark, machines break down, maintenance costs increase and the standard of care decreases. St. Luke's Hospital in Rathgar, for example, is limited to using just three of its machines at any one time to mitigate frequent breakdowns. This means it is losing a quarter of its capacity on any given day. I accept a replacement programme is finally under way in the St. Luke's network but why do machines have to reach breaking point before action is taken? Not one machine in Dublin is under ten years old and, as I said, four are approaching 20 years old. The need to replace machines is entirely predictable yet there is no rolling national radiotherapy equipment replacement programme in place. The machines in Galway will need to be replaced by 2032 and the machines in Cork will need to be replaced by 2029, just four years from now, yet no planning is under way. We need a rolling replacement programme and not an *ad hoc* system of replacement. This would also save the State money by buying equipment in bulk.

There are similar issues in relation to staffing. We now have a radiation therapy staffing shortage of between 15% and 22%. The increased reliance on outsourcing is creating a vicious cycle. In CUH, a radiation therapist told me that patients are being outsourced to private providers because the public system does not have enough staff. Outsourcing creates more business for private centres which, in turn, hire more staff. This means that even more consultants and radiation therapists leave the public system for the private system, which is booming on the taxpayers' dime.

Another issue I want to raise relates to radiography practice tutors. Radiographer tutors play a vital role in clinical education and training of students within our hospitals but their value is not recognised, not least in their current terms and conditions. We know that experienced radiography practice tutors are stepping down because the pay does not reflect the level of responsibility. If we are to attract and retain more tutors, they must be remunerated and graded appropriately. The cancer strategy is clear on the need to increase the number of student places and I welcome that the Government is implementing this recommendation. Just last week, however, I heard reports of radiography students studying in the library instead of doing clinical hours because of a lack of practice tutors to support their placements. One tutor described this to me as being akin to learning to drive by simulator. Hospitals must be funded to deliver these extra placements and there needs to be more joined-up thinking. What good is having college places if the tutors are not there in the hospitals? This escalating crisis requires an urgent intervention by the Minister for Health. It is time to support and value these tutors not just in words but in actions. Otherwise we will not be able to increase the number of tutors or retain them or provide patients with timely diagnostics.

I sincerely hope this debate is a wake-up call and in particular the really harrowing personal stories Members have shared about themselves, people they know, their constituents and family members. We really need to improve cancer services for people right across the country. This next strategy must not be starved of funding and it must not be at the whim of every budget cycle. We must have multi-annual funding. I would like the Minister of State to take that message back to the Minister. The downward trend in cancer care can and must be reversed. We have done it before and we can do it again. We need to have the same commitment to deliver that was present for the first two cancer strategies but notably absent in the third. I urge the Government to change track on this, to invest in cancer services and to start improving cancer services so we can improve outcomes, improve lives and prevent avoidable deaths.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** I welcome the motion put down by Deputy Cullinane and Sinn Féin. I acknowledge the personal testimony shared by Members throughout the debate. It is really appreciated and I know it will matter to a lot of people.

Today's motion is very timely, coming just a week after Daffodil Day when people across the country showed solidarity with those affected by cancer. People across this House showed the same solidarity by wearing daffodils and meeting local cancer survivors and advocates here in Leinster House 2000. I am very conscious that when representatives of the Irish Cancer Society come here, we all take pictures and share them but they expect us to take decisions. The decisions they are asking for are reflected in today's motion.

After the failure to deliver the last strategy, there can be no more delay. We need a new national cancer strategy for 2027 to 2037 backed with proper ring-fenced multi-annual funding, including an additional €30 million a year in new development funding, as the motion sets out.

Cancer touches every family in this country. People should not be left waiting when they are diagnosed, at a time already filled with so much stress and uncertainty, but that is exactly what is happening. In 2025, 45% of breast cancer surgeries did not happen on time, while 39% of lung cancer surgeries and 61% of prostate cancer surgeries were delayed in 2024. It is not just surgery: 23% of radiotherapy patients and 15% of chemotherapy patients did not receive treatments within their target timeframes either. Those are not small gaps. Behind every one

of those statistics, there are real people who have been left waiting when time matters. In our role, how often do we knock on a person's door to be told such a story? It happens too often in my constituency.

The most recent implementation review found that only one of 23 national cancer strategy objectives had been met. Nearly a decade later, we are below the EU average for MRI, CT and PET scanners. This is not pressure on the system; it is a systematic, documented failure of investment and follow-through.

We know that cancer does not impact communities evenly. In more deprived areas, including parts of the north inner city which I represent, there are significantly higher rates of lung and cervical cancer. Those communities have historically been under-served by screening and early detection. We learned that BreastCheck only screened 75% of its anticipated numbers in 2025, having already accounted for a 30% drop-off in invitations. We know that the women least likely to be reached are often those who need it most. We cannot allow inequality in outcomes to deepen because of a failure to invest in infrastructure, equipment and community-level screening. That is exactly how a postcode lottery becomes permanent.

Alongside all of this, there is the crippling financial cost of diagnosis. People are not just dealing with their illness; they are also dealing with the travel costs, car-parking charges, time off work, childcare and bills. In my own constituency, the operator of the Mater Hospital car park charges €15 a day. That is an outrageous cost to someone attending daily for treatment. I live less than half a kilometre away from the Mater Hospital. It is all too frequent that I get a phone call from a relative, a friend or someone asking if there is any free parking available in the locality. You often see people parking far away from the Mater Hospital and walking to it because of the cost of car parking. Some of these are people in the middle of cancer treatment. That is why the practical measures in this motion matter. We need to abolish hospital car-parking charges, increase medical card thresholds in line with GP visit cards, properly fund discretionary medical cards and place Sláintecare waiting time targets into law so that access to care is not optional but guaranteed and can be vindicated through the courts if that basic necessity is not met through the allocation of budget resources. Cancer already takes enough from people and their families. The system should not add to that burden.

Before I conclude, I acknowledge the healthcare workers who do immense and incredible work. People often share their stories and talk about the great service they received from individuals within the system. This motion is incredibly reasonable. It is timely and necessary and we support it. I know the Minister of State supports it in theory, but we need follow-through from the Government as a whole.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I thank Deputy Cullinane and Sinn Féin for bringing forward this very important motion on cancer services, which I am very happy to support. It is more or less a year since I started my cancer treatment for throat cancer.

*9 o'clock*

The most important thing I wish to say is how grateful I am to all of those who work in cancer services, from the doctors and nurses to the radiotherapists and nutritionists, from the orderlies and porters to the receptionists and the people who research in the area of cancer and help to develop the treatments - all these huge numbers of people. There are a lot more that I am

probably not mentioning. Without them, I might not be standing here, or I might be facing a bleak future, but instead the treatment was successful. It was thanks to those amazing people and all the work they did. I am very grateful. Given that 50% of the population will have a scrape with cancer, it is important to know that it is not a death sentence as maybe going back not so long ago it was seen as such. The treatment is advancing all the time if, ideally, we catch it early or it gets treated. If we invest and resource the people who work in this area properly, support them, the research necessary, the equipment necessary and the capacity and resources, then we can save a lot of lives. I am certainly a major beneficiary of that.

I am not quite sure why the Government has put down an amendment to Sinn Féin's motion because it could certainly add things to it. Sinn Féin's motion is very reasonable in saying that, of course, there should not be a postcode lottery. I have had a very good experience. It varies around the country. In more rural parts of the country, in particular, it can be very different. I would not like having to travel. I was lucky in that regard. I went to St. Luke's. I am well paid, so it does not matter so much, but in St. Luke's patients do not have to pay for parking. In St. Vincent's, there is a parking charge, and it is quite a lot. It is crazy to put financial obstacles in the way of people when they are in this sort of situation. There are other financial obstacles to accessing services, such as if a person does not have a medical card they still have to pay. The amount of money that they have to pay is significant for some people. We should not place financial obstacles in the way of people when they are in this sort of situation.

I agree with the motion. We need a cancer strategy for the next ten years. We need to resource that on a multi-annual basis, so there is certainty. We need to have equipment replacement programmes. It has already been referred to. The age of the linear accelerators is ridiculous. The vast majority of them are way past their sell-by date. That makes a big difference. One of the things a patient is affected by when getting treatment is the collateral damage of the treatment in terms of the side effects, but the newer the machinery and the more precise the treatment is, the better it is for dealing with the cancer and it lessens the impact of the side effects. This makes a real difference to the quality of life of people who get the treatment and to the precision of the treatment. We need to have that properly organised national equipment replacement scheme rather than it being done on an *ad hoc* basis.

Senior radiation therapists should be on a senior pay scale. A lot of the people who are qualified in this area are leaving the country because they do not have comparable pay rates to people in other parts of the country. We also have a problem that out of the eight PET scanners in this country, only one is fully publicly funded and one is partially funded. They are in private hands. The only place that the stuff that goes into PET CT scanners is made is Blackrock Clinic, a private clinic, which is ridiculous. There should not be that level of privatisation of the means to produce PET scanners and the equipment because it raises questions about equality of treatment when dealing with cancer. There are many more things that I could say but I am out of time. Hopefully, the Government is listening.

**Deputy Charles Ward:** I thank Sinn Féin for tabling this motion. I fully support it. I call on the Government to commit to a new cancer strategy. The postcode lottery in healthcare access across the country is unacceptable and deeply unfair. People in rural communities, such as Donegal, are at a severe disadvantage when they fall ill and require emergency treatment or treatment of any type. My constituents are facing chronic shortages of GPs and very limited services in rural areas. Many of them are forced to travel long distances for basic treatments,

often delaying care and worsening health outcomes. The longer waiting times and the reduced local services have contributed to increased stress, financial strain and in some cases, preventable illness and deterioration. A particular highlight comes from cancer care access in Donegal. It is shown by the report in *The Journal* investigates article last year that just 12% of cancer patients in Letterkenny University Hospital received treatment within the recommended 15 working day timeframe. Cancer patients in Letterkenny have to wait 50% longer than patients in any other hospital in the HSE West and North West region. This impact is life-threatening. The research has shown that the delays reduced the treatment options that are available for cancer patients. In some cases, it has caused avoidable death. Distribution of resources and services has clearly led to inequalities in healthcare outcomes. We have to address this.

Where a person lives should not determine how they get their treatment. The people of Donegal deserve the same healthcare outcomes as everybody else. The failure to invest and fairly distribute healthcare resources has left rural Ireland at a real severe disadvantage. The geographical isolation undermines the principle of access, the most recent example being the planned changes to the cancer flights from Donegal to Dublin and the removal of the midday flight, which has caused severe anxiety among the people and the cancer patients who are fighting for their lives. The passengers rely on this route to get necessary life-changing treatment. They are having to fight for this midday flight. It is the difference between getting treatment and not getting it, getting a hospital bed and not getting one and a getting a favourable outcome and not getting one. The proposed changes would cause people to miss critical treatment times. Many of them would have to stay in Dublin overnight at financial costs for themselves while severely ill, not able to afford hotel rooms and trying to travel on a bus. A bus up to Donegal from Dublin takes five hours. Coming out of chemotherapy and travelling up on a bus is not a desirable thing for anybody to do.

When they come in, they are looking for equality. The flight would give them that. The flight allows them to go, get their treatment, go back up in the evening and be home instead of coming to Dublin, trying to get a hotel room for €200, €300 or €400 that they do not have, then suffering and getting the flight first thing in the morning back up to Donegal. I ask the Minister of State to do whatever she can to make sure that this is highlighted and that we can make sure this flight is restored. I have spoken with the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, about this. I said that we need to make sure this flight is restored to Donegal. Otherwise, these patients are going to be suffering unnecessarily.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** I welcome the proposal in this motion. Unfortunately, the incidence of cancer is increasing. Many cancer patients are being failed. There are roughly 42,000 people diagnosed with cancer per annum in the State. That is a huge number of people. The State has the third highest mortality rate for people with cancer in the European Union. Poorer former eastern bloc countries are doing better than we are. For example, in County Laois, approximately 270 people were diagnosed each year. That does not include non-melanoma skin cancer. Unfortunately, in the most recent figures that we have from 2024, 138 people died from cancer.

I acknowledge the great work done by the Cuisle Cancer Support Centre in Portlaoise. Those centres need more Government support. A lot of the money is raised voluntarily. In Laois, people also face challenges with costs. Obviously, many of them do not have medical

cards. They have to travel to hospitals generally in Dublin. They have to pay tolls, parking fees and extra fuel. One of things that needs to be done is to waive the parking charges for cancer patients. It is a very simple measure that can be taken.

The delays in surgery are shocking. They are not being done within the timeframe. According to the Irish Cancer Society, 61% of prostate surgeries are not being done within the target timeframe. A total of 45% of breast surgeries and 39% of lung operations are not being done within the targeted timeframe. There are delays in radiotherapy, with 23% of cases not being done within the target timeframe, while in chemotherapy, the figure is 15%. That is shocking. Imagine the stress and worry for people who are delayed. I know somebody who was waiting and waiting. I had to intervene on their behalf at the time to get the necessary treatment that they needed. That is not good enough.

There is also a lack of awareness around the symptoms and delayed diagnosis. We need to increase public awareness around that.

In short, we need to expand the outdated diagnostic equipment that we have, invest in modern equipment and infrastructure in our hospitals and scale up because one in two of us is going to get cancer. That is the bad news. We need to expand the number of training places for cancer treatment staff because without staff, it cannot be done. Bowel cancer screening and BreastCheck are fantastic. Some work needs to be done to expand screening.

We need a greater emphasis on prevention and awareness. We need to strengthen North-South co-operation. One of the things that we can do on a North-South basis is strengthen co-operation in cancer research and treatment. There is a lot of talk about screening. Maybe when we get older, we encounter this but the number of people I come across who have prostate cancer is significant. We need to provide free screening and free blood tests for prostate cancer for men aged over 60. We need to ban sunbeds. Using sunbeds is crazy. A ban on them is recommended by the Irish Cancer Society and I do not know of any sensible person who would not support such a ban.

We need to give cancer patients automatic entitlement to medical cards. I have come across a case where a person died from cancer without being able to get a medical card. This person was not a millionaire. Their income was very modest but they could not get medical card because of the low income thresholds. If somebody has particularly stage 3 or 4 cancer, give them a bloody medical card because they need one. We should waive car parking charges for cancer patients. We should ask each hospital to do that. A simple voucher would do it.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** Like many other Deputies in this Chamber, I am a cancer survivor. I am blessed to be six years cancer-free. When you have cancer, it is like an enormous cloud descends upon you and your family. The more important message to go out tonight is that if you get treatment fast, the sun will shine again and that cloud will lift from your family. Getting treatment is the key issue and the problem is the fact that where someone lives in Ireland determines whether he or she gets treatment in a timely fashion. There is a postcode lottery in this country when it comes to cancer treatment and, therefore, cancer outcomes. The Irish Cancer Society has released damning information that shows massive variations in cancer diagnostics and treatments in this country. Patients in major cities, particularly those travelling from the north west, face delays of up to eight weeks for chemotherapy despite the national cancer strategy stating that a person should not wait for more than 15 days. People with breast

cancer and prostate cancer are being denied timely, life-saving chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I met a doctor in Letterkenny who told me that just 12% of cancer patients in that hospital received treatment within the recommended 15-day working timeframe. In Galway, patients are waiting seven to eight weeks for treatment. The National Cancer Control Programme has written to Aontú stating that the HSE is failing to meet its own radiation treatment targets. In the year to August 2024, treatment targets were met only once in Galway and only twice in Cork. Cancer services in the north west are being shut down. Cancer centres in Galway, Waterford and Limerick do not have the necessary PET scans, antique radiotherapy equipment is breaking down and people are dying for the lack of timely treatment.

The Irish Cancer Society has said that the Government has met only one of its six targets set for cancer treatment and tests. A reply to a parliamentary question from Aontú has shown that breast cancer survival rates can differ by 14% from one county to another. The Minister of State will be glad to know the breast cancer survival rates are as high as 94% in Cavan, but they are as low as 80% in the likes of Kerry. Last summer, BreastCheck, a countrywide screening service for women between 50 and 69, missed the target for 195,000 screenings by 30%, an incredible figure.

Aontú also discovered that there is a 12% differential in outcomes for breast cancer depending on whether someone is diagnosed in a public or private hospital. Someone diagnosed in a cancer centre has an 85% chance of surviving, while someone diagnosed in another public hospital has an 81% chance of surviving. However, someone diagnosed in a private hospital has a 93% chance of surviving. A patient diagnosed in Sweden is 7% more likely to survive, while a patient diagnosed in Britain is 5% more likely to survive. Other countries are doing far better and more people are being protected. Why is this? It is because the money in this country is not getting to the front line.

Many staff are going abroad. A reply to another Aontú parliamentary question has shown that 13,000 nursing staff left Ireland in the past five years. That is an incredible legacy left by this Government. In some years, the majority of graduating doctors are also leaving this country. Thankfully, cancer survival rates are increasing but that is because of better medicines, improved technology and improved treatments. It is certainly not because of the actions of this Government.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** We are talking about whether people in this country get seen, get treated and get a fair chance or whether they are left waiting, worrying and wondering if the system will fail them again. We have a national cancer strategy but only one out of 23 objectives has actually been delivered. Many Deputies have spoken today about personal tragedies when it comes to cancer. A cancer diagnosis is a dark moment in a person's life. It is not always a very dark journey but it certainly is a dark moment and a great difficulty. My mother died of cancer at 54 years of age - a young woman. At that time, which was 30 years ago, I thought 54 was a great age but I am above that age myself now so I find it to be a very young age. It was a young age at that time too but, unfortunately, it got the best of us - a strong woman.

We have a delivery problem, with patients paying the price. We have people missing chemotherapy and radiotherapy timelines and people waiting far too long for breast, lung and prostate surgeries. Depending on where you live, your access to care can swing from 60% to

95%. That is nothing short of a postcode lottery. We are short of scanners and staff and we are not even using the equipment we have properly, yet the Government could not even ring-fence funding in half the budgets. If it is not ring-fenced, it is not guaranteed and if it is not guaranteed, it is not going to be delivered.

Independent Ireland is calling for simple practical tips, such as using hospitals in the evenings and at weekends, training and keeping our staff here, replacing outdated equipment and supporting patients properly. Obviously, parking charges are a huge difficulty for people battling cancer. There needs to be a clear focus on that, including on family members who are visiting them. It is hard enough to be hit in one way but to be hit in the pocket as well is very unfair.

There is one thing we need to spend some time thinking and talking about here. We talk about a caring Government or a caring country but why are cancer patients not getting medical cards just for the duration of their disease, which could be six or 12 months? It hurts quite a lot of people coming to me. It sounds as if we are racist but we are not. People are coming in from around the world and we are nearly handing medical cards out to them at the airport when there are people who have worked hard all their life and cannot get them. People can apply and the hospital can apply but the disease has to be terminal or extremely serious before they get the medical card. I had a dispute here with the previous Minister of State on that issue. That Minister of State was wrong. We know that because we are the people who are making the applications and we know they are being turned down. Sometimes I worry about whether people are going to get a medical card because of their prognosis. It might not be the best for them and that is not good enough. This country needs to work in that direction so that if people can prove they have cancer, their illness is covered for the period of time they have it. If we cannot move towards that, then this is not a caring society.

I need to commend one sector. I was part of this organisation some time back. Cancer Connect in west Cork started under Local Link and has run an incredible service over the past number of years under Helen O'Driscoll and her team in the office in Bantry. They are taking people every day for cancer treatment free of charge. They are picked up at the door if it is a more serious cancer where the person cannot be in the bus. If it involves chemotherapy, the person is picked up in Castletownbere, Mizen Head and Sheep's Head or wherever and the team works its way up through Clonakilty, Skibbereen, Bandon and Bantry. It is free of charge and all of it is done to perfection. They wait for them for a short period, everyone is looked after and all of them are put back on the bus back to west Cork in the evening. It is a fantastic service. I think other counties are copying it. This is something we built about 15 or 20 years ago and it is a really powerful service that has really delivered.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion.

There is not a family in Ireland that has not been affected by someone belonging to them having cancer, people recovering from it or, sadly, some of their loved ones passing away.

When the strategy was done, we were going to have centres of excellence. A centre of excellence in Galway should be the same as one in Dublin, Cork or anywhere else in the country. We have failed abysmally. Go to Galway and look at the lab that people have to work in and then go to some of the places here in Dublin. Go to the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach's local

hospital in Limerick and see what happens. It is disgraceful that parts of the country are being left behind.

Think of a person in Donegal who has to go to Galway for treatment by bus and then travel home again. In this day and age, that is not on. A person in the north west or the west should not be left behind. People are being left behind. It is not the fault of consultants or nurses. They are doing the best they can. However, people are not able to get chemotherapy. The statistics and the facts show that they are not getting chemotherapy at the times they are supposed to be getting it.

Have a look at the capital plan. What funding under the capital plan was put into the west of Ireland in the past ten years in comparison with other areas? Anyone can look at it. It is a disgrace what has happened. I was at a meeting in Galway. We, as politicians, went to hear Professor Kerin, an expert, speak. He stated that if you are in the west of Ireland, you have a lesser chance of survival than in any other part of the country. That was a damning statement.

We listen to people, day in, day out, telling us about treatment being delayed. That is not good enough. Even in Galway, they have to send some of their patients to Dublin for more expert treatment. Centres of excellence should be in all parts of the country. A centre of excellence should not be at my backdoor, no more than at anyone else's. These centres should be located in all parts of the country in order to help people.

We also need to be mindful of people. As Deputy Collins and others stated, it is a stressful time when a person is told that they have cancer. Medical cards should automatically be given to people instead of them having to fight for them. The only way you will get a card urgently at present is if you have a terminal illness. We need to look at that.

There is another part to this. People with cancer cannot work. Thankfully, many people recover from cancer. That needs to be said. However, while they are going through treatment, be it radiotherapy or chemotherapy, they may have to have operations. It is a minimum of 12 months, and at times longer, where they are out of work, where an income is not coming in and where they have to attend hospital appointments. Even after therapy, they still have to attend hospital appointments. As for funds, they struggle to keep going. We have got to be mindful of that.

I ask that the relevant Ministers look at the state of cancer services and hospital infrastructure in general. The hospital infrastructure in Galway is abysmal. We deserve better. It is not just Galway; it is the entire west and north west.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** It is a damnable thing to say that Galway hospital does not have a PET scanner. Imagine that. A private hospital up the road has one, but the main hospital, the centre of excellence, does not. It is time that money was invested.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Like every other county in Ireland and, I suppose, other places across the world, Kerry has its fair share of cancer patients. Sadly, many people have passed on at a young age as a result of cancer. As a public representative, I come across more than my share of these patients from day to day.

Kerry is lacking in many ways because of the distances involved. A person with cancer who lives in Cahersiveen, Dingle, Lauragh or other places nearby is 50 miles or 60 miles from Tralee, in the first instance, and over 100 miles from Cork. Kerry has been promised, in the grounds of University Hospital Kerry, UHK, oncology services. We are still waiting for those. Comfort for Chemo Kerry has done a lot of fundraising for this project, which the HSE has approved. These services would help a lot of people who are currently travelling to CUH for treatment.

I thank those who operate the "cancer bus" that takes people for treatment, chemotherapy or whatever. That bus is funded on a voluntary basis. If anything deserves to be funded by the State, it is the bus that takes patients for treatment.

When people get cancer, they should be entitled to medical cards. Whatever means you have or whatever number of children, you are not able to work and you need a medical card to pay for treatment. Otherwise, you are treated as a second-class citizen. People feel like that.

Early diagnosis is of paramount importance, as is early treatment. We need to ensure that happens in every case.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** The other thing we must look at is what is causing it. I have been saying that the South American beef is not vetted in the same way as Irish beef, and I am worried about that.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** Táim an-bhuíoch as an deis chun caint ar an ábhar seo. Gabhaim buíochas le Páirtí Shinn Féin as an deis seo. I will start by saying "Go raibh míle maith agat" leis na daoine atá ag déanamh obair na gcapall sna hospidéal agus i ngach uile áit inár health service. It is commendable.

Three weeks ago, sadly, I lost my best friend, Eleanor Lanigan, to cancer. The men and women in St. Vincent's Hospital were there to the end working to make her as comfortable as possible. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam.

In recent weeks, I have been contacted by a number of constituents in Dublin who are deeply worried about diagnosis, delays and uncertainty. I commend Deputy O'Gorman and everyone who has served on the Oireachtas committee to do with cancer. I have been working on it since I came into this House.

I am grateful to the Irish Cancer Society for all the great work it is doing and all the details it gave us at the recent briefing, particularly in respect of my constituency.

When I was writing this speech, I rang a constituent, Jennifer Murphy, whose case I have been working on, and she gave me permission to mention her. Jennifer outlined how she was initially told that she would be waiting over 12 months for a non-urgent colonoscopy. It was only after she went back to her GP and following interventions by me, my office and other public representatives that her case was reclassified as urgent and she was given an appointment. That should not be how the system works. People should not have to fight to

have their cases reclassified as urgent. They should not be left in limbo, particularly when we know early diagnosis is critical.

I suppose that no one in this House can say that they have not been touched by cancer. If anyone has gone through it, cancer is a really horrific way to go. We need to provide every type of support for people who have cancer.

I welcome much of what the Deputies from every party and none have said during this debate. Behind the numbers there are people, families and friends. This should not just be about highlighting problems. We all know what we need to do. I read the Government amendment, but I suppose it is more about action. A lot of the time when we come into this House, we are just here to talk. We need to get out there and do it.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** We need to expand capacity, particularly in north Dublin, and provide clear and consistent referral pathways.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** I am glad to be able to participate in this debate. We have all been in community halls across the country and in our constituencies talking about road traffic issues when someone at the back of the hall pipes up and asks, "Does it take someone to die?"

Unfortunately, when it comes to cancer care, there have been far too many deaths. In particular, several very high-profile women were on the national airwaves and leading campaigns here at the front of Leinster House right up to their final hours. It has taken many deaths to get cancer care further progressed and it is still not where we need it to be. As many people have said tonight, there are many objectives of our national cancer strategy that are not being met, and that should be of huge concern to us all.

Just the other day, I was at my GP for a routine check-up and they took bloods. I was low on vitamin D; I need to get out in the sunshine. That is quite typical. However, I, as a politician, was alarmed to hear that the laboratory in University Hospital Limerick could not test for vitamin D. It was "overwhelmed", was the word I got. I will get over the vitamin D deficiency with an over-the-counter tablet and going out in the sunshine; that is fine. However, it is worrying to hear a laboratory that is tasked with detecting so many illnesses, deficiencies and diseases, and which is the gateway where many people find out they have cancer, is overwhelmed to the point that certain tests referred on from a GP practice cannot be followed through. I think that merits further investigation by the Department. I am not here to fault that laboratory; it does fantastic work. It is overwhelmed and needs more resourcing and support.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the news announced in the past week and a half regarding University Hospital Limerick and the choosing of a new site for that hospital in Raheen. I heard about it on the airwaves. The Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, was down there with all her colleagues. She ignored six of us who are colleagues of hers in government, but we tuned into the radio and found out what was going on. I cannot hide my disappointment. This was to be a new hospital campus chosen for the region. It will alleviate the pressures felt at UHL, those incessant trolley times and waiting times, but it does damn all for the people who live in the extremities of west and north Clare. For those people, there is no golden hour.

If they get into acute chest pain and collapse on the floor and someone in the household phones for an ambulance, it can take nearly an hour and three quarters - up to two hours - for that ambulance to get back there. They probably will not make it to hospital. Of all the things I have seen happen here over the past six years, if there was one thing that should have happened, it would have been more cognisance of geography in this decision, but that did not happen. I am running out of time-----

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** Thank you, Deputy. You are over time.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** -----but I will bring this up in a future debate.

**Deputy Michael Cahill:** A new permanent oncology and haematology unit at University Hospital Kerry is vital to the people of Kerry.

Cancer patient numbers in Kerry are continuing to grow, with many needing to travel from all over Kerry to a hospital, such as Cork University Hospital, the Bon Secours, the South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital, the Mercy Hospital in Cork, and with many others travelling to Limerick, Dublin and elsewhere for intensive treatments. The travelling involved is an extra burden on all those patients, and a permanent oncology unit in Tralee with increased capacity would go some way in alleviating some of the pressure and stress for many patients and their families.

With over 5,000 patients treated in University Hospital Kerry last year, I ask the Minister of State to prioritise this new oncology unit for Kerry patients. I previously received confirmation that it was at stage 1 - design. Could the Minister of State say where exactly this vital capital project for University Hospital Kerry is at now? Sadly, when we look at RIP notices, the number of references to palliative care in respect of cancer patients is worrying, to say the least. As a Government, we must invest more in cancer research. A new stand-alone oncology unit for University Hospital Kerry is vital for all cancer patients and their families in our county. I impress upon the Minister of State and the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, the urgent requirement for a stand-alone oncology and haematology unit on the grounds of UHK to provide Kerry patients with the dignity, privacy and comfort they deserve during one of the most challenging periods in their lives.

As I previously stated in this Chamber, the Comfort for Chemo Kerry committee, a wonderful organisation, has already raised in excess of €1.5 million in funds, and a site has been designated for the purpose within the UHK campus. We are told one in every two will get cancer in their lifetime. When it comes to cancer, the question on everybody's lips is what is causing it. Is it the food we eat, the air we breathe or the water we drink? This project is extremely important to us in Kerry, and I am anxious that it proceed as soon as possible. Delays only mean an escalation in cost for an already costly undertaking. As I previously mentioned, this vital project would lessen the need for many Kerry patients to travel to hospitals in Cork, Limerick and Dublin, some in multiple trips.

The temporary oncology unit in UHK simply cannot cope with the over 5,000 patients and rising who were treated there last year alone. I am anxious for us to do everything humanly possible to get this vital project over the line.

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Niamh Smyth):** I thank all colleagues who have made such personal contributions, not only about their own experiences but also facilities and gaps that remain on the island within cancer services. If I could be indulged, I wish to acknowledge a wonderful young girl from Bailieborough, Orlaith Lennon. At 24 years of age, she has lost both of her parents, her dad only a month ago. She had the bravery to go out on Friday for Daffodil Day, like so many other volunteers right across the country, to do some fundraising for the Irish Cancer Society. I do not know where people gather the strength to do things like that when they have had such personal experiences. I acknowledge her incredible work.

Colleagues have talked about the volunteers of many cancer groups, particularly in rural areas. In Cavan-Monaghan, where I live, there is Bailieborough Cancer Comfort, which provides the volunteers who provide transport. As we have discussed, transport can be such a big issue for cancer patients who have to get to the main urban centres and specialised hospitals for treatment. There is incredible work done by volunteers, as well as their fundraising, to make sure that compassion, care and transport is provided for patients.

I thank all my colleagues around the House who contributed on this most important topic of cancer services right across the island of Ireland. While many of our services deliver excellent, high-quality care, I acknowledge and recognise there can sometimes be delays in getting cancer treatment for some patients. I acknowledge the distress felt by them and their families when they face such delays. Where hospitals are challenged to meet service targets, they typically respond with a mix of local improvement plans, additional clinics, outsourcing of diagnostics and reviewing patient pathways where needed.

As clinics typically run at full capacity, any disruption of services can lead to a backlog which can take time to clear. Where centres fail to meet their performance targets, the NCCP works closely with hospitals to ensure that improvements to services are achieved and sustained, and that patients are seen to as quickly as possible. Every effort is made to address waiting times and patients are prioritised on the basis of clinical need. Often, not meeting performance targets arises from staff shortages or problems in accessing diagnostics or radiology services. Deputies will be aware that there is a global shortage of healthcare workers, and where we have very specialised services like those in cancer care, it can be difficult to recruit when vacancies arise.

In addition to local measures, the NCCP continues to monitor performance nationally and has implemented a range of initiatives to optimise capacity with rapid access clinics, particularly for those with breast cancer. Updated referral guidelines have been introduced, aimed at ensuring standardised access across the country and, where appropriate, post-cancer patients are participating in stratified self-management follow up, rather than attending unnecessary specialist appointments. These will reduce variation in the management of patients and will lead to more appropriate referrals within cancer services.

The HSE is also working to expand capacity. The HSE capital plan introduces funding for the design and construction of oncology day units and chemotherapy infrastructure at Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore, University Hospital Limerick and University Hospital Kerry. Deputy Cahill asked very specific questions. I will ask the Minister to respond on any issues raised specifically in respect of infrastructure.

A major radiotherapy equipment replacement programme is also in place, and work is underway to update equipment across St. Luke's Hospital radiation oncology network in Dublin. Long term, the delivery of surgical hubs and three elective treatment centres, once operational, will increase overall surgical capacity in our acute hospitals. In budget 2026, the first steps have been taken towards a new approach to funding, intended to strengthen performance by devolving health budgets to the new health regions. This provides greater autonomy to meet local needs, while holding them accountable for their targets and national standards. This will enable the HSE leadership to target resource allocation where it is most needed to address regional variation.

The NCCP will continue to lead on cancer service design and development nationally. It will monitor performance and work closely with the REOs to ensure the delivery of safe, effective cancer services in all regions, working to reach the same high standards across the country.

This new budget approach will build on the success of the national cancer strategy, which has, over the years, fostered a culture of improvement and innovation, as seen through the development of pioneering services. In the last ten years, we have seen the rollout of cutting-edge therapies, including radio labelling therapy, CAR T-cell therapy for adults and specialised radiotherapy treatments, which will reduce the number of treatment sessions compared with conventional radiotherapy treatments. More recently, and supported by our 2025 programme for Government commitments, the acute oncology nursing service has expanded, keeping ever more cancer patients out of emergency departments when they feel unwell. The rollout of the SSMFU framework is also helping recovering patients to avoid unnecessary hospital outpatient appointments, and it provides better management in their aftercare.

In recognition of the incredible contribution of the voluntary and community sector in providing services to cancer patients and their families, which we have all referred to tonight, the programme for Government made a commitment to continue to invest in community cancer support services. To support this commitment, the NCCP Alliance of Community Cancer Support Centres was allocated €5.5 million in funding for 2025, and that is now recurring.

We have also provided access to new and innovative medicines. Between 2021 and 2024, Ireland allocated an additional €128 million for new medicines, allowing for the introduction of 74 new medicines for cancer. Budget 2026 also allocates €30 million specifically for new medicines. New treatments have been introduced. CAR T-cell therapy became available in 2021, removing the need for patients to travel abroad for treatment. The service is being expanded to University Hospital Galway this year, and recruitment is under way. This will provide CAR T-cell therapy for adult patients in the south and west of the country and increase overall capacity nationally.

We are also seeing an improvement in new developments for patients, with the creation of the comprehensive cancer centres. This designation requires close collaboration between hospitals, universities and research centres, bringing care, teaching and clinical research together in a deeply integrated way. Patients attending these centres have greater access to clinical trials and the important benefits that brings. I am delighted that all of our eight cancer centres are participating in the EU project to gain accreditation and access to the EU Network of Comprehensive Cancer Centres. Membership of this project will enhance our treatment, teaching and research work, and this will in turn help to attract the best international experts.

We have a strong track record of supporting cancer care with investment in research, and I am determined that we will build on this. The cross-border cancer consortium research partnership between Ireland, Northern Ireland and the US National Cancer Institute has seen 25 years of progress, with over 35,000 patients participating in clinical trials. Annual investment in cancer research by the Health Research Board has increased significantly in recent years, from €5.4 million in 2017 at the start of the current strategy to €9.4 million in 2025. Since 2020, the Health Research Board has awarded €43.7 million in cancer research funding, including €21.6 million in clinical trials infrastructure. We are also creating and embedding a culture of innovation in health research more broadly. In November last year, the final report and recommendations of the national clinical trials oversight group were published. The implementation of these recommendations aims to streamline the regulatory processes needed to establish clinical trials, enhance public and patient engagement, establish clear, consistent approaches to conducting clinical trials and grow the clinical trial staff around the country.

The current national cancer strategy was launched in July 2017, with a ten-year implementation framework. This year, the Department of Health will commission an independent evaluation of that strategy. While the details have not yet been finalised, the previous strategy was evaluated by a three-person panel of international experts. Their report provided a detailed analysis and recommendations to guide the development of the next strategy. The evaluation process will examine the full continuum of cancer care, from prevention to screening, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and palliative care.

Patients are, of course, at the heart of our services. There will be opportunities for meaningful stakeholder involvement, including patients, their families, healthcare staff and all the cancer advocacy groups, among others.

I thank the Deputies again for their thoughtful, measured and considered contributions. We all share an absolute commitment to delivering the best outcomes for patients. The new national cancer strategy will be a critical step in planning our services for the decade ahead.

**Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan:** I strongly welcome this motion and commend Deputy Cullinane and his team on their latest health document, Enabling a New Cancer Strategy. It confirms what many of us have long suspected, that cancer services across Ireland have been slipping. The document sets out 42 recommendations for a new strategy, recommendations that would make a difference. We all know someone who has endured a cancer diagnosis. We have seen family and friends battle this disease. From my father to so many friends and family members, it has hit us hard over the years.

What we know is that early detection is vital for effective treatment, but the numbers paint a stark picture. Breast cancer targets are missed by tens of thousands every year. Some 15% of chemotherapy patients and 23% of radiotherapy patients do not start treatment on time. Some 61% of prostate cancer surgeries, 45% of breast cancer surgeries and 39% of lung cancer surgeries are not performed within the recommended timeframes. It is time that some of those in the Department did a bit of self-critique because the numbers do not lie. Patients are being failed in increasing numbers by poor management in the Minister's Department. As a result, we now have the third highest cancer mortality rate in western Europe.

What is missing is a strong emphasis on prevention, early detection and proactive treatment to tackle the primary drivers of cancer. It is anticipated that cancer diagnoses will double by 2045 compared with 2015. With the European Commission so eager to import meat raised on banned cancer-linked drugs, the situation could become even more severe.

In my father's case, he was quite sick and was housebound. Those who are housebound are some of the most vulnerable people. They need extra heating because they cannot move around like the rest of us. To say that I am absolutely disgusted by what has gone on here tonight is an understatement. The measly cut to home heating oil is a disgrace.

**Deputy Johnny Guirke:** I recognise the work of the volunteers who fundraise and provide services, such as the Meath Cancer Support Group. I thank those who fundraise for charities, such as LARCC and the Irish Cancer Society, which get very little of their funding from the Government. In my constituency, a service has been set up and provided by the Moylagh JFK 50 Mile Challenge committee, which provides transport to and from treatment free of charge. We cannot give enough thanks and credit to the volunteers who run the service, and those who give up their time to drive the Moylagh car. These volunteers fill the gaps in services and very often support those who would struggle to find help when they need it. A lot of money is raised through charity events, but volunteers and committees now face the challenge of getting insurance for these events.

I welcome the legislation on the right to be forgotten, which in 2022 had cross-party support and was introduced by a cross-party group. I am, however, disappointed that it has taken this long when we see such legislation passed in other EU countries. The Irish Cancer Society has done brilliant work in lobbying for this.

Access to surgeries must be prioritised. If one surgeon is unable to complete a surgery, another surgeon should be able to step in. I recently heard of a lady who, sadly, passed away. She was due to get a tumour removed but, unfortunately, her surgery was cancelled due to personal reasons with the surgeon. It was suspected that her tumour had burst. How often is this happening, and how are cases like this being recorded?

Money is being spent on encouraging people to get checked, but often, when they attend their GP, they are told that the waiting times for screening are lengthy.

Then there are people who are working but cannot afford to go to their GP to get checked. Last year, the Irish Cancer Society warned that Ireland's two-tier health system was failing public cancer patients and they were not getting the same potentially life-saving cancer treatments as those treated in private hospitals. Private patients have swift access to EMA-approved cancer drugs while public patients must wait on average two years to find out whether they will gain access to the same treatment. Cancer patients often leave work during their treatment, bills continue to come through their doors and they have to fork out for travel, accommodation and prescriptions, but they are refused access to a medical card.

**Deputy Johnny Mythen:** One in two people in our country will be diagnosed with some form of cancer in their lifetime. This is a stark but factual figure. Every one of us in this House, unfortunately, knows someone who has had this awful disease or has died from it, including my own father.

I am sure the Minister of State agrees there is a chance to change things with a new cancer strategy, as outlined by our spokesperson on health, Deputy Cullinane. We can put in place a world-class cancer service with properly ring-fenced and sustainable funding on an annual basis, doing away with the unfair postcode lottery to access cancer services. Early diagnosis and early treatment give each person hope and a far better chance of survival and recovery. However, recently released data paints a startling picture: 41% of breast cancer surgeries and 61% of prostate surgeries are not happening within the recommended timeframe. This includes 20% of radiography and 50% of chemotherapy patients who do not start treatment in time. Will the Minister work with us and take on board Sinn Féin's key recommendations in the recently published cancer strategy report by Deputy Cullinane?

Cancer has no politics and no boundaries but it can be beaten by putting in place a resilient and robust cancer service for all. The postcode lottery system must be done away with, as must the inequality in the system. Most of all, the wonderful staff who treat our loved ones through the toughest of times deserve a system that fully supports them by providing up-to-date equipment, staff supports and proper capacity. I ask all TDs to support the motion.

**Deputy David Cullinane:** First of all, I will correct something I said in my opening remarks when I was talking about chemotherapy patients in Cavan. In fact, 100% of those were seen on time; it was in Waterford that 66% of patients were seen on time, which means 33% were not. For radiotherapy, 98% of patients in Waterford were treated on time, compared to just 67% in St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network, which covers Dublin, the east and the midlands. They are two examples of the postcode lottery I was talking about.

I thank everybody for their contributions. There were some really strong contributions. People told stories of their personal experiences of cancer and of their family members' experiences. My mother died of cancer and it was a very long year for my family having to watch her suffer as she did. She showed tremendous resilience and did not show any emotions. Maybe when she was alone she did, but when she was with us, she was really strong. I got that from every contribution that was made. Deputy Gould spoke about how family members were very often the ones who feel it most.

I feel passionately about cancer services because they were and still are one of the areas where this State is doing well. Nowhere in the motion does it not recognise that there is a lot of good work being done. I said that in my opening contribution. I am blown away by the healthcare services given by first-class healthcare professionals in cancer care. I see it in every hospital I visit: the research done; the facilities in some hospitals; the staff who provide the services, from oncologists to nurses, radiation therapists and so on; robotic technology; and AI, which is now going to become a feature.

We are seeing huge innovation, changes and progression in cancer care, which is fantastic. That has to be matched by a Government and political system that back that up and provide the supports and resources that are needed. Far too often, hospitals are not getting those supports. If we have expensive hospital equipment lying idle part of the time because we do not have the staff, that does not make sense. That is an inefficiency. People look at that and ask what is going on when they are waiting and waiting for access to chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.

The figures in the motion came from the HSE through parliamentary questions. In some surgeries, we have slippage, we are not meeting the targets and more and more patients are not being seen as quickly as they should be. Those gold-standard targets of 20 to 25 days set for access to surgery, for example, and even less for a diagnostic scan, chemotherapy or radiotherapy, are things we should be proud of and should not be allowed to slip. They are targets we should try to make sure we meet. In some hospitals, they do not have the equipment or staff.

The motion does not state the cancer strategy was not funded, but it was not given new development funding for half of the lifetime of the previous strategy. For five years, it got some funding, piecemeal as it was. For the other five years, it got no funding. That is a matter of fact and I think that is wrong. That is why multi-annual ring-fenced funding is so important. It is so that the health service can plan. Reducing the cost of care for patients is important, which is why abolishing the car parking charges and more discretionary cards are needed.

The motion is about a new national cancer strategy. That is what we need. I will certainly work with the Government. Everybody in this House wants to achieve the best possible outcome for every cancer patient.

Amendment put.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time on Wednesday, 25 March 2026.

## **Financial Resolution No. 2: Mineral Oil Tax**

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon):** I move:

1) THAT section 99A of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999) be amended, with effect as on and from 25 March 2026, by the substitution of the following for subsection (3) (as amended by section 42 of the Finance Act 2019 (No. 45 of 2019)):

"(3) Where –

(a) gas oil has been purchased on or after 1 January 2020 and before 1 January 2026, or on or after 1 July 2026, then, subject to a maximum repayment rate of €75.00 per 1,000 litres, the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres of gas oil under subsection (2) is determined—

(i) when P is less than or equal to €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = (P - 1,000) \times 0.3,$$

or

(ii) when P is greater than €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = 21 + [(P - 1,070) \times 0.6],$$

or

(b) gas oil has been purchased on or after 1 January 2026 and before 1 July 2026, then, subject to a maximum repayment rate of €120.00 per 1,000 litres, the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres of gas oil under subsection (2) is determined—

(i) when P is less than or equal to €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = (P - 1,000) \times 0.3,$$

(ii) when P is greater than €1,070 and less than or equal to €1,150, by the formula—

$$A = 21 + [(P - 1,070) \times 0.675],$$

or

(iii) when P is greater than €1,150, by the formula—

$$A = 75 + [(P - 1,150) \times 4.5],$$

where—

A is the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres, and

P is an estimate of the average price (exclusive of value-added tax) in euro per 1,000 litres of gas oil purchased by qualifying road transport operators during the repayment period, as determined in accordance with subsection (4)."

(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).

This financial resolution amends the provisions for a partial repayment of mineral oil tax, MOT, on auto diesel purchased in the State and used in qualifying vehicles by licensed Irish and EU road transport operators. The arrangements are generally referred to as the diesel rebate scheme, DRS, which is used by hauliers and bus operators.

The draft amendments provide for changes to how DRS repayment rates are determined and for an increase to the cap on these rates to enhance DRS benefits for qualifying operators to assist in mitigating the impact of rising fuel costs. The rate of repayment is currently capped at 7.5 cent per litre. The cap is reached when the average price per litre of auto diesel is €1.16, excluding VAT. This financial resolution increases the rate to 12 cent per litre. The DRS runs on a quarterly basis and this financial resolution will apply for quarters 1 and 2 of 2026. The backdating of the measure to the beginning of this year is in recognition of the impact on hauliers and bus operators of steep increases in the price of diesel in recent weeks.

As the Tánaiste indicated, this temporary and targeted measure is in recognition of the detrimental impact of increasing fuel prices on hauliers and passenger transport operators and of the importance of these sectors to the Irish economy. The DRS provides targeted support to operators such as bus companies, who may drop Deputies' children to school; to food delivery trucks, which keep our shelves stocked; and to essential parts of business supply chains, which means business can continue with a cushioned impact. Households and businesses will be indirect beneficiaries of these additional supports to hauliers and bus companies.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** I understand an amendment has been tabled to this section.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** The amendment is out of order.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** Okay, that is fine. Well, it is not really fine but I accept the ruling.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Conor Sheehan):** I have just been told a letter would have been sent to the Deputy.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** I understand. The timeframes have been so tight, given the chaotic way the Government brought this forward, despite the fact it had four weeks to deal with this issue of support for workers and families in the middle of what was already a cost-of-living crisis. It is important to remember that, before the fuel crisis was brought on by the attacks in Iran and the impacts of the attacks Iran has launched in the Middle East, we had a cost-of-living crisis.

*10 o'clock*

Many families and businesses were already pushed to the pin of their collar. The real challenges people are facing in terms of just meeting basic necessities have been well rehearsed. I have heard the Tánaiste talk at length about his new idea for a savings scheme and how the State can help people to save and all the rest of it. That will be great for some people by allowing them to get more tax breaks for savings they have. However, a whole group of other people are asking me what planet the Tánaiste is on. Some of them are among the 320,000 people who cannot pay their electricity bill. Their cupboards are bare in the evening when their children come in hungry. We have a Minister for Finance who is talking about how we can generate more wealth and how the State can support that generation of wealth through tax cuts. The second debate that is taking place is about how we can allow the very small proportion of people who have an inheritance above €400,000 to keep more of that money for themselves. It is a type of parallel Ireland, with a divide between the haves and the have-nots.

This motion is about excise duty. The Government is being forced, after four weeks, into acting on the issue, which it did not want to do. It is moving from a position where it was going to monitor the situation, with no knee-jerk reaction, blah, blah, blah, to a point where, after we tabled legislation to cut excise and support workers and families, as well as transport operators and hauliers, it is being forced to bring forward some type of proposal. The resolution the Government has brought forward is a half-measure.

I completely and utterly acknowledge that we need to support hauliers. There are two ways of doing so. One is by increasing the diesel rebate scheme payment from 7.5 cent to 12 cent. That would mean hauliers having to pay the full whack at the pump and then wait until the end of the quarter to make a return and get the money back from Revenue or offset it. The other way of doing it is to reduce the excise duty, which means that when the hauliers rock up to the petrol station or buy diesel themselves in their yard, they get the reduction there and then. The second is the more appropriate way, with the reduction in excise automatically given at the pumps. Crucially, it not only gives the reduction to the haulage company and transport operator but also to every person who has to put petrol, or in this case, diesel, into his or her car. That is the measure that should be brought forward. It is a way to support hauliers, transport

operators and the general public. However, it is very clear the Government does not want to provide that additional support to the wider public. It is a serious error.

I was sent an image an hour and a half ago when people were looking at the vote going on in the House and seeing that every single TD who supports Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents in government voted to oppose a reduction in the maximum amount of excise on diesel and to oppose removing excise on home heating oil. The image I was sent, taken today, was of a forecourt showing a diesel price of €2.35. The message under the image said "What planet are these guys living on?". That is the sentiment I am hearing right across the board, namely, that the Government simply does not get it.

My amendment has been ruled out of order and I accept that ruling of the Chair. It was intended to ensure that the support hauliers and transport operators need is provided to them not in a delayed way, through a rebate, but immediately by cutting excise at the pumps. By doing that, we would provide the support for every carer, every person with a disability, every worker driving to work tomorrow morning and every commuter who has to travel by car tomorrow. That is the way it should be done and it is what our amendment proposed to do. As I said, I welcome any support for the haulage sector but there was a way of doing this whereby the support would not be limited to just one sector. It should have been provided for all but, unfortunately, the Government simply does not understand the cost-of-living pressures people are facing. If it got the issue, it would not have introduced the budget it did last year, with a total allocation of €9.5 billion that still left workers and families worse off than they were before it.

The Taoiseach claimed the ESRI keeps on saying that the lowest two deciles were the greatest beneficiaries of the budget. In fact, the ESRI report says they lost the most as a result of budget 2026 because of the withdrawal of cost-of-living supports. I ask the Minister to have a word with the Taoiseach and ask him to stop gaslighting the public by saying the opposite of what everybody knows is true, which is that they are worse off now as a result of what the Government did in the budget.

**Deputy George Lawlor:** The Labour Party supports this emergency legislation. We support the rebate because the haulage industry needs relief and it needs it fast. We must act with urgency and a sense of responsibility to the workers and businesses that keep this country functioning. This emergency legislation is not technical and nor is it distant from the daily lives of people. It deals with a crisis that has struck at the very heart of Ireland's supply chain. The sudden and severe spike in fuel prices following the attacks on Iran is drastically affecting large swathes of our constituents.

The haulage industry is not just another sector in Ireland; it is the circulatory system of our economy. As for every loaf of bread on the shelf, every medical supply delivered to hospitals and every export leaving our ports - none of it happens without the trucks that are on our roads day and night. In my county of Wexford, this is not just theory. It is central to the economic reality of a county that is home to some of the largest haulage companies in the country. Be it Rosslare Europort, our agricultural producers or our manufacturing base, Wexford depends greatly on the haulage industry, just as does every other county on this island. Thousands of jobs directly and indirectly rely on a functioning, affordable and stable transport sector. When

fuel prices explode overnight, it is not just hauliers who suffer but also every family, every business and every community that depends on the sector.

Supporting this legislation does not mean giving the Government a free pass. It does not mean ignoring the gaps, inconsistencies and unanswered questions associated with it. There is one question in particular that demands an answer. Why has the Government chosen to backdate this rebate to 1 January? What is the difference between the haulage industry and the thousands of householders across the country who have been struggling, week in and week out and for months upon months? We have all heard the stories of individuals and families having to make the choice between food and fuel. Do those people not deserve the same treatment, the same rebate and the same relief? Is their lobby group not as effective or influential? If this measure is a response to the extraordinary shock triggered by the attacks on Iran, then the timeline must make sense. Is this simply a date chosen for administrative convenience? The Minister owes this House a clear and unambiguous explanation. People deserve transparency and honesty.

There is another issue, which goes beyond Government policy and strikes at the heart of the behaviour of certain actors in the fuel supply chain. It is time to call it out plainly. When the attacks on Iran occurred, prices at the pumps rose instantly - not gradually, not cautiously but instantly. We were told the global markets had reacted, suppliers had no choice and the increases had to be passed on immediately. Yet now, when prices are falling and the immediate shock has eased, fuel industry representatives are telling us, as reported in the *Irish Independent* this morning, that it will be some time before reductions are reflected at the pumps. Prices went up like the rockets that were falling but are coming down like a feather. I say without hesitation that this behaviour is unacceptable, opportunistic and profiteering. It is gouging on the double.

People cannot have it both ways. It cannot be that prices are raised overnight when global markets spike and then feet are dragged when those same markets stabilise or, indeed, when the Government intervenes, as is happening tonight. The industry cannot demand sympathy when costs rise and then refuse to show fairness when costs fall.

It certainly cannot expect the public to swallow the idea that price increases are immediate but price decreases require time. This House should not tolerate it, the public will not tolerate it and the Labour Party condemns it in the strongest possible terms. The Government is stepping in with reductions intended to support consumers at a time of deep crisis but if we allow this behaviour to continue and suppliers delay passing on reductions, it means that support is not going to the consumers, workers and small businesses struggling to survive, but is going straight into the pockets of companies exploiting volatility for profit. That is not a functioning market. That is not fair competition. That is not acceptable in a country that claims to value fairness and transparency.

While we support this legislation, we also demand oversight. We demand monitoring of fuel pricing behaviour. We demand accountability from suppliers who seem to believe that crises are opportunities for profit rather than moments for responsibility to assist everyone. Families are not asking for special treatment; they are asking for fairness. Workers who have to commute to work are asking for recognition of the essential role they play in our economy. They are asking for support during this moment of global instability that they did not create and cannot control.

We absolutely understand the importance of the haulage industry to this economy. We see the trucks on our roads. We see the goods moving through Rosslare Port and other ports. We see the livelihoods that depend on a stable affordable transport sector. We know that if we fail to act to support this industry, the consequences will be felt far beyond the haulage yards. They will be felt in every corner of every county across the entire country.

While we have to pass this legislation, we also have to demand answers. We have to demand fairness. We have to demand that fuel suppliers act responsibly and transparently. There is absolutely no way that we can facilitate this. The Irish people will not be taken advantage of at a time when families and individuals across the board are put to the pin of their collar to live anything approaching a semblance of normal existence.

I am glad to hear that coach and bus operators are included in this. However, we also have taxi drivers and people who must meet spiralling transport costs in their businesses. Protection must be afforded to the many sectors that rely on the use of vehicles of all shapes and makes to keep their heads above water. We will be supporting this legislation, but there certainly are questions that need to be answered.

**Deputy Cian O'Callaghan:** Gach lá agus gach seachtain, feicimid Rialtas atá caillte ar bhealach, Rialtas nach bhfuil cúram gnáthdhaoine air. Ní gá go mbeadh sé ar an mbealach seo. Is féidir é a bheith difriúil. Rinne an Rialtas na roghanna míchearta. Tá na tosaíochtaí míchearta aige. Tá níos mó agus níos mó daoine á mbrú i dtreo na bochtaineachta aige. Tá níos mó agus níos mó daoine go hiomlán bréan den Rialtas seo. Tá athrú ag teastáil ó dhaoine. Ó thaobh na gcostas maireachtála, níl sé seo maith go leor. Ní mór dúinn cruthú níos fearr. Cruthóimid níos fearr. Níl aon am fágtha. Ní foláir dúinn gníomhú anois. Caithfidh gníomhú go práinneach. Ní foláir don Aire éisteacht agus gníomhú. Ní foláir don Rialtas éisteacht agus gníomhú. Ní rogha é go mbeadh a thuilleadh moille ná a thuilleadh easpa gníomhaíochta ann. Tá sé chomh simplí sin. Tá tráth an ghnímh tagtha. Céard atá ar siúl? An bhfuil aon rud á dhéanamh ag an Aire chun é seo a shocrú? An bhfuil aon smaoineamh aige? Does the Minister have any idea of the hardship that people are going through in terms of the overall approach the Government is taking?

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** The response from the Government to the cost-of-living crisis that has come on top of a cost-of-living crisis is absolutely inadequate. The Government response is miserly in comparison to the scale of suffering in the country. We are seeing rising numbers of people living in poverty under this Government. The Minister claimed that the Government is addressing these issues. The Taoiseach goes on about addressing and caring about child poverty. One in four children in this country is growing up in poverty right now.

The response we are seeing is absolutely inadequate. The Government's response actually means cuts for ordinary workers, ordinary families, the elderly and disabled people. Disabled people's supports were cut in the budget. It is Scrooge for ordinary people and it is Santa Claus for the investor funds, the developers and the fast-food giants. The Government is giving over €1 billion this year in public money to investor funds and fast-food giants, yet it turns around to ordinary people and says, "We have to wait. We're not quite sure if we can give you the money yet." The Government has billions sitting in a surplus while, as I said, one in four children is living in poverty.

It gets even worse. The rate of lone parents living in deprivation stands at 49%, and that has increased since 2023. The number of renters getting no rental supports who are living in poverty has increased from 36% in 2023 to 43%. That was last year, before the current increases, which shows the Government is completely ignoring a cost-of-living crisis and a level of poverty that is completely unacceptable. As I said, it is Scrooge for ordinary people and Santa Claus for the wealthy investors and the big fast-food giants.

It is shameful that the Government is not providing a sufficient response for people. Nor is it tackling the issue of price gouging and profiteering, which we know is going on again at the pumps and with the oil providers. The energy costs are crippling for people. People are choosing between heating and eating and it is not good enough. The Social Democrats have called for a targeted energy credit which could really help people. Why is the Government not doing that? It is unacceptable and we will continue to call it out.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** This resolution is very revealing about the Government's approach. Earlier, we had a resolution that introduced inadequate measures, small cuts in excise on petrol and diesel but no price caps, no guarantee, no security for people into the future and nothing to ensure there is not profiteering. Those measures are time limited until the end of May and could be wiped away by the end of the week. Prices could go back down to €2 per litre and then go back up again by the end of the week. It is something but it is also very inadequate, effectively nothing. On home heating oil, it will mean a €20 saving on 1,000 litres when the price has very close to doubled over the past number of weeks. That is insulting to people. The underlying thread we hear from the Ministers is, "Ah sure, we're getting out of the bad weather. People will be grand." They certainly will not be; they are struggling.

We have very minimal measures for the general population but then we hear that Resolution No. 2 is a targeted measure. It is a measure which, unlike the ones we voted on earlier that come in tonight and last just until the end of May, is backdated to 1 January and it goes all the way to the end of June. That is fantastic, we think. This must be for the disabled people who were hit by the Government with €1,400 of cruel cuts in the budget. They have been on the streets demanding again and again an emergency disability payment, not the full cost-of-disability payment which they were promised, not even getting back the €1,400 that the Government took off them. It should just give disabled people €400, which is a tiny amount that will go some way to cushion them from the blow, a targeted amount for them.

However, when we read the detail of Financial Resolution No. 2, I am afraid we discover this is not a targeted measure for disabled people but a targeted measure for hauliers.

They will get an extra rebate on diesel to go back to the start of January and to go all the way to the end of June, but ordinary householders will not. Of course hauliers need support. Of course their prices going up will feed through into the rest of the economy in what people pay for the goods they buy in shops and so on. However, what is the measure to do that? It is obvious. It is the same measure as for everybody else. It is dealing with the issue of the price of diesel. However, instead of actually doing that in an effective way for everybody such that they get the benefit and, therefore, consumers and the population at large get the benefit at the end of the day, the Government has done a special scheme just for businesses. It is very revealing of the Government's approach to this new cost-of-living crisis.

I do not think the Government gets it that for ordinary people this cost-of-living crisis comes on top of an existing cost-of-living crisis. People are really suffering. People were already really suffering two months ago. We remember the shocking statistic about four in ten parents skipping or cutting back on meals in order to ensure that their kids have enough to eat. We know there are over 300,000 people in arrears on their energy bills right now. We know that the Government's budget made all of that worse. Despite the misinformation that is put out there by the Taoiseach, we know and the ESRI, the Parliamentary Budget Office and so on will say that the Government's budget made it worse and made it hardest for the poorest groups in our society. That was the impact of its budget: increasing child poverty and increasing rates of poverty, including for older people. The Minister and the Minister of State have woken up to react to that. They are welcome. Let me tell them what the Parliamentary Budget Office said. It said the budget increased poverty rates from 11.7% in 2024 to 13.2% in 2025.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** What did the ESRI say?

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** If the Minister of State wants, I will get to him before we finish. The ESRI said that for the bottom 10% the budget would see a cut of about 2.5% in income-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The ESRI said it was a progressive budget.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** The ESRI did not say that. I will get the Minister of State the exact figures by the time I finish. The Government's budget - people can check it online - hit disabled people and the lowest income groups the hardest.

Let me say what the Government should have done and what we are in favour of doing. We should cap prices. We should give people certainty: €1.75, as was contained in our Bill, for petrol and diesel. Only a price cap can give certainty and security to car-dependent households. The way you do that is you cap the price and then adjust the tax as necessary to ensure that petrol and diesel can continue to be supplied. Then we need to expand the remit of the CRU to investigate petrol and diesel prices and send inspection teams to verify prices at the pumps. We need fuel companies to open their books to the CRU, and those found to be profiteering should be forced to contribute to the price caps by an amount equal to their excess profits. We need universal credits. The Government should just immediately get €500 back into the pockets of ordinary householders. It is the most immediate way to give people relief. That can be funded by a levy on the data centres. The data centres are now using more electricity than all households in this State combined and they are paying half the price for it. Let us fund it in that way. Yes, let us give an extra month of fuel allowance, let us give an extra payment, a double payment, on all social protection payments as targeted measures. Then let us invest in getting people away from fossil fuels.

I heard the Taoiseach earlier say that LNG and so on were not contradictory to moving away from fossil fuels. Of course they are. That was the latest demand of Trump at the White House: we want to sell more LNG. The warning signals came and the message should have been heard in terms of Ukraine but it was not. The western world did not do anything to get away from fossil fuels. In this country we have continued on this track of reliance on fossil fuels. The result is that every extra unit of power added by wind has been swallowed up by the data centres, and Micheál Martin wants to go even further with them. No more data centres. Let

us make public transport free. Let us invest in retrofitting to get off our reliance on fossil fuels, which is what makes us so exposed.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** I want to just inject the voices of ordinary citizens into this debate, if I may. These are the voices of a nurse and a garda that were posted on social media today. The first one said:

I am a nurse working in a Dublin hospital but I live in the midlands. I travel 100 km to work and 100 km home every day. We live in the midlands because we can't afford to live in Dublin but we really can't afford to live here either. We're barely surviving. Our main source of heat is oil. We ran out two weeks ago, we can't afford the bill and we can't heat our house. Very few people have that kind of money. We have two kids and it's early nights for all of us now. The only luxury we have is an electric blanket on our bed to keep us warm. The cost of living has gone out of control. I don't get a fuel allowance to help us get to work and back like politicians do. I pay €10 parking fees on top of soaring prices and I know other staff who are paying €15 parking fees every single day. I work it out that I can only go on two more months at this rate. I've already had to cut back on our shopping bill. We literally buy only essentials as it is. I don't smoke, drink or have any social life.

A garda responded:

I'm a mother of five. I'm a member of the Garda Síochána, as is my husband. We are struggling beyond comprehension. We pinch and scrape but we still seem to not have enough. We live week to week and one unexpected bill will put us under. I don't drink, smoke, go out, have takeaways, have luxuries. We have older cars. I can't remember the last time I bought something for myself. The toll it's taking on us is serious. How is it that people with good-paying jobs are still struggling? It's not right, it's not just. I'm heartbroken that our children are missing out so much because we don't have the finances. This government should be absolutely ashamed of itself.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I have been in contact with the road hauliers last Thursday, yesterday and this morning. They were taken to the end of their tether before this announcement and they are responsible people. They have made it very clear to me that they considered going out on strike but they did not want to go on strike on the basis of the effect it would have on the people they deliver the goods for. At the same time, however, there is only so much they can take before the Government could be faced with that crisis. While this financial resolution alleviates it and I will support it, I will certainly have serious concerns going forward if there is not more immediate action done there.

The Government forgot about the people who have the green diesel, namely, the farmer and the fisherman. It is a drop of only 3 cent on their fuel. Had the Government any thought on how they will survive? Had it any thought on how they will deliver their produce at the rate at which they are expected to deliver? That has not been afforded any thought. The Government is all talk all day about the great Government giving more than the rest of the world. It is taking. It is robbing the people left, right and centre with taxes of 60% to 65%, such as the carbon tax, the NORA levy and excise. It has given it every kind of name in order that it can sex it up and make it look as if it were some other kind of tax. It is tax. It is coming out of the ordinary, hard-working person's pay every day of the week, so when they go to the filling

station and put €100 into it, they are giving €60 to €65 to the Government. That is absolutely insane. It is not happening anywhere else in the world, and the Members opposite know that too.

The Government says it is giving a lot this time but it is not giving it back to the people. It has not considered to move us away from the need for fossil fuels. The idea of a floating LNG terminal has been put before the Government. Battery lorries, which work in New Zealand, Japan and all over the world, cannot be thought about here. We are always the laggards and that is all we will ever be. Grants for solar panels are at €1,800 but you spend €20,000 on the panels. This is where we are going. Barryroe should have been explored. There are the small things like toll bridge charges. The Government could have stopped them going forward. The toll bridge charges are another kick. You know when you switch on the car in the morning you are paying tax on the car when you purchase it, the tyres are taxed, the fuel is taxed and the oil is taxed. God almighty, we are an insane country to rob our own people, and now when they wanted a little back, the Government still did not give it to them. It is scandalous.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** I welcome the rebate for the haulage industry. The only thing about it is that is probably for licensed hauliers. What about the person who is a haulier of cattle? A haulage licence is not needed for that. What about people who own hardware and have to bring their own gear somewhere? They do not need a haulage licence. Do they get the rebate? If it is like the things before then they do not. What about the guy bringing straw from up the country? The Government is well aware that they will not get it either. These are the things that need to be looked at.

In looking at today's measures, while I welcome some things on the white diesel, I stated today that this Government has no interest in bringing the price of housing down because every digger working on a housing site today is costing €120 more per day in green diesel. The Government talks about doing sewerage projects and water projects. Every single machine working on those sites is costing €120 more because green diesel has gone up by 70 cent and the Government is giving a measly 5 cent back to them. Do not go telling me that the Government is interested in solving a housing crisis when we see the likes of that.

The Minister and the Minister of State are from rural Ireland. The Big Ms will be soon out in about four or five weeks' time. A silage harvester takes 1,000 litres of fuel. It costs between €600 and €700 or more to fill that. A Big M will need to be filled again at 3.30 p.m. How can anyone stick that? Is there a rebate for them? No. Where is the farmer going to get more money out of? Where are they going to get all this money to pay this contractor? What has been done is ill-thought out. I welcome the bits that are good, but my God, on the green diesel, does the Minister and the Minister of State realise that the price of white diesel went up by about 50 cent? It has gone from about €1.75 to €2.20 or €2.25. Does the Government realise that the Friday before that guy decided to go bombing Iran that the green diesel cost 98 cent, including VAT. It costs €1.61 this minute, plus VAT. When I went to school that was about 70 cent more at least. Even if the VAT is drawn back, it is 70 cent more per litre. It is actually 20 cent more than the white diesel has gone up by. The VAT on white diesel is at 23%, while the VAT on this is at 13.5% and the Government thinks it is great for what it has done today. It is a help for the haulage industry and I appreciate that. What about the guy in the quarry? Are we going to build houses without quarries? What about them? The crusher and the loading shovel use green diesel. I do not know what world the economists in the Department of Finance

are in but this will cripple the housing industry alone and it will put damnable pressure on the whole agricultural sector. The Minister and the Minister of State know that because they are from rural Ireland.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I am glad to get the opportunity to talk again this evening on this. I am sorry if I will be repeating some of the things that Deputy Fitzmaurice raised. It is because we are involved with the same kind of people and we are feeling for some of the people that have not been properly seen after here today. I welcome the good points that have been brought forward in relation to the white diesel and for the reduction and rebate for those who will qualify for it. Many hauliers who are very important people and who do great work will not qualify because they did not ever have to have a haulage licence. One of the components to qualify is to be a haulage licence holder. Many of those people will not qualify because they transport livestock. Drivers of lorries moving timber from forests to sawmills will not qualify. Bakeries that transport their own bread and scones or whatever to the shops will not qualify. So many of these will be left behind and it is not fair on them.

On the green diesel, I am sorry to be criticising the Government's reductions but did it totally forget such a thing or does it know what the colour of it is or what it is used for? Tractors are a necessary component of farm production and for many months now, farmers could not go inside their gaps because of bad, incessant rain and weather. There is a whole lot of jobs left behind and still to be done. Many farmers are contemplating not growing the grain at all or ploughing for it because with this they were banking on getting something reasonable. In fairness, 3 cent is not good enough to compensate for the rise of 70 cent over the last two or three weeks. It has gone up from 98 cent to €1.68 in our neck of the woods anyway. I am sorry that these people have been left behind. They do great things like tractor runs for charities such as the Kerry cancer support group bus that takes many people to Cork. We were out last Sunday and I thank all the young boys and girls that landed in Barraduff with their tractors to support the bus that takes patients to Cork, Dublin and Limerick.

Industrial machinery will be affected. There is an awful lot of talk about house building but a lot of people have gone into contracts for builders and they are now wondering will they be able to perform because of the cost of diesel, which is outrageous. Cranes, teleporters, diggers and dumpers are needed. They all run on green diesel and 3 cent will not make enough of a difference to give them the confidence to stay going.

Fishermen who are already on their knees, use a lot of green diesel to run their boats. They are affected as well. They will not get it any cheaper from the suppliers. I am very disappointed that people who have to use green diesel have not been properly treated here today. A cut of 3 cent is not enough. I am asking the Government to come back with another proposal. Everyone is entitled to make a mistake or to forget something. We cannot leave these people behind like this because it is not fair. When I went into politics, alongside my father, he always said that you have to be fair with everyone. That is what we will have to do here. We will have to be fair with these people. They are not being recognised here at all today. That is being dead honest about it. Because the Government has not got it done today, it must come back in a very short time. It had almost four weeks to put this package together properly. I know it is not the Minister's or the Minister of State's individual job to organise this package but they are the ones in charge. They must get after the officials in the Departments to ensure that the farming community, the people that drive tractors and produce our food are looked after. Food is

paramount to stay alive. On top of that, they are one of the major exporters of goods out of this country and they have to be recognised and treated as such. We need to make sure that they want to stay at it. With all the aggro that is thrown at farmers for the climate and blaming them for this and for that, it is wrong to leave them behind.

It was mentioned that the story could get worse and the Government will have to come back to deal with all the other things again. So be it but do not come back here another day without thinking of the farmers, who are so important to the country. They have given so much of their lives. They inherited their places from parents or grandparents and they want to hand them down in the same way as they got it from their fathers and mothers, for their sons and daughters. They will not want to stay at it and when the young people who we are trying to get into the farming sector with generational renewal hear and see this, they will not put up with it at all.

The Ministers must beg, borrow or steal. This Government borrowed almost €1.8 billion to give to Ukraine to keep the war going. That is our record in the last couple of months but we cannot give a greater part of the 70 cent back to the tractor men and the people who use green diesel. That 3 cent is all they can get. That is a ridiculous percentage. I am sorry for being hard here tonight but, when I think of the people out there, I am not that sorry at all because they have to be represented just the same as everyone else. I am afraid they have been left behind for too long. That is the fact of it. That was demonstrated here today. I welcome the good parts, such as what we are getting for the haulage industry, although not for other sectors. I am sad that the farmers have been totally and absolutely neglected by this Government tonight.

**Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy):** I thank the Deputies for their contributions this evening. The financial resolution amends provisions for a partial repayment of mineral oil tax on auto diesel purchased in the State and used in qualifying vehicles by licensed Irish and EU road transport operators. As the Minister, Deputy Heydon, indicated earlier, this temporary and targeted measure is in recognition of the specific and detrimental impact of increasing fuel prices on hauliers and passenger transport operators and the importance of these sectors to the Irish economy.

The DRS provides a targeted level of support to the operators who keep this country running every day. As an island economy, we rely hugely on hauliers to take our produce and products to us. Passenger transport operators provide invaluable services to schools, to businesses and, as we look deeper into spring and summer, to our tourism sector. The front line of this war might be far from our borders, but these are the businesses that are feeling the daily impact of the situation in the gulf on our roads. Government has sought to support them, including with a backdated measure, so that they can operate with certainty over the months ahead. We are seeing how quickly things change. Even in the last couple of hours, there has been a further update on the Strait of Hormuz. This requires agility and it is agile supports that the Government has brought forward today.

I reiterate the Minister, Deputy Heydon's affirmation that the Opposition amendment cannot be accepted. I understand that it has been ruled out of order. The amendment proposes that a report be produced on the efficacy of the increase of 4.5 cent in the diesel rebate scheme rate within one week of the passing of this resolution. As the scheme operates on a quarterly basis

and claims can be made up to four months after the end of the quarter, the full data required to produce such a report would be unavailable until the end of the final claim period.

Recent increases being felt by consumers and businesses are ultimately driven by market factors. Overnight changes cannot offset all of those increases but, as I have said, the Government is acting with agility to protect and support, insofar as is practical, those at the coalface, our hauliers and our transport operators, including the bus operators who bring people to work and who bring our children to school. The enhancements to the diesel rebate scheme are positive and are targeted at those operators I have described. There is a clear expectation that it will also have a knock-on impact on the customers who use their services.

Question put: "That Financial Resolution No. 2 be agreed to."

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Will the Deputies claiming a division please rise?

*Deputies Ruth Coppinger and Paul Murphy rose.*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** As fewer than ten Members have risen, I declare the question carried. In accordance with Standing Order 87, the names of the Deputies dissenting will be recorded in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Dáil.

Question declared carried.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 10.55 p.m. go dtí 9 a.m., Dé Céadaoin, an 25 Márta 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.55 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 25 March 2026.